

"Checking Our Pulse:
Today's Women Ministers
In the Free Methodist Church"

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INTRODUCTION

As a woman ministerial candidate in the Free Methodist Church, I have experienced two basic feelings. There is deep joy and a sense of awe at the calling which God has given me, but this joy is tempered by a feeling of isolation. As the only woman ministerial candidate in my conference (until this past year), with little contact or fellowship with other F.M. women ministers and seminarians, I have experienced loneliness. These feelings have led to questions, out of which this project was born.

"What are other women in the pastoral ministry and leadership of the Free Methodist Church experiencing, thinking, feeling and doing?"

"What is their vision for our denomination and their place in it as leaders?"

"Do they approach the future excitedly, seeing unlimited possibilities for ministry, or are their expectations reserved, believing the possibilities to be limited?"

"Are any of them experiencing discouragement or opposition, and how are they handling these?"

"Do any of them ever wonder, 'Where do I fit?' "

"How do they feel their denominational leaders, fellow ministers and church members can better support, validate and encourage their calling and ministry?"

"What advice would they give to other women pursuing the pastoral ministry in the Free Methodist Church?"

Any contemporary discussion on women in ministry in the Free Methodist Church must be preceded with reference to the Scriptural support of women in ministry, to the foundational teachings of Benjamin Titus Roberts, and to the testimonies of the lives of some of the many women whose courageous, faithful pioneering has paved the way for our women of today. In the first section of this paper I will include: Scriptural support for women leaders and teachers in the Church, a summary of the teachings of B.T. Roberts on the ordination of women and a short history of the ministry of women in the Free Methodist Church. The second section will include descriptions of the population polled and the questionnaire used, and a summary of the results.

Finally, I will present implications from these data concerning the future direction for women in the ministry and leadership of the Free Methodist Church.

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Biblical Support of Women in Ministry

Upon discussing the right of women to preach, teach and lead in the Church, we must be aware of two basic positions. On the one hand we have the traditional or hierarchial viewpoint. Woman is assigned a particular role in a chain of command or hierarchy of authority. Supported by particular interpretations of such Scriptures as Ephesians 5:22-24; I Timothy 2:11-14; I Corinthians 11:7-9; I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Peter 3:1-7; Genesis 2:18-23 and Genesis 3:16, proponents of this viewpoint stress male dominance and women's subordination. Women are excluded from the teaching and ruling ministries of the Church. (Key Scriptures used to support this position tend to be isolated from the surrounding passage and held as normative, with situational and cultural context often being ignored.) The arguments behind this position are several. Traditionalists believe the relationship of Christ as head of the church requires male leadership and authority in the church and home.¹ The patriarchal system is seen as God's chosen leadership model.² Attention is drawn to the fact that Adam was created first, with woman created for man; that Eve was deceived at the Fall, and that Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles. Without studying the circumstances or larger Scriptural context, traditionalists quote Paul's description of women being the weaker vessel, and his commands for women not to speak in church, not to teach or rule over men, and to submit to their husbands as "the head of the home".

In contrast to the traditional viewpoint is the egalitarian position. Emphasis is placed on man's creation in God's image, both male and female (Gen. 1:27,28). Through faith in Jesus, all become one. There is no longer

any distinction between Jew or Greek, bound or free, male or female (Gal. 3:26-28). Equality of male and female, lost after the Fall (Gen. 3), is restored in Jesus. Every Christian is also encouraged to identify, develop and exercise their spiritual gifts, apart from any sexual distinction (Rom. 12:6-8; I Pet. 4:10; I Cor. 12:4-31; Matt. 25:14-30).³ Husbands and wives are to submit mutually to one another (Eph. 5). Paul's teachings are seen within cultural and situational context. He addressed specific people and specific problems within the early Church. I Corinthians 14:33-36 for example, is a passage within a discussion on spiritual gifts and the orderly use of them within the church assembly. Paul was concerned about disruption of worship by uneducated married women asking questions.⁴

The egalitarian position is also illustrated by Christ's revolutionary response to women. Jesus treated women responsibly, never dominating nor humiliating them. B.T. Roberts wrote, "no woman ever came to him to be repulsed".⁵ Christ shattered the rules and conventions of men which devalued women, relegating them to anonymity, and prohibiting them from worship, educational and leadership opportunities. Jesus taught women and included them in theological discussion (Mary of Bethany and the Samaritan woman). He ministered to the unnoticed: a sick mother-in-law (Mt. 8), a grieving mother (Lk. 7) and a crippled woman (Lk. 13). Jesus raised up women as models of faith (Lk. 15,18,21), included them as members of His family (Mk. 3) and privileged them to be initial participants in the main events of His life (Mt. 1; Mk. 14:3-9; Mt. 28 and Jn. 20). Jesus received ministry from women (Jn. 12: 2-3; Lk. 8:3).⁶

Finally, the Bible includes numerous examples of women teachers, prophetesses and leaders. In the Old Testament: Miriam (Ex. 15:20; Micah 6:4); Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); Deborah (Judges 4); Noadiah (Nahum 6:14); Esther, and the woman of Proverbs 31. In the New Testament we meet the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9); Phoebe, deaconess and overseer of the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1); Priscilla, discipler of Apollos (Acts 18), and Junia,

apostle (Rom. 16:7).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

B.T. Roberts and the Ordination of Women

B.T. Roberts, founder and first general superintendent (bishop) of the Free Methodist Church was a strong proponent for the ordination of women in our denomination. He viewed the Christian priesthood as that which embraced all of God's people (I Pet. 2:5,9).⁷ In answer to those who would question the necessity of ordination in order to minister, B.T. Roberts defended his support of the ordination of women by stating that ordination: "prevents improper persons from thrusting themselves into the ministry, and thus bringing the Gospel into contempt".⁸ Continuing, Roberts wrote:

"The function of the church, therefore, as to ordination was, not to create or bestow the gift of the ministry, but simply to recognize and authenticate it when bestowed by the Head of the Church."⁹

"There is nothing, then, in the nature of ordination which indicates that no women should ever be ordained. If she is called of God to his work, and this is evident to the church, then may the church separate her to this work by ordination".¹⁰

At the conclusion of his book, Ordaining Women, B.T. Roberts summarizes his beliefs:

1. Man and woman were created equal, each possessing the same rights and privileges as the other.
2. At the Fall, woman, because she was first in the transgression was, as a punishment, made subject to her husband.
3. Christ re-enacted the primitive law and restored the original relation of equality of the sexes.
4. The objections to the equality of man and woman in the Christian Church, based upon the Bible, rest upon a wrong translation of some passages and a misinterpretation of others.
5. In the New Testament church, woman, as well as man, filled the office of Apostle, Prophet, Deacon or preacher, and Pastor.
6. Woman took a part in governing the Apostolic Church.¹¹

And finally, Roberts taught and believed in egalitarianism in marriage:

"Christ said nothing about the subjection of women. The greatest domestic happiness always exists when husband and wife live together

on terms of equality." 12

Outline History of Women in Ministry in the Free Methodist Church

- 1861 - Genesee Convention - Resolved to "ban women preachers from the denomination's pulpits."
- 1862 - General Conference - Issue of women's preaching did not reach "the floor".
- 1874 - Women preachers given denominational credentials - as lay evangelists. Denied right to pastor a congregation or share in church government, but granted the right to preach.
- 1882 - General Conference - declared that the Discipline should not be interpreted so as to prevent women from election as delegates to annual conferences.
- 1886 - Evangelists permitted seats in their quarterly conferences.
- 1890 - General Conference - B.T. Roberts presented a resolution for women to be ordained as elders, when "duly qualified and called of God". Resolution failed by two votes of 78 cast. Denomination requested that more study be done by annual conferences before the Discipline would be changed.
- 1891 - B.T. Roberts' book, Ordaining Women was published.
- 1894 - B.T. Roberts died. E.P. Hart became General Superintendent. General Conference issued statement opposing women's ordination.
- This mistake caused by a printing error in Hse to Ase. E.M.* → 1907 - Resolution passed at General Conference stating that:
1911 "Whenever any annual conference shall be satisfied that woman is called of God to preach the Gospel, that annual conference may be permitted to receive her on trial, and into full connection, and ordain her a deacon, all on the same conditions as we receive men into the same relations; provided always that this ordination of women shall not be considered a step toward ordination as elder." (Women ordained in the Free Methodist Church.) 13
- 1911 - Bishop Hogue denounced ^{this} 1907 resolution - considered that granting a woman a seat in the conference but denying her a vote (because she was not an elder) was unconstitutional. Resolution to allow women full equality was defeated in committee.
- 1974 - Resolution to ordain women as elders passed with its first introduction. There was only one vote of opposition. *
- 1985 - Spring - Convocation at Spring Arbor College to promote women's leadership in the F.M. Church. General Conference - July, resolution to include a statement in the Discipline about our approval of women's full ordination - defeated in committee.

(Information : 14, 15).

* This accomplished by removing any reference to gender.
 * I take it that they wanted a statement of approval - not just no restrictions.
 E.M.

Since its founding in 1860, many women have served in the ministry of the Free Methodist Church, courageously, creatively and faithfully. The purpose of this project does not allow for much sharing of biographical material on these women, much of which has not been recorded, but there are three significant contributions made by F.M. women which deserve mentioning.

Hundreds of women preachers, deaconesses, missionaries, and district and conference evangelists have labored in the ministry of the F.M. Church, many behind the scenes. Their contributions have been remarkable. One such woman was Julia Arnold Shelhamer, born in 1879. At age 101, in 1980, Julia was still preaching, writing and praying. As a child, she accompanied her evangelist parents along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, holding tent meetings and preaching from their boat, "The Floating Chapel". At age 17, Julia began her preaching ministry at the Olive Branch Mission in Chicago, which continued in pool rooms, dance halls, on street corners, and at vaudeville theaters and boxing rings during intermissions. She held the conviction that "age is nothing with God". A soft-spoken preacher, whose sermons were simple and succinct, Julia felt "the Lord could use her best when she was just herself". As a young mother, with her husband often away doing evangelistic work, Julia raised her family and pastored four churches. When their children were grown, the Shelhamers made two evangelistic tours around the world, and travelled the U.S. extensively, holding revival meetings. Julia had a special love for black people and for the poor. It ran in the family, with her grandfather aiding and transporting slaves to Canada via the "Underground Railroad" before the Civil War, her mother ministering to blacks in Georgia, and her daughter and husband, Gilbert and Esther James, starting a church and school in Shreveport, La. At age 70, along with her sister, Julia moved to Washinton, D.C., to begin a ministry in a ghetto area called "hell's half-acre". Their ministry began with the distribution of tracts, then moved to their tenement house, where

they held worship services. With the placement of an ad in the newspaper, an aggressive phone ministry began, with 20,000 calls received in one 8-month period. Julia was later invited to the presidential prayer breakfast by President Eisenhower. Julia raised much money for the poor, and several black students were able to attend Christian college because of her support, one of whom became the principal of her daughter's school in Shreveport.¹⁶

Another significant contribution was made by two women, Mrs. Hawxhurst and Sarah Cooke. While attending Dwight L. Moody's meetings in the Chicago Y.M.C.A., these women began praying for him, and later approached him with the "importance of seeking the baptism of the Spirit". Modern-day Priscillas exhorting their "Apollos", they spent much time in prayer "that he might receive his Pentecost". Moody pastored the largest congregation in Chicago, but these women felt he also needed the special anointing of the Holy Spirit on his life and ministry. B.T. Roberts later heard Moody exclaim in a large gathering how he had searched the Scriptures concerning this doctrine, brought to him by "those plainly-dressed and shining-faced women". Moody concluded that following a time of intensive prayer, he received the Holy Spirit, and that "whatever success has attended my evangelistic labors has been due to the baptism with the Spirit."¹⁷

A third important contribution made by women in the F.M. Church was their part in the ministry of the Pentecost Bands, begun in Michigan in 1882 by the Rev. Mr. Vivian Dake. These bands, each consisting of several young men or women, held street meetings, revivals and began churches. By 1890 there were 23 bands operating in nine American states, Canada, England, Norway, and Germany. The ministry of these "bands" was characterized by preaching, witnessing and singing. Thousands attended their meetings. But the bands met with opposition, on the streets and within the denomination. Band members, including many women, were often arrested for disturbing

the peace. Due to their enthusiasm, the fear that the activity of these bands were hurting the established churches, and concern over the members' lack of formal training, denominational leaders began to seek to curb their ministry. (Bishop B.T. Roberts remained a strong supporter of the bands.) At the 1890 General Conference, the Pentecost Bands and the issue of the ordination of women met with hostility. The activity of the bands was stifled, causing a decline in evangelism in the denomination.^{18.}

Today's Women in Ministry in the Free Methodist Church

The 1985 Yearbook of the Free Methodist Church lists the following numbers of women in the ordained ministry and leadership of the Free Methodist Church:

Ordained Elders: Canada - 2; United States - 22

Ordained Deacons: Canada - 4; United States - 34

Ministerial Candidates: Canada - 4; United States - 27

Total # of Conferences = 36

Conference Leaders : Superintendents - 1 (American Indian Extension).

Conference Treasurers: Canada - 1; U.S. - 6

Members of Conference Boards of Administration: Canada - 2; U.S.- 34.

Members of Conference Boards of Ministerial Education and Guidance:
Canada - 3; U.S. - 15.

Members of Conference Stationing Committees: Canada - 1; U.S. - 4.

Denominational Leaders: Canada: There are no women listed as serving on any of the five committees of the jurisdictional conference.

Total # of Bishops in the Free Methodist Church (U.S. and Canada) - 5.

Total # of women bishops in the F.M. Church - 0.

United States:

Commission on Christian Education - 1

Commission on Evangelism - 2.

General Director of Christian Education is a woman.

Commission on Missions - 3.

Area Administrative Assistants - Missions - 0.

Council on Ethnic Affairs - 1.

Council on Social Action - 1.

Study Commission on Doctrine - 0.

United Ministries for Christ Budget Committee - 0

Administrative Commission - 0.

Light and Life Magazine Editorial Advisory Council - 3.

Free Methodist Publishing House - 0.

Overseas: Philippines - Elders - 26; Deacons - 22

Hong Kong - Deacons - 2

Mexico - Ministerial Candidates - 1

Missionaries: Elders - 5; Deacons - 2; Ministerial Candidates - 2

**Women Delegates to General Conference - 1985 - out of 264 Ministerial - 0;
out of 258 lay delegates - 14; reserve delegates - 7.

Appointments for 1985 - Out of 2500 ministers, 36 U.S. conferences and 3
Canadian conferences.

Canada - 2

United States - Senior Pastor: 7 (Three of which are in the American
Indian Extension).

Assistant Pastor: 2

Minister of Christian Education - 3

Minister of Counselling or Guidance or Evangelism - 3

Youth Pastor - 1

Church Planters - 3 (Two of whom are retired missionaries, serving
together in the same church planting project).

Supply Pastor - 7

Lay Leader - 1

Several significant observations are: the low numbers of women ministers
receiving appointments; the lack of female ministerial delegates to General
Conference, 1985; the low numbers of women on conference MEG boards and
stationing committees; few women youth pastors; few women church planters;
other than one serving an ethnic group extension - the absence of female
conference superintendents; no women on the denominational Study Commission
of Doctrine; no women bishops; the absence of women on the denominational
level Administrative Commission or budget committee, and the highest number
of women elders and deacons being in the Philippines.

PROJECT - POPULATION POLLED AND STUDY RESULTS

In the course of this project, I designed and distributed a
questionnaire to 35 women elders, deacons, ministerial candidates and two

denominational leaders. Of the 35 questionnaires mailed, I received back 31 responses. A short questionnaire was also sent to each of our denomination's five bishops, all of which replied. Following is a list of some of the characteristics of the women I polled:

Elders - 12; Deacons - 9; Ministerial Candidates - 6; Local Preacher - 1; Retired Pastor - 1; Denominational leader with no ministerial status - 2.

Current Ministry Status -

Senior Pastor - 5; Associate Pastor - 2; Minister of Evangelism - 1; Minister of Christian Education - 4; Minister of Counselling - 1; U.S. Army Chaplain - 1; Para-Church Organization - 2; Secular Work - 1; Christian Educator (F.M. college) - 1; Church planter - 1; Superintendent - 1 (among the Navajos); Denominational leaders in Christian Education - 2.
The remainder are not actively involved in the ministry at this time.

Geographical Location -

Canada - 3; United States: Northeast - 3; East - 2; North - 6; Central - 7; Southwest - 3; West - 4; Pacific Northwest - 4.

Educational Information - Phd - 1; MDiv - 4; MAR - 2; MA - 9; MS - 1; BS - 1; BA - 10; Seminarians - 2 (one of which is married to a seminarian).

Marital/Family Status - Married - 19; Single - 8; Widowed - 2; Divorced - 1. Women with children at home - 7; married to active pastors - 8.

Age Groupings - 25-29 - 5; 30-39 - 12; 40-49 - 4; 50-59 - 2; 60-74 - 8.

RESULTS

Following are a few of the key questions asked of the women polled, with their corresponding answers. The women proved themselves to be honest and articulate.

1. "WHAT LED YOU INTO FORMAL MINISTRY IN THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH?"

While the women polled revealed many pathways through which they were led into formal ministry in the F.M. church, all of them expressed experiencing the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some felt a definite call to the full-time pastoral ministry early in life, while for others, their call was confirmed over a period of time, with a pursuit of ordination flowing out of various ministries in which they were already engaged. The Lord led these women into ministry as a part of a process. One woman pursued missionary service upon receiving her call, feeling that this was the only avenue of ministry

open to women. Several have pursued ordination following mission experience, others while in seminary, some following involvement in Christian education, one following years of conducting women's Bible studies and retreats, and others under the influence of seminary professors or ministerial fathers or husbands. Some women are entering full-time ministry following other careers in teaching, counselling, Christian education, or youth work. One woman, in the 60-74 age category, became an assistant pastor upon retirement from college teaching.

2. "CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH, DO YOU FORESEE LIMITED OR UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES FOR THEM, AND WHY?"

Reasons shared for feeling that the possibilities are limited include:

I foresee they will be utilized as assistant pastors, directors of Christian education or perhaps pastor of a small and struggling church when no man can be found for the job.

It's hard for some churches to feel a woman can be a leader in the church.

I do not foresee a woman bishop in the near future, (An opinion shared by several of the women, as well as the bishops polled.)

I see a trend in the church to admitting more women, but in curtailing her advancement, into say a Bishop's position.

I see the possibility of a woman becoming bishop, but we have to work up to this acceptance by opening doors for women in lower positions of leadership and providing ample opportunities for them to develop their gifts.

Being a largely conservative body, it will be many years, perhaps generations before women are given significant opportunities for leadership. Note the percentage of women elected as delegates to annual or general conference, or the number of those serving on stationing committees or MEG boards (Ministerial Education and Guidance).

Many men in positions of authority are unwilling to relinquish the traditionally male pulpit to females. They view women as excellent Sunday School teachers of children, or as missionaries, but refuse to recognize women's abilities to teach adults these same truths. Women are viewed as "inferior" to men in management skills. Considered to be the weaker sex, women's business capabilities are considered swayed by emotions rather than based on sound judgments and objectivity. Her administrative ability is underestimated because of a lack of aggressive demands to be heard. Silence, rather than quick judgment, is viewed as a weakness rather than a strength.

To say that the church as a whole opposes women in ministry and leadership positions would be false; yet, on the other hand, neither are women really encouraged to seek positions of leadership.

Most people, men and women, don't want to change what is comfortable.

Being a minister is predominately seen as a man's job. An assistant or associate position is acceptable for a woman to fulfill. It will be a big step in our conference if a woman becomes a senior pastor.

There needs to be an elimination of the "chain of command" mentality that is a sad sign of fallen man, not a reflection of the way things can be with God.

The woman's skills and abilities must be several cuts above the man's to be considered.

We're still a male-dominated denomination, with male ideas and male language.

(Quoting a Lutheran female pastor, one woman wrote:)

"Men are accepted as competent until they prove to be ineffective; women are believed to be incompetent until they prove themselves to be competent."

Some women qualified their answers by claiming that the limits can be loosened with education and proper role modelling.

Others saw the possibilities as wide-open.

I believe the leadership of our church is progressive. I have encountered nothing but support and open doors from F.M. leaders.

The F.M. church is becoming more open and more acceptive of women in ministry. At least at headquarters and seminary levels.

I'm proud of our leadership at headquarters for being so willing to help in anyway those, male or female, who feel called of God into a leadership role.

Unlimited opportunities, if we continue to push on and educate others.

While not wanting to present^d a predominately negative picture, we do need to hear the discouragement reflected in some of the previous answers.

Rosemary Ruether writes:

"Slowly ordination opened up to them. Yet women's victory has somehow been a hollow one. Equal access to the ordained ministry has not resulted in equal access to positions of leadership traditionally available to the clergy".¹⁹

And Clara Leffingwell, one of our early missionaries to China wrote:

"Consider the difficulties they must encounter, prejudice, lack of faith in their calling, lack of confidence in their ability... till they can hardly keep afloat."²⁰

All of the women polled who are married and have families stated that they have very supportive husbands. One woman mentioned her husband's frustration with her need to study so much while in seminary. Another mentioned the difficulty of ministering and maintaining a balanced family life, stating that the ministry commitments often come into conflict with her role as wife and mother; that her family gets frustrated with so

many people feeling that they "own her" and are entitled to her time. Still another woman said her husband has remained quiet and neutral. But as a whole, the women said their families and husbands are extremely supportive, sharing in their ministries. A few were initially encouraged to consider ordination by their husbands.

3. "DEFINE ANY SIGNIFICANT OBJECTIONS TO, OR UNDERLYING ARGUMENTS AGAINST YOUR MINISTERING AS A WOMAN IN THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH".

The most common objections the women have received have been related to certain Scriptures taken out of context: "Women should not be in authority over men"; "Women should not speak in public"; "Women should learn in silence from their husbands".

The church believes in supremacy of men over women, due to mistranslated words of Paul. Gal. 3:28 and I Cor. 11:11,12 are ignored.

They pull out verses about women not speaking in public, having authority over men, submitting, and wave them in the face of committed Christian women, gifted and called by God.

Some women recognized a particular cultural conditioning which has caused some men to feel threatened by women in leadership, or at the least, uncomfortable.

People of the church tend to feel you are inferior until you prove differently. (age 40-49)

I am in my ninth year of ministry and the church has learned to trust my ability. It wasn't so when I began. (age 60-74).

The mind-set of the congregation is the most important influence. Are they willing to accept and follow female leadership? (age 30-39).

4. "HOW CAN WE BETTER RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT ORDAINED WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH?"

Nearly every woman shared the need for support groups, role models, mentors or covenant groups (something our male ministers would benefit from also). They placed great emphasis upon providing "a support system; a networking for sharing encouragement". Others suggested that more confidence in women be displayed by placing them in up front positions and electing them to major committees. Others want woman's call to be better respected and validated by others. Many agreed that women need more visibility. They want to see more women encouraged to enter the ministry, and to see effective teaching taking place to educate our church to the truth of Scripture regarding women in ministry.

The majority of responses received by the women I polled were positive and expectant. They are proud to serve in the Free Methodist Church and share a deep love for the Lord. They warn young women considering entering the ministry to be certain of their calling, and to look to God to fulfill that calling and lead the way.

5. "WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN CONSIDERING ENTERING THE MINISTRY OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH?"

Realize the obstacles are there. Trust God to remove them or to help you go around them. But this doesn't mean - be a doormat. 14.

Look to God and expect great things from Him.

If God calls, obey!

Be sure it is God's call and directive and that you cannot get out of it without disobeying God's voice. Otherwise, don't do it.

Be sure God is leading you. Be certain your family is "called" to this ministry, too.

You should definitely know God's calling upon your life, not see it as an occupation.

Go for it! One role model may influence dozens or hundreds of other women to be able to hear God's voice when He calls them.

It will be uphill, but God called you and not man. Be faithful in your calling and God will open doors and move mountains. Don't get discouraged but keep pressing on "to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus".

Women must not accept second best, such as a teaching position or Christian education if God has called them to be pastors. Thank God He makes His will clear for each individual.

When a woman is placed in the ministry for the sake of proving that a woman can do the job as well as a man, rather than because she is gifted for her position, great problems can result.

Be certain that your motives for being in the ministry are clear to you. Follow God's leading and wait on Him. He will open the right doors.

Make sure you're certain of your call!! Once one is convinced it is God's will and comes to grips with it in her own heart, the rest will fall into place and there will be no need to defend one's decision, either. Scripturally, theologically, personally or otherwise. Those about will see your resolve and respect you. God is still an active God. He still raises up people He chooses to do His work, in the place He chooses.

The women also urged other women considering the ministry to be students.

Do an historical/Biblical study of women in ministry.

KNOW THE WORD!! or forget it and pursue less of a great responsibility. Be committed to continual scholarship.

Use your time as a ministerial candidate to refine your goals and discover more clearly your gifts and talents.

Be your best for God. Perform with excellence the ministries He brings your way.

Prepare academically as well as spiritually. It is very important to receive the best training possible.

And finally, the women stressed the importance of maintaining a Christlike, loving spirit.

Continually check your attitude; if you are not keeping that sweet spirit God wants you to have, then wait until you are filled with it anew. Seek His constant refilling, for you cannot give what you do not have.

Go carefully, prayerfully, honestly and confidently.

Don't be discouraged when you run into attitudes you disagree with, or don't understand. It will happen (you'll find people who think differently, and you'll find people who even abuse their power.)

Just don't let it sour you on the Lord and His work. Don't be so eager to prove a point about women in ministry that you spend your time fighting issues and not ministering.

Win over the "doubters" with love.

With any call of God comes persecution and sometimes from unexpected sources. Be loving and kind when confronting. Guard your heart from any "root of bitterness". Keep a forgiving spirit.

Don't carry a chip on your shoulder and don't assume the worst. Be available and trust God to care for the road blocks, in His time.

Wise advice! I was encouraged by what I found upon "checking the pulse" of Free Methodist women in ministry. For some the pulse is weak, but still remains. But for most, the pulse is steady and healthy. These women are ministering with their eyes wide open and their hearts resolved to do God's will. They are honest, with themselves and with others. Some are discouraged (one to the point of leaving the ministry), but the majority are fighting the good fight of faith, to do what God has called them to do in spite of obstacles placed in their way. My challenge to our denomination is to praise God for all those whom He has called to serve and lead us, and to seek His help in supporting and validating the ministries of these courageous and faithful servants of God. Linda J. Adams writes:

"We live in an age when women are filling the other professions at an unprecedented rate. Let's not force the brightest and best of our sisters and daughters to make their mark outside the church."

21

These statement is also echoed in G. Roger Schoenhals' words:

"Women continue to emerge in our midst with the gifts and convictions for spiritual leadership. Will we act subtly to discourage them? Or will we affirm and encourage them? Let's support our women ministerial candidates as enthusiastically as we do the men. And let's welcome them sincerely to our pulpits and to the other places of spiritual leadership. Let's allow the men and women of God to labor 'side by side'...in the gospel".

22

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The five bishops interviewed. all mentioned women who have positively influenced them. One bishop mentioned that his own mother pastored their church when his father became conference superintendent for awhile. Others mentioned women preachers, describing them as warm, competent and highly respected. Others mentioned female Sunday School teachers and college professors who had influenced them. One bishop stated that a woman pastor invited him to preach his first sermon in her church. While none of the

bishops saw that any areas of ministry should be closed to women in the F.M. church, several mentioned that they felt the election of a woman as a conference superintendent or bishop was very improbable in the near future (a sentiment shared by nearly all the women polled). One bishop stated that while he sees no theological barriers, he believes there are social and role considerations which cannot be underestimated. He saw women having raised their families, looking for a "new, mid-life career" as being better candidates for the ministry. He is concerned about the effects of women in ministry on their families and marriages. Most of the bishops referred to certain categories when describing possibilities for women in ministry in the F.M. church: Christian Education, music, pastor's wives, teachers, F.M. college professors, and denominational headquarter executives. Another bishop was concerned over a woman in ministry experiencing more stress than men. He also saw single ^{female} ministers as being harder to appoint.

I see three areas that need to be addressed in the future by the denominational leadership of the Free Methodist Church regarding their women in ministry: 1). Increased support and encouragement of F.M. women in ministry; 2). Improved education on women in ministry at denominational, conference and local church levels, and 3). Increased visibility and placement of women in ministry and leadership positions within the church.

First of all, we must consider the area of support and encouragement of women in ministry, at conference and national levels. Several women expressed a need for a mentor, and for connectional support with other women in ministry. One woman wrote:

If possible, find a confidant who understands what you are going through, or someone who is at least a good listener. A sponsor helps if you are willing to accept criticism and teaching.

Support groups for our women in ministry need to be facilitated locally and nationally. One recommendation which I received from several of the women polled was for a national newsletter for Free Methodist women in ministry. I would also like to see a convocation/retreat for women in ministry sponsored by our denomination every one or two years. A separate gathering could also be held for clergy couples.

On the conference level, superintendents can support the women under their leadership by meeting regularly with female pastors, seminarians and ministerial candidates for the giving of encouragement and support, and for the receiving of feedback. They need to be aware of the women's experiences in ministry, and sensitive to their needs for further opportunities.

In the area of educational and ordination preparation, there need to be more opportunities created for women to complete their internship requirements for ordination. And scholarship grants need to be set up for women candidates at our seminaries. It is difficult to attend seminary when you have no "wife" to

put you through. School loans are extremely difficult to repay for a single woman, with few prospects of receiving full-time ministry positions upon graduation.

Our women also need encouragement in developing their spiritual gifts and ministerial skills. Why is it such a struggle for ministerial candidates, especially female ones, to find opportunities to practice their preaching skills? I would like to see more ministers taking an active interest in helping to equip women preachers. Back in the late 1800's and early 1900's there were many women preachers in our denomination, but today there are but a handful. When given the opportunity to preach, it is often once a month (or less), on a Sunday night. If a woman's preaching skills are weak when she first answers God's call to the ministry, how can they be developed and strengthened if given few opportunities to preach, followed by little or no feedback? It is unfortunate that women ministerial candidates often have to ask for opportunities to minister, risking being labelled as "pushy".

Secondly, the most important area where there is room for improvement in our denomination's stance toward women in ministry, is that of education. I was pleased and impressed to discover how well educated are today's women in the ministry of the F.M. church, with many holding master's degrees, and several in seminary. But there is a different kind of education that needs to be taking place in our denomination. The local church needs education on the issue of women in ministry. One woman wrote: "The older generation remembers many women in ministry, younger ones are open, but in the middle are some difficulties". Several women polled mentioned that their greatest discouragement in the ministry so far has been negative reactions from their local pastor, general congregation or conference superintendent (sometimes subtle and indirect, sometimes open). One woman stated that her superintendent is openly opposed to appointing a woman to a pastorate in his conference, even though our denomination fully approves the ordination of women elders (as of 1974). While I believe that such a response by a conference superintendent in our church is rare, it does indicate that there is traditional and hierarchial thinking that needs to be addressed and changed. How many Free Methodists today are really aware of the egalitarian stance of our founder B.T. Roberts? How many know the teachings of the two models (hierarchial and egalitarian), and how our culture has subtly influenced us to adopt a traditional view regarding our stance toward women? I would like to see our Light and Life magazine print an article which carefully and intelligently contrasts these two viewpoints, showing how they influence our relationships with one another.

I would also like to see our denomination offer courses on women in ministry at our seminaries; universities and colleges. Because there

is a need for sufficient and correct teaching concerning Scripture's stance on women in ministry, I would like to see an adult Sunday School unit on women in ministry being published by Light and Life Press, to be included in the Aldersgate Series. A similar unit could be included in the John Wesley Seminary Foundation correspondence curriculum.

Education on the local level should include teaching children and youth about our denomination's stance on women in the ministry, presenting preaching, teaching and leadership as viable spiritual gifts for women. Such teaching is needed, considering that nowadays children rarely see or hear a woman pastor/preacher in their churches. When our ministers preach and teach on spiritual gifts, teaching needs to include the truth that all spiritual gifts are open to any believer. Such a belief should be validated with our history and denominational teachings, particularly those of B.T. Roberts. Our denominational Board of Christian Education and our Publishing House would enhance this education process by checking the Sunday School materials being developed, being careful of what role models and/or biases are being presented to our children and youth.

And finally, it would be helpful for the Light and Life magazine to devote part of an issue each year to our women in ministry, as well as inviting our women ministers and leaders to submit articles. One woman also suggested that Ordaining Women by B.T. Roberts be re-published.

Thirdly, I believe our denomination can improve in the amount and kind of visibility they give to women in the F.M. church. Women need to be used in more non-traditional leadership roles, and seen more frequently leading worship, praying, reading Scripture, sharing announcements from the podium, even ushering. If they are called and gifted, and their lives testify of their godliness and love for Christ, no area of ministry should be closed to women. Women ministerial candidates can be helped by being given as many opportunities as possible to develop their preaching, teaching and leadership gifts, to gain the respect of the people they have been called to lead. They need to be offered at least as much exposure as male candidates, and entrusted with equal responsibility.

On the conference level, I would like to see forums sponsored, educating congregations on the doctrinal, Scriptural and denominational support of women in ministry. This could help change misconceptions held by many Free Methodists. At pastor's meetings, conference committees and annual conferences, for example, women ministers are sometimes mistaken as wives, secretaries or lay delegates. When ministry positions are open, I would like to see conference superintendents, stationing committees and local

personnel committees and pastors giving women candidates equal consideration, if their spiritual gifts, experience and calling fit the needs of the particular position. After all, what criteria are really important for choosing our leaders? Divine calling, spiritual depth, scholastic competence, communication and relational ability, and tested leadership capabilities should be the qualities considered when filling both staff and lay ministry leadership positions, not whether someone is male or female. One woman polled wrote:

Women are not encouraged to think of formal ministry like pastors tend to encourage young men or any man who takes an active role in the church life. Women should not be stereotyped into only children's and women's ministries. It's a pity that the majority of our members who are women are only 'holding down the pews' or are not being encouraged to use the precious gifts the Holy Spirit has given to them.

Finally, visibility can be increased by including a statement in the Discipline that we give women the right to be fully ordained in our denomination. Some may feel this to be trivial, but it is not. Such a statement would prove that we are willing to take a public stand on our support of women in ministry, and that we consider the practice to be a vital and permanent element of our denominational identity.

Redeeming the gifts and calling of women as well as men can only make Christ's Church stronger, better equipped to continue its ministry of building the Kingdom of God and of fighting the forces of evil.

Howard A. Snyder Writes:

"When women are free to exercise their full, God-given rights of leadership alongside men, both the church and the family will function with new power. God has yet to show what he can do when his Spirit is fully poured out on 'all people', 'sons and daughters', 'both men and women'." (Joel 2:28-29).²³

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Adelp
1990
"WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH": A QUESTIONNAIRE

- I. Age: 18-24 25-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-74 75+
- II. Marital Status: Married Single Engaged Widowed Divorced
- III. Members of Household: (Circle: husband natural children foster children elderly relative(s) invalid college student boarders other relatives other: _____).
- # of members in your household _____ Ages of child(ren) _____
- Husband's occupation: _____
- If a minister: Is he: active inactive retired?
- IV. Education: (Circle degree(s) held: Phd Thd MDiv MA MS BA BS Honorary Degree(s) _____).
- Specify area(s) of concentration: _____
- Institutions granting degree(s): _____
- Are You Currently Attending Seminary? Yes No Plan to in the near future.
- Name of institution _____
- Degree Goal: _____
- Prospective Date of Completion of Degree _____
- Describe the ministry you would like to be involved with upon graduation from seminary? What are your plans? _____
- V. Current Ministerial Designation in the Free Methodist Church: (Check One: Ordained Elder Ordained Deacon Ministerial Candidate Local Preacher Lay Minister. Year you were ordained Elder: _____ Deacon _____)
- VI. Present Title of Pastoral Ministry: (Check those which apply) Senior Pastor Co-Pastor Associate Pastor Youth Pastor Minister of Christian Education Minister of Evangelism Other: (Explain: _____).
- (If none of the above apply to you, please respond to question #VII).
- VII. Current Ministry Other Than Pastoral Ministry: (Check appropriate one(s)).
- Educator/Administrator. Name of Institution: _____
- Area of Concentration: _____
- Professional Counseling Missionary Chaplain: (Armed Forces Hospital College/University (Where? _____) Prison).
- Para-Church Organization (Name: _____)
- Area of responsibility: _____
- Denominational Leadership Position (Specify: _____).
- Public Speaker Author Other: _____.
- VIII. Present Involvement in Ministry
- Full-time Part-time (# of hours per week: _____)
- Retired (# of years you served as a minister in the F.M. Church _____ # of years you have been retired _____).
- Inactive (If not presently involved in a pastoral ministry, do you plan to return to one in the future? Yes, as the Holy Spirit so leads. No Uncertain, at this time.

"Women in Ministry of the F.M. Church" Questionnaire (con't)

XIII. What has been the most encouraging and/or discouraging aspect of your ministry or preparation for ministry, thus far.

XIV. If married, or engaged, what has been your husband, fiancée and/or family's response to your ministry?

XV. How can we better recognize and support ordained women in the ministry of the Free Methodist Church?

XVI. What advice would you give to a woman considering entering the ministry in the Free Methodist Church?

OTHER COMMENTS: