

**GENDER BIAS IN THE LEADERSHIP OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES**

BY

**SHEILA MARIE HOUSTON**

A Written Project submitted in partial fulfillment

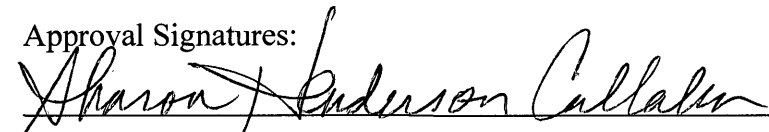
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

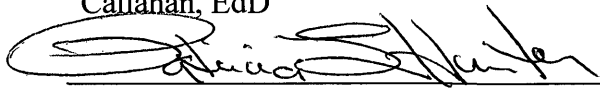
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

2018

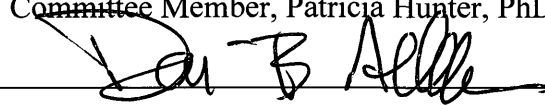
Approval Signatures:

  
Committee Chair and Program Director, Sharon Henderson  
Callahan, EdD

11/12/2018  
Date

  
Committee Member, Patricia Hunter, PhD

11/12/2018  
Date

  
Committee Member, Dan B. Allender, PhD

11/12/2018  
Date

---

ProQuest Number: 13855843

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 13855843

Published by ProQuest LLC (2019). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

© Copyright by Sheila Marie Houston 2018

All Rights Reserved

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In my service, as the first and only African American female elder in the Pacific Northwest Free Methodist Conference and now serving in the Southern Michigan Conference, I acknowledge that I am impacted by the slow pace of change in attitudes and behaviors toward women clergy—especially women in leadership or aspiring to leadership as lead pastors in American Protestant churches.

I would also like to thank Catherine Smith for her editing skills. She greatly assisted me in preparing this document for publication.

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to those women who are called by God to lead churches, even though they do not feel supported. I dedicate the strength of my work to my mother Lillie Kate Lindsey who struggled in her activism so that I would have a role model, coach, and mentor who poured into me the need to help advance others. In addition, I dedicate the love for this research to Dr. Sharon Henderson Callahan who believed in me when male clergy leaders did not respect or support my leadership call and gifts. I am thankful for my husband, George Houston; without him and my family's love and support, I would not be who I am today: an educated Black woman who believes the only limitations are the limitations we create in our own minds. Show me a door that others believe cannot be opened, and I will show you the right tool to pry it open.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **GENDER BIAS IN THE LEADERSHIP OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES**

Houston, Sheila M., D. Min. Seattle University, 2018. 94 pages.

Chair: Dr. Sharon Henderson Callahan, EdD

This research study examined the possibility that gender bias, toward women pursuing or serving as lead pastors, is prevalent in Protestant churches. The study design consisted of an online survey containing five questions. Responses were sought from up to 20 women; however, 13 women completed the Qualtrics online survey that underpins this project. The study questions were directed only to women capable of meeting study criteria. Each participant needed to meet one of the criteria listed below:

1. Presently pursuing a pastoral position within a church.
2. Currently serving as an associate or senior pastor in a church.
3. Recently (within the last one to five years) stopped serving as a pastor or stopped pursuing a senior pastor leadership role in the church.

Alongside the concerns about gender bias is a second concern affecting some women in church leadership (i.e., the reality that some women of differing ethnicities serve—or seek to serve—in leadership roles as clergywomen). These women often feel forced to choose between responding to the bias directed at their ethnic heritage or their desire to liberate women's status so that more women achieve leadership roles.

Liberation theologian James Cone (Kimura 2015, 13) noted in 1998 his anger “with the silence of white theologians on racism in the United States and in the modern world.”

This study uses a qualitative, heuristic approach, so it differs from a purely quantitative research project.

As a female Protestant pastor, I can relate to the struggles my 13 survey participants have encountered, as described in the report that follows. One research goal is to help women to see how the leadership roles of women are contained, although generally understated, in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Likewise, I do not compare church leadership characteristics with those espoused by secular leadership. While some male scholars have done research about leadership, women—especially African American women pastors—have contributed limited research to date.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Research Problem .....	3
Background and Role of the Researcher.....	4
Importance of the Study.....	7
Theological Frameworks .....	12
Liberation Theology.....	13
Womanist Theology.....	14
Feminist Theology .....	15
Limitations and Delimitations .....	17
Summary.....	17
CHAPTER 2 .....	18
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION.....	18



Introduction.....	18
Scriptural Views.....	18
Rediscovering the Biblical History of Women.....	20
Matriarchs .....	21
Sarah .....	21
Hagar.....	22
Rebekah.....	23
Rachel and Leah.....	25
Women Prophets.....	25
Prophetesses – Miriam, Deborah, and Hulda.....	26
Miriam.....	26
Deborah.....	27
Huldah.....	29
New Testament Women.....	30
Mary, the Mother of Jesus .....	30
The Samaritan Woman .....	31
Pauline Statements.....	32
Mary Magdalene .....	33
Summary .....	35

CHAPTER 3 .....	36
METHODOLOGY .....	36
Introduction.....	36
Overview of Purpose and Research Question.....	36
Research Survey Questions.....	38
Methods.....	38
Anticipated Limitations/Delimitations .....	38
Recruitment of Survey Participants .....	39
Data Collection .....	39
Data Analysis .....	40
Summary .....	40
CHAPTER 4 .....	41
RESEARCH FINDINGS .....	41
Introduction.....	41
Results.....	42
Question 1 - Credentials.....	42
Question 2 - Discrimination.....	44
Question 3 - Biblical .....	51
Question 4 - Qualifications .....	56

Question 5 – Impact on the Body of Christ .....	57
Things I discovered from research.....	60
My Surprise.....	60
The Survey Finding Confirmed .....	61
Summary .....	61
Chapter 5 .....	62
Research Summary .....	62
Introduction.....	62
Differences in Style.....	64
The Need for Further Study .....	67
References.....	70
Appendix A - Recruitment Letter .....	74
Appendix B – Qualtrics Consent Form.....	76
Appendix C – Survey Questions.....	78
Definitions of Terms .....	81

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Introduction**

My first pastor—the man God used to teach me about faith, trust, and the importance of studying and believing God’s word—invited me to speak at a Women’s event held at his church. A few days later, he sent me an email asking my husband for permission to let me speak. He did not know my husband. I could not believe what I was reading. I was shocked! He knew that I had been pastoring with my husband for years; it was not a secret. His gender bias was evident in his email; he did not respect me in my role as a pastor. I declined his invitation because of his disrespect toward my call and toward me as a woman. I should not have been shocked by his actions, however, because of the history of African American women and the church.

I come from a family that has been involved in the church for generations. Men have often overlooked the contributions of the women in my family who have provided strong leadership. Like our Pentecostal women pastors, I have also seen gifted and Spirit-filled women not appreciated by their male counterparts. I understand what it means to serve in cross-cultural ministry and to have Black male pastors fail to acknowledge God’s calling on my life to be a Pastor. Such behavior is consistent with the way many female church leaders have been treated through the ages. Royster notes that “African American women have served as implicit leaders. Implicit leadership entails providing guidance, direction, and support for religious institutions without officially holding an office or title” (Royster 2013, 317).

Also,

Traditionally, African American women served in nearly gender designated leadership positions including women's ministry, deaconess, missionary societies, and Christian education with an emphasis on women and children....the late 20th century marked the beginning of gender progress for African American women religious leaders. African American women began occupying positions that have been traditionally male dominated, including ordinations. (Royster 2013, 317)

Royster continues:

Although several Baptist denominations across racial boundaries strictly outlawed the ordination of women, the Progressive National Baptist Convention ordained women from its inception in 1961. African American women gradually began overcoming structural barriers of ecclesiastical leadership beginning in the mid-70's. (Royster 2013, 318)

Obstacles still remain for African American woman clergy when pursuing lead pastoral positions. For example, as a female associate pastor, I am respected and given many opportunities, except the opportunity to become a lead pastor. As Royster states

In light of the evidence of increased inclusion of African American women in formal religious leadership positions, the need to overcome structural barriers persists. There remains a tendency for religion as a traditionally male- dominated institution to continue to accept attitudes of reluctance in terms of including women wholeheartedly as equals....African American women religious leaders are less likely to have husbands who are willing or economically positioned to play the role of supporting spouse. African American women have fewer predecessor role models as religious leaders in comparison to their male counterparts. The greater challenge African American women religious leaders continue to face rests in co-existing in traditionally male-dominated space as equals, free from pressure to compromise their femininity, such that they may remain faithful to their "calling" while remaining "unapologetically woman." (Royster 2013, 321)

I am convinced that this is not just an African American woman's struggle; I believe other women in ministry face similar challenges with their peers, and denominations, with regard to their leadership. Women leaders today owe a debt to

women church leaders serving in Protestant churches over the last few hundred years in America. With this in mind, this research project begins, in this chapter, by outlining the research problem and noting the theological framework that will be further developed in chapter two. Next, it offers a quick look at the research methodology that will be considered in chapter three. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Research Problem**

This study is a qualitative examination of women pastoral leaders serving in Protestant churches today in the United States. To understand their experience, this research used questions that led participants to think deeply and engage in dialogue with their own leadership journey. Open-ended questions invited from five to twenty participants to share their thoughts online, as though in an interview setting. The five questions posed were:

1. What credentials does a senior pastor need in order to lead a congregation successfully?
2. Have you experienced gender discrimination as a woman in church leadership? If yes, how has it affected your leadership?
3. What do you think needs to be addressed within the church or in seminaries so that women are treated and acknowledged as equals in the church?
4. According to your understanding of Scripture what are the qualifications for women in leadership?

5. Do you think the body of Christ is negatively impacted if women are not operating in the leadership position that God has called them to? If not, why not? If yes, describe how.

Using Qualtrics, an online survey tool, the researcher posed the just-noted, open-ended questions. Within a two-week timeframe, approximately twenty survey participants were expected to complete the survey. In fact, 13 participated fully by completing the survey. Participants were restricted to the following:

- Women currently pursuing pastoral positions; for example, those who are serving in leadership in some capacity but not as senior pastors;
- Female seminary students, ministerial candidates, and ordained elders;
- Women currently serving as an associate or senior pastor; or
- Women who within the last one to five years have stopped serving as pastors or pursuing a senior pastor's position.

Using Qualtrics allowed me, as the researcher, to collect the data quickly and, because it is a software program, data could be analyzed digitally. The survey offered participants an opportunity to tell their stories—including their struggles, successes, and failures.

### **Background and Role of the Researcher**

My story relates to this research, and I present it as part of the heuristic nature of this research project. I began my Christian journey in my twenties, in a nondenominational church. My first pastor, Pastor T, was an excellent Bible teacher. He taught me about faith, trust, and the importance of studying God's word and believing

God's word. Pastor T was the final authority for all things that pertained to the church. Within this church culture, women could be children's church teachers with little or no experience. In fact, I became one a few months after accepting Jesus into my heart and joining the church. Because the pastor was the dominating force in that church, he never talked about gender roles. Neither did any of the women in the church.

I found out recently, after over twenty years of knowing him, that he just now believes that women can preach. However, he only invites them to speak on Women's Day. Even then he does not acknowledge women as pastors. He acknowledged me as "first lady" even though he knows I am a pastor and he addressed the other women as "sisters." I served in that African American Church for two and half years before God showed me, in a dream, the next church he wanted me to join. The next church was located in South Seattle and was founded by one man who had the final word pertaining to every decision in his church.

The next church was racially diverse and placed great emphasis on evangelism. The lead pastor was white, but the rest of his team came from different ethnic groups. Women served in leadership roles. Most women leaders were considered evangelists. However, their leadership roles and responsibilities were equal to their male pastoral peers, even though they were not given the title of pastor. After decades of that church's existence, people began to leave, and the church building was sold. After the church disbanded, some of the women evangelists became senior pastors and apostles, and some are still serving today. In fact, many of their churches are still growing. I was only at that church for two years before it shut its doors, but the love I experienced and the relationships I made with the people of God at that church continue today.



The next church I went to, before I became a pastor, was considered a Bible-based church. Here again the founding pastor had final authority and was not accountable to anyone. This church was an influential Africa American church unlike my first church. There were various levels of leadership and ongoing leadership trainings throughout my time there. Pastor M did acknowledge women as pastors, but very seldom were women in the congregation given an opportunity to walk in the gifts of a pastor or elder. We were given only the title of leader. However, visiting women pastors were given this opportunity.

All three of these churches were nondenominational, and the pastors were the final authority. I believe this fact may have accounted for their lack of inclusiveness and the structural shortcomings.

Pastor M. ordained my husband and I, and he then released us to plant our own church; however, our releasing came with no support. After a few years of wandering in the wilderness and trying to build a church, we joined the PNWC Conference and became Free Methodist pastors. I was the first and only African American woman in the Pacific Northwest Free Methodist Conference, and my husband is just the second African American male. It has been about eight years since we became elders/pastors in the Free Methodist denomination.

As an elder/pastor within the Pacific Northwest Conference, I served as an associate pastor at Living Hope Christian Fellowship. I was accepted as a pastor, I functioned in my role as a pastor/elder but have never been given an opportunity to become a lead pastor. Recently, I moved to the Southern Michigan Conference where my

husband was given a senior pastoral position at Stone Haven Free Methodist Church in Troy, Michigan. It is the wealthier church of the two churches we serve in. I was asked to lead a poorer church in Detroit, Michigan. In all honesty I have to admit that it could be that my history of working in difficult environments was the reason behind me being asked to lead the Detroit church. Nevertheless, I am still the only African American female in this conference and my husband is still only the second African American male.

Leadership in Michigan feels much more encouraging than leadership in the Pacific Northwest Conference. I also serve on the 2019 General Conference Board with the three ruling Bishops; I am a delegate for the conference as well being a speaker for our Multiplying Conference held earlier this year. Still, I have only been presented with one opportunity to become a lead/senior pastor.

Structurally, the Free Methodist Church, which is guided by *The Book of Discipline*, is led by three ruling Bishops as well as regional superintendents and boards. My experiences in various churches, and my knowledge of other women's stories—so similar to mine—drove my research related to gender bias within the church.

### **Importance of the Study**

This research is vitally important because women represent a very small percentage of senior church leaders, even though they comprise the majority of members in most churches. The “Faith Communities of Today” 2010 national survey found that twelve percent of Protestant congregations had a female head. (Emmert 2015, 1). As long as women are content to let men be the senior leaders, they can

have some level of contentment, but if they aspire to senior leadership it is a different story. Barna Group research on Christian Women Today (part one), discusses women's thoughts about faith, leadership, and their role in the church. The research describes two types of these experiences that Christian women encounter within their settings.

The first group represents the majority of women in this study; these women experience a great amount of satisfaction in the churches they attend in the area of leadership opportunities. The other group of women were frustrated by their lack of opportunities within their congregations; these women feel undervalued by their church leadership. (Barna Group 2009)

An article in the *Christian Century* "The State of Female Pastors" recognizes that women in leadership are on the rise in some churches, and this fact has ignited discussion on the topic. While female ordination occurs within the American Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the Southern Baptist Church permit female ordination. Yet, "today women clergy are leading 20% of mainline Protestant churches" (Emmert 2015). This means that men are still leading 80% of mainline churches today.

My denomination, the Free Methodist Church USA, believes in ordaining women. In 1974 the Free Methodist North America general conference, which constitutes all the Free Methodist Churches in the United States, passed a resolution "giving women equal status with men in the ministry of the church" (General Conference Minutes 1974, 388). Because of opposition outside the denomination, in 1995 the General Conference adopted a statement affirming women in ministry. Within my

recent denomination in the PNWC, out of forty-seven churches, only one woman currently serves in the role as lead/senior pastor. Furthermore, three couples and only one woman without a spouse serve as superintendents; no women bishops preside over this conference. Yes, women are ordained, but they are still not given equal consideration for leadership.

The 2010 “Faith Communities of Today,” national survey, found that twelve percent of Protestant congregations had a female head (Emmert 2015, 1). While some may see this as great progress, it really is not that significant when you consider that most church members are female. Instead of using women in leadership roles some denominations are experiencing decline as male pastors leave the ministry and as church doors close.

There was a time when Pentecostals believed every believer was a minister of God, and women were included.

Theologians agree that the most distinctive element of Pentecostal theology is its emphasis on spiritual gifts, which empower the laity for ministry right alongside the professional clergy, qualify them as a priesthood and “prophethood” of believers and make the church “a mutual fellowship of believers in which every believer regarded as a bearer of the Spirit and a minister of God. (Macchia 2002, 1137)

“From its beginnings, Pentecostalism practiced equal rights in religious leadership, and Pentecostal female pastors are examples of such a theological perspective” (Gill and Oleson 2013, 282). However, beliefs shifted. “Scholars say their eschatological fervor cooled and was replaced by institutional structures that restricted women” (Gill and Oleson 2013, 285). In addition, other denominations addressed women’s leadership.

Contemporary evangelicals find their roots in the denominations, organizations, and movements that began during the Great Awakenings, a series of revivals that took place in much of North America and Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries....Women were significantly involved in these evangelical revivals. They made up most of those converted, and they supported the movement in a variety of ways: leading and organizing prayer meetings behind the scenes, sharing their testimonies at revival meetings, writing hymns, and evangelizing those around them....Evangelicals today remain just as divided over the role of women in church leadership as they were four centuries ago. They run the gamut from denominations that were formed by women and embrace their leadership in all positions of authority to denominations that believe women are called to serve in positions subordinate to men, excluding them from the pastoral office.” (Deasy 2013, 276-280)

During denominational formation, many mainline churches had numerous women leaders, sometimes called laborers.

Female laborers in frontier revivalism were important leaders, but they did not attempt to claim the religious authority of clergy....Female leadership was proper as long as women did not rob men of their rightful authority inside the church. Therefore, early female laborers did not seek ordination; they expected and invited men to govern the church....As Protestantism became more institutionalized, the power of male clergy reasserted itself and the leadership of women in mainline Protestantism declined. (Zikmund 2013, 288)

Beyond denominations, what elements affect women’s choices for leadership?

Societal and cultural influences that are not scripturally based continue to affect how Protestant churches respond to women in church leadership. For example,

Racial and ethnic minority women in this society find themselves in a double bind, daily negotiating and walking the line between race and gender. For racial and ethnic minority clergywomen, institutional church adds another dimension: religious beliefs and practices. Clergywomen of color are often forced to choose between gender and race as their primary identity, depending on whether the barrier is sexism or racism. Using ordination as one important marker of leadership, the choices Asian American women make about where they will do their ministry is telling. An Asian American woman seeking ordination may prioritize her gender over her race in order to take the path of least resistance, meaning that she will opt to serve a Euro-American congregation where ordination of

women is more acceptable. On the other hand, an Asian American woman may prioritize her race over her gender and decide to serve in her ethnic-specific church, knowing that because of its beliefs and practices, the church will not ordain her. She may choose to serve as a layperson in that context in order to honor her ethnic identity. (Lee 2013, 298; Pak 2013, 297).

Most female Anglo pastors will never know the stress of choosing to serve a different culture and race, not because you choose to be a missionary, but because your community of support clings to male leadership as part of its cultural identity and heritage. "... (Asian) women who choose gender over race in order to access power as clergy find that they alienate themselves from the source of support that their ethnic-specific churches may be able to provide" (Pak 2013, 298). "Since Asian American male clergy primarily serve in their own racial-ethnic-specific churches, Asian American women are the ones in cross-cultural appointments" (Pak 2013, 299). This tension is real.

There may always be tension in some churches when it relates to the idea that women can and should be ordained. My examination of Scripture reveals that women held key leadership positions both in Israel and in the early church. The argument is usually that

Jesus chose only male apostles, that only a male can properly represent the person and work of Christ to the people of God and that ordination of women would be a major departure from a centuries-old tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. However, from a Reformed perspective, these arguments are entirely unconvincing. (Migliore 2014, 312)

There is evidence in scripture of women who demonstrated significant leadership roles, both in the Hebrew scriptures and in the New Testament. However, very few churches recognize those women's leadership roles. In fact, even some women struggle with the idea of women pastors. "Unconscious and inarticulate emotions related to

sexuality often drive women's resistance to female pastors....If he is attractive, personable, and fun to be with, the male pastor can fill a void for female parishioners that a woman cannot" (Smith 2013, 38).

Because of their gender, women encounter unique challenges as they pursue leadership appointments in Protestant churches. "Throughout history and especially today the Bible is used to keep women in subjection and to hinder their emancipation" (Fiorenza 1984, 11). When it comes to Christian character, commitment to preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, education, experience, references, leadership abilities, and suitability for a given body of believers, the women applying for pastoral positions are usually just as qualified as, or more qualified, than their male counterparts. "Women, however, consistently have been denied access to the inherent blessings (including leadership) of God's endowment to humanity" (Smith 2013, 39). The next section outlines the scope of theological impacts addressed in this project.

### **Theological Frameworks**

The overall purpose of this study was to give protestant women in church leadership a platform to use their voices to describe their experiences. In addition, it provided an opportunity to reexamine biblical texts in light of contemporary insights. This reflection, therefore, acknowledged Liberation Theology and also relied on womanist and feminist theologies—because their focus extends beyond a male perspective. These theologies were shaped by a female point of view. This was an important factor since this research project focused on gender bias and women in leadership within the Body of Christ.

## **Liberation Theology**

Stacy Floyd-Thomas, an associate professor of ethics at Vanderbilt Divinity School, defines liberation theologies and suggests an historical emergence of these ideas. She writes,

Liberation Theologies emerged in the late 20th century, concerned with the transformation of social existence as a religious quest. They are contextual, tied to the experiences and needs of concrete communities. They are political in nature and religious in commitment. For most people in the United States, Latin American liberation theology is typically the first form of liberation theology of which they have become aware....within the U.S. context, liberation theology was first present in the form of Black theology by James Cone. It was James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power and A Black Theology of Liberation that set the initial tone for black liberation theology in the United States as a systematic theology. (Floyd-Thomas and Pinn 2010, 1)

It is important, and necessary, for me to acknowledge the work of James Cone, the father of Black Liberation theology (Kimura 2015, 13). As a seminary student in 1968, Cone was disappointed with the failure of theologians to address white supremacy. In 1998 he was still angry with white theologians' silence on racism—in the United States and in the modern world. He went on to say that this silence had been partly broken in several secular disciplines; yet, theology remained virtually mute about white supremacy (Cone 1999, 14). In 2000 Cone was still frustrated by this silence. Although Cone had been writing about this problem for thirty years, white theologians still refused to discuss white supremacy as a theological problem. I can attest that Cone's words are still true—and they are prevalent in my life. In actuality, I acknowledge Cone's concerns, because I am impacted as an African American,



Many theologians have no biblically sound theology on women in church leadership, and Cone's writing and teaching do not address the gender issues that need to be addressed through the lenses of womanist and feminist theologies, which constitute two important elements for this work. To address these concerns, this project will refer to womanist theologian Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and feminist theologian Lynne Bundesen, among other voices. This inclusion of women theologians sits alongside the overarching discussion touching all women seeking leadership roles as clergywomen in Protestant churches in the United States.

Theology in these contexts can be understood as a reflection of "faith-based" commitments and activities.

### **Womanist Theology**

Floyd-Thomas and Pinn state, and I agree,

Womanist theology reveals itself to be organic discourse inasmuch as it is faithful to the church while also seeking to remake this most central and cherished institution. It is deemed a continuation of Black women's traditional culture struggles, survival, and celebration that represents the likes of womanist muses. (Floyd-Thomas and Pinn 2010, 37)

The authors continue, Black women have remained faithful to the church even when the church has not been faithful to them in regard to their gifts and callings. "The Women's movement and feminist theology proved to be little different in effect....[because of their] failure to acknowledge Black Women's realities throughout three evolutionary waves of modern feminism" (Floyd-Thomas and Pinn 2010, 38).

Even though we are women, differences exist because of our social locations. For this research project, however, I highlight the female gender and the bias in our churches, regardless of ethnic differences. While I acknowledge that differences exist between Feminist and Womanist theologies, I choose not to allow the differences to distract from the overall purpose of this investigational study.

Black woman theologians (womanist theologians) and Hispanic woman theologians (mujerista theologians), while closely related to feminist theology, offer critical voices within it. They emphasize the oppressive power of racism and classism in addition to sexism, as well as the failure of white feminist theologians to engage the evils of racism and classism not only among men but also among white and often affluent women. (Migliore 2014, 218)

Being an African American woman and a Free Methodist pastor, who walks alongside white female pastors, I believe that this research can tear down some of the barriers encountered in our dealings with one another. My hope is that we will adjust our thinking to help the church in America understand that there is a need for women pastors, women lead pastors, and other women from all backgrounds in leadership roles

### **Feminist Theology**

The text that follows examines the differences and similarities of various theologies that relate to women and explores their realities. In 1913

“feminism” became a frequently used term in the United States. Originating in a French activist group in the 1880s, the label “feminist” migrated to the Americas through Britain. Until then the activism of North American women had been identified as the “woman movement.” Frequently associated with the 19th-century organizing for women’s suffrage, the “women’s movement” included a host of other forms of activism....the term “feminist” became a marker suggesting a more radical agenda and it named a much narrower population in the early decades of the 20th century. (Floyd-Thomas and Pinn 2010, 209)

In this period numerous issues about which women had concerns came to the forefront, so the term “feminist” expanded to include women’s interests in civil rights, hiring laws, anti-discrimination laws, etc. (Floyd-Thomas and Pinn 2010, 209). While attention was given to gender discrimination in many areas of society, and despite the fact that many of the women leading these changes were women of faith, the church failed to embrace gender equality in its pews and among its leadership. In the twenty-first century we still have equal rights issues, sexual exploitation, and discrimination when it comes to appointing women in leadership positions in the Protestant church.

I appreciate the foundational work for gender equity within church leadership that has been accomplished by the scholarly women who came before me.

Historian Nancy Cott points out that, despite its restrictive gender women’s sense of their “moral and social role.” In the movement, as women “apprehended Protestant teachings at a different angle from that intended by most ministers.” Women had long contested the patriarchal traditions within the Bible. Some even studied the original languages of scripture in order to correct some of the anti-woman interpretations. Convinced that Christianity had better things to offer than biblical prohibitions on women’s agency, Elizabeth Cady Stanton brought together a group of scholars to produce *The Women’s Bible*. (1895)....The consciousness of many women, black and white, was significantly expanded by the civil rights movement, which was grounded in religious vision” (Floyd-Thomas and Pinn 2010, 210)

Because of my social location and my current connectivity to my white colleagues, I pray my theological perspective can draw us closer to continue the work of the civil rights movement in this particular case: toward empowering all women who are pursuing senior leadership roles in the church.

As a researcher, I am attempting to release the power behind the stories told in the Hebrew scriptures about Sarai/Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, and some prophets, along

with women like Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the Samaritan woman, whose stories appear in the Christian scriptures.

For a definition of terms used in this project, please refer to Appendix D.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This research project limits itself to female participants with Protestant affiliations. In addition, participants were female ministers, as well as those pursuing ministry leadership, and some leaders who had left ministry within the last five years. The research pool included 13 survey participants. Because the survey was conducted online, no interpersonal interactions occurred; as a result, the research does not include nonverbal responses. As the participants' answers were coded, similarities to the stories of some biblical women emerged.

### **Summary**

This chapter introduced the overall study of current gender bias in leadership within Protestant churches. The researcher acknowledges the influence of Black Liberation, Womanist, and Feminist theologies in determining the scope of this project. The chapter explored women's experience in leadership roles within Protestant traditions using a qualitative, heuristic approach. All questions, permissions, and other significant materials are included in the appendices for review. Chapter 2 considers several biblical women and their impact as leaders of faith communities.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces and reflects on the Scripture stories of several women of faith who exemplify women's leadership. Relying on Liberation, Feminist, and Womanist theologians, the chapter examines the stories of three women, as people called by God, to lead other men and women to faith and community. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **Scriptural Views**

My theological observation is that beyond gender bias there is a ceiling or barrier within some Protestant churches that limits women seeking leadership roles. Although this barrier is invisible, it nonetheless exists in the minds of both men and women, and its impacts are real and far reaching. For instance, within the Free Methodist church tradition, barriers are seen in the hiring process whereby very few women have become lead pastors of small churches and no women have become lead pastors in larger churches. Furthermore, in top leadership all the bishops are males. In the second level of leadership only one female serves as a superintendent throughout all the Free Methodist conferences. In spite of this, women are ordained yearly within the denomination. This type of organizational/church structure hinders women's success in becoming senior leaders within the church.

The cultural origins of these limitations affect the power distribution in the church and influence women's leadership opportunities. This power structure has been institutionalized into church doctrine because of the way traditional church leadership has

interpreted and applied Scripture. Such practices have impacted the way church and traditional roles for women are understood. For example, scripture passages like these are used against women “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). “Let a woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:11-12). These foundational New Testament scriptures are voiced and unvoiced in many of our Christian churches. Whether spoken or unspoken, the results are still limiting to clergywomen’s success.

Church leadership should embrace two goals when regarding women in church leadership. I believe that “the historian Joan Kelly has succinctly stated the dual goal of wo/men’s history as both to restore wo/men to history and to restore history to wo/men” (Fiorenza 2001, 144). In addition, I think John Wesley’s statement sums it up “I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field” (Lodge 2016). If John Wesley saw the whole world as his mission field, why should it be different for a woman since “in Christ there is neither male nor female” as stated in Galatians 3:28?

By way of illustration, I have reconstructed the lives of biblical women by examining what scripture says about these women leaders and the roles they played in their family, community, and society. This method of reconstructing the lives of these biblical women allows their voices to be heard and respected.

As a female clergy member, and as a researcher, I recognize a serious failure in the way power is distributed between males and females. Knowing this I have deliberately chosen not to focus on reactionary responses to gender roles. Kraemer and D'Angelo have stated that

Instead of concentrating primarily on male attitudes toward women as has been done in the past, the focus should shift to reconstructing the lives of women themselves. Every effort should be made to hear their voices, to witness their behaviors. In essence, early Christian women need to be brought back to life. (Kraemer and D'Angelo 1999, 199)

To bring women's stories back to life or restore history to women and women to history, we must continue to ask why gender bias prevails in the church. To gain perspective, it's important to study some of the historical women whose lives and leadership are portrayed through the scriptures. What lessons do their lives teach? I have used this research project's survey results to help reshape a religious vision that is able to bring about the shift toward equity within the church. This study does not attempt to study the contribution of every woman in the Bible, but only those few women who were recognized as leaders in the scriptures. I recognize that the Bible was written by and to men; therefore, their perceptions/perspectives were culturally influenced.

### **Rediscovering the Biblical History of Women**

According to John Bowker "Ancient Israel was a patriarchal society where family lives were male based and polygamy was accepted. Women had few legal rights and were excluded from the ranks of religious officialdom. Yet this is far from a complete picture of the position of women in ancient Israel" (Bowker 2001, 112). Bowker goes on to say that this caused women to have few social as well as legal rights. Some women, however, were more vulnerable because they lacked the protection of male relatives. In

spite of these challenges, there were women who exerted their influence on society and within their families. As Bundesen notes, some “chapters of Genesis are about matriarchy and the Spirit of God moving in the lives of women. The men play important parts, but the protagonists are women, as can be seen in countless biblical stories” (Bundesen 2007, 52).

In scripture we have examples of these women who were matriarchs, prophets, rulers, *and* wives. The book of Genesis we must also remember, like the rest of scripture, is told from a male perspective and tends to emphasize the achievements of the male while ignoring the achievements of women. Because of the male influence, the Bible quickly mentions the matriarchs, but maintains focus on the males. In addition, the Bible has, historically, been interpreted from a male perspective. Knowing this and keeping this perspective in mind, it is important to include resources that offer a holistic view.

### **Matriarchs**

The four matriarchs whose lives beg to be explored are Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. These women form part of the legacy given to our biblical forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These matriarchs were seen “as mothers in Israel,” a title of great importance.

### **Sarah**

“Sarah is the first matriarch of the Bible” (Bellis 2007, 60). In Genesis 12:1, God called Abram to leave his country, and Abram called his wife Sarai to leave with him. The call then became a husband and wife calling. Sarai encountered many challenges to protect the promise of God that was given to Abram/Abraham. More than once she pretended to be Abraham’s sister because he feared he would be killed.



When he was on the point of entering Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, see now, I know that you are such a beautiful woman that when the Egyptians see you, they will say, “This is his wife.” And they will kill me in order to keep you. Please say that you are my sister, so that I may be well treated for your sake, and my life spared through you. (Genesis 12:11-13-AT)

“The idea that he is manipulative and dishonest, and Sarai is silent property is heard most often. But the text actually indicates that he is asking, not telling, his wife, that he treats her as equal in this journey....” (Bundesen 2007, 35). Because of her willingness to be courageous, Abraham increased in wealth. Sarah was a financial asset to her family. In Genesis 17:15 we learn that God changes Sarai’s name to Sarah, and God promises: “I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of people will come from her.” Sarah’s role becomes equal to Abraham’s role as father of nations in the same chapter (Genesis 17:16). In remembering history, we must remember Sarah is the one who brought forth the promised son, Isaac. Years later Sarah dies, and Abraham becomes a widower. Isaac is motherless (Genesis 23.1).

### **Hagar**

I would like to point out that Sarah’s servant, Hagar, is not designated a matriarch. “The story of Hagar is the story of a servant and her mistress, or in modern terms an employer and employee. It is the story of struggle for status. It is sadly also the story of abuse and exile” (Bellis 2007, 63). The truth is that Hagar needed someone to look after her—as God did when Sarah dealt harshly with her, and when Hagar fled (see Genesis 16:13). In some ways Hagar’s situation is the situation that many women of color find themselves in. They are marginalized and their needs and concerns are not a priority. This is why there is a need for the voices of the womanist theologians to speak to

the situation and experiences of woman of color. Sojourner Truth spoke plainly of this double standard in her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech in 1851.

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And isn't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Sojourner Truth 1851)

As Sarah and Hagar struggled, it is hoped this research effort can bring womanist and feminist voices into harmony so that important leadership work can be achieved.

### **Rebekah**

After Sarah’s death Abraham ordered one of his servants to go among Abraham’s people to find a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24.4). Just as the role and responsibility of the wife was important and critical to Abraham’s call, so was choosing the correct wife critical to his son fulfilling God’s promises. Abraham’s servant traveled to a far country and meets Rebekah. Her family gives her the power to decide if she wants to leave her people in order to meet and marry Isaac. “And they said, we will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Will thou go with this man? And she said, I will go” (Genesis 24:55-58) (Bundesen 2007, 52). She agrees to marry Isaac; she immediately becomes the second matriarch in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 24:60 we read “And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gates of those which hate them” (Bundesen 2007, 53).

Rebekah could not have children and was barren until Isaac prayed for her. The pregnancy was difficult, so Rebekah consults with God, who tells her that she will bear twins and that the oldest will serve the younger (in the usual translation of Gen. 25:22-23) (Bellis 2007, 68). “The next episode in Rebekah’s story concerns the birth of Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25:19-21). Rebekah did not just have twins, she was carrying two nations: “Two nations in your womb, two peoples from your loins” (Bundesen 2007, 54). We cannot ignore the fact that Isaac showed concern for his wife by praying for her, but it was not until Rebekah sought God for herself that God not only answered her but also gave her insight into her children’s future. God listens to women.

Isaac loves his son Esau more than his son Jacob and sibling rivalry is born. Esau did not value his birthright—or as some would call it, his inheritance, so he sold it to his brother for food. What’s interesting is that Isaac, the leader, was mentoring the wrong son, while Rebekah was mentoring the son who would become the third patriarch of the family and holder of the promise. It appears that she was more discerning than her husband. The plot of the story continues with Jacob’s name being changed to Israel; he became the forefather of the nation of Israel.

Some would say Rebekah taught him how to be deceitful, and that is true, but she also instilled in him commitment, faithfulness, love, and the ability to ask for forgiveness and to offer forgiveness. In reality, in all the acts of Jacob’s/Israel’s life one discovers that these were attributes he lived throughout his life. Although the Bible shows the great contributions that men made over centuries, this project focused on restoring women to history and history to women.

### **Rachel and Leah**

“Rachel and Leah constitute the third generation of Hebrew matriarchs. Their story is found in Genesis, chapters 29-35. After Jacob arrives at Laban’s, he meets Rachel and falls in love with her (Genesis 29:1-14). He agrees to work for Laban for seven years in exchange for the privilege of marrying her. Laban, however, deceives him by placing Rachel’s older sister Leah in his tent on the night of the marriage, rather than Rachel, claiming that the older daughter had to be married first (Genesis 29: 15-26). Jacob agrees to work another seven years to earn Rachel’s hand in marriage (Genesis 29:27-30) (Bellis 2007, 71). Unknowingly, Leah and Rachel will spend the rest of their lives at odds with one another all because of their father Laban’s desire to fulfill tradition.

Now we have sisters who were in love with the same man. Jacob the trickster reaped what he had sowed when he was tricked into marrying Leah although he loved and wanted Rachel for his wife (Genesis 29:18-25). It would be wise to say, even though they were in competition with each other throughout their relationship with Jacob, they produced the twelve tribes of Israel. They both became joint heirs with Jacob in God’s promises. They were also examples for their descendants, some of whom were prophetesses.

### **Women Prophets**

Bowker notes that “later Jewish tradition named seven women as prophets but only three of them had the title of a prophetess” (Bowker 2001, 112). These seven women are Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. We will only be focusing on the three who walked in the office of prophet that we call prophetess.

## Prophetesses – Miriam, Deborah, and Hulda

### Miriam

Miriam's story begins with her younger brother Moses whose story begins with five women who were important to his survival. Although Moses is highly esteemed around the world in both Jewish and Christian circles, little is said about these five women. Bellis acknowledges these women in her book *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*. "Five women are instrumental in his birth and survival. They are the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, Moses's mother Jochebed and sister Miriam and Pharaoh's unnamed daughter" (Bellis 2007, 83). Of these five women, Miriam is also acknowledged as a prophetess.

Miriam exhibited leadership and responsibility as a little girl when she kept watch over her baby brother floating on the river. She stayed near him until Pharaoh's daughter rescued him. After his rescue, Miriam was brave enough to propose a leading question to Pharaoh's daughter that would reunite Moses with his mother. I believe that his rescue and return home ensured that the king would protect Moses' entire family. The Bible does not tell us how Miriam was feeling emotionally, as she took on such a heroic responsibility as a young girl. Nevertheless, she had enough foresight to know that it was an important task. In the book of Exodus Miriam is called a prophet. Bellis quotes Exodus 15: 20-21: "Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them."

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, noting the work of M. Brenner, who believes that the whole song complex of Exodus 15:1-21 is a literary unit that developed relatively late, during the Second Temple period, states that perhaps all that can be said is that Miriam founds a women's song

tradition. She also notes that even if this is true, Miriam's song has been placed in the shadow of Moses. (Bellis 2007, 87)

No matter how large a shadow Moses casts, it is Miriam who is still leading the women into a new song of the Lord as the final narrative of Israel's exodus from Egypt. "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:20-21). As Bellis notes "Miriam is the first *person*, not the first woman, but the first person, in the Hebrew Bible given this title in its general sense. Aaron is earlier called prophet, but only in the sense of spokesperson for Moses" (Bellis 2007, 87). In the book of Exodus, Miriam is acknowledged with her two brothers Moses and Aaron. God did not forget her leadership role. "I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam" (Micah 6:4). Miriam is remembered in the Christian world as Moses' sister but my prayer is that she also be remembered as a woman who held the title of a prophet/prophetess.

### **Deborah**

The next woman leader I want to restore to history is Deborah. What does the Bible say about her? The book of Judges says "Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. Deborah is a judge. She sits under a palm tree, called the palm of Deborah" (Judges 4:4-5). In addition to what the Bible says, Bellis gives us extended information:

she is either married to a man named Lappidoth or, according to another understanding of Hebrew, she is a woman of torches—a fiery, spirited woman. She held court between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. (Bellis 2007, 102)

All of Israel went up to her, not just women. In her day, Deborah is comparable to the Moses of God's people. Through her leadership God's people were delivered from their enemies the Canaanites. Deborah called Barak to lead the army to war, but he refused to go without Deborah, the woman leader, by his side (Judges 4:6). She said she would go and she prophesied that because of his refusal to lead without her, the victory would be given to a woman. It has been questioned whether Deborah had to go to the battlefield. As readers, sometimes we forget that Moses did not always go to the battlefield.

The book of Exodus talks about Aaron and Hur holding up the hands of Moses while the people of God fought the battle (Exodus 17:10-12). Also, in the book of Numbers, Moses sends out the spies instead of him going with them (Numbers 13:3). There were other great leaders like King David who did not always go to the battlefield. Nevertheless, Bellis writes, "Although Deborah accompanies Barak and the troops, it is not clear whether she actually goes into battle" (Bellis 2007, 102). Whether or not Deborah fought on the battlefield, her prophecy was fulfilled, when the woman named Jael killed King Sisera. After the victory, just as Moses and Miriam sang a song of gratitude, so did Deborah and Barak—except in this case the song is called the Song of Deborah. Bowker declares, "The Song of Deborah is one of the oldest passages in the Bible and calls her the mother in Israel" (Bowker 2001, 106).

The Women's Bible Commentary explains why Deborah judges under the palm tree. "So that she would not violate modesty laws, which prohibited a female from being alone in a room with a man who was not her husband, a situation she could have

encountered as a judge” (Lapsley 2012, 129). “Deborah, he argues, was a woman who governed the people, lead armies, selected generals, and triumphed in war. He concludes it is not sex, but valor which makes [her] strong” (Lapsley 2012, 130). Mieke Bal approaches the issue from a literary-critical perspective, “It is perhaps not a coincidence that the only judge who combines all forms of leadership possible—religious, military, judicial, and poetical—is a woman” (Bellis 2007, 102). “Susan Ackerman suggests that the story of Deborah could possibly reflect the historical reality that “women in early Israelite villages actually assumed Deborah-like leadership positions” (Bellis 2007, 103). There are many voices concerning Deborah’s authority to lead Israel, but men and women both agree that Deborah was the woman sitting under the palm tree; Israel came to her to solve their disputes and to have her cry out to God on their behalves. Deborah was an intercessor who stood in the gap in prayer on behalf of Israel. Deborah is an example for all women serving as leaders.

### **Huldah**

Huldah is another woman prophet that the Bible recognizes as working in the office of prophetess. Hilkiyah finds the book of the law. He tells the secretary Shaphan and he read it, and then both of them went to the King; Shaphan and Hilkiyah read the book again to the King. The words gripped the King’s heart and caused him to rip his robe, a symbol of repentance. The King ordered

Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaah the King’s attendants, Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found.” (2 Kings 22:8-13)



These five important men went and sought out a woman in the midst of all those men in Israel to give them the word of God for the King and all Israel. Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum. She said to them, “this is what the word of the Lord, the God of Israel says” (2 Kings 22:14-15). It is important that these men were able to look beyond gender to find out what God was saying to his people.

### **New Testament Women**

The compelling stories of women from the Hebrew Scriptures remain with us but are revealed to be part of a long line of faith-filled women who hear God’s voice and respond. The Christian Scriptures note other women who hear God’s call, a call sometimes breaking through history in unexpected ways and sometimes heard in the events of everyday life.

### **Mary, the Mother of Jesus**

The first woman in the New Testament, a compelling example of a woman leader, is Mary the mother of Jesus. When approached by the angel Gabriel, about bearing God’s Son in her body, Mary was given a choice. She was not forced to accept God’s will, nor did the angel speak first to her betrothed, Joseph, about God using her in this manner (Luke 1:26-38). Mary listened to the Angel Gabriel and considered God’s request. Though troubled, she responded in faith and said, “let it be done according to your word.” Mary remained engaged in life; she considered her cousin’s needs and offered her assistance. These things sound simple yet are the attributes of a good leader. Mary

listened, remained open, gave her response, and continued to engage others by seeing their needs and responding to them—all attributes of a strong leader.

Later, before Jesus had performed any miracles, she recognized a need—something that might cause another family embarrassment—and she asked her son to assist. Her faith in him was such that she knew he would know best the action to take. She then tells the attendants at the wedding feast in Cana to do whatever Jesus tells them to do, and they listened and turned to Jesus for direction (John 2:3). And finally, we see Mary in the upper room after the resurrection of Christ; she is mentioned as being with the leaders of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). God entrusted her to give birth to Jesus and train him up but not only the Lord Jesus. “Mary is honored widely in the Christian church...in helping to establish the early Christian church with Jesus’ brothers after His death” (Bowker 2001, 316).

### **The Samaritan Woman**

In the Bible, although women played significant role, they did not get much attention; in fact, they often remained nameless. One example is the “woman” at the well in Samaria whom Jesus engaged in conversation (John 4:7-42). The Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well became an evangelist in that she influenced her entire community with her words. She carries an awareness of reality—she knows the history of the place. She recognizes as truth what Jesus tells her, because he reveals her spiritual capacity as well as her past actions. “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’ When the Samaritan people came to Jesus, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two

days. And because of his words many more became believers” (John 4:39-41).

Modern-day experts tell us that influencers are leaders. The woman at the well was able to use her influence to lead the whole town to come to hear Jesus. Her conversation with Jesus is also one of the greatest discourses on worshipping God, and yet we have no idea of the woman’s name.

### **Pauline Statements**

The four daughters of the evangelist Phillip are another example of women’s roles in salvation history. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul visits Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the seven in Caesarea. Phillip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). The text does not directly say they prophesied to Paul, but it is a strong possibility these women did give the Apostle Paul a word from the Lord. The evangelist Phillip recognized his daughters’ gifts and so did others. The Bible tells us that “a gift opens the way” (Proverbs 18: 16).

The ability of women to use their gifts equally with men is noted in the example of Phillip’s four daughters. Their ability to prophesy was shared with us, so we can see that God used women in the days of the Apostles. I believe that God is still calling women into leadership roles even though their names may never be known. It is also interesting that the Bible identifies one of the New Testament women as a sinful woman.

Sometime before his death, Jesus was invited to the house of Simon the Pharisee for dinner. When he arrived, a woman from the town—whom we are told had lived a troubled life—came and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them dry with her hair and poured expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet. Simon, the host, could not see her courage

in her ability to push back her fear and step out in faith with humility. He could not see the reason for her to give her most priceless possession to another and not count the cost. All of her attributes, many, no doubt, gained from her troubled life, made it possible for her to see Jesus as another who had experienced a troubled life. She knew what was needed—to lead from humility. She was a leader in her right; she anointed Jesus (Luke 7:36-39).

### **Mary Magdalene**

After Jesus' death and before his departure to heaven, at his tomb he released Mary Magdalene. Jesus said, "do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" She told them what Jesus said to her (John 20:17-18). Mary did not question Jesus, instead she believed it was him and that what he was saying was true. Mary Magdalene was instructed to spread the word as an evangelist.

Evangelism is part of the five-fold leadership call. Each of these women took on leadership roles, yet each in her own way. Christ himself gave "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in faith and become mature" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

One of the strongest statements on gender equality occurred when Paul announced in Galatians that "there is neither male nor female" in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). I believe this passage of scripture let's us know that because of the cross of Christ

we are equals, and we should look beyond our gender and embrace the call to impact this world for Christ.

Paul includes an extensive list of individual names of believers and sends that list to people in a city he has not yet visited. He no doubt hoped that these individuals would pave the way for the reception of his letter and its content—doing what today would be called networking. A second unusual feature of the set of greetings is the prominence of women within it. First comes Phoebe who is a deacon. Paul continues and acknowledges nine women, “Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, and Julia, and the sister of Nereus. He speaks of these women having risked their necks for him and identifies them as the host of congregations” (Lapsley 2012, 555).

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul talks about these women briefly. I will talk about Prisca, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis to illustrate that women had leadership roles in the days of the Apostle Paul. Paul calls Priscilla and Aquila co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for him and the church. He acknowledges that they had a church in their home. Paul talks about how great Andronicus and Junia are. They are fellow Jews and had been in prison with him; he notes how outstanding they were among the apostles. Paul went on to admit that they were in Christ before him. Paul acknowledges that both Tryphaena and Tryphosa, were hard workers in the Lord. Persis was another woman Paul talks about as working hard for the Lord (Romans 16:3,7,12). I have purposely selected Romans 16 to share because so many churches have built their theology around Paul, saying that women should be quiet in church and this constitutes their argument about why women should not lead churches. However,

Romans 16 clearly acknowledges that Paul believed in and recognizes women in leadership roles.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have offered a scriptural overview of a few of the leading women in the Bible. Many women leaders need these leadership abilities or gifts to be restored to history. I have determined, however, that this effort—to address every woman leader in the Bible—would require years of research. I have also discovered that there are not enough Womanist theologians to write on this topic to bring my project to completion. Because it is important to understand biblical women's lives, I will continue to study their gifts. I have attempted to give voice to a few of these women and, through my methodology using the Qualtrics online survey, I am able to give voice to women in this century who are applying for lead positions or serving in pastoral lead positions.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

As noted, this research project discusses gender bias in the leadership of Protestant churches in the United States. My study asked how female clergy, other than the author, have experienced gender bias. This study originated from the investigator's frustration with being a female clergy person within a Protestant church that functions as a male-dominant organism. The earlier overview in chapter one included elements of the investigator's background and current social location as it relates to leadership.

My research and lived experience suggested questions to ask participants in my study, which took the form of an online survey. As the researcher, I acknowledge that there were limitations in this study. This chapter introduces the methodology's aim and design, as well as data collection and analysis protocols. The chapter also concludes with a look at validity and ethical issues that arose in the research project.

#### **Overview of Purpose and Research Question**

This study was undertaken to give voice to women in ministry. It also compared and contrasted positive biblical examples with current female leadership options. I was able to examine the possibilities and occurrences of gender bias within the church toward women who were pursuing leadership positions or serving as lead pastors in Protestant churches. All study participants were female clergy affiliated with a Protestant church. Limited research has been done on this topic; I discovered that more research is still needed because female clergy are still encountering obstacles when seeking leadership

positions within the church. In this research I narrowed my questions and research to the Protestant church only. Even though I believed that the same gender biases occur in Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and many other denominational churches.

The article “Gifted for Leadership” recognizes that statistics on women in leadership are on the rise in some churches, and this has ignited discussion on our topic.

Female ordination within the American Baptist, Presbyterian USA, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America supports female ordination, but denominations such as the Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist are still against ordaining women. Today women clergy are leading 20% of mainline Protestant churches. (Emmert 2015, 1)

Hartford research survey estimates consistently find that around only “10% of congregations have a woman as senior or sole leaders (Emmert 2015, 1). In 2010 a national survey of a fully representative, multifaith sample of 11, 000 American churches found that 12% of all congregations had a female as senior or sole ordained leader.” For Old-line Protestant churches, female leadership has increased to 24%; yet, in Evangelical congregations it drops to 9%. These studies have not tracked the gender of associate or assistant pastors. These research studies also do not include the Church of God in Christ denomination, which is predominantly African American. Research shows that the Free Methodists have only 1% of clergy who are women, while the American Baptists have 12% female clergy (Emmert 2015, 1).

Each research article confirms my findings that gender bias still exists in the church. As an expert I suggest that there is still a need for further study on this topic. I believe that equality and justice for female clergy is needed to create balance in our



Protestant churches. The questionnaire used for this investigation asked the open-ended questions provided here:

### **Research Survey Questions**

1. What credentials does a senior pastor need in order to lead a congregation successfully?
2. Have you experienced gender discrimination as a woman in church leadership? If yes how has it affected your leadership?
3. What do you think needs to be addressed within the church or seminaries so that women are treated and acknowledged as equals in the church?
4. According to your understanding of Scripture what are the qualifications for women in leadership?
5. Do you think the body of Christ is negatively impacted if women are not operating in the leadership position that God has called them to? If not, why not? If yes, describe how.

### **Methods**

#### **Anticipated Limitations/Delimitations**

Research limitations included the study's time focus (two-week span) and the fact that participants were only from Protestant affiliations. Likewise, participants were only female ministers. There was no sampling from men regarding this topic. In addition, the research study project had 13 participant respondents who completed the online Qualtrics survey—in contrast to the anticipated 20 respondents. Because the survey was given online no personal interaction with the researcher occurred. The data gathered, therefore, lacked nonverbal communication input.

### **Recruitment of Survey Participants**

I invited a diverse group of participants, both racially and from different protestant denominations, to participate in the online survey. The identity of each participant was to remain anonymous and no respondents were to self-identify. The places and people I gave referrals to included: Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry, doctoral women students, my personal female clergy contacts, and Free Methodist Women Clergy contacts on Facebook. Each group received the same recruitment letter in shown in Appendix A. The total number of women respondents was 13, as stated previously.

### **Data Collection**

The five questions posed to online participants were open-ended and qualitative, and available in an online Qualtrics survey. Since the research focused on the issues that women face when pursuing lead pastoral positions, data received was based on their experiences and perceptions. The research design was phenomenological so that female clergy would think deeply; heuristic inquiry was used to draw out the researcher's experiences. Survey data were collected over a two-week period, and at the end of the two weeks the survey was closed to all participants. The data were read and reread over the three weeks following the survey closure. To analyze the responses, I looked for common threads and experiences. To generate themes, survey answers were categorized by using *descriptive coding*. I assigned

labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data. [Descriptive coding] provides an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing. (Saldana 2013, 292)

The categories considered were theoretically important to me as the investigator.

### **Data Analysis**

Using a Qualtrics online survey allowed me to collect the data quickly; data also can be analyzed digitally because Qualtrics is a software program (Creswell 2016, 153).

To engage in the general process of data analysis the researcher read through the data slowly, numerous times, and made notes of what participants said. Once I was confident of my assessment, the coding process started. After what was being said was clear, as the researcher I assigned codes to all text passages. Next, similar codes were grouped together to build evidence in support of the broader categories or themes. These themes would tell the story of the barriers that women clergy were facing within Protestant denominations. The themes also gave voice to the struggles survey participants have had and are currently experiencing,

### **Summary**

To reveal the participants' individual experiences, the researcher chose to ask five qualitative, opened-ended questions that would allow the individuals to share their experiences. Data from this phenomenological and heuristic study was reviewed and compared to similar occurrences to discover to what degree women are finding acceptance as senior pastors. Qualtrics was used to collect data, to help create descriptive themes, and to code findings.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This research study was undertaken to examine the possibility that gender bias—toward women pursuing or serving as lead pastors—is prevalent in U.S. Protestant churches. The overall purpose of this study was not only to give women in church leadership today a voice regarding gender bias that they may have experienced with church practice and leadership, but also to offer a biblical foundation regarding women leaders and their leadership.

The research effort, as noted, used a Qualtrics online survey to facilitate gathering and analyzing data. Five open-ended, qualitative questions were given to participants to elicit comments. Since the research topic focused on the barriers that women face when pursuing lead pastor positions, responses were based on their perceptions. The project methodology has been detailed in chapter 3.

In the Results section that follows are details or outcomes as determined from the women's responses.

## **Results**

### **Question 1 - Credentials**

**What credentials does a senior pastor need in order to lead a congregation successfully?**

Because the backgrounds of the respondents varied, so too did their responses. I did not define “successfully” for the respondents but left it up to them to define what success was. The qualifications the respondents identified varied, but they included:

#### **Successfully completing formal Theological or Biblical Training**

Respondents #2 and #10 listed a master’s degree as their only requirement. But nearly all included some type of seminary or theological training either before or after assuming the senior pastor’s position.

#### **Successful completion of an ordination process**

Respondents #2, 4, 6, and 12 cited the ordination process as a means for determining and recognizing the qualifications needed to serve as the lead pastor. Others recognized the need for some sort of oversight, developmental, and accountability structure for the senior pastor.

#### **A life that has demonstrated good character**

Respondent #1 listed, almost exclusively, character traits. She cites, “A willing spirit, a growing faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and a humble recognition...a commitment to keep studying and learning, humility toward others and a commitment to growing in speaking skills. Respondent #5 stated that the lead pastor should be “proven

to be a person of character,” while respondent #9 put character first saying, “They need to be people of integrity and good character.”

### **Evidence or development of Leadership skills**

At least one respondent did not see a link between credentials and success because for her (respondent #8) “Success depends on gifts, perseverance, determination, opportunity.” Respondent #9 stated, “They need to possess gifting for the job, and be leaders whom people follow. They should have a proven record of fruitful ministry. They should have the skills to manage a staff with all kinds of people and be able to relate to a congregation with love.” Respondents #5, 6, 7, 11, and 13 felt that leadership skills, while important, were something that could be developed through “Extensive Leadership Training.”

### **A Spirit-led life**

Respondents #1, 4, 5 and 9 mentioned or emphasized being Spirit led. While being spirit led is mentioned several times, Respondent #9 had a good description on what being Spirit-led looks like for the lead pastor: “They should have a strong relationship with God where they practice the spiritual disciplines, so they can grow and learn in the faith.”

### **Fruitfulness in Ministry**

“They should have a proven record of fruitful ministry” (#9).

### **A personal call**

While many of the respondents cited a personal call, some identified the call as coming from a church or denomination #11 and #12 or being an affirmation of the calling. Respondents #3, #4, and #13 emphasized the call as coming from God.

## **Question 2 - Discrimination**

**Have you experienced gender discrimination as a woman in church leadership?**

**If yes, how has it affected your leadership?**

All thirteen-survey participants stated that they had experienced gender discrimination as a woman in church leadership. While not surprised by that finding, I am still amazed that so many women, like myself, who are serving God continue to fight a fight that saps them of energy, time, and resources. At a time when the accomplishments of women in the world are being heralded, there is a great need for church leaders—both female and male. Church leaders who are choosing to ignore these findings on gender bias do so at their own peril.

### **Nature of Discernment**

In responding to the question of discrimination against women in church leadership, I began by examining the settings where the discrimination occurs. Next, I examined the nature of the discrimination that survey participants had experienced and are still experiencing. Finally, I highlight the results or impact of the discrimination in the lives of these female church leaders.

### **The Locations where Discrimination/bias was Experienced**

Although I did not ask the survey participants where they had experienced discrimination, it soon became obvious from their responses to questions that participants were receiving discrimination at a number of institutions as they struggled with church leadership.

#### **Discrimination in Seminaries**

Seminaries were often mentioned as a place where they respondents experienced discrimination. Seminaries are institutions that many participants stated one should attend to receive credentials for becoming a lead pastor. For most women seeking to serve as a pastor, attending a seminary is an obvious first step in one's pursuit of church leadership. Imagine enrolling in a seminary that purports to be supportive of training God's people for ministry, paying your tuition, and then encountering flagrant discrimination against you. Respondent #1 reported "In seminary I had men who acted surprised that I was pursuing an MDiv and [they] tried to show me scriptures which spoke against women being pastors. I also had a professor who took my questions and interest in the subject being taught as 'flirtatious.' His words silenced me from speaking up in class for the rest of my time in seminary."

#### **Discrimination at the denominational level**

For many participants, the discrimination they experienced was most notable at a denominational level. This is also the level where women are dealing with other peer leaders in their denomination. Respondent #6 stated, "The main discrimination might have been in the ordination process when it was assumed that I would not be interested in



senior leadership since my husband was already a senior pastor. It caused me to doubt my capability and question my call.” Participant #10 stated, “It [discrimination] has affected and limited my ability to move in mainline church leadership positions. Oftentimes it feels as if my gifts are not acknowledged on the same level as my male colleagues.” Even when participants are acknowledged as leaders within the denomination, getting appointed to a church is a different story. Participant #12 replied, “it [discrimination] limited my ability to even be appointed to a church.” Again, all of these things are happening within denominations that *recognize and support* women serving as lead pastors. When dealing with her peers, participant #12 states, “...it appears as though I was the first woman who truly desired to be involved and [I] asserted my seat at the table. This was awkward at first and many of my male peers didn't know what to do with me.”

### **Discrimination in the local church**

Participants reported the area where they experienced the most discrimination was at the local church. This should come as no surprise since pastors do their work and spend the most time at the local church. Respondent #1 reported “...there have been people in congregations I've served who treat me differently because I am a woman.” Respondent #4 reported “It has affected my leadership by not being viewed [to be] as competent as my male counterparts. Since my style of delivery is different then, there are still a few members who refuse to receive the message or will label the message as mediocre.”

### **The nature of discrimination against participants**

When trying to describe discrimination, one is often left grasping for a definition. But like Justice Potter's statement about pornography, "I know it when I see it," women leaders who have been discriminated against, recognize it. It is often overlooked or ignored, however, by male peers. At times discrimination is blatant and direct. Respondent #11 related concerns about "people of the church" who would think and act in the ways that were anti-female, patriarchal, etc., or as pastor #13 said in ways that are "misogynistic and abusive."

One of the things that saddened many participants were those members of the church who would leave and go to another church rather than have a woman as a pastor. These individuals may not see their actions as being discriminatory, as many churches experience members who leave when the senior pastor leaves. Reasons for the departure are usually not stated, as "I don't want a woman pastor." Unfortunately, many pastors, churches, and seminaries teach that a woman cannot be a pastor, so it's no surprise that even in churches and denominations that state they believe in women pastors, not all of the members subscribe to gender equality.

Several participants reported attempts to undermine their leadership and authority. One pastor (#12) stated, "Within this year I have experienced many, (some subtle, some intentional division behind my back, some more blatant and disturbing) acts of discrimination due to my gender. Though we all try to keep these things from affecting our ministry and leadership, it is impossible to not be affected. It makes it far harder to

trust people and particularly those on your leadership team, and it also adds an air of needing to constantly prove yourself.”

A woman’s competence for the senior pastor position is questioned. Participant #1 noted, “Sometimes it is subtle, such as commenting on my attire and hair; sometimes it has been more overt by not believing that I can be as knowledgeable or trustworthy as a man. Most of my discrimination has been experienced as people not valuing my mind as much as they would a man's.”

### **Results of discrimination against survey participants**

The current status, and ministry, of the women who participated in the survey vary greatly. But one thing is clear from every respondent, the impact of discrimination against women lingers, and it is a heavy load to carry. None of the survey participants expressed appreciation for the discrimination they have experienced. Some have resigned to work in a field where they may never be as appreciated as their male peers, and some recognize themselves to be pioneers paving the way for women who will come after them. Regardless, every woman pastor respondent works with the knowledge that discrimination exists, and the pain of discrimination shaped how they do ministry. Respondent #2, I believe, spoke for majority when she said, “It [discrimination] makes me feel unwanted, ineffective, incapable of doing as much as I'm gifted and designed to do.” Respondent #3 replied, “It’s like I’m stuck and not able to move forward in ministry within the church.”

While all of the participants suffered the effects of discrimination, it has been especially harsh for some. Some have considered resignation or drawing back into

traditional roles. Respondent #13 said, “I have experienced gender discrimination and my Leadership confidence has suffered, in that I tend to take a back seat more often than I probably should. I don't have the energy to pursue ‘non-traditional’ roles anymore.”

Respondent #9 said “Sometimes it made me feel guilty like I should quit.” Participant #7 acknowledged, “It has caused me to almost resign my position, and [I] wondered if the situations I was going through at the time, and the stress it created on me physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, was worth it.”

For many of the participants, discrimination drove them to seek God more deeply than they ever had before and to discover a new maturity. Respondent #4 wrote, “In the beginning I was intimidated, but once I began looking with spiritual eyes, I saw the truth of the impact of what God said through me. I had to recognize the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts of people. Most importantly I had to remember it is my job to prepare and give the Holy Spirit an equipped vessel and then trust that He would do the rest.” Respondent #5 wrote, “Although at first it [discrimination] affected my motivation to speak and [my] attitude when I spoke, both of which were not good, in the long run it helped me to be more discerning, wiser with my words and ultimately it gave me a sensitivity to the prompting of the Holy Spirit which restored my boldness to speak and be ‘heard’!” Respondent #11 recalled her experiences with humor, “Some of those moments and experiences provide for entertaining recollections and stories now. At the time they happened, it was sad, frustrating, made me annoyed with the ‘people of the church’ who would think and act in the ways that were anti-female, patriarchal, etc. Those experiences also caused me to keep learning and growing about how change occurs, to become even more secure in my sense of self and my call to ministry.” Pastor #9 is considerate of

future ministries, “In other ways, it made me stronger and depend more on God for understanding my call. It made me want to raise up strong women leaders and be mindful of little girls who are growing up who need to have strong female pastors to listen and look up to as leaders.”

For some their persistence and boldness has enabled them to circumvent or bring change to the established structures. Respondent #8 notes “I have experienced that [discrimination] from conference and denominational leadership. However, I started my own church so that lessened the impact. It did however take me an extra year to get ordained.” Another respondent, #12, related, “I know that there are a few members of our weekly gathering whose attendance has fallen off since my arrival and at first this made me feel like I should pull back out so as not to upset the apple cart, but the Lord convicted me strongly that it needed upsetting, so I stayed. I am overjoyed that the Lord has done great work in this venue and it seems that my presence is now welcomed by most.”

My research findings confirm those of Zikmund et al. published two decades ago:

Women often have a more difficult time than men in being accepted initially and in carrying out their ministries, which might weaken their self-concept as competent clergy. By contrast, [in] their efforts to become clergy, many women have had to overcome numerous obstacles and survive difficult experiences and hard knocks, leading to greater self-confidence as women who know who they are and who feel good about themselves. (Zikmund, Lummis and Chang 1998)

### **Question 3 - Biblical**

**What needs to be addressed within the church or seminaries so that women are treated and acknowledged as equals in church leadership?**

The responses to this question tended to focus on biblical hermeneutics, gender awareness or sensitivity training, and the pastoral selection or hiring processes. All respondents, except one, provided feedback that indicated a need for biblical teaching and training that shows women as equals and provides examples of women in church leadership. The respondents also pointed to the different ways that men and women church leaders respond and lead, as well as the need for training that acknowledges and respects the differences.

The one exception is respondent #5 who does not believe that women are equal to men. She believes that women were created to be in partnership with man not equal to man. Her response to the question was an attempt to educate me, as the survey creator, to God's plan and intention in making men and women. "Partnership to me thrives not through equality but by one valuing the others contribution to the whole. Just as Life cannot procreate without both, neither can a church, a family, or a community be fruitful without both man and woman." While this respondent did not answer the question, since she does not believe in male-female equality, it provides us with a look at the historical and traditional gender role model of church leadership.

### **Biblical Hermeneutics**

The participants, for the most part, responded with solid suggestions for improving the atmosphere where women pastors serve. These are some of the common

threads and experiences that shed light on the topic. The number one need that most women surveyed would like to see is proper hermeneutics. The author agrees with this statement and addresses this subject in Chapter 2. As respondent #1 put it, “Strong exegetical teaching is essential so that men and women can learn to read and teach the larger narrative of scripture that includes women and men as equal leader's in God's church.” Some of the respondents, when asked this question, responded with a reference to a single verse of scripture. Respondent #4 stated “The church must first acknowledge and address that Paul was addressing Jewish women (wives) under the Law. Paul was correcting women who were being disruptive.” No doubt she was referring to Paul’s admonition in 1 Timothy 2:12. Perhaps she chose this verse because this is one of the scriptures often cited when limiting women from church leadership positions. But for most respondents the main concern was how the volume of scripture was interpreted.

Respondent #13’s entire response to this question was, “The misinterpretation of scripture.” While this hardly serves as a road map for addressing gender discrimination in the church, I can appreciate how, for some, the scriptures are used as a tool to subjugate women. “I think a holistic approach to biblical interpretation of women in ministry needs to be taught,” wrote respondent #7. While still another respondent (#9) wrote, “The issue gets down to biblical interpretation, and that is where the divide occurs. Even with sound biblical exegesis, the divide cannot be bridged because there is a different interpretation.” Most of the other respondents agreed that something is needed to supplement biblical hermeneutics to address the culture of the church both historic and contemporary. This respondent recognized the need for something that went beyond biblical exegesis that would serve as a bridge. Others have recognized and commented on the need for

something additional that would help the women pastors to be able to work with their male counterparts, and which would help these males to be able to work with them.

### **Gender awareness training**

Respondent #11 commented, “We need to continue to have courses and conversations on women in leadership. There is some sense that by 2018 we are past all that, but unfortunately, that is not true. The deep conversation and reality check-ins need to continue for men as well.” Courses and conversations on “women in leadership” could happen in either the seminaries or in the churches. The women responders, without exception, seemed to acknowledge and celebrate the differing styles of men and women leaders. Respondent #6 wrote, “Women could use some training in how men lead and collaborate—so she can effectively work with their style—but men could use training in how women lead so they would understand that styles of leadership are different but can be equally effective. Of course, understanding and strong teaching that God calls both men and women is essential.” The courses and trainings suggested could be held at, or sponsored by, the church, denomination, or seminaries. Respondent #9 also was somewhat insistent that seminaries help lead the way. “In denominations where there is a theology of equality, there needs to be mentoring, advocacy, empowering, and opportunities for women to be equipped for all levels of leadership. In seminary, women need to be treated as equals and everyone should have to write a paper on the biblical reasons why women should be in church leadership.” In addition to the training the theme of accountability was also presented. This is in perfect agreement with the findings of other scholars.



Zikmund et al. have previously asked questions concerning the differences between male and female leadership.

The question arises as to whether male and female clergy differ in approaches to leadership. Are female pastors leading their congregations differently? if so how?...The collected [data suggested] both women and men think that significant differences exist between male and female....Male clergy believe that women clergy are more caring than men about the individual lives of members of the congregation, more personally sensitive, more nurturing, and more likely to draw on personal experiences in preaching, teaching, and counseling....Everyone also agrees that clergy women are less interested than clergy men in congregational politics, power over others and job prestige. (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998)

The research also acknowledged that women are more willing to share power than their male counterparts. However, male clergy reject this finding. In addition, clergywomen's leadership styles are slightly more democratic than male clergy who have a more directive leadership style (Zikmund, Lummis and Chang 1998).

### **Pastoral selection/ hiring processes**

The hiring or selection process for pastors drew the ire of some respondents. For instance, #2 wrote, "Church boards and denominations need accountability to increase representation at all levels, even if it means passing new bylaws." The responses suggest that women were not given the same opportunities as men, but there were no consequences for not hiring qualified and fruitful women or for hiring unfruitful men. In addition, respondent #2 said "Churches need to stop hiring men who have no proven leadership fruit regarding empowerment of women in leadership. Respondent #11 indicated "Overall there was a consensus that more women need to be included in major decisions and jobs. They also wanted concrete examples of "how men pastors are supporting women in ministry and actualizing" it in their ministry settings. The bottom

line is that the women leaders surveyed did not feel that these changes would just happen if things are left as they are. There is a need to be intentional about change and a need to be sensitive to the struggles that women pastors have. The following incident from respondent #12 sums it up. Chaves has noted that change may be desired and required due the circumstances but that does not necessarily bring about lasting transformation.

Mark Chaves addresses clergy shortages.

It is certainly the case that clergy shortages influence the extent to which women do the work of clergy. This phenomenon—women fulfilling slots that men do not want—is widely observed across occupations and historical periods....Religious work is no exception. Even Martin Luther apparently believed that women should preach if there was ever a shortage of men. (Chaves 1997, 131)

He argues,

While not denying the market forces that lead congregations faced with a shortage of male clergy to draft women to do the work, emphasizes the likelihood that such a market forces will not directly translate into formal rules that enshrine gender equality. (Chaves 1997, 132)

Number 12 continues,

“I think that all leadership needs to be far more intentional toward inclusion in all things. You know, the forward blatant discrimination is easier to deal with, painful, but something you can address. But it's the subtle things that happen, many with no ill intentions that are most damaging. I will give you one example: The annual conference when the roll call of new appointments the year of my appointment was an event I looked forward to. I had worked so hard to hear the title ‘Lead Pastor’ after my name in the company of my peers, I couldn't wait! I listened with growing excitement as my peers were declared, ‘Lead Pastors’ then the moment came... and the person of authority said my name and the name of the church of appointment...and nothing else. No declaration of ‘Lead Pastor,’ just my name and the name of the assistant pastor also appointed. My heart was broken. When I mentioned it to my female supervisor, there was a passing apology and a comment that she was sure it was simply forgotten. ‘You know he's one of our biggest supporters!’ And he is, and she feels pretty sure it wasn't intentional, however....This broke my heart even more. Someone should have been extra

careful that the only female appointment to a lead pastor role that year was given the same level of honor and respect that everyone else was given who happened to be male. I didn't want more than they had, just the same thing they had, and it was denied. These subtle, even small mistakes are treated like no one notices and should be easily forgiven then forgotten, but they influence minds and hearts in insidious ways. The enemy capitalizes on these things and it harms our leaders.”

#### **Question 4 - Qualifications**

**According to your understanding of the scriptures, what are the qualifications for women in leadership?**

##### **Equals**

The respondents as a whole stated that the qualifications for a woman in leadership are “the same as the qualifications for a man” and most stated it in those exact words.

##### **Character**

A few participants mentioned specific characteristics including salvation, knowledge of God’s word, humility, the fruit of the spirit, a compassionate heart, a teachable spirit. Respondent #6 summarized what the other respondents were saying “Confirmed to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, knows and obeys Scripture, a person of prayer, self-controlled, above reproach, servant heart.”

### **Question 5 – Impact on the Body of Christ**

**Do you think the body of Christ is negatively impacted if women are not operating in the leadership position that God has called them to?**

**If no, why not? If yes, describe how.”**

All the respondents indicated that the body of Christ is negatively impacted if women are not operating in the leadership position that God has called them to. The manners and ways in which they believe the body of Christ is negatively impacted varied greatly. Following are the responses of each of the participants in her own words.

**Respondent # 1** “Genesis 1 tells us clearly that the image of God is represented through men and women. If we only have men in leadership then we consistently present a distorted, incomplete image of God to people. I have been surprised how much the men in my community appreciate my voice and perspective on scripture. Men and women learn so much from each other. To have only all women in leadership would create the same problems. God was intentional in his creation of people being not just one gender; we are called to live into the fullness of God's creation and it is in the fullness of humanity that we move toward the fullness of God.”

**Respondent # 2** “When women aren't leading as God called them too, I have seen seeds of resentment and bitterness grow, and it poisons the church. Recently I gave a sermon about two women Jesus healed, and people kept saying, "I never thought about the passage that way before." I said, "Maybe that's because we need more women in the pulpit." We miss out on the full interpretation of Scripture when we limit who is qualified

based on the type of body they have. Also, the church is denied the intelligence and gifting God has given it when they channel women into restricted roles.”

**Respondent # 3** “There are many women sitting in churches hurting, broken, emotionally wounded, wearing a mask, stuck, and want freedom to move forward but don't know how.”

**Respondent # 4** “The body of Christ will be negatively impacted if women are not operating in their leadership positions. The women of the Bible were not identified as having been key to the establishment of Christianity. So women today make very significant contributions to Christianity. Women outnumber men in the church, so if women are not operating in their position many ministries would not be established. Many men who started ministries began them mainly because they believed that women were not permitted to have authority over a man or be in leadership.”

**Respondent #5** “The body of Christ is negatively impacted if women are not operating in their leadership position that God has called them to, as I stated earlier woman brings necessary and essential elements needed for health and growth. The body of Christ will be deficient and walk with a “limp” without woman being fully engaged and activated within the church. We have to be careful not to allow culture to override God’s intentions and not allow movements to dictate church leadership.”

**Respondent # 6** “God is both male and female—so the church, the body of Christ, should be equally represented and led by both genders. The different perspectives add depth and insight not possible with only one gender.”

**Respondent # 7** “Not only are they missing out on the voice of half the church, they are missing out on providing a platform and outlet for women to fulfill their God-given callings and identify, develop, and deploy their talents and gifts within the Body of Christ.”

**Respondent # 8** “B.T. Roberts said we shouldn’t be pushing women off the scaffolding who are trying to build the Kingdom. The church grows best with all its potential engaged and is the best Body with all its parts functioning. I think the complementary gifts of men and women benefit the church.”

**Respondent # 9** “It is imperative for both voices to be heard in teaching and preaching, so people can hear the Word from both perspectives. If only a man is allowed to speak, half the room does not have a voice, which they can relate to or maybe even hear. Also, if people are given gifts based on the Spirit and not gender, that means the body is not fully functioning to its full capacity. It means the Kingdom cannot move forward as well, or possibly as quickly, since there are less leaders. It means the witness to the unchurched may be hurt as this internal struggle continues. The church is negatively impacted when hierarchical systems oppress those God could use.”

**Respondent # 10** “To deny women the ability to operate in a leadership position is to deny part of God. God is represented in all of humanity and to exclude women is to deny humanity a balanced perspective of who God is. In the image of God we are created.”

**Respondent # 11** “If anyone is not functioning as God has gifted them, the body of Christ is not whole or living up to its ability.”

**Respondent # 12** has summarized question 5 quite well “The body of Christ suffers when anyone is not living up to their call. The Lord has a plan and will for each of us individually and corporately. If we are not all walking in that will the body, is not as fruitful as it was designed to be. Women called into leadership have been called for their unique gifts, those gifts have a season when they are necessary relating to what God desires to accomplish. If the woman with those gifts is not supported, encouraged, and elevated in her call, God's plan and purpose may not be realized.”

**Respondent # 13** “We have seen in other religious traditions that where women do not operate in their God called leadership roles, they [the tradition] is misogynistic and abusive.”

### **Things I discovered from research**

1. All of the participants have experienced gender-based discrimination.
2. Even in the institutions that say they support women clergy, much discrimination still exists.
3. Participants were able to recognize not only the problems of gender bias, but they were able to give concrete solutions.

### **My Surprise**

The participants did not allow the pain of their discrimination to hinder them from providing solutions for the body of Christ. In fact, most of the respondents were more

interested in moving forward instead of focusing on the discrimination they had [experienced] or are experiencing.

### **The Survey Finding Confirmed**

Gender bias is prevalent, and it has the ability to discourage women leaders and hinder effective ministry. I anticipated finding discrimination in the church, but I underestimated the impact of discrimination in Protestant denominations and seminaries.

### **Summary**

All survey participants were able to give witness to their own experiences of discrimination. The pain and grief they suffered is not a thing of the past; many are still struggling with it or healing from it. Even among the individual who does not believe in gender equality, there was recognition that gender biases have a devastating impact in the lives of women leaders and churches. The respondents recognized the need for accountability in the training and in the selection process for pastors, male and female. In addition, there needs to be some type of sensitivity training that addresses women in church leadership from a biblical and historical perspective. The research results confirmed my initial belief that gender bias is prevalent in the Protestant church.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH SUMMARY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore whether gender bias was prevalent within the structures of leadership in Protestant churches. The research did this by giving a statement of the historical problem, by recognizing other researchers' findings, and by exploring biblical researchers' works which shed a light on the scriptures. Next, I surveyed current and past women leaders in Protestant churches and drew conclusions from the results of the survey. I concluded this study by looking at areas of research that require further study and where my study might contribute to the practices of ministerial leadership.

My research confirms that discrimination/bias against clergywomen is real and that survey participations' experiences reflect other research findings. The historical findings address different groups of Protestant women that include African American, Evangelical, Asian, Mainline, and Pentecostal women leaders. One research project noted that Asian women pastors are often faced with choosing between gender and race in responding to the call to lead (Pak 2013, 298). As an African American woman pastor, I have experienced discrimination on multiple levels. One researcher noted:

In light of the evidence of increased inclusion of African American women in formal religious leadership positions, the need to overcome structural barriers persists. There remains a tendency for religion as a traditionally male-dominated institution to continue to accept attitudes of reluctance in terms of including women wholeheartedly as equals.... (Royster 2013, 321)

My research agrees wholeheartedly with Royster's research, which found that respondents still are struggling for equality as leaders within the church, and their struggle is compounded when their ethnicity is not considered.

In this survey, one respondent referred to the failure of the church to acknowledge women's leadership in biblical days with today's failure to acknowledge women's current contributions. She saw the same marginalization that happened in previous generations happening today. She wrote, "The women of the Bible were not identified as having been key to the establishment of Christianity. So, women today make very significant contributions to Christianity. Women outnumber men in the church..." Despite the progress that has been made, women are still being discouraged at some seminaries and told that they cannot lead. The seminaries are a great place to address some of the biased attitudes that persist. Even when the professors are not hostile to women in church leadership, at times the other students are. These students while claiming to present a correct and historical view of women in church leadership, fail to recognize the true contributions of women in scriptures. "Because of their gender, women encounter unique challenges as they pursue leadership appointments in Protestant churches. Throughout history, and especially today, the Bible is used to keep women in subjection and to hinder their emancipation" (Fiorenza 1984, 11). While seminaries are becoming more inclusive and exploring the contributions of women in the Bible, the environment in some of our seminaries, not only the teachings, needs to be addressed to make the seminaries a less hostile environment.

In the literature review, the focus shifted to reconstructing the lives of biblical women by making every effort to hear their voices (Kraemer and D'Angelo 1999).

Hearing their voice through retelling the scripture stories helps to examine women's leadership roles instead of their domestic roles. This study is not denying the fact that "men play important parts, but the protagonists are women, as can be seen in countless biblical stories in countless continuing chapters and verse" (Bundesen 2007, 52). In the Results chapter each woman's private voice as well as her corporate voice could be heard.

It is not possible to paint Protestants churches with a brush as being all the same or to draw one conclusion about them all, and less possible to draw conclusions regarding a subset such as the Evangelicals. As one researcher observed,

Evangelicals today remain as divided over the role women in church leadership as they were four centuries ago. They run the gamut from denominations that were formed by women and embrace their leadership in all positions of authority, to denominations that believe women are called to serve in positions subordinate to men, excluding them from the pastoral office. (Deasy 2013, 280)

The battle women face in this research is a battle has been going on for centuries. Some women even struggle with the idea of women pastors.

Unconscious and inarticulate emotions related to sexuality often drive women's resistance to female pastors...If he is attractive, personable, and fun to be with, the male pastor can fill a void for female parishioners that a woman cannot. (Smith 2013, 38)

Conclusions that can be drawn from this research study include the fact that every respondent experienced some form of discrimination, and many of the respondents felt that there were significant differences between men and women in the way they lead.

### **Differences in Style**

Some of these differences result in women leaders experiencing discrimination and misunderstanding in the church. Some women believe the differences are minimal,

while others believe the differences are significant. For example, Respondent #1 reported “...there have been people in congregations I've served who treat me differently because I am a woman.” And respondent #4 reported “It has affected my leadership by not being viewed as being as competent as my male counterparts. Since my style of delivery is different then there are still a few members who refuse to receive the message or will label the message as mediocre”.

Lehman comments on the past and present efforts to address these issues:

As was the case in the secular women's movement, up through the 1970s supporters of women's ordination typically emphasized gender equality and down-played sex differences in taking the role of ordained minister. The predominant goals were to reform sexist practices, reconstruct (reinterpret) biblical traditions, and promote an androgynous ministry. All of these specific objectives were designed to open the ordained ministry to women—to “bring women in.” The predominant assertion was that women could perform clergy roles just as well as men. The argument at the heart of this movement was that there were no relevant differences between men and women in terms of their capacity to serve congregations as religious leaders—a ‘minimalist’ argument. Accordingly, the actions the churches were called upon to take were clear and simple—barriers to women's ordination and placement should be removed (Lehman, Jr. 1993, 14).

In calling for training that emphasizes the difference between men's and women's leadership styles, many of the respondents either knowingly or unknowingly embraced more of a “maximalist” approach to women in leadership. These differences are real and there is a need for the church to be informed of their existence as well as for church leaders to know what some of the major differences are and how those differences can be mitigated (Lehman, Jr. 1993),

Lehman, Jr., discusses the research that was done in the areas of differences between men's and women's leadership styles. In chapter five, Lehman Jr.'s study

(1993) of ministry style in four mainline Protestant denominations is the most complete examination of those questions to date. Based on the arguments of the maximalists, the study identified nine ways in which male and female clergy supposedly differed in their approach to ministry:

1. Using power over the congregation;
2. Seeking to empower lay church members;
3. Desiring positions of formal authority;
4. Using formal/rational decision-making;
5. Making ethical decisions legalistically;
6. Interacting with an open interpersonal style;
7. Preaching with a focus on human needs;
8. Seeking status among other clergy; and
9. Being involved in social issues.

The study-collected data from roughly equal numbers of male and female clergy who were asked multiple questions related to each of those nine aspects of ministry style. When the responses of the clergymen were compared with those of the clergywomen, being male or female accounted for differences in the measures of only four of those areas: (1) More men than women manifested tendencies to use power over the lay members of the congregation. (2) More women than men were trying to empower their lay members to master their own spiritual lives and congregational affairs. (3) Men were

more legalistic than women in dealing with ethical issues. (4) More men than women preferred making decisions using formal and rational criteria.

These patterns lend some support to the argument that women and men approach the ministry differently. However, it must also be noted that while the male/female differences in each of those aspects of ministry style were statistically significant, they were not very strong. On the other hand, there were no significant differences in the way clergymen and women approached the other five facets of pastoral ministry. Men and women tended to be very similar in the level of formal authority they wanted, their modes of interacting with lay church members, their approach to preaching, their concepts of what gives them status, and the extent to which they were personally dealing with social issues. Those patterns tend to support the arguments of the minimalists: no difference exists in ministry style between men and women. So, the data gave a split verdict. (Lehman 2002)

Additional research needs to be done on the different leadership styles, as well as cross-cultural leadership in regard to women from different ethnic backgrounds, as well as gender bias in the hiring and appointment practices of senior church leadership.

### **The Need for Further Study**

The impact of gender bias on women clergy needs to be studied in greater detail and should include defining and evaluating the effectiveness of male versus female pastoral leadership. Many of the survey participants felt as if they were pioneers. What are some of the long-term impacts of being a pioneer in ministry? If women pastors serve as role models, do more females enter the ministry? Do the dynamics change within a church when a female lead pastors serves? If so, how?

I would also like to see research that studies the different styles that women and men use in ministering, as well as some investigation into cultural contexts. Although my research was not focused on ethnicity, as I researched the issue of gender bias in

Protestant churches, I recognized that the issues that mainline white evangelical women are dealing with are often different than the issues that women of color face, even within the same denomination. Women of color like me are forced to choose between color or gender, whereas white women in church leadership are usually able to identify not only with the culture of the church, but also its history. As a womanist theologian I think future research should include African American women but also other women of color.

Multicultural approaches to racial/ethnic justice can help to break up the simplistic white-black dichotomy too often assumed when racism is discussed, and support a religious sensibility within Christian worship practices that views God's power and mystery as multiply located and shared (West 2006, 113).

In this regard there is a need to examine the ethnic context in ministry and allow the different voices and identities to speak to their unique context. Such research is not only needed, but it would be applauded.

The hiring practices in the Protestant churches, as it pertains to gender, needs to be studied in greater detail. In situations where the congregation selects the lead pastor versus situations where a bishop appoints the lead pastor, means should be sought to ensure that women's appointments are given equal consideration with men's assignments. How are churches and denominations addressing the fact that many churches, which are supposedly open to women lead pastors, often have congregations and even leadership on a denominational level that prefer male leadership, thus depriving women pastors the opportunity to serve?

### **Summary**

This research provides insight into the climate of leadership from a biblical, historical, and contemporary perspective within Protestant denomination as it pertains to gender bias. Biblical women's leadership has been explored and references cited which can help further research studies. Ultimately, this research provided insight from researchers and multiple participants. I have conducted this research, as an African American woman pastor ministering within the context of a predominately white denomination



## REFERENCES

Barna Group, Ltd. 2009. Number of Female Senior Pastors in Protestant Churches Doubles in Past Decade. Ventura, CA.

Bellis, Alice Ogden. 2007. *HelpMates Harlots, and Heroes*. Second edition. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

Bowker, John. 2001. *The Complete Bible Handbook; Illustrated Companion*. Edited by John Bowker. New York, NY: DK Publishing.

Bundesen, Lynne. 2007. *Feminine Spirit*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chaves, Mark. 1997. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organization*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: First Harvard University Press.

Cone, James. 1999. *Risk of Faith: The emergence of a Black theology of liberation, 1968-1998*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Creswell, John W. 2016. *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Deasy, Jo Ann. 2013. Women Leaders in Evangelical Congregations, *Religious Leadership: A reference handbook*. Edited by Sharon Henderson Callahan. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Emmert, Ashley. 2015. The State of Female Pastors. *Christianity Today International*, October 2015. Available at [womenleaders.com](http://womenleaders.com).  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/women-leaders/2015/october/state-of-female-pastors.html>?

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. 2001. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing feminist biblical interpretation*. Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books.

- . 1984. *In Memory of Her*. New York , NY: Crossroads Publishing.
- Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M., and Anthony B. Pinn, Eds. 2010. *Liberation Theologies in the United States*. NYU Press.
- Free Methodist Church, USA. 1974. *General Conference Minutes*.
- Gill, Deborah, M. and Ava K. Oleson. 2013. Pentecostal Female Pastors. *Religious Leadership: A reference handbook*. Sharon Henderson Callahan, Ed.. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Holy Bible, New International Version. 2011. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.
- Kimura, Takeshi. 2015. James H. Cone's Black Theology of Liberation as post-modern public philosophy. *Journal of American and Canadian Studies*. (Institute of American and Canadian Studies. Tokyo: Sophia University), (Jan 2015: 13).
- King James Bible*. 1994. *Giant Print Version, Personal Size Reference Bible*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Kraemer, Ross Shepard, and Mary Rose D'Angelo, Eds. 1999. *Women & Christian Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lapsley, Jacqueline, Carol Newsom, Sharon Ringe. 2012. *Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Lee, U. 2013. *Religious Leadership: A reference handbook*. Sharon Henderson Callahan, Ed. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lehman, E. C. 2002. *Women's Path Into Ministry: Six major studies*. Vol. 1. [www.pulpitandpews.duke.edu](http://www.pulpitandpews.duke.edu). Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School Press.

Lehman, Edward C., Jr. 1993. *Gender and Work: The case of the clergy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Lodge, Carey. 2016. John Wesley: 10 Quotes on faith, evangelism and putting God first. *Christian Today* (UK). Published 28 June 2016. Accessed: <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/john-wesley-10-quotes-on-faith-evangelism-and-putting-god-first/89402.htm>

Macchia, F. D. 2002. Theology, Pentecostal. In S.M. Burgess and E.M. van der Maas (eds.) *The new international dictionary of Pentecostal and charismatic movements* (revised and expanded) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1120-1141.

Migliore, Daniel L. 2014. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, Third ed.* Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Pak, Su Yon. 2013. *Religious Leadership: A reference handbook*. Sharon Henderson Callahan, Ed. Thousand Oaks, California : Sage Publications.

Richards, Lyn and Janice M. Morse. 2002. *Readme First: A user's guide to qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Royster, Michael D. 2013. *Religious Leadership: A reference handbook*. Sharon Henderson Callahan, Ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Saldana, Johnny, ed. 2013. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Smith, Christine A. 2013. *Beyond the Stained Glass Ceiling: Equipping & encouraging female pastors*. Valley Forge , PA: Judson Press.

Sojourner Truth. *Ain't I a Woman?* Delivered at Women's Convention, Akron, Ohio. 28-29 May 1851.

Zikmund, Barbara Brown. 2013. *Women Leaders in Mainline Protestant Churches. Religious Leadership: A reference handbook*. Edited by Sharon Henderson Callahan. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Zikmund, Barbara Brown, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M. Y. Chang. 1998. *Clergy Women : An uphill calling*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Hi,

I am Pastor Sheila Houston. As part of my Doctoral research at Seattle University I am looking for women who are ordained to participate in an online research study on gender bias toward women in leadership of Protestant Churches. There are three criteria and participants must meet at least one criterion:

1. Women who are presently pursuing a pastoral position within a church;
2. Women who are currently serving as an associate or senior pastor in the church; or
3. Women who within the last one to five years stopped serving as pastor or pursuing a senior pastor leadership role in the church.

This project is all voluntary with no incentives. If you are willing to participate I will send you a link to the online survey. Once the survey opens, it will only be open for two weeks. If interested in this research please send me an email, and if you have any questions, feel free to send me an email to [.houstos@seattleu.edu](mailto:.houstos@seattleu.edu). Once I have the total number of participants needed for this research, the survey will be opened for responses.

Thank you for considering being a part of this online survey.

Pastor Sheila Houston

Stone Haven FMC

**APPENDIX B**  
**QUALTRICS CONSENT FORM**

## Gender Bias in the Leadership of Protestant Churches

 This survey is currently LOCKED to prevent invalidation of collected responses! Please **unlock** your survey to make changes.

▼ Default Question Block



Consent



When clicking into this research survey you are giving your consent to participate in this online survey. You will receive no gifts/ incentives for this study. There is no monetary cost to you as participates. This research project seeks to investigate the possibility that gender bias is prevalent in Protestant Churches toward women pursuing or serving as lead pastors. You will be asked to answer 5 open-ended questions.

This study is being performed as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Doctoral degree in School of Theology at Seattle University. The only risk if any will be discomfort from telling your story.

This research study may be used for future work.

Thank you for your willingness participate in this study,

Pastor Sheila Houston

☐ I consent to the terms of this agreement



**APPENDIX C**  
**SURVEY QUESTIONS**

### **Survey Questions**

1. What credentials does a senior pastor need in order to lead a congregation successfully?
2. Have you experienced gender discrimination as a woman in church leadership? If yes how has it affected your leadership?
3. What do you think needs to be addressed within the church or seminaries so that women are treated and acknowledged as equals in the church?
4. According to your understanding of scriptures what are the qualifications for women in leadership?
5. Do you think the body of Christ is negatively impacted if women are not operating in their leadership position that God has called them to? If no, why not? If yes, describe how

**APPENDIX D**  
**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

## Definitions of Terms

**Black Liberation Theology** – a theological response to the racism and oppression experienced by Blacks that is intended to address segregation and apartheid from a biblical perspective. These issues were first addressed by James Cones in *Black Theology and Black Power*, written after he noted the failure of white theologians to address white supremacy.

**Feminist Theology** – Feminist theology emerged as a scholarship that uses religious and cultural traditions to enhance women's flourishing; it contrasts with those traditions that diminish women's status. According to *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, this theology has been mostly associated with Western white women.

**Womanist Theology** – A theology that draws upon both Black Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology but differs from each in that it draws upon the experiences of Black women and seeks to empower and liberate them. Alice Walker's 1983 book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, helped lay the foundation. Womanist refers to a particular dimension of the culture of black women that is being brought to bear upon theological, ethical, biblical, and other religious studies. *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Bellis 2007, 9).

**Phenomenology** –According to the *Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide* (1999), *Phenomenology* is the science of phenomena; the description and classification of phenomena. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* offers this: Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences.

**Heuristic Inquiry** – a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher...it focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and co-researchers. It is the combination of personal experiences and intensity that yields an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*.