

LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE PASTORS
IN THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH, USA:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Ministry Dissertation

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The purpose of this study was to gather life stories of clergywomen in the Free Methodist Church, USA. The study used a qualitative, ethnographic approach. Five pastors were asked to provide their life stories on video.

Themes emerged from these previously unheard stories. These female pastors showed courage for risky ministry initiatives. They told stories of creating communities of care. They displayed a passion for wholeness and health for their churches and the individuals who comprise those churches. Their roles in ministry and life are negotiated and by hearing their testimonies the church can stretch current understandings of practicing ministry.

Fundamentally, the stories of female pastors in the Free Methodist Church, USA, are far from monolithic. The women told about God's action in their lives and their obedience to their call in the face of much opposition. It is important that stories such as these are heard.

Recommendations for various levels of church hierarchy concluded the study. Specific suggestions include how the church can better hear the stories of female pastors; how the church can better utilize their passion and strength; how the church will be better positioned to meet stated goals and objectives by valuing women clergy and working toward better gender equity.

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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE FOR STUDY

This project is born from years of serving as a pastor. I am convinced that latent sexist attitudes in the church cause rejection of clergywomen. Recent studies suggest that women experience dissonance between who they are as persons and the expectations of them in their role as pastor.¹ There is an axiom in business: “Think manager, think male.” It is equally true for pastors: “Think pastor, think male.” The role of pastor has been visualized and articulated using male-dominant language and metaphors for millennia. Thus, females who are called into ministry are often told that they do not fit. The pastoral role is saturated with latent expectations, many of them-latent gender expectations. It is my working assumption that these expectations cause much dissonance in the female experience of pastoring.

Motivation and Purpose for This Study

Women pastors long to be able to provide their own definitions of ministry without having to borrow “identities” from others, especially others that are primarily male. Because of their minority status among their clergy peers and their relative lack of power, women clergy do not frequently share their stories.

At the very beginning of this study, I was staying in the home of another female pastor who serves on staff at a large church. I mentioned briefly my interest in exploring stories of people like us. In no time at all, she talked about a male-dominant hierarchy in her previous church that verbally affirmed her call to ministry, yet it had refused to ordain

¹ See both: Elaine J. Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Columbus, Ohio: American Folklore Society, 1993) and Virginia O. Bassford, “Perspectives of Strength: Female Elders in United Methodist Ministry” (PhD diss., Texas Woman’s University, 2008).

her. She told of how she did not feel free to share concerns and frustrations with those in her current setting because she did not want to be labeled a “complainer.”² Indeed, her story was sad. It was not safe for her to express legitimate concerns and the reality of that left me feeling wretched. As I listened to her story, I noticed a subtle shift in our conversation. Both of us started to whisper. We unconsciously shifted to whispering because our stories and our needs are often hushed. We have accommodated. Perhaps I unconsciously bought the lie that our stories were not worth telling. Perhaps I was keeping my voice down and my head bowed so as to not cause trouble. The truth is: she and I felt as though we were cooking up something that seemed like a conspiracy as we talked about how she could better cope with her situation. It felt conspiratorial because we had been trained to think that self-advocacy is selfish and dangerous. In that space, we were taking inventory of her resources much like one does when making a grocery list. Her resources were scarce. Yet, I am hoping and praying that what we whipped up together will help her. It occurred to me that such conversations might be recipes for surviving (dare I say thriving!) in her ministry setting. These conversations are legitimate and need not be hushed. Female clergy have a wealth of experiences that will challenge and embolden the church. We must refuse to whisper our stories. Our stories can and will benefit the church.

There is a peculiar isolation that is reported among evangelical women who are called to the ministry. Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine D. Pohl studied

² See Barbara Kellerman and Deborah Rhode, *Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 14-20. The authors present results from studies done showing that women leaders are less likely to self-promote or self-advocate. Women often do not promote gender equality because they fear it will not be productive or that it will backfire. Women worry about being branded as feminists or as complainers.

evangelical women who chose to serve in theological education instead of parish ministry. From their research, the women who reported growing up in evangelical environments were very attached to their churches, which were nurturing places for these women. In their formative years, they received care and compassion that one hopes is present in church. However, as they grew in their calling and gifting, they report a change. One would assume that this journey toward discovering their call to ministry would cause even greater closeness and endearment within their communities of faith. The opposite was found for these women. They reported that their call often served to create distance. They were forced to live on a boundary or liminal space. This experience has its own isolating and silencing effect. Evangelical women who are gifted and called by God were not welcomed in their churches. Furthermore, their stories about being excluded were rejected. It seemed that the church was not a safe place to express dissonant stories. Creegan and Pohl brand this a “double sadness.”³

Though heart-wrenching and humbling, these stories present an opportunity for the church. Clergywomen have unique experiences. There are challenges peculiar to their gender, but these are often silenced. This “silencing” of the real life experience of women pastors heaps grief upon grief on to those who are already wounded.⁴ This project is timely and crucial precisely because it is time for clergywomen to speak and it is time for the church to listen.

Complexity of Human Experience

³ Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine D. Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries: Evangelical Women, Feminism, and the Theological Academy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 115-121.

⁴ Ibid.

In discussing the concepts of the role and functions of ministry, it is instructive to keep in mind the complexity of human experience. Persons are formed and function within complex matrices of spheres and dimensions. The formation field paradigm of Adrian van Kaam lays out a framework that demonstrates the numerous sources from which persons receive directives from what he models as spheres (presphere, intrasphere, intersphere, immediate situational sphere and mondial sphere) and dimensions (socio-historical, vital, functional, transcendent and pneumatic-ecclesial).⁵ A female pastor hears expectations coming from her own sense of call, will, and dispositions. She must decipher and appraise multiple and mixed messages coming from her congregation, her particular ecclesial tradition, and social norms.

Classic Definition of the Role of Pastor

It is necessary to reclaim a classic understanding of the role of pastor. The most fitting way forward in the complex and complicated situation in which we find ourselves is to be deeply rooted in scripture and tradition. The vocation of us all is to live a life of apprenticeship to Jesus. The occupation, call, or role of the pastor is to make oneself available as a guide along this journey. It is as Cahalan describes:

Disciples are right to look to ministers for how to live the life of discipleship, but they can also place unrealistic burdens on ministers if they expect them to live as perfect disciples. Their lives are a sign, one among many, to be sure, in the community, of what discipleship means. And yet all disciples are to be a sign and witness of discipleship. Ministers cannot bear the burden of being the sign for the community.⁶

⁵ Rebecca Letterman, “The van Kaamian Formation Field” and “Annotated Vocabulary from van Kaamian Theory of Formative Spirituality” (lecture and handouts, Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, NY, January 15, 2013).

⁶ Kathleen Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, Kindle Edition, 2010), location 1115.

A pastor experiences what he or she perceives to be a God-given call that is confirmed by the church. This process of affirming those called by God through ordination must then be understood by the church to be a vocation to a life dedicated to the ministry of the word and the sacraments. The purpose of ordination is to authorize those who are called to preach, teach, celebrate the sacraments, provide care, lead, and maintain order within the body of believers. These are the basic functions of Christian ministry. Ordination vows signify a call, consecration, empowerment, and utilization from God through the church.

The Neglected Classic Role of Pastor

There is much contemporary confusion about the role and function of the pastor within churches and ecclesial traditions. Some have neglected a scriptural shepherding model of ministry for that of pastor as a CEO.⁷ This thinking has contributed to the confusion. Pastoral theologians and practitioners, such as Eugene Peterson, fear that the church and pastors have neglected classical functions of the pastoral role and have instead exchanged these for those of our culture. He states: “Men and women who are pastors in America today find that they have entered a life that is in ruins. The vocation of pastor has been replaced by the strategies of religious entrepreneurs with business plans.”⁸ His work repeatedly reminds clergy of their essential calling: ministry of the word and sacrament. Even those who are not as quick to accuse the church of abandoning classic forms of ministry for consumerist models express concern that the “church growth

⁷ Donald Bastian, *The Pastor's First Love: Other essays on a High and Holy Calling* (Toronto, Canada: BPS Books, Kindle Edition, 2013), location 742.

⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2011, Kindle Edition, 2011), 4.

movement” has had dangerous consequences for the pastoral role. Reggie McNeal contends that the church must return to its missional roots in order to remain faithful. In his understanding, the mission of the church is to offer the gospel to those who have not yet heard it. This emphasis will result in growth of many sorts; however, growth is not the primary purpose. McNeal criticizes the church growth movement for presenting all growth as good. He notes that this has had tragic unintended results in clergy.

Church growth played to the dark side of some church leaders. The abuse of CEO privilege and position in Wall Street scandals has its counterpart in the church. The money and power that gravitates to leaders of large organizations can place extra pressures on already-cracked character foundations. Under the all-growth-is-good mantra, some unscrupulous and spiritually suspect methodologies have been employed to “get the numbers up.” The rise of celebrity-status church culture (not the child of the church growth movement, but a development of a church culture parallel to American pop culture) has created thousands of “losers,” pastors and church leaders who are not serving high-profile, high-growth churches. Consequently, a large part of the leadership of the North American church suffers from debilitation and depression fostered by a lack of significance. The army of God has a lot of demoralized leaders.⁹

Neglected Lived Experience of Clergywomen

Among the most demoralized leaders in the church are clergywomen. As research shows, women are more likely to pastor churches with declining membership and declining financial stability. Women are grateful for the opportunity to serve and graciously accept such assignments. Nevertheless, those who appoint women may not consider that even in “nothing to lose” ministry assignments, the stakes are high for clergywomen. Because of the peculiarity of gender, women are expected to prove

⁹ Reggie McNeal, *Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (New York, NY: Jossey-Bass, Kindle Edition, 2009), 23.

themselves. Male pastors rarely feel and express concerns such as, “if I fail here, then I ruin the chance of this church ever again getting a pastor of my same gender.”

Gender expectations are rarely addressed. Gender role expectations, especially among those who align with evangelicalism, persist in church. Because of the persistence of essentialist gender role expectations, women who are called often receive conflicting messages. There is still debate whether it is “biblical” for women to serve in church leadership. Furthermore, even within denominations that have officially settled the question about women being ordained, tension remains. The conflicted attitude toward women even in my own denomination, the Free Methodist Church USA, is well documented.¹⁰ As is mentioned here, the denomination admits that there are still significant barriers for clergywomen.¹¹

Many forms of subtle sexism impact clergywomen. William Willimon compares it to the latent racism that many African Americans still face in church and society.¹² “Simply ordaining” women is not enough according to Willimon. He refers to these latent attitudes and behaviors as the “myth of the open door.”¹³ When he was asking of his female students the reason that most women were not vocal in class at Duke Divinity School, one of them responded: “when one is rejected enough, one naturally stops

¹⁰ See Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) and S.K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Gerald Bates, Cathy Stonehouse, and Carolyn Ellis, “Women in Ministry in the Free Methodist Church: Getting the Picture,” accessed June 14, 2014, <http://www.freemethodistchurch.org/PDFpercent20Files/Beliefs/Wherepercent20wepercent20stand/Womenpercent20inpercent20Ministry/WOMEN2a>.

¹² William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, Kindle Edition, 2010), 292.

¹³ *Ibid.*

trying.”¹⁴ He adds: “for there are limits to how much pain we can endure and rejection is painful.”¹⁵

This subtle, but powerful, example of “silencing” is what makes this project urgent and timely. Examples are not simply anecdotal; my assumption is that these gender tensions are embedded in the lives of clergywomen. Women routinely feel a heavy load of expectations that include those not normally present for Caucasian male pastors. Additionally, clergywomen do not have the same access to mentoring and often suffer from isolation because of it.¹⁶

Current Situation of Women Pastors in the Free Methodist Church

There are overt and latent sexist attitudes present in evangelicalism. The conflicting ideals held about gender roles have a destructive impact on the Free Methodist Church. The Free Methodist Church is a relatively small Wesleyan-Holiness denomination that traces its founding in the struggle for both evangelical zeal and social holiness within the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, in the 1860s. The principal founder of the Free Methodist Church, B. T. Roberts, wrote a courageous work called *Ordaining Women*, which championed full participation of women in ministry.¹⁷ The argument in *Ordaining Women* is similar to those presented by many current biblical

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Beth Armstrong, “Promoting Clergy Gender Equity: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of an Egalitarian Evangelical Denomination” (PhD. Diss., Gonzaga University, 2015).

¹⁷ B.T. Roberts, *Ordaining Women* (Indianapolis, IN: Light & Life, Kindle Edition, 2011).

feminists.¹⁸ However, his ideals have been inconsistently implemented in the denomination's history. From the early days of the Free Methodist Church until 1974, there were several debates regarding how women would function within the church. It was in 1911 that women evangelists were allowed to be ordained as deacons. Essentially, this decision was passed in order to validate the women who were already serving the church.¹⁹ It was not until 1974 that the leaders in the Free Methodist Church voted in favor of the full ordination of women to the role of Elder. Now, forty years later, there remains a large dissonance between the ideal and the practiced reality within churches.

The study commission on doctrine is working to resolve these matters. One report states: "At a time when women are entering formerly male-dominated professions in increasing numbers and providing community leadership, the percentage of women among Free Methodist pastors, especially senior pastors, and in the church and conference leadership roles, is not growing as would be expected."²⁰ There is disparity between the official statement of the denomination and the lived experience of clergy women. Women are not recruited, appointed, or promoted at the same rate as their male counterparts. Indeed, the statistics are disappointing: "women filled a mere 5% of senior

¹⁸ See these: Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001) and *What's Right with Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); John Stackhouse, *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Kristina LaCelle-Peterson, *Liberating Tradition: Women's Identity and Vocation in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

¹⁹ Bates, "FMC Statement on Women in Ministry."

²⁰ Ibid.

pastor positions.”²¹ However, it is encouraging that the church is acknowledging the disparities.

The recent research of Beth Armstrong highlights these discrepancies.²² Her mixed-method study will be helpful for providing statistical data. Quantitative research presents the facts of the situations. Her study presents data that suggest that there are persistent barriers for women in ministry leadership in the Free Methodist Church. In fact, this study shows that the percentage of women in solo and senior roles in the Free Methodist Church is decreasing. In 1997, 20% of women reporting were serving in the role of senior or solo pastor. In 2015, 16% of women reporting were serving in the role of senior or solo pastor. Additionally, 19% of females in ministry report desiring a full-time position, but that a position is not available to them.²³ Clearly, there remains a stained glass ceiling through which women have yet to ascend.

There are also studies that focus on women clergy experiences conducted in mainline denominations. But there is a gap in the research on women clergy in the Free Methodist Church because of the relatively small size of the denomination. It is my hunch that studying Free Methodist women clergy will produce different data than what has been found in other denominational contexts.

I am an ordained woman in the Free Methodist Church and I currently serve as a senior pastor. I thoroughly appreciate the egalitarian stance of the Free Methodist Church.

²¹ Barna Group, Ltd., “Number of Female Pastors in Protestant Churches Doubles in Past Decade,” (2009), accessed December 28, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/leadership/304-number-of-female-senior-pastors-in-protestant-churches-doubles-in-past-decade#.U8QshJRdWSq>.

²² Armstrong, “Promoting Clergy Gender Equity.”

²³ *Ibid.*, 149ff.

We, as the women who serve within this denomination, recognize how rare it is that we are able to be ordained in a denomination that holds to an evangelical heritage. Chapter two will give more details about the cultural wars that have been waged regarding gender in religious groups. In short, there remain many groups that hold that it is not Biblical to ordain women and in some groups, women are prohibited from leading in any way.²⁴ Therefore, Free Methodist women and men celebrate the reality that ordination is open to all.

This study is unique and will fill a gap in the research. Free Methodist clergywomen represent an untapped resource of pastoral theology and practice. These unheard stories and this untapped pastoral theology of women clergy will benefit the church. The good, the bad, and the ugly of the lives of women pastors will offer both the church and the participants an opportunity “to give a critical and public account of its [The church’s] purposeful presence in the world, and the values that give shape to its (sic) actions.”²⁵ These neglected and silenced stories will instruct, correct, exhort, and strengthen the church. There is a great opportunity for the church to lovingly listen. By listening, the church fulfills the greatest commandment to love others. The church embodies Christ’s continual presence on earth. Chapter three explores the incarnation which continues in God’s people. This means that as the church begins to listen and thereby honor these women, it will be walking in greater faithfulness to Christ. Jesus treasured women by listening to them, healing them, and entrusting them with the

²⁴ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 8-26.

²⁵ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 208.

message that the Kingdom of God was and is available to all who will listen. Listening is an act of love.

In keeping with the goal of seeing greater faithfulness of the church, I have an additional hope that the testimonies of women clergy will cause God's glory to shine beyond what is imaginable. In spite of difficulties and resistance, both overt and latent, women have persevered in ministry. Women pastors and their stories show that strength does not come from gender. Strength comes from the power and presence of God embodying the everyday experiences of ordinary men and women.

Free Methodist female pastors demonstrate determination and resilience. It is this kind of strength that I want to harness and multiply. This strength often manifests itself in quiet and unobtrusive ways. Self-advocating and being vocal about the full rights of women in church leadership has not been the norm. Women clergy in the Free Methodist Church are conflicted about self-identifying as feminists, even though, arguably, biblical feminism is present in our heritage. In order for there to be significant change, there must be a new boldness in using our voices and telling our stories. Christian feminism needs to be reclaimed as "an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and an end of sexism in all forms."²⁶ Female challenge or critique of injustice is an important element in this study.

Aligning oneself or being labeled a "feminist" can be professional suicide for clergywomen, especially in evangelical churches.²⁷ It is a label that has often been used

²⁶ Sally Haslanger, Nancy Tuana, and Peg O'Connor, N., "Topics in feminism" in Zalta, E. N. (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-topics/#Int>, accessed June 15, 2014.

²⁷ Armstrong, "Promoting Clergy Gender Equity," 40.

as an insult toward clergywomen. It is my hope to advocate for a Christian feminism that is rooted in Jesus' own treasuring of women. Christian feminism is part of the Free Methodist tradition. God's intent and work in creation and redemption shows that full human status, role, and voice is available to both men and women.²⁸ This full voice is yet to be enjoyed. Elaine Storkey puts it plainly that

We need to address issues of power, discrimination, poor communication, injustice, unfaithfulness, violation, competitiveness, and stereotypes, because in all of these areas we can contravene the principles that God has given us for gender relationships. We need to develop loving, just, impartial, faithful, and open ways of relating with one another, because then we are responding together to God who is love, justice, righteousness, faithfulness, and truth. God calls us into responsible and right relationships, and gender patterns call from us a response of obedience.²⁹

Christian ministry in the name of Jesus will, by necessity, be an embodied reality. In the way of embodied witness, I will speak as a female. As I will elaborate within the biblical and theological foundations section of this work, people (both male and female) are created by God and restored in relationship with God and one another. Our creation and redemption is sheer gift. This is at the very essence of my ministry project. Women are fully human and are agents of their own lives, just as men are. Women are, alongside men, called to work and exercise their dominion for the good of God's creation.

Methodology Suitable for This Work

²⁸ See Amy Peterson, "F-word: Why Feminism Is Not the Enemy" *Christ and Pop Culture*, February 20, 2013, <http://christandpopculture.com/the-f-word-why-feminism-is-not-the-enemy/>, accessed November 10, 2014. She states that feminism is not "necessary" as an essential. This means that it is not necessary to have feminism in order to champion the full human rights of women. She perfectly summarizes the necessary-but-not-necessary label when she writes: "I'm a Christian. And until the day when the world automatically understands that to mean that I believe in the full humanity and personhood of both men and women, you can also call me a feminist."

²⁹ Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 128.

Women should work alongside men and are indeed given the command to be embodied witnesses in the world. Women are the ones who will be most capable of telling their own stories. This research will allow a previously silenced group of people to voice what is good, true and valuable given their experience. I will use an open-ended methodology. It will be an ethnography which allows time and space to honor the particularities of each woman's story.

Creswell provides the following definition of ethnographic research. He states that: "ethnography...focuses on an entire culture sharing group...a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture sharing group."³⁰ The culture-sharing group that I am interested in studying is women pastors of the Free Methodist Church. I am interested in hearing them share their experiences of being pastors. How did these women learn what was or is expected of pastors? How do these women see themselves functioning in a role that is dominated by male language and metaphors? What criteria are used to evaluate their success or fruitfulness? What biblical and theological metaphors do they use for themselves? What resources are available and accessed by female pastors in order to meet challenges and to aid them in their resilience?

It is particularly empowering for women who have been marginalized by society to speak, to exercise their agency, and to express how they operate within a male-dominant society. The biblical concept of *imago Dei* directs both women and men to use their power and influence to bring good to others. The methodology actually supports and builds into the study this theologically significant reality.

³⁰ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 3rd Edition, Kindle Edition, 2012), location 1989.

Sample and Design of Study

The sample of participants will be gathered through combing the *Free Methodist Yearbooks*, which is a publication that contains annual statistical data. Potential participants will be contacted in order to verify that they qualify for the study. The criteria for participation in the study are: ordination in the Free Methodist Church, at least some seminary training, having served at least five years in ministry, and experience as a solo or senior pastor. Data collection will include extensive interviews and observation. Participants will be informed about the study, and they will be asked to sign a consent form indicating that they are willing to have a video recording taken of their life stories. Information will be confidential and every effort will be made by the researcher to protect the privacy of the participants. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim, and notes from the interviews will be taken. Transcription will be available to participants upon their request. If the participant does not think that the oral story matches reality, she will have the option of submitting an additional written document. The researcher will ask follow-up questions. In the written presentation of the study, pseudonyms will be used in an effort to provide as much confidentiality as possible.

The data will be analyzed and categorized using coding, identifying themes and categories that emerge from the stories of the women. It is important to allow these women to speak for themselves; therefore, the researcher is dedicated to using the clergywomen's language as much as possible in the identification of themes. Analysis will be done in a descriptive and non-evaluative manner. Conclusions will be drawn and questions that motivated the study of this topic will be answered. At the conclusion of the

study, additional research topics will be suggested for those who may be interested in further study.

Conclusion

The time is ripe for Free Methodist clergywomen to boldly tell their stories. Women pastors, like me, have experiential knowledge to contribute regarding the practice of ministry. I am convinced that their testimonies will provide new ways of practicing ministry. Furthermore, I am convinced that Free Methodist clergywomen love the church and deserved to be loved by the church in return. These previously unheard stories will challenge and embolden the church toward greater faithfulness.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The primary purpose of this chapter is to review key themes that are present in the literature regarding the lived experience of women clergy. The experiences of women clergy are not monolithic. As was discussed in chapter one, the experiences of women clergy are not frequently heard, validated, or featured as study material. But because these experiences are legitimate, they must be shared. This literature survey is divided into four sections: church and cultural conflicts regarding women in ministry; studies done by sociologists regarding women clergy; gender roles that are especially important for women clergy who are part of evangelical traditions; and role congruity theory and women in leadership.

Church and Cultural Conflicts Regarding Women in Ministry

Throughout the history of the church, there have been women serving in various capacities. However, beginning in the early 1970s the number of denominations that ordained women grew.³¹ It has been argued that this professionalization of women in ministry was caused by the feminist movement. Chavez argues that pressure from the women's movement caused debates regarding women's ordination to be understood as an issue of gender equality. His data also shows that denominations refusing ordination to women did so largely as an action symbolizing rejection of cultural pressure. Reacting against the outside world with its liberal social agenda, they set the ordination of women

³¹ See Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 15ff, in which he compiles denominational histories regarding granting full clergy rights to women. Figure 2.1 demonstrates the steep rise in proportions of women entering previously male-dominant professions such as medicine, law, and clergy. During the twenty-year period (1970-1990) all three show significant increases. The percentage increase in both law and medicine is around 10-15% whereas the percentage increase for clergy is only 4%.

as a “prominent marker of the boundaries separating these denominational worlds from the ‘liberal’ world.”³²

Fierce anti-feminist rhetoric is evident in broad culture and is exponentially present in evangelical sub-culture.³³ These types of phenomenon are understood as backlash episodes. Strides are made in securing equal access to women in various fields of work. Then such strides are halted. There is much evidence that such backlash phenomenon exists during times of social change.³⁴ Thus, immediately following denominational conflicts regarding women’s access to official religious positions, there is a backlash that would halt that progress. For example, during the 1880s there was much discussion about women who were already doing the work of ministry having access to ordination. These discussions resulted in a few denominations changing official policies. However, in the following three decades, there was a backlash to second-wave feminism that resulted in a slowing of policy changes. Among the most obvious policy changes was the decision of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to refuse to hire professors based on their views about the full participation of women.³⁵ This decision served as a pivotal event for that denomination and it had a ripple effect in evangelical circles. Other

³² Ibid., 63.

³³ S. Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1991). See also the work of Kenneth Burke (University of California Press) and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, who address these matters using rhetorical analysis.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See: Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), Paula D. Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

backlash events occurred in the 1980-1990s after the influx of female seminarians and newly ordained women clergy in the 1970s.³⁶

Denominational decisions regarding women in ministry were heavily influenced by external cultural pressure. Denominations felt pressure when other denominations, which are perceived as being similar, made policy changes regarding the participation of women in the church. As studies conclude, an official policy of denominations toward ordaining women frequently causes a “backlash” on the local level.³⁷

Some denominations re-examined the biblical and theological foundations for ordaining women and concluded that a policy change was most consistent with their heritage and with scripture. The policy changes, whether influenced by cultural pressure or by theological examination, slowly impacted practice. As is explained in this study, the Free Methodist Church, USA, adopted an egalitarian policy that invites women to discover and fully exercise their calling and gifts for ministry. This stance is celebrated as there are many evangelical churches that remain patriarchal in policy and in practice.

Sociology of Religion Research

In studying churches with egalitarian policies, researchers discovered various reasons that churches may not be consistently implementing their inclusive policies. There are factors of resistance at the local church level and other factors within church hierarchies. Resistance happens at the local level, which shows that national policy changes do not automatically or quickly impact local church practice.

³⁶ Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 4ff.

³⁷ Chavez, *Ordaining*; See also Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*.

The congregational culture, which Sullins points out, may more aptly be understood as a “family culture.” He points out the important distinction is that organizational systems center around authority. The family culture that is present in congregations bears more similarities with the complex web of relationships found in families. The most influential party may not be the one with the position of authority. Furthermore, finding or keeping harmony may be the cultural value that trumps all others. Thus, a family culture may either actively or passively resist women in pastoral leadership.³⁸ These sources of resistance may act irrationally because of a perceived threat.

This persistent lay resistance appears to be alive and well in Wesleyan-Holiness denominations. These denominations were categorized as “Spirit-centered” in an important study conducted by the Center for Social and Religious Research at Hartford Seminary. Lay respondents were asked if they would actively seek a woman to fill a pastoral vacancy at their church. Out of thirty five Spirit-centered lay respondents, only 4% answered in the affirmative.³⁹ These statistics point to the reality that being ordained may now be less difficult, but being perceived as a desirable candidate for pastoral office is another matter altogether. The cultural influences and their corresponding backlashes

³⁸ Paul Sullins, “The Stained Glass Ceiling: Career Attainment for Women Clergy,” *Sociology of Religion* 2000, 61(3), 243-266.

³⁹ Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 106. It may be a point of contention that the sample in this study is very small and therefore may not prove to be true overall. However, it is also interesting to note that if this percentage is correct, there was only one person, a female, who said that she would be in favor of seeking a female pastor if there were a vacancy at her church.

tell the real story. It is at the congregational level that conflicts about women in ministry arise. The reality of resistance has changed little.⁴⁰

And finally, the Spirit-centered denominations, which initially had no prohibition against the ordination of women, have shown growing apprehension about clergy women. The Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Church of the Nazarene, the Free Methodists, and the Wesleyan Church sometimes embrace a theological fundamentalism that is inconsistent with their roots. In the twentieth century, these denominations have given mixed messages regarding the issue of women's ordination.⁴¹

Other denominational clusters that are the focus of most of the research on the dynamics of women clergy show similar patterns of resistance. There is some debate among scholars whether lay resistance or church hierarchies poses greater barriers to women in ministry. Subtle forms of sexism, or latent sexism, can be seen in the patterns recruiting, supporting, and promoting clergy women in studies from mainline Protestant denominations.⁴² One clear example of latent sexism that was found in Nesbitt's study was the prevalence of women who served small rural congregations throughout their career. These women were passed over—not viewed as suitable candidates—for more prestigious appointments.⁴³ Latent sexism gives way to more overt acts of sex discrimination within these faith groups when women clergy succeed and present a threat to the status quo. This is displayed in the data that shows that there is a tipping point at

⁴⁰ Sullins, "Stained Glass," 261.

⁴¹ Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 106.

⁴² See Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*; Sullins, "Stained Glass Ceiling"; and Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*.

⁴³ Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 4ff.

which male clergy colleagues change their support into reticence.⁴⁴ As long as women clergy are the minority, and as long as women clergy are earning less money, and are offered less prestigious posts, male clergy voice support of women in ministry. When these factors tip toward more equity, their support turns to resistance.

There is much debate in the literature about the dynamics involved in resistance. One debate centers on the impact clergywomen have on the church. Part of this discussion is whether there is a distinctly “feminine” style of pastoral leadership. As will be discussed in another section, ministry leadership style is influenced by culture. Seminary education in the 1990s emphasized “more of an inclusive, democratic leadership style than a directive, autocratic style.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Hartford study found that, regardless of gender, clergy in Spirit-centered denominations tend to slightly prefer a directive leadership style. This may be due to denominational expectations. It is also, possibly, influenced by theologically and socially conservative attitudes in this cluster.⁴⁶

American church and society experienced dramatic changes through the 1960s-1970s. Some blamed declining congregational attendance and vitality on the ordination and presence of women as pastors. As Paula Nesbitt found, the “feminization” of the clergy did have an impact on the church.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the influx of clergywomen did

⁴⁴ Adair T. Lummins and Paula D. Nesbitt, “Women Clergy Research and the Sociology of Religion,” *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000), 447.

⁴⁵ Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 57-58.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 102-103; see also Howard Stone, “The New Breed,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 47 (fall 1993), 286-297 in which he documents a study of 1139 seminarians over a ten year period and found that the female seminarians displayed greater intellectual and cognitive ability

not cause declining congregational attendance and vitality. Those who lamented the “shortage” of clergy were, more precisely, lamenting the decreased supply of young male clergy.⁴⁸ Her research focused on patterns of clergy careers over several decades in two denominations: the Episcopal Church and the Unitarian Universalist Association. Nesbitt’s study found that there was severe gender-segregation for her research subjects. The idea of “career trajectory” was nearly non-existent for women. Women began their clergy careers at entry level positions and were likely to remain at lower-paid and lower status positions throughout their careers. Conversely, the male clergy filled a disproportionate majority of higher-prestige positions.⁴⁹ This phenomenon is what has been called the “ghettoization” of women clergy.⁵⁰ Studies by Sullins and Zikmund confirm that, even when clergy women exceed their male colleagues in educational attainment, women were less likely to be appointed to or hired for senior leadership positions in ministry.⁵¹ This also clearly impacts and works in tandem with the economic discrimination that clergy women experience. The Barna Group and Zikmund both present data showing that for clergymen and clergywomen with similar education, training, years of service, in similarly sized churches and in similar denominations, there

than did the male students. He states: “if it were not for the increased number of women entering ministry over the last two decades, the decline of the cognitive ability of today’s seminarians would appear even greater,” 289. Therefore, from this study, one might argue that the best and the brightest are indeed clergywomen.

⁴⁸ Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 102-103.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Zikmund, et al., *Clergy Women*, 81.

⁵¹ Ibid., 83-88; Sullins, “Stained Glass Ceiling,” 260-261.

is salary differential of at least 9%.⁵² One might reason that denominational polity that operates with an appointment system with the bishop having final authority to deploy pastors would foster more equity for women clergy, but the sparse research available suggests that this is not the case.⁵³ Along with this, it appears that women's career attainment is such that earning a Masters of Divinity degree might not be a worthy investment. As Perl and Chang found, "alas, in the disproportionately moderate and liberal denominations requiring the M.Div., women do not benefit at all from attaining an advanced degree."⁵⁴

Women clergy's lack of career attainment is sometimes attributed to their lack of ambition. However, the women in a study conducted by McDuff and Mueller shows that women actually possess strong career orientation and professional values.⁵⁵ Clergywomen in their study also placed a higher value on their sense of calling than their male counterparts. These findings agree with others such as Chang who studies clergy careers. She notes that "traditional sociological research supports the interpretation that the concentration of women in this secondary labor market is a negative outcome of discriminatory practices."⁵⁶ She further lists many "push" and "pull" factors that keep

⁵² Barna Group, Ltd., "Number of Female Pastors in Protestant Churches Doubles in Past Decade" (2009), accessed December 28, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/leadership/304-number-of-female-senior-pastors-in-protestant-churches-doubles-in-past-decade#.U8QshJRdWSq>.

⁵³ Zikmund, et al., *Clergy Women*, 80-81.

⁵⁴ Paul Perl and Patricia M.Y. Chang, "Credentialism Across Creeds: Clergy Education and Stratification in Protestant Denominations," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39 (June 2000): 186.

⁵⁵ Elaine M. McDuff and Charles W. Mueller, "Gender Differences in the Professional Orientations of Protestant Clergy," *Sociological Forum* 17 (September 2002), 481.

⁵⁶ Patricia M.Y. Chang, "Introduction to Symposium: Female Clergy in the Contemporary Protestant Church: A Current Assessment," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (Dec. 1997), 568.

women in low status positions. Women who face resistance toward their leadership can feel pushed out of the ministry. They may have ambition to apply for senior and solo pastoral positions, however, they choose to stay where they are in order to avoid future resistance. This is what it means for them to feel “pushed” to stay in lower status positions. Resistance there seems minimal.⁵⁷ There are other options also. One such option, which seems very appealing to these women, is non-parish ministry. They are pulled to positions such as chaplaincy, theological education, or para-church ministries. These women express having more control over their lives, less demands or conflicts with parish-family commitments, and the ability to work part-time or with more predictable work hours and expectations. It is at least possible that some women clergy leave parish ministry and claim that it is in order to re-prioritize their lives. Could it be, as Joy Charlton surmises, a mask for the real reason? She states, “Caring for children as a reason for leaving often masked other, less easy to publicly announce, reasons for leaving. It might be fair to say that sometimes children provided the timing and face for leaving but not necessarily the ‘reason.’ In addition, some clergywomen have taken temporary leaves for rest and recovery, taking non-ministerial jobs in the meantime.”⁵⁸

It is concerning that clergywomen have a higher rate than men of dropping out of the ministry altogether. Studies also suggest that women are more likely to return after a time away. Joy Charlton conducted a longitudinal study with United Methodist and Lutheran clergy women. The initial interviews were during seminary in the late 1970s.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Joy Charlton, “Clergywomen of the Pioneer Generation: A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (December 1997), 606.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

She interviewed the same women fifteen years later and found that about half of them were not working in a parish setting. These pioneer clergy women were not shy about articulating how difficult ministry was as they were “told directly and indirectly” that they did not “fit” in the ministry.⁶⁰ Her respondents told the war stories that come with living with the contradiction of being both female and clergy. She states that “women in ordained ministry have embodied a contradiction.”⁶¹ Using the comparison of an anomalous twelve year old college student, she writes that there are particular expectations that one has of twelve year olds and there are very different expectations that one has of a college student. Every interaction with this twelve year old college-aged student requires all involved to negotiate the contradiction.⁶² Eventually, one of the two statuses might disappear with the expectations that are attached to it. Another way of handling the tension is to become isolated or segregated. Perhaps this is the reality that explains how women accommodate to and find contentment with being segregated into a secondary labor market. Clergywomen who prefer to deemphasize their status as women also might choose this as a way of reducing the tension of living the contradiction. Clergywomen may also work to negotiate a better way of understanding what is considered successful and appropriate while embodying both statuses. A final option that resolves the contradiction is for the clergywoman to leave parish ministry.⁶³

As has been discussed thus far, the majority of these studies focus on clergywomen of mainline denominations. Women in churches that belong in the Spirit-

⁶⁰ Ibid., 603.

⁶¹ Ibid., 601.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

centered cluster are likely to have additional barriers to being accepted, ordained, and deployed. Experience of these women is sparsely researched and is highly influenced by context of time and space. There is a complex web of reasons that Wesleyan-Holiness clergywomen face resistance to their leadership. One aspect of the complexity is the matter of gender.

Gender, Gender Norms and Roles in Evangelical Subculture

Roughly defined, there are two positions regarding gender and power relations. Essentialists view gender as biologically and naturalistically driven. This “givenness” of gender dictates gender norms and gender roles. Simply stated, in essentialist reasoning, the female gender is biologically disadvantaged to the male gender, therefore socially disadvantaged.⁶⁴ The opposing position is constructivist. This view suggests that gender is not innate or primarily “given” through biological and naturalistic means, but rather is negotiated through culture and convention. Gender is a social construct and therefore, the social disadvantages attributed toward the female gender are not pre-determined.

The word “sex” and the word “gender” are at times presumed to be interchangeable. However, an important distinction has been emphasized by social scientists. “Sex” refers to the biological reproductive system with which each person is born. “Gender” is a cultural classification by which biological males and biological females are sorted. It is frequently posited by feminists that gender categories also

⁶⁴ Judith Lorber and S. Farrell, *The Social Construction of Gender* (Newburg Park, CA: Sage Publication, 1991); see also, Karen V. Hansen “‘Helped Put in a Quilt’: Men’s Work and Male Intimacy in Nineteenth-Century New England,” *The Social Construction of Gender*, edited by Lorber and Farrell (Newburg Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991) for a discussion regarding how division of spheres for men and spheres for women create and enforce power differentials in society. It is not simply a matter that women were socialized toward domestic roles and work that is the concern, but that these roles and this work was and is culturally and economically undervalued.

express inequality. “When we speak about gender we also speak about hierarchy, power, and inequality, not simply difference.”⁶⁵ There is debate among feminists about the best definition of power. Some even counter that the very definition of power has been formed by male domination.⁶⁶

Particularly valuable to this study is an exploration of how essentialist gender concepts have impacted those in evangelical circles. These cultural forces present challenges for women who are called to leadership in the church. Gender essentialist thinking has dominated evangelicalism since the early twentieth century. Two main elements offered to mainstream evangelicalism from fundamentalists are scriptural authority and the role of women in church and society.⁶⁷ The years following World War II are viewed as years of gender norm and role entrenchment along essentialist lines under the influence of fundamentalism. The subculture of evangelicalism presents an ideal of the good woman as one who finds greatest and ultimate satisfaction in being a wife and mother. This ideal places great emphasis on men being leaders in their work and at home.⁶⁸ Furthermore, on a popular level, writers such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem present these narrowly defined gender norms and roles as the only biblical

⁶⁵ Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

⁶⁶ Amy Allen, “Gender and Power,” in Stewart Clegg and Mark Haugaard (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Power*, 293-310 (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

⁶⁷ See also Mark Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) and George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) for a full discussion these matters.

⁶⁸ Sally Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003). It is interesting that Gallagher’s research found that the “ideal” of essentialist gender norms and roles among evangelicals was entrenched; however, most families functioned in a soft patriarchy or pragmatic egalitarian way.

paradigm.⁶⁹ It is as Ingersoll found in her study on evangelical women, that on a popular level, traditionalist gender ideology and the conflicts precipitated by this ideology are present in the lived experience of evangelical Christian women, especially those who own a call to ministry.⁷⁰

This traditionalist gender ideology promotes and enforces expectations for men and women. Chavez concluded that denominations used traditional gender ideology as a sort of litmus test for being considered “biblical.” On a micro level, similarly Ingersoll found that “an individual’s views regarding women’s roles are used as a litmus test to determine whether the person is ‘one of us’ or ‘one of them’.”⁷¹ These polarizing tactics in the name of heterodoxy leave many evangelical women wounded. Women use terms such as “war stories” for that which they have suffered.⁷²

It is particularly telling that college students who were interviewed by Ingersoll in the 1990s were unaware of any “middle ground” on gender issues. These students had not heard of biblical feminism or organizations such as Christians for Biblical Equality. She discovered that on evangelical college campuses there were students who considered the word “feminist,” to be the “f” word.⁷³ The scant minority who identified themselves as

⁶⁹ See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991).

⁷⁰ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*; See Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminisms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 179ff, who points to the contradictions and misunderstandings of this view. She states that those who make feminism out to be an anti-family code word do not know that feminism was birthed among evangelicals. Amy Peterson, “The ‘F’ word: Why Feminism is not the enemy,” *Christ and Pop Culture* (Feb 20, 2013), accessed on Dec. 27, 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christandpopculture/2013/02/the-f-word-why-feminism-is-not-the-enemy/>.

either biblical feminists or evangelical feminists said that they were berated by fellow students after being seen reading biblical feminist books.⁷⁴

If constructionists are correct, it appears that evangelical institutions “do gender” by direct or indirect social pressure.⁷⁵ The enforcement of essentialist gender norms and roles happens in a variety of ways. The gender norming is experienced in little things as well as grand overtures of exclusion. For instance, latent sexism can be detected in words and actions that convey definitions of masculinity and femininity. Consider a situation featuring a person saying “he needs to man up.” This slang verb, “man up,” means that a man needs to act in a stereotypical masculine manner. Traits such as courage are ascribed to the male gender. A man who is told to, “man up,” is receiving gender norming. Both genders receive messages and are therefore shaped or enculturated.

The gender norming messages that women receive may appear to be minor in severity. Yet, as researchers suggest, language is a powerful weapon that keeps those who are marginalized from increasing in social power. These subtle messages are damaging to women and must be recognized as such. Social scientists such as D.W. Sue label such messages as micro-aggression. He states that “microaggressions are constant and continuing experiences of marginalized groups in our society; they assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being, and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life

⁷⁴ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 45.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 127-140 for a summary of constructivist notion of gender as that which is produced or performed, always being negotiated, and in flux see Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” *The Social Construction of Gender* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1991), 13-37.

expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care.”⁷⁶

There is a broad spectrum of gender ideologies that are taught and practiced within the church. On one extreme, there are those who believe that wives should submit to their husbands and that women should not be permitted to hold any church leadership whatsoever.⁷⁷ Men are enculturated to lead in both the home and church. They are told to “man up.” The more moderate version of this is also very common. This view holds to the belief that women can have leadership roles as long as they do not have authority over men. The other side of the spectrum is represented by evangelical feminists or egalitarians. Although there is some variety of opinion among them, egalitarians generally embrace women serving in whatever roles for which they are called and gifted. As mentioned previously, the Free Methodist Church, USA, is egalitarian. This means that the church affirms that the gifts that God gives are given to both men and woman and that all church roles should be open as such.

Ingersoll points out that many Evangelical women are conflicted about gender roles. This internal conflict can be present even if a woman is called into the ministry. Egalitarian views are not always taught at the local church level as previously discussed. Women may conform to traditional gender norms.⁷⁸ Among those who do so, there are some who view traditional gender norms, women submitting to men and men leading, as empowerment through submitting. These women attest to a reality that is dominant in

⁷⁶ Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 6.

⁷⁷ See Piper and Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

⁷⁸ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 7.

Christian spirituality more generally. As one surrenders to God's control (in this case it would be a woman submitting to her husband as leader), one is given the grace to submit and forgive.⁷⁹

Alternatively, there are some women who do not have such an experience. The enforcement of gender norms and roles can create dissonance and inner conflict for young women who know that they are being called into ministry. It is naïve to think or suggest that a young woman in this situation would leave the church of her upbringing for a more a mainline denomination that intentionally expresses egalitarian views. It is difficult, if not impossible, for one to leave a faith family if one is nurtured in it, educated by its schools and colleges, and has accumulated a social support system that is largely dependent on membership in it. The tension regarding gender that women endure is not usually reason enough to leave. Creegan and Pohl assert that “while to leave would mean abandoning part of ourselves and our family, living within evangelicalism can sometimes feel like being invisible among difficult and uncooperative family members.”⁸⁰ It is also possible that mainline denominations have been tagged as “them” in the polarization. Furthermore, it is likely that these women hold tenaciously to a high view of scripture and they very well might perceive that view as lacking from mainline denominations. In light of clergywomen studies of mainline denominations, at least at the popular level, their leadership there might also be contested. This is precisely the dilemma that “pushes” young women who are seeking theological education away from parish ministry and into

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3-7.

⁸⁰ Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 65.

other settings. The sad reality that the literature suggests is also that there are women who leave Christianity altogether because of gender battles.⁸¹

Creegan and Pohl agree with Ingersoll on the reality that women bear the burden of the gender conflicts within evangelical subculture, but they do not want to agree that gender roles are the defining element within the movement.⁸² They do not diminish the tension with which evangelical feminist women live. They acknowledge that evangelical identity contains cultural, cognitive, and experiential elements. Cultural elements of story, song, and family of evangelicalism embody theological content and experience. This adds to the complexity of women who choose to live in the conflicting worlds of evangelicalism and feminism. The experience of alienation is what they call “living on the boundaries.”⁸³ This is a way of conceptualizing women’s experience in attempting to inhabit these two worlds. As was spoken by the pioneer clergywomen in Charlton’s study, there is contradiction of status and an ever present tension for women in ministry.⁸⁴ These themes resonate in the stories and statistics of many studies of women in ministry. There is a sense of homelessness, of not belonging, of being pushed to live in an in-between, both-and, boundary space.

This uneasy relationship between evangelicalism and feminism is addressed by Esther Byle Bruland. Bruland is hopeful as she calls for conversations between evangelicals and feminists. She is calling for a middle ground in Christian ethics. She

⁸¹ Ingersoll, *Evangelical*, 137; see also Adair T. Lummis and Paula D. Nesbitt, “Women Clergy Research and the Sociology of Religion,” *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000): 443-453.

⁸² Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 60ff.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24ff.

⁸⁴ Charlton, “Pioneer.”

states that these two groups have some overlapping methods and foci.⁸⁵ Conversation focusing on the shared values of both evangelicals and feminists could begin with those from Wesleyan backgrounds. Indeed, both evangelicals and feminists value the personal, relationships, and experience as “body mediated” knowledge. Both groups also have sensitivity to power and control issues. She is hopeful that those from Wesleyan backgrounds could be most congenial. “Those from Wesleyan (including Holiness) and Pentecostal strands of evangelicalism have been more ready to affirm experience in the process of deriving norms, given their more immanent foci of sanctification and the work of the Spirit. Hence persons from these latter traditions have more easily and readily entered into dialogue with Christian feminists.”⁸⁶ This call for conversation and meeting on common ground might bring improved conditions for women within Wesleyan-Holiness denominations. It most certainly would reduce the amount of “demonizing” of the “other” that occurs.⁸⁷

It is also noteworthy that B.T. Roberts, the principle founder of the Free Methodist Church, begins his argument in *Ordaining Women* with the statement that he has no intention of following the spirit of the age.⁸⁸ He proceeds to use reason, experience, and scripture to argue for full inclusion of women in all ministries of the church. Perhaps he would not have considered himself a feminist, but he presents the

⁸⁵ Esther Byle Bruland, “Evangelical and Feminist Ethics: Complex Solidarities,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17 (1989): 139-160; see also Randy Maddox, “Wesleyan Theology and the Christian Feminist Critique,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 22 (1987):101-111 for a thoughtful discussion about the convergent and divergent commitments of Wesleyan and Wesleyan Holiness theologies with feminism.

⁸⁶ Bruland, “Evangelical,” 150.

⁸⁷ Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 72.

⁸⁸B.T. Roberts, *Ordaining Women* (Indianapolis, IN: Light & Life Press, 1992, Kindle Edition), location 77.

struggle of women for equal rights right alongside the struggle for equal rights for African Americans. He names the social oppression that is endemic in the institution of slavery as an evil that is as grievous as the social oppression of women that is institutionalized in churches that refuse ordination to women. His human rights argument is quickly followed by arguments from scripture. In summary, B.T. Roberts' argument matches those who self-identify as biblical feminists.

The Hartford study claims that remaining naïve about gender conflict may hold some benefit for the clergywomen from the Wesleyan-Holiness cluster. These clergywomen had the lowest overtly “feminist” thinking along with the highest levels of contentment with their current ministry situation.⁸⁹ However, it is also interesting that the few with strong feminist thinking were the most discontent with their current setting even as compared to those from other denominational clusters.⁹⁰ Additionally, Lummis found that women with the strongest feminist beliefs, who were more vocal and pro-active about equality, were those with worse overall health.⁹¹ There may or may not be a causal link between the two. It is possible that Wesleyan-Holiness clergywomen who have endured resistance and rejection have decided to identify their experience as oppression and thereby have grown more strident in feminist thinking as they make meaning out of their experience. These dynamics are also evident in a study of contemporary Pentecostal

⁸⁹ Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 141.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁹¹ Lummis, “Women Clergy Research,” 447.

clergywomen done by Susan Kwilecki.⁹² It is likely that Wesleyan-Holiness clergywomen bear similarities to these Pentecostal clergywomen. Kwilecki notes that the attitudes of Pentecostal clergywomen reflected that of pre-feminist female pastors. Although she observed that these pastoral leaders claim their authority to minister on the basis of God's call and empowerment, most of the women held patriarchal views based on a fundamentalist view of scripture. There were some who espoused more egalitarian views, however she found few "pure" types with some having inconsistent and confused responses. For example, one respondent rejected feminist labeling and later outlined a biblical argument for equal call and role functioning for both sexes.

In the Gender Parity Project by Janel Curry and Amy Reynolds, gender role tension also was found in evangelical non-profits. According to their research, a majority of male leadership in evangelical non-profits express egalitarian gender views. Yet, in reality, few organizations explicitly state whether leadership positions are open to both men and women. In the case of these evangelical non-profits, the numbers communicate that women are far from parity with men in access to leadership positions.⁹³

It may be argued that there is greater parity experienced by women in Wesleyan-Holiness churches than in churches that explicitly limit access to leadership by women. However, the data does not necessarily suggest that this is the case. In fact, gauging by data that is available, such as that published by Barna, the number of women who serve

⁹² Susan Kwilecki, "Contemporary Pentecostal Clergywomen: Female Christian Leadership, Old Style," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3 (Fall, 1987): 57-75.

⁹³ Katelyn Beaty, "Study: Where Are the Women Leading Evangelical Organizations?" *Christianity Today* (Sep. 2014), accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/september-web-only/study-women-leading-evangelical-organizations.html>.

as solo or senior pastors is comparable to that of those of denominations such as the Southern Baptists who have explicitly limited access to women in such positions.⁹⁴ Data suggest that clergywomen from the Wesleyan-Holiness cluster are less likely to attend seminary. If this is the case, it stands to reason that these clergywomen are not aware of the biblical feminism that is an important part of their tradition. This factor may also discourage young women who are sensing a call to preach from fully embracing it. This contributes to an additional dynamic that is a disadvantage for women in their career attainment because data show that women often hear God's call to ministry early in their lives and do not pursue ministry until later in life.⁹⁵

For the Free Methodist denomination that has settled the question about the full participation of women, it stands to reason that there should be fewer barriers. This lack of consistency is among the things that motivate this study. The data suggest that the conflicts of the past continue regardless of official policy changes. The false consciousness or the fallacy of an open door plays out in the lived experience of clergywomen.⁹⁶ As Lehman and Sullins discovered, at the time of their studies (1981 and 2000, respectively) resistance toward women clergy has not waned in the last forty years.⁹⁷ The perception that official policy changes translate to a friendlier climate toward

⁹⁴ Barna Group, Ltd., "Number of Female Pastors in Protestant Churches Doubles in Past Decade" (2009), accessed December 28, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/leadership/304-number-of-female-senior-pastors-in-protestant-churches-doubles-in-past-decade#.U8QshJRdWSq>.

⁹⁵ Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 159.

⁹⁶ Lummis and Nesbitt, "Women Clergy," 450 argue that because social change is slow and can be wearisome, it is easy to become discouraged, but that even as there is still work to be done, those who long for gender equality in opportunity must never see the work as completed. A piece of evidence that there is progress is that there is a corresponding backlash.

women being ordained and employed is, to a large extent, false. This translates to additional frustration for those who have been ordained in the last twenty years. Ingersoll observed the naivety and dashed expectations of these clergywomen. She stated:

Those women flocked to Christian colleges and then to graduate schools and seminaries. They became teachers, pastors, and professors, and scholars. They believed, perhaps naively, that their sense of calling, their hard work, and their devotion to their faith, would be respected and valued in their Christian subculture...but conservative Christianity is a subculture divided over the very issue of women's proper roles, and when these women moved into positions of respect, authority and responsibility they encountered difficulties they could not have anticipated and for which they were not prepared.⁹⁸

Difficulties are part of the territory for all pastors. Nevertheless, clergywomen are less likely to have mentors and even much less likely to have women mentors.⁹⁹ This can cause greater isolation when difficulties arise. Without other clergywomen with whom they can share their life experiences, they logically conclude that whatever difficulties they are encountering are their fault. The lack of available supportive ministry peers can cause clergywomen to suffer in silence.¹⁰⁰

It is important to appreciate the complex social pressures that women experience and the impact that this has on their choices and lack of advancement in ministry. On one hand, women are prudent and pragmatic in gladly accepting whatever opportunities come to them. On the other hand, women who have substantial experience and education would do well to learn and model for younger clergywomen necessary skills of negotiation and self-advocacy. These skills are under-appreciated in females. This is especially true for

⁹⁷ Edward Lehman, "Patterns of Lay Resistance to Women in Ministry," *Sociological Analysis* 41 (1981): 317-338; Sullins, "Stained Glass," 261.

⁹⁸ Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*, 2.

⁹⁹ Beth Armstrong, "Promoting Clergy Gender Equity: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of an Egalitarian Evangelical Denomination" (PhD. Diss., Gonzaga University, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 76ff.

evangelical women who are not generally schooled in being assertive. They are schooled in norms and definitions of a good woman being agreeable, submissive, and compliant.¹⁰¹ Being socialized to be accommodating and submissive, women may not realize that they have acquiesced too often. Literature supports the reality that women and men both have bought the lie that women do not deserve more prestigious ministry assignments. It is a subtle form of internalized sexism that impacts the choices of women. It is altogether understandable that women have opted out because of their own fear of being labeled as a feminist and rejected. This is evident when women who have influence decide that mentoring young women would accentuate their femininity and thus decide against it.¹⁰² Furthermore, this choice, while understandable, is evidence of the systemic devaluing of women's experience. It is possible that this internalized sexism, however unintended, has contributed to the "ghettoization" of clergywomen. Women may personally question whether or not they are suitable for advancement in their careers.

Organizational uncertainty can create opportunities for women clergy. As Lehman notes, churches may acknowledge their inability to employ the caliber of clergy that they once did and at that point, be willing to consider accepting a female pastor.¹⁰³ The actual "receptivity" of such congregations cannot be gauged in such situations, since many lay people feel like they must try anything to keep the church from closing. This kind of challenge or opportunity for women clergy can reinforce the perception that women are more suitable for less viable and less prestigious pulpits. The studies of both Nesbitt and

¹⁰¹ Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 9ff.

¹⁰² Barbara Kellerman and Deborah Rhode, *Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 19.

¹⁰³ Lehman, "Patterns," 336.

Sullins confirm that there is no such thing as an upwardly mobile career trajectory for women.¹⁰⁴

Further, as Nesbitt concludes, the essence of the problem is systemic. Institutionally, it appears that those in power arrange gender-segregation by appointments and job titles. Women are systemically put in positions that will not pose a threat to the status quo. Women, who are appointed as a last resort before an organization or church crashes, may succeed in keeping the doors open, or may not. However, even if clergywomen do exceedingly well in last resort situations, they are not likely to be offered more stable or prestigious posts.¹⁰⁵

Chavez, Nesbitt, Lummis, and Zikmund present institutional or denominational level resistance as the greatest barrier for clergywomen advancement. These studies pull data from mainline denominations. It is possible that there are even greater barriers in evangelical denominations. As is suggested by Ingersoll, the stringent essentialist gender norms built into evangelical sub-culture suggest that there are greater implicit and explicit barriers for evangelical clergywomen.

Lehman and Sullins highlight the unchanging resistance to clergywomen on the local level. “Persons in churches that are organizationally sound in terms of membership and finances are more likely to reject clergywomen than those in struggling and declining churches.”¹⁰⁶ Lay respondents reflected the prejudices that are reflective of society in general. Social-psychological stereotyping cause these lay respondents to be most

¹⁰⁴ Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 73ff; Sullins, “Stained,” 243ff.

¹⁰⁵ Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 79-89.

¹⁰⁶ Lehman, “Patterns,” 335.

resistant in accepting women in the role of religious leader or head of staff. This factor is addressed by social scientists and their study of women leaders is particularly fitting.

Role Congruity: Gender and Leadership

The tension between gender norms and leadership expectations is another critical factor. There are various roles in which clergy function: preaching, teaching, worship and liturgical leadership, pastoral care-giving, and administration. The role “senior pastor” provoked the most resistance toward clergywomen from lay respondents in Lehman’s research. These respondents were less resistant toward women in the roles of preacher, teacher, or even serving in the role of “associate.” Role congruity theory offers an explanation and is an important lens through which to look in order to better understand the role negotiation women clergy face.

According to social-psychology research, the stereotype, “think manager, think male” is accurate. According to Lehman’s respondents, it is also true “think pastoral leader, think male.” Social psychologists observe that gender stereotypes influence organizational behavior. Linda L. Carli and Alice H. Eagly have been studying gender stereotyping trends for thirty years.¹⁰⁷ Gender norms can be descriptive or injunctive. Stereotypes, or descriptive gender norms, suggest that women are communal with

¹⁰⁷ See for full details and data from studies: Linda L. Carli and Alice H. Eagly, “Gender, Hierarchy, and Leadership: An Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 57 (2001): 631; Alice Eagle H. and Steven J. Karau, “Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders,” *Psychological Review* 109 (2002): 573-598; Alice Eagly H., Mary C. Johannesen-Schmidt, and Marloes L. van Engen, “Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Style: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men,” *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (2003): 569-591; others have challenged Eagly and Carli asserting that there are certain contexts in which women in executive positions may experience an advantage because of their gender, Ashleigh Shelby Rosette and Leigh Plunkett Tost, “Agentic Women and Communal Leadership: How Role Prescriptions Confer Advantage to Top Women Leaders,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95 (2010): 221-235.

attributes of showing concern for the well-being of others, being affectionate, and being interpersonally sensitive. Conversely, men, attributed with agentic characteristics, are ambitious, assertive, independent, and self-confident. Role congruity theory, which they present, suggests that female leaders are perennially in a double bind. Women, occupy their socially acceptable “role” in society as female by being polite, kind, collaborative, and gentle. However, leadership roles demand confidence and assertiveness. There is tension, and incongruity, between the two roles. Gender roles and leader roles hold conflicting and incongruent expectations.

According to Eagly and Karau, there are variables that moderate the amount of congruity in leadership settings.¹⁰⁸ For instance, studies show that there is increased incongruity for women in leadership settings where the leader role is articulated in stringent “masculine” terms. The double bind for women leaders is particularly acute when the leadership role is typically occupied by men. Rhode and Kellerman note that “aspiring female leaders risk being liked but not respected, or respected but not liked in settings that may require individuals to be both in order to be succeed.”¹⁰⁹

Another variable that moderates congruity in leadership settings is the sex of the perceiver. Perceivers who are male are much more likely to view women as less qualified than men for leadership.¹¹⁰ In addition to these variables, research asserts that there are factors such as culture and sub-culture at play. It is noted that as women climb organizational hierarchy, the paucity of other women leaders makes it more likely that in

¹⁰⁸ Eagly and Karau, “Role Congruity,” 576ff.

¹⁰⁹ Kellerman and Rhode, *Women and Leadership*, 7.

¹¹⁰ Eagly and Karau, “Role Congruity,” 577.

the absence of other women occupying the same role, perceivers will rely primarily on gender stereotyping for evaluating and making sense of the leader.

It is also interesting that there is a gap in the literature in regard to ministry leadership in this regard. I was not able to find any published studies that tested role congruity among women clergy or women leaders of evangelical non-profit organizations. However, it appears that role congruity may be one possible contributing factor in the lived experience of clergywomen.

Conclusion

This set of factors contributes to what some have termed “the stained glass ceiling.”¹¹¹ It is glass because it is not necessarily obvious why women routinely encounter resistance. It is noted in the research that women consistently receive less favorable performance reviews and are conspicuously absent in major leadership posts.¹¹² This is the situation with female pastors along with female leaders in other occupations.

The glass ceiling is a metaphor for prejudice and discrimination. To the extent that people are prejudiced against women as leaders and potential leaders, this prejudice would manifest itself in many ways and have multiple effects. Prejudice can take subtle and blatant forms and can be held by employers, customers, voters, and even by the targets of prejudice themselves. Prejudice against women as leaders and potential leaders would interfere with women’s ability to gain authority and exercise influence and would produce discrimination when it is translated into personnel decisions within organizations and political structures.¹¹³

Role congruity theory supports the findings of the clergywomen studies featured here. Moreover, they have been tested over time and in many spheres where women seek

¹¹¹ Sullins, “The Stained Glass Ceiling,” 243-266.

¹¹² Eagly and Karau, “Role Congruity,” 573.

¹¹³ Carli and Eagly, “Gender, Hierarchy,” 631.

leadership. Therefore, it is fair to assume that these findings translate to women in pastoral leadership. When translating these complex variables into the context of pastoral leadership, women in ministry may need to be aware that it is possible that the “less than favorable” evaluations that they receive may be based on their disregard for gender roles by virtue of their excelling in their pastoral leadership role.

As previously discussed, evangelicalism’s sub-culture gender norms are not simply descriptive. Gender norms are also injunctive. They are consistently taught and enforced as that which women “should” be in order to be a good Christian. Sometimes, these gender norms are supported by an essentialist understanding of gender and argued as biblical. This poses interesting leadership questions for the church. These questions regarding gender norms are not likely to be asked by those who are naively content. Men, by virtue of the power and privilege conferred on them by church and society, are not likely to notice the burdensome impact of living in such incongruity.

Negotiating these complexities requires much energy from women. This energy would be better spent on advancing the vision and purpose of the team (church) which they are leading. Image management detracts from the real task of leadership. Ibara states it succinctly:

But the time and energy spent on managing these perceptions can ultimately be self-defeating. Over investment in one’s image diminishes the emotional and motivational resources available for larger purposes. People who focus on how others perceive them are less clear about their goals, less open to learning from failure, and less capable of self-regulation. Anchoring in purpose enables women to redirect their attention toward shared goals and consider who they need to be and what they need to learn in order to achieve those goals. Instead of defining themselves in relation to gender stereotypes – whether rejecting stereotypically masculine approaches because they feel inauthentic or rejecting stereotypically

feminine ones for fear that they convey incompetence – female leaders can focus on behaving in ways that advance the purposes for which they stand.¹¹⁴

The real task of clergywomen is to follow Jesus and invite others to do the same. In the context of church life, the clergywoman proclaims and embodies the Gospel in such a way that God is glorified and disciples are multiplied. She leads others into an empowered and abundant life. This goal is worth pursuing with courage and tenacity regardless of the barriers.

As overviewed in this chapter, clergywomen live in a peculiar tension in addition to the standard tensions endemic in church life. Negotiating these complex factors requires courage and resilience. Clergywomen, by virtue of their calling and career, break gender norms and roles. This adds stress to their lives. Moreover, women long for congruence in life. The call to ministry for women is an outgrowth of discipleship. Women desire the ability to follow and serve God in the church with their whole selves. The whole self includes gender. This makes a study that focuses on the lived experience of clergywomen especially timely. It is my aim to invite conversation that will stretch the current conversation. The lived experience of Wesleyan-Holiness women clergy will do this. Like other women leaders, we inhabit and embody liminal space, and by doing so, we invite conversations about authenticity, self-awareness, and moral integrity.¹¹⁵ From the lived experience of clergywomen, whoever is willing might be invited to explore how

¹¹⁴ Herminia Ibarra, Robin Ely, and Deborah Kolb, “Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers,” *Harvard Business Review* 91 (September 2013): 66.

¹¹⁵ Laura Morgan Roberts, Kellerman and Rhode, editors, *Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 329.

we all can faithfully inhabit the contested spaces in church and society in which we find ourselves.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Researching the lived experience of women clergy necessitates theological reflection and investigation into the nature of the church and the role of church leadership. I argue for full participation of women in church leadership.

Introduction

This chapter will set forth a relational Trinitarian theology related to this project. God created humanity, both male and female. God, in Christ, restored humanity, both male and female. God intends for the church to reflect his glory to all creation. The church with both women and men leading best represents the embodied character of the good news of the kingdom of God. Women, along with men, must be bearers of God in order for the mission of God to be accomplished in the world.

Creation and Humanity in the Image of God

God's intention and action in creation is suffused with self-sacrificing love. This is seen in the whole of scripture. It is crucial to view all scripture in this light.¹¹⁶ In Genesis 1, God's powerful word creates. There is a repeated affirmation that God's creation is good (Genesis 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). At the creation of women and men, there is special emphasis on the goodness of humanity: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

¹¹⁶ Gordon Free, *Listening to the Spirit of the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press), 71, states as part of his exegesis of the household rule in Ephesians 5: "There simply is no biblical structure for the household... (what is set out is) Christ-likeness in our relationships... Shalom, filled with the Spirit... to love with Christ's love by self-sacrificing giving of ourselves. And I would suggest that if we do that well, the matter of structure will pale into insignificance."

At the very essence of created reality is a goodness that radiates from God. As the pinnacle of God's good creation, humans are also gifted with a distinct role within the created order. The human is given the gift of being created by God "in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26), which is followed by a charge or call to take care of creation.¹¹⁷ Male and female together receive *imago Dei*; together and in partnership with God, they and the rest of creation would develop and flourish. Instead of flourishing in God's good design, dominion was distorted into domination.¹¹⁸ Domination destroys God's well-designed created order. On the other hand, this careful attentive, creative, care was lived out by Christ, the new Adam. It was this "mind of Christ" that is "to rule" in the hearts of human beings (Romans 5:12-21, 12:1-7, Philippians 2:1-11, Colossians 3:1-17).

In the story of creation, the humans received one prohibition. Their inability to respect this reflected a rejection of God. This was a neglect of the gift of being made in

¹¹⁷ See J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 140-141. There is a detailed discussion contrasting the Hebrew terms for "glory" and "worthlessness." The *imago Dei* means that humans are both gifted and called by God. They stealthily disassemble the common postmodern notion that the "self" is constructed. The authors offer the biblical concept of *imago Dei* as both gift and call. Middleton and Walsh state: "Contrary to the ideal of autonomous dragon slayer, the self as gift implies that we neither construct ourselves nor affect our redemption by overcoming evil. On the contrary, our identity as human beings and redeemed people is the gracious gift of our Creator and Redeemer, who has provided for us a creational home and a normative, redemptive story in which to dwell and be nurtured. But the self as gift also addresses our experiences of powerlessness and fragmentation, since with identity comes agency. Contrary to the disempowered sense that we are motes in the dragon's jaws, mere effects, constructed by multiple, often oppressive worlds and stories we inhabit, the Scriptures grant us a vision of empowered angst, delegated genuine authority and stewardship in the earth, able even to impact and affect God's metanarrative of redemption by our actions."

¹¹⁸ See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 85-99 for an analysis of this text. The gift and charge of creation means participation with one another and in harmony with the earth. She states, "They enhance the delight of the garden. By the same token, they give to the earth creature the joy of work. This work changes human life from passivity to participation. Moreover, it precedes sexuality to characterize total humanity. Work fulfills both creature and environment, proving dignity and integrity. It testifies to the oneness of humanity and soil at the same time that it establishes the responsibility of the earth creature for the earth. Distinction without opposition, dominion without domination...unity, solidarity, mutuality, and equality."

the image of God. It is also a neglect of the responsibility that was conferred on humanity because of this image. Instead of listening to and honoring God, and working in partnership with God and one another, the male and female gave their attention to the serpent. This is the basic problem of sin. The essence of sin is the severing of relationship; it is neglect or rejection of the gift and/or the responsibility of the *imago Dei*.¹¹⁹ Because of sin, human relationships become difficult, as seen in Genesis 3:16, where partnership between the man and woman is distorted into patriarchy.¹²⁰

The joyous poem that expressed God's intention for partnership between the man and woman in Genesis 2 came from the man. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman" (Genesis 2:23). Her creation blessed (blesses) the world; for now, Man ('*iš*') had a companion ('*iššâ*') with whom to share life. Hebrew scholars, such as Phyllis Trible, agree that this is not Man "naming" woman (Genesis 2:23). The word for "name" is not used here. At this point in the story, there was no domination.¹²¹ Rather, Adam was verbally expressing that he was ecstatic about her creation. This "suitable" (*kenegdo*) "help" (*ezer*) was one who corresponds to man. "Help" is frequently used in the Hebrew Scriptures for God or another person who is of superior status to the one being helped.¹²² It is frequently used referring to God in the

¹¹⁹ See Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 81, in addressing inherited corruption, he states that Wesley consistently "resonant(s) with the Eastern theme of lost participation: Humans are creaturely beings who can develop spiritual wholeness only through dynamic relationship with God's empowering grace. The essence of the first sin was the severing of this relationship, the desire to be independent of God...all subsequent human beings come into the world already separated from God, hence spiritually dead."

¹²⁰ Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, see footnote 18.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹²² See William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009, Kindle Edition), for a discussion about the use of

Psalms. God is called upon as a helper for assistance, partnership, rescue, and companionship. It is certainly the case that the Psalmist did not view God's help as some have seen the same word "help" applied to women. The helper is called upon for strength and "fitness" in relationship. Man and woman are created to be in partnership with one another, to walk in intimacy with one another and with God. This partnership of mutuality reflects God's creational intent to bless the world.

It is significant that this ecstatic poem and the modifiers used for woman celebrate God's creation. It is only after the fall that woman was "named." The consequence of sin was that man would "rule over" her. This domination is seen as Adam gives her the name "Eve" (3:20).¹²³ This consequence, though it may seem natural, was not the cause of celebration. Domination and subordination cannot be found in God's gracious intent for humanity. These are the destructive consequences of sin and the fall. This is what Rebecca Merrill Groothuis calls a "gross distortion of human relationships brought about by sin, and reinforced by sinful patterns woven into the fabric of human societies."¹²⁴

Embodiment

God effectively deals with human sinfulness with self-giving sacrificial love as is evident in the incarnation, life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who is the Christ. Restoration of all creation begins with the incarnation. It is notable that

the helpmate –suitable helper being used by egalitarians. They argue that even though *ezer* is used 128 times and that 72% of those passages feature one of superior-status doing the help, this only is not enough evidence that Biblical usage favors a usage of *ezer* as a helper of at least equal status as the one doing the helping. His point is well taken and alone is not absolutely convincing. However, it is also clear that those who use this passage to argue the "lesser" status of woman as helper will need to find another word besides "helper" with which to convince their readers.

¹²³ See J. Richard Middleton, "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the Imago Dei in Context" *Christian Scholar's Review* 24/1 (1994): 21 and Tribble, *God and Rhetoric*, 85-99.

¹²⁴ Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 54-55.

women play a significant role in the life of Jesus. Humanness, human flesh, and embodiment are intended for good purposes. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is approached by an angel, Gabriel, and is greeted with these words: “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). God chose a woman, Mary, for an incredible task. God chose a woman to partner with him for the crucial task of incarnation.¹²⁵

Mary is chosen by God and given a grand task that includes but also extends beyond childbearing. Mary has been commissioned to bring Jesus into the world, whom the angel later says, “will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). She does not raise any objections, though she asks one clarifying question: “How?” (Luke 1:34). The final words from the angel’s mouth could serve as a summary message for this story as well as the whole of the story: “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Mary is satisfied. She replies in willingness and humility with the words “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

Mary thus becomes what the Eastern Orthodox Church calls *theotokos*, God-bearer.¹²⁶ At the very least, God’s choice of her convinces us that women can be used in God’s purposes. It may also be true that in the incarnation, God shows humanity that

¹²⁵ See Kristina LeCelle-Peterson, *Liberating Tradition: Women’s Identity and Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, Kindle Edition, 2008), location 945 for discussion with good humor points. She points out that “at this crucial juncture, the impending birth of the most significant person ever born, God does not use a ‘man as spiritual head of the house’ model, such as many Christians teach as God’s way of doing things. And you think God would want to do it right at the birth of the one and only Son of God.”

¹²⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, “On the Incarnation,” *Oxford Early Christian Texts: Cyril of Alexandria: Selected Letters*, ed. L. R. Wickham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 4:22-6:28; and John of Damascus, “On the Incarnation and Icons,” *Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 4.18.

restoration is begotten of a woman and, therefore, she is first in line to see the availability of the Kingdom of God. The fall that enacted her alienation is now reversed and enacts her liberation.

The incarnation, the Word made flesh, demonstrates the Divine commitment to manifesting the reality of God in the world. Embodiment is God's specialty. There is a link between the incarnation in the person of Jesus and God's on-going incarnation in the life of the church. These are visible, embodied expressions of God's good intentions and good actions for God's creation. As will be presented here, God's actions (past, present, and future) are concrete and personal. God's commitment to having a community, a body, naturally produces an identity that is congruent with the source. Restored humanity, male and female, are gathered into and formed into the body of Christ. This physical, incarnational expression of Christ's body by necessity will include both genders in a similar way that the *imago Dei* is given to both genders. This embodiment logically extends throughout the body. Jesus, the Christ, who is simultaneously divine and human, becomes a saving mediator between humans and the divine precisely because of the incarnation. This embodiment is the ground on which Trinitarian love becomes most obvious and accessible. Christ comes to us as one of us, "meeting us at the bottom of the stairway" as Newbigin put it, and taking on everything it means to be human, including suffering and death.¹²⁷ It is God's willingness to become vulnerable that makes Jesus the "unique avatar."¹²⁸ In a similar vein, Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar uses the

¹²⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Kindle Edition, 1995), 2464.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 277.

word “transparent” in describing what God has done in Christ.¹²⁹ In the kenotic (divine self-emptying) act of incarnation, the Divine gift to humanity goes

into that which is contrary to himself as he gathers into himself the sin and the lostness and so the abandonment by God of his creatures, and takes it upon himself. He does not thereby cease to be himself, what he is and what he can do. God can be dead without ceasing to be eternal life and he can, acting in this manner, prove finally that he is life and love and the goodness and grace which pours itself out in selfless self-giving...the heart is pierced, its spring uncovered, water and blood pour forth, there is nothing more than this.¹³⁰

God joins the human condition in the incarnation. It is a self-giving, gracious, love act from God. It also demonstrates that God’s initiative is not manipulative, controlling, or distant. God intersects human history by joining the sin-wrecked world and offering physical and spiritual healing for creation. In becoming human, God affirms the goodness of creation and willingly suffers for those whom He loves. In becoming human, God also enters human suffering, in this way becoming the second Adam, who set in motion the restoration of all things. Jesus faced evil, suffering, and death and is accomplishing God’s work of wholeness and healing.

Christology

During his life, Jesus, teaching and healing, brought the reality of God’s wholeness into human existence. The study of the person and work of the Christ, who he was and what he did, is often referred to as Christology. His life, suffering, and death are

¹²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Kehl and Loser (New York: Crossroads, 1997), 194.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

addressed separately only for the sake of systematizing thoughts. Indeed, these aspects are part of a whole. Redemption is found in his person and his work.¹³¹

The Gospels report that Jesus, in the pattern of prophets, begins his public ministry by proclaiming: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:17). Jesus called disciples to follow him, to learn from him, to become his apprentices. Those who would do so not only learned from a rabbi, whom the general public would observe had an authority that far surpassed that of other teachers, but from one whose teaching was thoroughly consistent with his character.

Jesus’ relationships with people, both men and women, incarnated the Kingdom of God. It is important to observe that the person of Jesus listened to people, respected their freedom, and honored those he encountered. His signs and wonders brought the Kingdom of God to bear in a tangible way. The content of his teaching was the Kingdom of God and how to live life in partnership with God. His character, his prophetic words and deeds, and his truth telling courage all displayed the Kingdom of God. Among the most surprising aspects of the Kingdom of God, as he spoke and lived it, was and is its availability to everyone.

His life of compassion toward those who were on the margins of society stands in stark contrast to other teachers of the day. His actions transcended social convention by extending welcome to those who were not typically included in religious life. His person and work had a magnetic effect on the blind, those who were disabled, those suffering

¹³¹ See Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2009), 223 for a full discussion. In short he states: “The overall design of classical Christology is essentially simple and need not be confusing even to the novice. It hinges on a clear-cut distinction between who one is and what one does. A living person is not the same as the person’s work. The work is done by the person. We do not commonly say that the person’s work is precisely the person, because the person preceded and transcends his work. Rather we say the person’s work (acts, actions, behaviors) reveals who the person is. Therefore, the person and work of Christ are distinct, but not separable.”

from all kinds of ailments and diseases, as well as on women, children, and the elderly. His teaching ministry showcased a wisdom and understanding that was well beyond that of other prophets and rabbis.¹³² Those who accept his invitation to apprenticeship, learn from him how to live in this same reality. Furthermore, it is important that he brought this reality into our world by becoming human. It is the humanness of Jesus that is significant. His maleness is less significant. Those who are most marginalized by society, including women, those who are disabled and diseased, those who do not have the capacity to contribute anything of economic value to the world, can be confident that in Jesus, God entered the worst of human suffering.

Jesus' Encounters with Women

It is instructive that the Gospels contain many stories about Jesus and his encounters with women. A few stand out as particularly fitting to mention. For instance, Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman at a well. The disciples found him revealing his identity as the Christ to her. His disciples were astonished that he was having any conversation, let alone a theological conversation, with a woman. The text states this explicitly: “they were astonished that he was speaking with a woman” (John 4:27). She abandoned her water jar at the well with Jesus and ran to the city. “She said to the people ‘come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’” (John 4:29). Her testimony resulted in many Samaritans from the city

¹³² See Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishing, Kindle Edition, 1997), 134 for a thorough treatment of Jesus as teacher, proclaimer of Kingdom reality and availability. Willard asserts that the loss of Jesus as teacher has had a debilitating impact on Evangelical thinking and practice. He asserts that it is ridiculous to think that anyone who does not view Jesus as smart and competent would be willing to put their trust in Him and follow Him in real life. After describing the inept Jesus that is so often presented, Willard asks: “Would you be able to trust your life to such a person? If this is how he seems to you, are you going to be inclined to become his student? Of course not. We all know that action must be based on knowledge, and we grant the right to lead and teach only to those we believe to know what is real and best.”

believing in him. The Samaritans responded to her testimony and discovered for themselves that Jesus is “truly the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42).

Simply by entrusting his revelation to this Samaritan woman and giving her an invitation to be among those who would worship in spirit and truth, Jesus elevated the woman at the well from one who would have been forever on the outside (rejected) to including her as one who was of inestimable value to God (treasured). Jesus, who possesses all power and authority, reversed the domination and subordination under which this woman had suffered. The power of his words and actions brought the reality of the Kingdom of God into her actual life. She was no longer disqualified from direct relationship with God because of her gender. Instead, she was one who was loved, restored, and empowered to do what was within her ability to do. She witnessed to who Jesus was and as a result, a whole village knew about the Messiah.

Another story in the Gospel shows Jesus as upending societal assumptions about gender. To those who value women mostly (or solely) because of their child bearing ability, Jesus asserted a new sort of human family. In Mark 3, someone informed Jesus that his mother and his brothers were outside requesting his attention. This request, consistent with societal norms, gave honor to Mary for being Jesus’ mother. There was an implicit message here that Mary (and perhaps all women) was of value simply because of her child-bearing capacities. This kind of family honoring was now trumped by a new humanity that Jesus introduced. In the text, Jesus replied: “‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’” (Mark 3:33-35). The humanity that he is gathering values all people and exposes each as those

who bear the image of God and who, by a response of listening and doing the will of God, are included in this humanity.¹³³

Finally, the pinnacle of the Gospel story, the resurrection, showcased women. It was consistent with Jesus' inclusion and treasuring of women that they were the ones coming to anoint the corpse of Jesus only to find an empty tomb. Mary Magdalene, in John 20, discovered the stone had been rolled away. She ran to get the other disciples. Both Peter and John reportedly showed up and confirmed that the tomb was empty. They returned to their homes while Mary remained there at the tomb crying, where Jesus appeared to her. It is significant that post-resurrection, Jesus chose to reveal himself first to one of his most beloved disciples, a woman. Jesus commanded that she go and bear witness that he was risen. "But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her'" (John 20:17b-18). Evidently, Mary's love and obedience to Jesus before his death gave him confidence that she would be a worthy instrument in announcing the good news of resurrection to the rest of the disciples (John 19:25). It is clear from this story and others that Jesus chose women without hesitation as part of the kingdom and its work. He reversed social convention by valuing them as fully human and treasured by God. He was also confident in the ability of women to be proclaimers of the good news. The devotion

¹³³ LeCelle-Peterson, *Liberating*, location 1029, points out that Jesus "isn't putting Mary down, but raising the status of all the women in the crowd. After all, none of them could have the honor of being his mother, but all of them could be blessed on account of obedience to God. This is good news for them. Further, it speaks of a different valuation system: rather than being valued for the children they bear (in Mary's case, the Messiah), women will be valued on the same basis as men, on account of their discipleship, their doing the work of God. This is tremendously good news, even for Mary: she is depicted in the Gospels as a faithful disciple, not simply as a traditional Jewish mother."

and abilities of women did not seem to be of any concern to Jesus. He entrusted women to be competent in bearing the life of God in both word and deed.

The Cross

The cross stands in history as a decisive point. It was inevitable that Jesus Christ would suffer and die. Suffering and death are part of the human experience. It is in his suffering and death that he willingly empties himself for the sake of humanity. In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, he puts it like this: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). The obedient self-sacrifice of Jesus, his death and resurrection, breaks the power of sin and death. This is what brings new life and restores everything that was lost.

The atoning work of Christ was fully accomplished by Jesus for both women and men. Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been many ways of understanding this atoning work. While there is some validity in all atonement theories, none of them are sufficient or able to stand entirely on their own.¹³⁴ Whatever atonement theory one prefers, it is clear that "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19) and "the world" included both women and men. Because of this outpouring of love, humanity and the entire created order is being restored to its

¹³⁴ See Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995), Chapter 5:1-27 offers excerpts from original writings from atonement theologians such as: Athanasius (incarnation), Simeon the New Theologian (Byzantine – deification model), Charles Wesley (economy of salvation including self-emptying, liberation, and enlightenment resulting from Christ) Anselm (satisfaction), Gustaf Aulén (Christ, the Victor), Peter Abelard (love of Christ as example), Thomas Aquinas (satisfaction), and J.I. Packer (penal substitution).

creational intent. Christ taught that it is possible to live in loving obedience to God, to exercise dominion for the good of the world, and to learn from him how to love others because of the continual work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. This process of transformation, of sanctification, is a life-long process and it is for both men and women. Eastern Christians thought that the goal of life is to become deified, to become like God. This understanding of perfection is not intent on behavioral management but recognizes that the whole of the person (heart, soul, strength, and mind) is to be surrendered to and devoted to God. The end result of the process is Christlikeness. Furthermore, this process of sanctification, becoming Christ like, is available to all who follow. The church affirms that this is not limited to men only, but includes women as well.

In God's pattern of embodied love, revealed in the incarnation, life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, both women and men are restored and charged to carry out the mission of God to bring good to the world. There are indications that in the early church, women and men were partners in bringing God's good news to the world. Several New Testament passages are important in this regard. There are complex factors relating to how women negotiated their roles and ministries. Reviewing the way that women were treated in the earliest church can provide insight to some of these complicated factors.

Apostle Paul and Women

It is evident that Paul valued partnership in ministry with women. For instance, in Romans 16:1-2, he wrote, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well." She was referred to as "sister," "deacon," and "benefactor." It

appears that the duties of a deacon included: visiting the sick, poor, and providing relief for them, giving oversight to financial matters, and ministry of the word.¹³⁵ It is likely that the letter to the Roman church was delivered by Phoebe.¹³⁶ Paul had confidence in her. He was, therefore, telling the church to welcome her with all that she brought. In recommending Phoebe as one who could have answered any questions and offered further commentary or exposition upon request, he was adding weight to the authoritative role that she had. Furthermore, stating that she had been one of Paul's benefactors communicated that the sharing that Phoebe and Paul enjoyed was one that was reciprocal. His exhortation earlier in Romans that the saints embody Christ's own care was expressed here in his commendation of his sister in Christ.¹³⁷

In Romans 16:3-4, Paul stated: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." This husband and wife team was commended for their work with Paul. In Acts 18, we find that this couple invited Paul into their home and that they shared a tent-making occupation. They also were credited for instructing Apollos in the faith, which suggests that they had significant gifts of teaching and discipling. It is also significant that Prisca or Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned three other times in the writings of Paul. According to biblical scholars, the names of women are rarely mentioned first in order. Therefore, in the case of Priscilla, it is notable that her

¹³⁵ Moo, McKnight, Keener, and F.F. Bruce suggest that it was a term comparable to that used in the synagogue for the person who was in charge of the building, Torah, and who was a salaried officer.

¹³⁶ Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 183.

¹³⁷ See Susan Matthews, *Women in the Greetings of Romans 16:1-16* (England: Bloomburg, T & T Clark).

name consistently appears first.¹³⁸ It is suggestive of the possibility that she had greater influence than Aquila.

Perhaps the most remarkable section is found in the closing chapter of Romans. Paul writes: “Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was” (Romans 16:6-7). There are recommendations, blessings, and exhortations in these closing words of Paul’s letter for and to Paul’s fellow workers in the church, and a third of them are women.¹³⁹

There is not much known about the specific Mary mentioned in this text, but she is considered a co-worker of Paul’s like Priscilla and Aquilla. Andronicus and Junia are likely another husband and wife team. This part of Romans states that they are relatives to Paul and were in prison with him. It is surprising that Paul mentioned Junia as one of some prominence among the apostles. Many later Biblical translators changed the feminine Junia to Junias or Junianus because they thought that it was impossible for a woman to be listed among the apostles. However, there is consensus among biblical scholars that there exists no name “Junias” during this time period. Junia is clearly a woman who was also an apostle or at least was among the apostles. Paul considered Junia with her husband to be, like himself, apostles along with others.¹⁴⁰ Along with those

¹³⁸ See: Acts 18:26ff, 1 Cor. 16:19, and 2 Tim. 4:19; common, among these scholars: F.F. Bruce, Gordon Fee, and Craig Keener. Keener, *Paul, Women, Wives* (Peabody, MS: Henderson, 1992), 240-241, adds that it appears that “Paul is aware of the prejudice against women’s contributions in his society, and therefore works all the harder to make sure that the praiseworthy among them receive their due.”

¹³⁹ See Webb, *Slaves* and Scot McKnight *The Blue Parakeet* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Matthews, *Women*, 105, she states: “Their apostolic status could be counted in the same way as that of Barnabas, Silas, and Apollos. Since they were in Christ before Paul, it is likely they were members of the Jerusalem crowd who received a vision of the resurrected Christ,” see also 1 Cor. 15:7.

specifically named (or mentioned in a general category of “the women”), there are also various other occasions in Paul’s epistles where women were mentioned as co-workers with Paul in the church.¹⁴¹ These women served in a variety of capacities in the early church.

Passages that address spiritual gifts and their use do not indicate that they were or are given along gender lines. There is no segregating of “gifts” along gender lines in the “gift” sections of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4). This omission may seem insignificant, however if Paul had intended to restrict the use of spiritual gifts by women, it would stand to reason that these sections would contain prohibitions to that effect. Limiting the exercise of certain gifts by half of the body of Christ would be important and thus making that explicit here would be expected. However, there are themes that are explicit and repeated due to their significance. Self-giving love, partnership, and equipping others are resounding themes in Paul’s explanations about spiritual gifts. It is telling that those who have argued against women’s full participation in ministry spend very little time focusing on these themes.¹⁴² Instead, they focus attention on isolated texts and insist that they be interpreted in a certain way and applied universally. It is not wise to ignore the weight of the other

¹⁴¹ Noteworthy examples: 1 Cor. 3:9, 2 Cor. 8:23, Phil. 2:25-4:2-3, 1 Thess. 3:2, Philem. 1:24.

¹⁴² Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 133, calls 1 Tim. 2:11-15 a “discordant” text and that because this is the case, it would require repeating and clarifying as other major shifts do.

scriptures in which Paul affirmed women in ministry and focus exclusively on texts that support a dissonant theme.¹⁴³

A Contrary Text

There is one particular text that presents a contradictory statement to the general congeniality presented thus far. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 states: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived and became a transgressor, yet she will be saved through childbearing, providing they continue in faith and love and holiness with modesty.” This passage is considered textually difficult by many scholars. Among the questions that abound in this text are: “How is it possible for Paul to forbid women speaking or teaching when it is clear that this was a common occurrence in churches that he planted and whereas he commends these women for their ministries as we have already addressed? What does it mean to have authority over a man? How is it that understanding the order of creation helps this argument? Is Paul really presenting childbearing as salvific? Even to the casual observer, the difficulties and ambiguities of the text disqualify it from being one on which a wise student of the Bible would base doctrine or draw upon for guidance on an important matter.¹⁴⁴ Many scholars have argued convincingly that it is possible to understand this discordant scripture as Paul’s ad hoc approach to crisis management

¹⁴³See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway Books, 1991). They argue that these passages need to be elevated above; these authors are among the most influential voices in the debate against full participation of women in ministry.

¹⁴⁴ In Gretchen Gaebelien Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1987), 259-265 for a list of 25 questions about this text.

within a particular situation in Ephesus.¹⁴⁵ Though specifics of the text are debated, biblical scholar Ben Witherington III states that: “1 Timothy 2:8-15 is situation-specific advice. From all this we conclude that women were not banned from meaningful work in the Christian community...no universal prohibition of women speaking in church but the author dealing with some serious problems that cause him to ban women from teaching and domineering over men in Ephesus.”¹⁴⁶ In a similar way, Keener concludes that it is not even “all” women of Ephesus, but a particular crowd of unlearned women who were teaching false or erroneous doctrine.¹⁴⁷ There is evidence that Artemis worship was influential especially among the large group of young widows in the congregation at Ephesus. This theory surmises that the young women were being duped into the teaching that women were created first and that they were therefore superior and were supposed to be granted more authority than men because of this.¹⁴⁸ Regardless of whether or not one is convinced by these theories, it is clear that the objection raised here by Paul is addressing particulars of that congregation because Paul elsewhere commends and affirms women in leadership in the church. What is also obvious is that reading, interpreting, and applying this scripture as a universal prohibition to all women directly contradicts other passages. This text also stands in contrast with Paul’s practices. It

¹⁴⁵ Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992) and Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985) and sections within books such as N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture* (NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 2014), and Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

¹⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 196.

¹⁴⁷ Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992).

¹⁴⁸ See Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).

conflicts with his (and Jesus') imperatives of love and mutuality within the body of Christ. This scripture is thus unconvincing as a universal gospel principle because the good news stands vehemently against reducing human beings to their social categories and functions. As Paul insists in his letter to the Galatians, "in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

There is arguably a universal principle present in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, but it is not that women should remain silent in church or that women need to be under the authority of men. The universal point present in this text is that it is not wise to allow those without understanding or those without effective communication skills to speak in church. This truth is emphasized other places in Paul's writings, though it may be missed in this passage if its lens of interpretation is only narrowly applied to women.

Bearing Christ in the World

The gift and task of church leadership is to equip the church for being the church in the world. Scripture states that leadership is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13). The body as a whole is included in God's mission in the world. The body is called to unity and is built on knowledge of and attachment to Christ.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, it was the priest's role to approach God on behalf of the people and to serve in liturgical functions, such as the offering of or officiating over the

sacrifices. The image is modified now because, as followers of Christ, there is no longer need of the offering of sacrifices for sin. However, the function of leading the people as chief or presiding liturgist remains firmly in place throughout the church. The congregation seeks God's face in worship and knows that the one who is officiating represents God in the offering of the means of grace. The role of leadership is a humbling and awesome task and one that is given by God in the pattern of the incarnation.

Paul set the bar for all parts, roles, and functions of the Body of Christ within the context of love with these images from Ephesians 4-5. Christ's leadership pours forth in such verbs as: loving, sacrificing, sanctifying, nourishing, tending, and cleaving. In Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul co-mingles the body image of the church with the image of the "body" being the bride of Christ. Christ is the source of the church and the center of the Church. The bar of love, with Christ as the pattern and example, is extraordinarily sacrificial with an emphasis on serving, tending, and cleaving. It is best understood that Paul is advocating that all relationships for those who are part of the body of Christ are suffused with the life and fruit of what its head provides. Love is foundational for and is a benefit of connection with Christ.

Trinitarian love seeks embodiment. This was true not only in the initial creation, but in the incarnation of Christ. As has already been set forth, the nativity signals a world-changing message. Mary's "yes" meant that God's love would inhabit human flesh. The womb of Mary, what von Balthasar calls "the room at Nazareth," serves as the fertile ground of the church of Christ.¹⁴⁹ It is there that the church catholic was planted. The "creaturely counterpart to the infinitely self-bestowing love of God" was the womb

¹⁴⁹ von Balthasar, 214.

of a woman.¹⁵⁰ Mary's self-less, life-giving extension of hospitality offered the bodily necessary space and nourishment for the full expression of God-with-us to be born.

In a similar fashion, the collective body of Christ now serves as a womb in the world, an embodiment of space and nourishment that gives birth to new and eternal life. The life that is coming forth is not of human conception. God does it with the cooperation and participation of humans. Mary is the quintessential *theotokos*, the God-bearer. It is her cooperation with God, her responsive obedience to God, which suggests her as a scriptural model. Her willingness made the incarnation a reality. Following Mary's example, the church is the continued incarnation of God in the world. In responsive obedience, the church continues to bring forth awareness of God's power and presence in the world.

In this God-bearing partnership with God, female (and male) pastors serve in the capacity of a midwife. This paradigm for ministry embodies a deep awareness that God is the one speaking and acting in the midst of the gathered community, in the individual lives of people, and in the world. The pastor as midwife then emphasizes careful listening, waiting, and discerning.¹⁵¹ The feminine images of God-bearing and midwifery are fitting here precisely because these are, at once, biblical and feminine. The pastor listens deeply to and with others, all the while listening deeply to God. The pastor waits with patience, understanding that incubation for new life is often slow. The pastor

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ See Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville, TN: UpperRoom Books, 1998), for a thorough treatment of the "art" of Godbearing in the context of youth ministry. This work is a well-developed, thoughtful presentation of pastoral theology not only for those in youth ministry, but others as well.

discerns what is best and most appropriate within various relationships, knowing that love both demands and supplies complex resources for ministry.

The other aspect of the metaphor of pastor as midwife that rings true is that it speaks of the pastor being in a unique role and at the same time, entirely of the same substance as the person giving birth. Although one hopes for an experienced and competent midwife, it is frequently understood to be the case that one is called out from among many women to serve.¹⁵² In this way, the role of pastor as midwife is to serve and accompany others. This metaphor is highly sacramental while at the same time being representational. Consistent with the biblical instructions for leaders within the Body of Christ, the pastor functions as a midwife nurturing the body to maturity in Christ Jesus.

Theological Moxie for Female Pastors Like Me

As we have just seen, Trinitarian love spills into human existence in the person of Jesus. He is the full embodiment of God and showed great love for humanity in his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. The church is Christ's continued incarnation in the world. The church manifests this life in the world as being the Body of Christ, the God-bearing community. The essence of the pastoral role is: preaching the word, celebrating the sacraments, and keeping order in a congregation. The church throughout generations has ordained clergy to this role to ensure that the church be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

¹⁵² The term in Greek is *diakonoi*, in the verb form was the self-defining term used by Jesus in Lk. 22:27: "But I am among you as one who serves." There is a great amount of leadership literature for pastors that emphasize "servant leadership." This is indeed scriptural; however, as Willimon cautions using Zaragoza, servanthood images need to be balanced with others. He states servant language "can be used as a cover for manipulating the laity to serve the servant's need for adoration, appreciation, and affection," William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002), 71.

Though John Piper uses the “representative” function of clergy in such a way as to exclude women, I argue that the charge to “representation” and the charge to fulfill the creational mandate to exercise dominion for good of the world necessitate instead the full participation of women in church leadership.¹⁵³ A short summary of Piper’s argument reprise is that Jesus is male, therefore a female cannot embody (or represent) Christ. This would be a fair argument if Jesus’ gender was a significant factor in him functioning as our prophet, priest, or king. However, it is not significant and could be argued that the only significance that this detail makes is that it demonstrates that God is willing to be culturally accessible. Given the patriarchal culture in which Jesus was born, it would have been impossible for him to gather a crowd or call followers to follow him as their rabbi if he had been female.

His bodily life and obedience showed us that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). His body was given so that all may be whole. This wholeness not only allows women to exercise their full range of gifts, it also requires it. The creational mandate to both women and men to exercise dominion in partnership with others and with God for the good of the world is, in effect, what women must do. This we must do in our bodies; women must engage all of their faculties. Women can and do in fact embody and proclaim the good news. Indeed, Jesus himself entrusted Mary to bear God in the world. The *missio dei* is partial if it is only embodied in one gender. How can a “male only” clergy represent a body of believers to God? How can a self-giving and non-hierarchical Trinity be represented to the people through a hierarchical “male only”

¹⁵³ See Piper and Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, chapter 26 features a full discussion.

clergy? In their representative role, it is imperative that the clergy represent God in front of the people and it is imperative that the clergy represent the people in front of God.

If one is to serve in a representative capacity for God, it is clearly necessary for the apostolic tradition to take great care in evaluating, screening, and equipping those who sense a call to such a ministry. Ordination vows signify a call, consecration, empowerment, and utilization from God through the church. Women who are thus ordained have much experience to share. However, the unique experiences that women clergy have to contribute, especially those that feature the challenges peculiar to their gender, are often silenced. This grievous silencing cause much hurt for women pastors.¹⁵⁴ This unnecessary and often institutional hurt also grieves God, who in Trinitarian fashion shares, empowers, and thrusts out into a hurting world with the good news those who are called and equipped with healing and hope.

Despite such hurt and silencing, the reign of God for the good of humanity cannot be thwarted. In Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection, the real extension of life with God under His rule is extended to all. Jesus has thus bound all human life and, in fact, the whole cosmos, into God's reign for good. The groans of women who have been silenced are joined by the groans of the whole of creation. These groans and laments need to be spoken and they need to be heard. Imagine the strength and vitality that would come to the church and the world if my sisters in Christ were given opportunities to join God in the *missio dei* in the ways that they have been called. Women clergy have been silent and silenced long enough. It is now our time to share with moxie the vision of the church that God has planted in us. God clearly creates humans, both female and male,

¹⁵⁴ Creegan and Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries*, 115.

restoring and gifting them to exercise dominion in partnership with one another and with God. The *missio dei* suffers as long as any hurting voices are silenced by the church. It is time that our groans, the ones previously heard only by God, are heard. I am hopeful that those who have ears will hear.

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN OF STUDY

This qualitative study will investigate the life stories of clergywomen in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition in the Free Methodist Church. As previously stated, this research is necessary because of the silencing that has been so prevalent. The church will benefit from these previously neglected stories.

This chapter includes a basic description of ethnography with clarifications regarding the theological reflexive nature of the study. The researcher's role as researcher and participant will be described, along with assumptions and biases with which the researcher approaches the work. It will also outline how research participants will be selected, the criteria for participation, and how participants will be contacted. Due to the nature and design of this project, there will be special attention given to ethical matters. This includes statements about the protection of human subjects and informed consent that each participant will receive stating as clearly as possible potential risks and benefits of the study. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of research participants. Finally, this chapter will include details about data collection, organization, storage, and analysis.

Ethnography

Ethnography is research that describes, analyzes, and interprets the patterns of a particular group of people. Creswell states that ethnography “interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language.”¹⁵⁵ It originated in the field

¹⁵⁵ John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Newburg Park, CA: Sage Publications, Kindle Edition, 2012), location 1989.

of anthropology and is now a common methodology used by sociologists, psychologists, educators, and others. Ethnography has been utilized to study religious culture.

Furthermore, it has been used by pastors and congregations.¹⁵⁶ As has already been mentioned, there are values, behaviors and language of Evangelical sub-culture that present constant challenges to women in ministry. Thus, the interplay of the self to the social dimension is informative. This distinguishes this methodology from biography and autobiography.

Ethnography used as a reflexive theological method of inquiry is particularly fitting for situations where there is marked dissonance.¹⁵⁷ In the situation at hand, the official statement of full participation of women at all levels of church leadership belies the lived experience of women in Wesleyan Holiness denominations.¹⁵⁸ The focus here is on the life stories of clergywomen who serve within the Free Methodist Church, a

¹⁵⁶ See the following cases in which the researcher serves also as a participant. Three, include to varying degrees, researcher as both researcher and participant; Virginia O. Bassford, "Perspectives of Strength: Female Elders in United Methodist Ministry," PhD diss., Texas Woman's University, 2008; Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "Faith in My Bones: An Exercise in Ethnographic Theology," PhD diss., Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, 2011; and Clyde Kratz, "A Pastor's Transition into a Congregation: An Autoethnographic Study," DMin. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008. See also studies published in book form: Elaine J. Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 1993); and Nancy Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998).

¹⁵⁷ See discussions in Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 35-39; and Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997), 80-82.

¹⁵⁸ See *Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* (Indianapolis: The Free Methodist Church, 2011), available online: <http://fmcusa.org/bookofdiscipline/>. See also Gerald Bates, Cathy Stonehouse, and Carolyn Ellis, "Women in ministry in the Free Methodist Church: Getting the picture," Unpublished manuscript and Free Methodist Church of North America, "Statement adopted by the 1995 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church of North America," states: "and women should be encouraged to take their place in all areas of church leadership and ministry. Jesus calls us all, women and men, to make disciples and build the kingdom of God," accessed March 11, 2015, [http://www.freemethodistchurch.org/PDF percent20Files/Beliefs/Where percent 20we percent20stand/Women percent20in percent20Ministry/WOMEN2a](http://www.freemethodistchurch.org/PDF%20Files/Beliefs/Where%20we%20stand/Women%20in%20Ministry/WOMEN2a).

Wesleyan Holiness denomination. Collecting and interpreting experiences of clergywomen will bring insight of their experience and transformation of the church. Religious culture itself can also be impacted by further knowledge and theological reflection on matters of gender and church leadership.

Assumptions of the Researcher Participant

The strategy and design of this study have roots in Christian feminism. The design is birthed from the assumption that women's experience can contribute knowledge. It is important that this kind of research is not only done about women, but that it is also done in their own words. The real lived experience of Free Methodist women clergy will offer the language and categories of analysis, and will provide some suggestions on moving toward a more equitable future. This fits well with the recent turn in feminist research circles to valuing story and lived experience. Serene Jones advocates for this when she states:

Respecting difference in the lives of women requires that feminist theorists listen carefully to the varied experiences of all women and avoid too quickly imposing upon them theoretical categories that do not fit. This means attending to women's accounts of their lives in their own words, according to their own narratives. This turn to story expands the scope of feminist theory as a whole; in telling and listening to women's stories, we discover new rules, assumptions, and categories of thought that provide new material for feminists both to analyze and critique and to explore constructively and use.¹⁵⁹

The qualitative approach used here resonates with postmodern sensibilities in that it that the lived experience of clergywomen can itself provide a body of knowledge. It is knowledge from a particular perspective. It is an *ethnographic* study because it presents knowledge that is embedded in the lived experience of female pastors.

¹⁵⁹ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000), 6-7.

The aim is to study a social group of which I am a part. I am a Free Methodist clergywoman and the question for this study began in my own experience. The assumption is that women clergy struggle with similar situations regarding resistance. I know firsthand that there is dissonance between expressed theology of gender inclusion and lived experience. In addition, I have noticed that clergywomen, myself included, have amazing ways of negotiating this dissonance in real life.

Individual stories will serve as the content of the study. Descriptive moments of the lives of women clergy will shape the topics for theological reflection. These stories provide content and texture for this study. The researcher can conjecture various themes that may emerge, though this methodology will rely on the stories themselves for the themes to emerge. For example, the women in Joy Charlton's study presented family needs as a main reason for leaving the ministry.¹⁶⁰ The researcher can reasonably assume that Free Methodist clergywomen may also use such reasons for leaving full-time leadership ministry. Nonetheless, the individual stories may or may not bear this out. Regardless of the particular topics that arise within the study, the researcher will observe and interpret the interplay between personal and cultural dynamics. For instance, women may state, as was the case with clergy women in Joy Charlton's study, the personal choice of leaving the ministry.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, there may be a cultural dynamic influencing this decision. As it turns out, in the particular case in Joy Charlton's study, sexism in the church was the primary reason for leaving, a reason that is not as easily

¹⁶⁰ Joy Charlton, "Clergywomen of the Pioneer Generation: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (Dec. 1997): 606.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

stated.¹⁶² The researcher is committed to observing practices and patterns that are present in everyday life. This means that the researcher is flexible and is willing to investigate whatever the findings suggest.

Studies featuring the researcher as a research participant are referred to as reflexive ethnographies or autoethnographies. This methodology has been used successfully by others studying practical theology. Recent work by Wigg-Stevenson and Kratz show that such research is suitable and beneficial, especially in terms of its ability to honor the textual richness of narratives.¹⁶³ The researcher is familiar with the use of this methodology, having both read research that uses an autoethnographic approach, and having carefully studied its methods, including guidelines and cautions that guard its integrity as a research method. She has thus determined it to be the most fitting methodology for the goals of this project.

The researcher's own story will be but one of the set in this multi-voiced study.¹⁶⁴ The researcher acknowledges that there are dangers in using her own story. However, there are precautions that guide those that have conducted such research. The researcher observes, listens, and gains a sense of what other participants offer in their life stories. While the participant brings her own experience and knowledge to the participants during the interviews, the researcher respects that each participant's experience is unfamiliar. This means that as the interviews are taking place, the researcher must "bracket" her own

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "Faith in My Bones: An Exercise in Ethnographic Theology" (PhD. Diss., Vanderbilt University, 2011). Clyde Kratz, "A Pastor's Transition into a Congregation: An Autoethnographic Study" (DMin. Diss, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008).

¹⁶⁴ As a point of clarity, the researcher video recorded and transcribed her story. It was the last story recorded and the last transcribed.

experience. This bracketing means that the researcher suspends whatever emotional reaction is in her by the others' stories for later reflection and processing.

As is clearly stated in the informed consent, there are both potential risks and benefits to which the participants voluntarily agree. The participants will be asked to offer their life stories and will be asked follow-up questions. These stories will produce a multi-voiced, theologically reflexive ethnography. Ultimately, the life story of the participant remains the property of the woman by whom it is shared. It is my ethical obligation to be especially careful not to intrude upon, coerce, or harm in any way, research participants.

It is my intention to honor these women and allow them to speak for themselves. This means that I am not only going to work to be especially cognizant of my own biases and assumptions as the researcher; I am also approaching with humility the prospect of giving voice to other women's stories.

Research Participants Qualifications

A list of Free Methodist clergywomen will be compiled. The list will be gathered from data contained in the 2010-2015 *Free Methodist Yearbooks*. The *Yearbook* is the yearly publication which contains a listing of all churches, their appointed pastors, and statistical information. Initial contact with potential participants will be made via e-mail or telephone.

During the initial contact, the researcher will qualify participants for the study. The qualifying criteria for the study will be: ordination in the Free Methodist Church, at least some seminary training, having served in ministry at least five years, and some experience as a solo or senior pastor. The participant does not necessarily need to be

serving as a solo or senior pastor at the present time, since the number of women who actually serve as senior pastors in the Free Methodist Church is relatively small. The assumption that I am making is that this will significantly narrow the pool of participants. Possible participants will be contacted. It is important to have a broad range of demographics within the pool. For instance, the researcher's aim is to have various regions and conferences represented. The participants need to meet the criteria; however the whole pool needs to have within it variety of life and ministry experience. Contact through e-mail will produce a pool of five qualified participants. Those who express willingness to consider participating will be sent an e-mail accompanied by the informed consent document (Appendix 1).

Ethical Treatment of Human Subjects

The clergywomen have the right to be informed about any potential risks and benefits of their participation in the project. Because the Free Methodist Church is a connectional system and there are only a limited number of clergywomen who meet the participant criteria, it is possible and even likely that identities may be guessed. As far as is possible, I intend to vigilantly protect participants' privacy. For example, I will use vague descriptions for locations and institutions. For example, instead of stating that Roberta Mosier-Peterson attended Central Christian College, I will rather say, she attended a Christian college in the Midwest. As has already been mentioned throughout the process, each person's participation is voluntary and can be ended at any time. The potential benefits that the clergywomen participants may experience include self-awareness, additional insight regarding the practice of ministry, and a sense of shared purpose.

It is possible that participants may feel distress during the interview. The researcher will respect the participants' needs and will refer any who suffer emotional distress from the interview process to appropriate help.

Design of Study

The clergywomen who agree to participate in the study will be contacted in order to schedule a convenient time for video recording of their stories. As is indicated on the informed consent, each participant will be video recorded. The open nature of the request is intentional. The participants will be informed of the purpose of the study and my research question and bias. Before participating, they will have opportunities to ask questions and understand the nature of my project. However, for the video recording, there will be one simple request, "give me your life story as a clergywoman."¹⁶⁵ The researcher will ask additional questions in order to clarify or supplement the story (Appendix 2). This will take an hour and a half to two hours depending on the participant. The recording can be paused for short breaks.

Two weeks after the initial interview, the participants will be e-mailed a request for follow-up. They will be asked to write and electronically submit a summary of their stories and follow-up questions. The participants also will be asked to write a reflection about the experience of sharing their story. The participants will be given four weeks to complete the summaries. The documents will be returned via e-mail and are to be limited to less than five hundred words.

¹⁶⁵ See Elaine J. Lawless, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 1993); also see Stanley Susie, *Holy Boldness: Women's Preacher's Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002). Both of these researchers gathered clergywomen's stories in their own words. Literary Feminist theory regarding life stories of women is also interesting and tangentially relevant. Important authors such as Sidonie Smith, Bella Brodzki, Celeste Schenck, and Julia Watson make significant contributions toward understanding the life stories of women.

The recordings will be transcribed verbatim, except for identifying information that will be changed. These electronically stored recordings will be only viewed by the researcher. They will be stored as password protected files. The notes will be typed and stored in a secure location. As is stated on the informed consent form, participants can offer a pseudonym and in the event that they do not have a preference, one will be chosen for them.

Field notes of each session will be taken and be kept confidential. Each recorded session and the notes will be stored with a number and pseudonym. A key that discloses the identity of the participants will be stored in a separate and secure location. The electronic storage of all personal information will be password protected. If a participant requests a copy of the transcript of her life story, it will be provided to her once transcriptions are complete.

Analyzing and Interpreting Data

Analyzing and interpreting the data will be the final step. In-depth study of transcripts and other documents will be followed by coding responses that center on themes. Such coding of key words and ideas will allow themes to emerge organically. After themes and categories emerge from the data, then the data will be sorted for patterns. Codes will be assigned and threads of similarities and dissimilarities will be drawn out. It is important to utilize the actual words of the participants as much as possible. In written findings, the analysis of the data will protect the identity of the participants. Conclusions will be drawn and initial assumptions and questions will be addressed. There will be suggestions made for those who might choose to further research this or similar topics.

Location and Role of Researcher Participant

It is my assumption that these women are eager to tell their stories. It is my prayerful intent that those who accept the opportunity to share their stories will be further empowered in their ministry.¹⁶⁶ There is a growing body of literature written by women in theological education and as pastoral practitioners. However, the majority of these contributions come from mainline traditions. Their contribution is valuable, but it does not adequately represent the practice of ministry from a Free Methodist perspective. The neglected and silenced stories in the Free Methodist tradition have potential also to contribute valuable insight for pastoral theology and practice.

Another assumption I have is that these women deserve respect and that their stories deserve to be honored. As has already been mentioned, clergywomen suffer in silence much of the time. My commitment is to be especially gentle as I “hear them into speech.”¹⁶⁷ Because of the sensitive nature of these stories, I will take every precaution to protect clergywomen from harm. Listening is an act of love. I assume that those who share will be strengthened in the telling of their stories. Their voices will no longer be silenced and they will no longer be isolated.

This being the case, it is necessary that I keep a journal of my own personal feelings and reflections along with a set of field notes that record descriptions of that which is observed. It is also necessary to de-brief with my dissertation advisor and keep my journal reflections as data collection progresses.

¹⁶⁶ For examples of the empowerment that comes through “pastoral ethnography,” the sharing of, listening to, and bearing witness to one another’s stories, see examples in Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008), chapter 6.

¹⁶⁷ Lawless, *Holy Women*, chapter 2, “Hearing into Speech,” gives credit to Nelle Morton for the phrase “hearing to speech.” However, I was unable to obtain this original source.

I do not aim to reduce these clergywomen's life experiences into a monolithic descriptive or prescriptive mold. I plan to capture the moments of life with thick descriptions that bring to light meanings, actions, and feelings that they experience.¹⁶⁸ For, in fact, ministry cannot simply be reduced to "gendered" forms or styles. By investigating the life and ministry experiences of these clergywomen, I anticipate discoveries that will bring surprise and confirmation to the existing literature. In teasing out the threads of their stories, I am likely to discover that we are all very different as well as being very similar.

Conclusion

This research will be an exercise in practical theology. A goal of practical theology is to discern the gap between expressed theology and practiced theology.¹⁶⁹ If there is, in fact, dissonance between what the church says and what it does in reality, then it is the job of church leaders to pay attention to this gap. This study is aimed at observing and paying close attention to what is experienced in everyday life and allowing that experience to inform the church as to ongoing dissonance that requires humble attention.

The interplay between the personal and the social aspects of ministry are particularly important. As the clergywomen engage in theological reflection and converse about their life and ministry experiences, they will contribute knowledge and become agents of change. Desirable change is possible in local settings and in the church in general. This type of experiential knowledge is missing from contemporary writing on

¹⁶⁸ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 101.

¹⁶⁹ For thorough discussions about the function and methods of practical theology see the following: John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006) and Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

the topic of clergywomen. It is my conviction that this missing piece, once provided, will result in an opportunity for greater faithfulness for the church.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to give voice to the previously neglected stories of female pastors serving in the Free Methodist Church, USA. Chapter five describes the interview and data collection process, presents the data analysis process, and explores the themes that emerge from the lived experience of clergywomen. The categories that emerged from the findings are: pastoral role; relationships; resources for fruitfulness and resilience; and expectations of female pastors. The qualitative approach used here assumes that women's experience can contribute knowledge to practical theology. As far as possible, the findings will be in the actual words of the women clergy themselves.

Qualifications and Participants Pool

The qualifying criteria for participation in the study as outlined in the project design were: ordination in the Free Methodist Church, at least some seminary training, having served in ministry at least five years, and some experience as a solo or senior pastor. The researcher initially assumed that the pool of potential participants would number around fifty. However, investigation of the *Free Methodist Yearbooks* from years 2010-2014 brought forward some startling findings. For instance, according to the data in 2011 *Yearbook*, there were only eleven out of the twenty four conferences with women as senior or solo pastors. The pool of participants was much smaller in number than what was initially assumed. It was clear that in more than half of the conferences, while there were women who served in various capacities, they were not in senior leadership.

Another research assumption that was challenged as initial observations were made was that the pool of participants would be diverse in demographic and ministry

experience. It was assumed that there would be variety in the sample. However, finding age, location, familial and ministry experience diversity was challenging given the small pool of participants who had served as senior pastors. The researcher prepared an invitation to qualified participants at the Free Methodist denominational gathering at the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Conference in North Carolina in April, 2015. After inviting qualified participants to speak with the researcher, it was assumed the sample that emerged from that gathering of eighty Free Methodist clergywomen would include women from various locations. This was also a faulty assumption. There were only a few women at that gathering who had served as senior or solo pastors. Furthermore, two out of five women who approached the researcher explained that their experience in ministry had been in church planting. Three of the five women served in the Midwest.

Reflecting on the initial challenges to assembling the participant pool, the researcher reevaluated priorities for the study. The researcher observed that there exists latent institutional sexism in the Free Methodist Church and that the language and practices of certain conferences would demonstrate this. Certain regions and conferences that the researcher had assumed would recruit, train, and appoint women for senior leadership did not. Nonetheless, other regions of the country which the researcher assumed would be less likely to recruit, train, and appoint women for senior leadership did so.

Initial assumptions about the diversity of the pool of participants for this research were thus challenged. There was not a large pool from which to draw. There was not a mixture of experiences. Observing the *Yearbook* and the response from the conference, the researcher found that there was a disproportionately large pool of women who met all

the qualifying criteria for this study except senior or solo experience, and that the large majority of the women who did not meet this qualification but did not meet the other qualifications were or had been church planting in the Midwest. Due to these challenges and in conversation with the research advisor, the researcher decided to consider church planting experience as senior leadership experience.

Demographics of Participants

An invitation was e-mailed to fifteen potential qualified participants. The initial e-mail invitation was responded to by five women. Other potential research participants were invited to participate in the study by the researcher through a verbal announcement at the 2015 Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Conference.¹⁷⁰ Five more women clergy expressed interest in participating in the study. Once this set of potential participants was gathered, the researcher selected the participants that represented the broadest demographics possible, based on such factors such as location of current ministry, familial setting (e.g. marital status, whether or not children were being raised during ministry years, etc.), current age, and number of years in ministry. Demographic consideration was important because, if the researcher had made appointments with the first five women who responded to her invitation, the pool would have been filled predominantly with women who served in the Midwest and who had been church planters, not senior pastors. The researcher decided that a broader demographic representation pool was important.

¹⁷⁰ The setting for the announcement was the Free Methodist denominational gathering at the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Conference. The conference convened in Charlotte, North Carolina, in April, 2015.

Those who agreed to participate in the study were e-mailed the informed consent form. They each received it and signed it. The Free Methodist Church is a relatively small and highly connectional denomination, which makes protecting the participants' anonymity very difficult. Appointments for video recordings were arranged. Two life stories were videoed in the homes of the participants; two were captured in hotel rooms while participants were attending a conference; and one was conducted in the church office of the participant.

The researcher had imagined that it would be possible to give a brief summary of each participant in an attempt to bring their unique qualities and experience into view. This task proved to be impossible due to the small pool and the need to protect their privacy. Therefore, a group summary instead of individual summaries follows.

One participant had a spouse who was also a pastor. All five participants were married at the time of video recording; however, one of these had been unmarried for more than half of her ministry career. Two of the participants raised children while serving in ministry. Three of them had either fostered or adopted children while serving. Three of the participants had planted churches either solo or as a member of a team. Three of the pastors had served in staff positions before serving as senior or solo pastor. Two are life-long Free Methodists while one found the Free Methodist Church to be home while attending an affiliate institution. Two participants intentionally sought out the Free Methodist denomination because of the stance of full participation of women at all levels of church leadership. These two women became Free Methodist after serving in ministry environments that banned them from senior leadership or ordination. The youngest participant was around age thirty-five. Two pastors were around age forty-five.

One was around age fifty-five and the oldest participant was around age sixty. All five participants served in the United States: three served in the Midwest, one in the South, and one on the west coast. At the time of the study, all five women were serving in ministry. Years served range from five to thirty-five. Additionally, there were not significant numbers of non-white, English speaking, potential participants. There was no racial diversity in the sample: all participants were white.

For reporting purposes, the five women will be referred to by their pseudonyms (Agnus, Betty, Elyse, Mae, and Penelope) except in certain cases where anonymity is at stake, when more general references will be used. Other details such as names of cities, states, conferences, family members, and judicatory officials have also been changed to protect participants' privacy.

Research Questions and Data Collection

Based on the method of research employed for this study, the researcher used an open-ended, simple introduction to each recording session, such as: "This is Mae, she would like to give us her life story as a female pastor in the Free Methodist Church." The goals of the study were met because through their storytelling, it became obvious that the women gained strength as they reflected on their own experiences. In all cases, either vocally or in the follow-up response, each woman remarked that some particular insight had been articulated for the very first time. The process of story-telling empowered the women. Moreover, the specific questions in which the researcher was interested were generally addressed in their narratives. The specific questions at the end of each interview served to synthesize insight that had already been found in the story: Are there expectations or demands placed on you as a pastor that are peculiar to your gender? What

Biblical image for being a pastor most resonates with your life and experience? What criteria do you use to evaluate your own success or fruitfulness? What are insights that have helped you negotiate challenges and conflicts peculiar to being a female pastor?

The videos were transcribed using HyperTRANSCRIBE and then they were coded and analyzed using HyperRESEARCH qualitative data analysis software. In total, there were 56,419 words transcribed. Each of the cases was viewed on video and transcriptions were read several times. Notes were taken on emerging themes. Codes as prompted by the software analysis were assigned to texts to facilitate the retrieval and analysis of source material.

It was important in the process of this research to hold in tension the answering of the research questions about roles and role negotiation of female pastors while at the same time remaining open to the organic telling of the stories by the research participants. The organizational structure of chapter five developed from the stories, while keeping in mind the classical definition of the role of pastor as defined in the introduction. Hence, the structure of sections and subsections is presented under four major themes. The first theme was “role of pastor” and it includes leadership, worship, evangelism, and pastoral care. The second theme was “relationships” and it includes family of origins, husbands and children, mentors, judicatory officials, and mentees. The third theme was “resources for ministry” and it includes criteria for measuring success, access, and utilizing God’s grace and remembering God’s call. The final theme is “expectations of female pastors.”

Role of the Pastor

The role of the pastor, classically defined, includes: preaching, teaching, celebrating the sacraments, providing care, leading, and maintaining order within the body of believers. The women in the study spoke of all of these as part of their understanding of the pastoral role. These basic functions of Christian ministry roughly fit into four categories that are presented here. It is also significant that ministry among the poor and disenfranchised emerged as a dominant thread in three stories and a significant value in the others. This theme overlaps both pastoral care and evangelism. Nonetheless, for the purpose of presenting what the women's lives organically spoke, these categories will be used to present the findings: leadership, worship, evangelism and pastoral care.

Leadership

Women in this study all addressed their role as pastor being closely linked with leadership. The word "leadership" was used by the women when referring to their roles as pastors. One pastor explained that she had been serving as a co-pastor when her partner was elected to serve as the conference superintendent, after which she was appointed to serve as the senior pastor in that same church. In the process, there were many who were excited about her being appointed the senior pastor of that congregation. There were many, though, who questioned her ability to make hard decisions. She stated:

That is so unfair, they told me that as a woman I would not be able to pull the trigger on hard decisions, I was too relational, and like crazy, crazy, crazy stuff. And it was a very painful period of time for me and there was about six weeks there, where honestly, truly, where what my dad believed about me and what Andrew [her ministry partner] believed about me, was so significant to me because the men who had authority were not giving me a break.

This pastor remembered this painful period in ministry. She worried about hurting people's feelings. She also wanted to please them. She feared that those who predicted

her failure would be right. She worried that she wouldn't be able to make hard decisions. She was also worried that she would err in the opposite manner and be more aggressive than necessary. She used the phrase "pull the trigger," which aptly portrayed the tussle she experienced in her early years of ministry.

Eventually she was appointed at that church as a senior pastor, though a difficult adjustment period followed for her.

They did appoint me here. And like almost immediately, my choices were second guessed like the guy that I had picked to be my associate pastor, they didn't want to approve. And he was an ordained Free Methodist man, and it was like, so if you ordained him, why would you not approve him? It was like, everything I would do would be micro-managed. And then, the craziest thing happened. And this was harder on me really than what happened with the MAC. A group of people, a large group of people here left the church here. And that seemed to prove everything they said. They were people who, I, one of the guys said to me.... he said, "I don't understand this, I really don't...I was a rebel, I was away from God" (he was crying when he was saying this) I was raised in a Baptist church and I hated it and never went there. But he said.... "you are the reason that I'm not divorced, God used you to save my marriage, you are the reason that I have two beautiful kids" and he went through this long thing. "I will take anything you say to me across the table from you. But my dad is so critical of the fact that I would go to a church that is led by a woman that I just can't do it. I just can't do it." And he was a very influential guy. And so, there was a group, which in a church of about 250, a group fifty or sixty leaving...this is big stuff. They were tithers. You know....they were people who were, they were pretty much transplants from other churches that left. And it was very painful to me, but it helped create the vision in my heart.

As she talked, another research participant, Agnus, reflected back on her initial thought that "ministry came out of nowhere." She realized that she had often been invited by others to explore leadership. This repeated experience seems as though it should have made it obvious to her, but she was slow to recognize her own gifts and abilities for ministry. Her perception has changed, she noted:

There were times where I would lead a bible study or participate in a bible study, where somebody couldn't lead it anymore and they would say, "Hey, would you lead this?" and I would say, "Yeah, I can do that." It has only been in the last couple of years that, as I looked back, I say, "Yeah, I guess I was doing ministry in various ways...through the years." I would say, "Ministry came out of nowhere, haven't really done it before in my

life" then I started looking back and going, "Well, there was that time...there was that time." But I had never seen it as ministry, it was just sort of responding to the need that was there.

All of the women recognized and were grateful for the invitations and opportunities that they have had to lead. They expressed gratitude for those who had invested in them in their leadership journey. Four out of five of the women have served on conference or national committees or in some capacity beyond the local church. They are quick to mention how gracious and empowering those in authority have been toward them, enabling them to serve in these roles. Nonetheless, all of the women also mentioned the precarious nature of leadership for women.

In offering Biblical characters or images that most resonate with their lives and ministries, three of the five women chose Moses. The researcher noted that in most of the interviews the women were inclined also to offer additional characters or images. It was interesting that the women were not sure whether to choose a feminine or masculine archetype for their paradigm. For instance, Agnus said:

Ok, two come to mind and one I reject because it is too feminine. I don't want to be wholly that because there is this constant, yeah, sometimes I just feel like I have to go over the top to reject any connection with any kind of feminine thing. There is a picture in scripture, in the Psalms and various places of God being this hen...like this mother hen and protecting His own. I love it because...part of it, I don't like, but I look at my life and there is a lot of tending to my children but that is not how I see ministry in my mind, for me. There are people that do and do it well and do it far better than me. But for me, it's not me. I like that image even more because that is my image of God, the image that I like. As far as a leader, I would say Moses. You know, with this strong leader who was called out to do amazing things and did significant things in his role and had shortcomings. And God worked with those...but yeah, just this really strong leader.

As she talked, it was clear that another participant, Elyse, enjoyed thinking about Biblical characters and images of ministry. She responded:

Moses. I mean there is a lot. I really love the Old Testament...I like the New Testament too. I think him being willing to take risks. Um, not really, him NOT being willing to

take risks, but God telling him to be obedient. To do it because God told him to do it. Even though he had to have someone else be his mouthpiece for a time. And needing help and a team and people to hold his arms up. Him being a little bit aggressive at times. Like I just think, not all of it is a perfect picture, of course. But that God did redemptive things with him and led the people where he was calling them to go. He didn't get to see it, he didn't get to go there, but he knew that was God's promise. One of the first sermons I felt like I really preached was Joshua 1, "be strong and courageous, and do not be afraid, for the Lord our God is with you." I feel like Joshua and Caleb did a lot of risky things, people I think of a lot, just honor the Lord no matter what it takes. I think it's because I'm afraid a lot. And Esther, same thing, I think of Esther a lot, because I try to think of women who have done crazy things and have been obedient too. Um, yeah, biblical people...no, I like those, I could go on and on, but I think I'm good with that.

The themes of courage and risk-taking were also repeated. For instance, Mae offered the biblical character of Deborah who was a prophet, judge and leader. She mentioned that one of the reasons she accepted leadership beyond her local church was the opportunity to support and empower other risk-taking leaders. Her experience of conference leadership was a mixture of support and non-support. The conference leadership that had initially supported her eventually was gone and she felt called to do for others what her supportive leader had done for her by continuing to serve in that role.

The word "catalyst" was used by two of the women as they acknowledged that there is risk in good leadership and that the leadership to which they were called requires courage. Penelope stated:

And, so, I have had my moments and I know that God's hand has been upon me and there have been times when I like, "you are so responsible before God" because he has brought you here for such a time, I have always felt, ever since I was a little girl, I didn't know how to describe it then, but I knew "you are a catalyst, a catalytic person between generations and between people." And I believe - I was called to do that - I believe fiercely.

The words "together" and "team-work" were spoken by three participants in relation to leadership. This value was seen as present in the Biblical image of Moses and in the

women's life experiences generally, leadership was experienced as team-work. Penelope mentioned:

When I became the lead pastor, it was a significant struggle for me and it took me some weeks to get through it. I really feel like God was telling me to do like Ronald Reagan and Moses, two very different people. But one thing, like with Moses, and God asked me, this might sound ridiculous, but it was significant.... asked me "do you want to be a great person or do you want to be a great leader?" I said, "I don't think that's fair, I want to be both." Then he said, "No, we can discuss that later, at this moment I'm asking you if you want to become a great person or a great leader." Ok, then I want to be a great leader." "Then that is going to require you being like Moses. How quickly would Moses have gotten to the promise land if he had gone by himself, he could have been there like that. But he was with these people and so it took him forever. Can you imagine how impatient he was? When we read the stories....how angry he got, you only see the ones where he lost his cool, don't see where he talked to me day after day and said 'these idiots and I can do this by myself. I don't need them.' So that is what you are choosing to do, that is what you are choosing to do to become a great leader, a leader is not great unless people are following them...you have to walk with them slowly; you are going to have to develop a great love for these people that will stand through heartbreaks and disappointments and all this...that is what it takes to be a great leader. You can be a great person by simply having integrity and doing things by yourself and having a great skill that gets you notoriety. But if you are a great leader, the people around you are the people who love and respect you the most because you have walked slowly enough for them to walk with you."

Furthermore, two women mentioned that their emphasis on a team or collaborative understanding of leadership had been challenged by others who strongly believed and expected that vision for ministry in a local congregation must be generated and driven by the senior pastor. For these clergywomen, this was a source of tension and learning. Betty spoke of this in her story. She discovered that her congregation was riddled with generations of power struggles and conflict that had not been addressed. She addressed them, but in doing so, she admitted that her tactics in addressing the conflicts lacked the patience and finesse of more mature leadership. Betty stated:

I was disappointed with myself, my lack of courage, my lack of character, my lack of boundaries, and my lack of spiritual formation...obviously I had allowed busyness and the demands of others to take precedence over the movement of God in my own heart and

mind...the leadership demands were steeper than I had the commensurate character in Christlikeness to deal with and I knew it.

The clergywomen in the study spoke of much learning that had come from seasons where their leadership was challenged. They all spoke of their commitment to passing on the leadership lessons that they had learned to the next generation. The empowerment of other leaders around them was a life-long commitment that appeared in their stories. Two women said that the process was one of finding and trusting their own voices. Elyse gave this description:

We're experimenting forward...the Lord is calling me out. I have got to lead. I have to trust my voice, even though some of our friends, they're probably not going to be part of it anymore. And that's going to be hard because we are community, we are friends and it's going to be hard, but I'm going to have to be ok with that. Doug and I are also processing through my job... the superintendent wanted me to join his staff [because of the work that I was doing developing young pastoral leaders]. One of the Bishops had recommended me to be working with him. But he realized that the return is going to be long-term and it didn't generate revenue for our denomination, for our conference...unless I raise my own funds, I will be out of a job. I would love to be able to invest in those places but they don't want me to do that because I have not pastored a large church...The superintendent wanted me to help them, but then he realized that they wanted him, he has pastored large churches, because he is superintendent, maybe because he is a man, I don't know. I'm not going to put those words in his mouth. So, I have taken the authority that I've been given [in empowering leadership training opportunities] for churches and for our pastors as much as they give me room.

In brief, leadership was a significant feature in the ministries and lives of the participants in the study. It can be understood as a function that was closely related to all other aspects of the pastoral role. This was significant because, as their stories showed, the leadership of women was frequently resisted.

Worship

The role of the pastor as worship leader and preacher was present in the stories of these female pastors. However, this theme was less prominent in their stories than other

themes. One possible explanation for this is that, at the time of the interviews, only two of the five were serving in a role that included weekly preaching. However, it is significant that three out of five reported receiving positive feedback from congregations regarding their preaching.

Three years ago, Agnus transferred to the Free Methodist Church. Even while she was planting a church out of her home, she had not heard a woman preach or seen any of them function as a pastor. She went to seminary and slowly discovered her call. She reported:

[I was] Doing the house church and at some point in time someone called me and asked me if I would come speak. It was someone I didn't know from another town. I didn't know her but she knew me and invited me to come speak at a woman's tea...a women's gathering. But they invited me to speak and I said, "Are you sure?" and they said "Yes" and about that same time, I joined the ministerial association in the community just because I wanted to get to know other pastors. I was really worried that somebody would construe what we were doing at our house as competition and I didn't want any bad blood. So, I joined them to tell them that (1) we don't really know what we're doing and (2) we are really not competition. And so I had made some relationships there and the community always did like a community Good Friday service. They rotated all the time as to who was going to preach and this dear pastor Fred who came alongside me and said, "It's time for me to preach and I would like you to preach in my place." I never...I preached once growing up on youth Sunday. I was like late elementary school or early junior high....nobody else wanted to do it. Usually it was the juniors or seniors, senior high youth group usually did most of the service and they would let the younger kids do some cute little song. None of them wanted to preach. I don't know how or why, but I said I would preach. But I had only preached one sermon as a sixth grader and that was the only other time that I preached in my entire life. So, I had this preaching engagement at this women's thing and then I had preached at a community Good Friday service like within a week's time period and I had never done either of those before in my life. I did it and I liked it. And I was actually pretty good at it. So, within a few weeks of that, we went from using the video from our planting church to I started slowly preaching every week. The more I did it, the more I loved it and I was kind of good at it.

The denomination of which she was previously a part had commissioned her, but refused to ordain her. She reported that she was not fully authorized to administer the sacraments or perform weddings, but that she did it anyway. She reported that it was a

relief to her that that denomination did not have any established churches in the area of the country where the family was moving. She felt released from that ministry and found the Free Methodist Church. She said: “the Free Methodists ended up taking my commissioning process and, which they realized was almost identical to their ordination process, and kind of taking it as a transfer. Within a year, the next annual conference I was ordained.” Being so new to the Free Methodist Church, she was surprised that there were lay people in the Free Methodist Church who had never heard women preach. In her present church, she is affirmed and shared:

This summer there was this man here who came up to me and he served on our board, he served denominationally, he has served at the conference level on considerably significant boards...the MEG board and MAC boards. He has always been in the Free Methodist Church or the Wesleyan Church, he came up and said, "I have never," big, big man, big imposing man, but also gentle, it was never a fearful thing. But he came up and said, "I need to talk to you." I said, 'OK" and he said, "I have never sat under a female pastor," and I was a little surprised given his Free Methodist background, he said, "I just wanted you to know that you are changing me...God works through you and you can say things about scripture and God that nobody ever could if they weren't female and nobody has ever said that stuff to me. God is changing me because of you. It's not that I was against female pastors before, but I was just in general in favor. But I hadn't experienced it and now that I have I want you to know how significant your ministry is in my life." He not only said that one-on-one to me, but several weeks ago he said it several weeks later when it came in the board meeting that all sorts of stuff was changing, there really hasn't been that much and we still don't know what they were pointing to. But he said the same thing again in front of the entire board. All on his own, unsolicited. He said, "if the change you are talking about is Agnus coming on staff, I want you to hear this." He carries a lot weight in the church. Things like that are what I hold onto.

Mae and Betty both report missing the preaching task when they served in roles that didn't include preaching. Mae was excited to be able to preach every week. Betty missed being able to form a community of faith around regular rhythms of the Christian year. She missed leading worship and preaching more than any other part of the pastoral role.

Mae wanted her preaching to be taken seriously. There were times when she felt that her appearance during worship received more attention than it should. She remembered that “one Sunday, I wore a red dress and one guy said, ‘boy that kept me awake.’ I thought, ‘Would a guy have to go through this....NO....but I didn't care.’ So, there is that.”

In conclusion, the women in this study believed that preaching and leading worship was a significant aspect of the pastoral role. They did not have many examples of women functioning in these ways before entering the ministry themselves.

Evangelism

When speaking about the aspects of the church and the role of the pastor that is most important, two women in the study mentioned evangelism. Among the other three, it was mentioned frequently as a priority. One of the women reported that this aspect, evangelism, “fit like a glove.” Mae recounted her early commitment to evangelism by saying:

I remember when I was a little kid when I came home to my mom and told her that we had to invite all the neighborhood kids to go to vacation bible school because they didn't know Jesus. And my mother was more introverted. Bless her heart, she went door to door with me and we brought all the neighborhood kids.

Elyse spoke of her early commitment to sharing her faith with her friends while in high school and college:

So I invited my friend to go to camp with me that summer and she became a Christian that summer which started to change the trajectory of life for me because I got to lead her to the Lord with my youth pastor who was a female... From that point we decided that we wanted all of our friends to know Jesus. We started inviting them to our church...our youth group...camp and all sorts of things...I was a Christian and that is all that mattered. I wanted my friends to be Christians and that is all that mattered: Jesus!

For Agnus, it was her desire to share her faith with those who were not yet part of the Body of Christ that led her to plant a church. She discovered her call after several years of simply accepting the opportunities that were presented to her. As she admitted, she was slow to recognize these occasions as God's initiative. In hindsight, she knows that she was being invited to discover and develop her gifts for ministry. She was gifted in evangelism. She welcomed a small group of people into the family home for a video and a discussion. She was confident in her ability to offer hospitality and a safe place for discussion. It was her willingness to invite people into her home and into a relationship with Jesus that caused a flock to spring up. She reported that it was God's leading and guiding that brought so many people who needed Christ to the church that was being planted out of her house. This new church was sponsored by a church that belonged to a denomination that didn't ordain women.

We had like fifty new people come to Christ the first year and so all these pastors who didn't agree with women being pastors, would look at what we were doing at the Bridge which is what we called the house church and they couldn't say anything against it because it was being successful.

Two women spoke of feeling called to move into a neighborhood or city in order to do incarnational ministry. In one case, a community college setting seemed natural for her because of her affinity for artists. She enjoyed connecting with the artists and connecting them with God, whom she described as creative. She said:

I liked that...being with them and at the college. Starting to meet all these artists and creative people and being able to share with them, "I believe in this God that is like creative and I think that might resonate with you." So, we got to have these good conversations with these people who were open. They're artists. They were spiritual people.

The other woman who stressed incarnation relocated to an urban neighborhood where she and her husband were the racial minority. Like many others in the study, she expressed a

commitment to be a redemptive presence in whatever community of which she was a part. The church and community were comprised of broken, lonely, poor, disenfranchised and suffering people. However fitting that call might have been for her, she reflected that at the end of her time in that community, she was burned out and decided that it was time to leave that church. During this transition, she also considered stepping away from being a pastor. She added:

I did not feel at home any longer in that city because my identity there was as a pastor. We had bought a house in an inner-city neighborhood in order to be an incarnational presence, to be witnesses to the light of Christ there. We, ourselves became victims of burglaries, vandalism, and gun violence. We no longer felt safe in our own home and this added to an overwhelming sense of loss.

Another participant, Penelope, maintained that her commitment to evangelism can be seen, not in her being a church planter (she was one of the two women in the study who had not been church planters), but in the church that she pastors birthing new congregations.

The theme of evangelism was found in stories of both Mae and Betty. This was evident in Mae picking Mary Magdalene as the Biblical character that most resonated with her ministry and life experience. Mae said:

It is Mary Magdalene where Jesus tells her to "go and tell the brothers." To me that's a really powerful, reigniting the church in whole new way. I look at that and think, "how do people think that women shouldn't be anything...?" The first person that Jesus comes back to, intentionally a woman and he gives her a commission to go and tell the brothers. I hang on to that a lot.

Betty clung to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model for life and ministry. As a Biblical character, Mary expressed much meaning. For this pastor, Mary conveyed God's action in choosing to partner with humanity to bring salvation into the world. She saw her own obedience as a conduit for others to come to know life and hope that Jesus brings.

In summary, the female pastors in this study were passionate about and gifted in bringing the good news of God's action to those who have not yet heard the gospel. They perceived this as an important aspect of their lives.

Pastoral Care

It was noteworthy that the clergywomen in this study did not explicitly present pastoral care as a significant aspect of their role. However, even though it was not expressly stated, it was clear that nurture and tending was woven into the fabric of these women's lives. As will be developed more broadly in the Relationship section of these findings, caring for the needy was a crucial operational value and cannot be confined to role expectations. Pastoral care was not something that these women do as part of their job. Care was innately who they are in and beyond their roles. Observing the fruit of these women's lives and ministries, one will quickly notice that not only was care central to their lives, but they used their influence to change the world for those with whom they interact. Among this fruit was: adopting and fostering children; working with sexual assault victims; alleviating poverty by creative means; working with urban poor; and reaching out to disenfranchised youth and to drug addicts. The theme of nurture can be overlapped with the theme of evangelism and working with those on the margins of society. These two expressions of nurture were very dominant in the women's stories. This was evident in Penelope, her story, and the church that she pastors. She said:

One of our core values is that...we are important people doing significant things. And then we value innovation and creativity. We believe that people are made in the image of God and that things that appeal to their senses will be best. We embrace our limitations... And we just work that. That comes from me. The DNA of our church is very compassionate. We are a very compassionate church. We have great global and local outreach... an umbrella for our local missions and global ministries... We are not the largest church in the area, but we are the most well-known church in the area.

Two of the images that most resonated with the clergywomen were those that feature the pastor as caregiver. Agnus mentioned the nurturing image of God as mother hen that was available in scripture. Elyse stated that being a pastor means: “Being a shepherd. Tending to the sheep, realizing they are stubborn, knowing that I am a servant and am human, I have been placed in a role of servant authority and my job was to mimic the Great Shepherd in his calling me to care for sheep.” In addition to this, Elyse reported that when she was grieving that the church she had pastored had to close, she was confiding in a ministry coach. She said:

Also, just to go back a bit, during that time when everything was closing. I was driving with the coach person, and this was pretty formative, it was pretty painful. We were driving to a conference meeting or something or ministry meeting, he said, "What are you going to do now that your church is closed?" And I said, "I don't know, I guess I will go and be on staff somewhere, I just want to love people, I just want to disciple people." He said, "I don't know if there is a job for you to be able to do that....anywhere," Like he didn't know that pastors could actually....he didn't think that there was a job, to be employed doing that sort of thing.

Elyse held core values in life and ministry in regards to pastoral care that were totally foreign to her coach. Her essential calling was incarnational and about offering the transforming presence of Jesus to everyone. She offered:

It's about Jesus, it's all about Jesus. It's who it's for, it is what it's about. I can be bold and courageous because of Jesus. Probably, it is tattooed on my foot because I needed to know. I mean, for it, it is in phrases, sometimes. It's on my foot so it's leading me. It is the "I am with you"... Jesus is incarnated in me and that I get to go and be with others and do the same and that is a risk. It's on my foot so it's leading me. There is a lot of depth to that and it is core. That he has called me to be a pastor and that he has called me to be with people. To bring him to them. That's a good insight for me.

Penelope and Betty both mentioned that fighting for social justice was important to them in their ministries. This is an example when pastoral care was associated with “leadership” more than “nurturing” per se. Penelope said, “I will fight over things that I feel passionate about. I will fight for clean water. I'll fight over mistreatment of gays and

minorities and the abused...I will not fight for me.” This participant didn’t feel that the gender equity battle was one she was called to fight. She explicitly stated being “strident” or labeled a feminist can hurt women. It could also feel selfish to her. Betty, on the other hand, argued that all oppression is part of a system that is worth fighting to dismantle. She realized during a season of working with teenage girls that she was not only providing a nurturing environment for them, but that she was also empowering them and challenging the sexist norms of society.

The pastors in the study, as a rule, nurture those whom God gives them. They consider part of their role to be ensuring that those who are most vulnerable are seen, heard, and nurtured. They emphasize how important it is that the church be a community of care.

The data that emerged from the women’s stories suggested that women see their role as pastor in a variety of different ways. There was a plethora of experience in the stories regarding evangelism, leadership, worship leadership and pastoral care. There are several prominent points: pastors discern the places of greatest need and intentionally move toward those who do not yet believe and are not yet connected to a church; pastors discern what leadership tasks are necessary in their contexts and courageously set out to accomplish them; pastors lead through preaching and leading worship; pastors shepherd those around them with special attention given to building compassionate communities.

Relationships

In general, the clergywomen in this study valued relationships. The women mentioned their families of origin and spoke about their relationships with their husbands

and children. Also presented here is the data given regarding those in authority over them and those over whom they have authority.

Family of Origins

All five families in which these women were raised were church-going families. Denominations ranged from Assemblies of God and Baptist to United Methodist and Free Methodist. Four out of five women were raised by both of their biological parents. One woman mentioned the divorce of her parents and the profound hurt that it caused her in her young life. She stated:

As my mom and dad were divorcing, we moved to another city. My mom went back to work. It was during this time that I remember experiencing God's presence with me. We attended a Free Methodist Church. I have a treasured memory of a Sunday School teacher who gave me a Good News Bible for me to keep as my very own. During my time in church, I remember how alive and real the stories were to me. It was a wonderful new world with exotic places and adorable people. I didn't simply listen to those stories, with my imagination fully engaged and my hyperactivity (not medicated), I entered their lives. Moses, Miriam, Joseph, David and Paul were part of my inner world. For instance, when the teacher or preacher would say that Moses threw down his staff and it became a snake, my pulse quickening, my feet rising off the floor, perhaps I would even jump up onto the chair. The reality of God penetrated my being and I was thrilled to be a part of the meta-story of his people. The church and these new found friends and stories became a safe place for me in the otherwise chaotic world. The chaos of my parents' divorce rattled my inner world. In the depths of my soul, I felt abandoned, rejected, and alone. The church met my need for a family.

Agnus mentioned that she felt that she needed to be perfect in order to be acceptable or valued by her parents. She desperately wanted the affection that they gave her when she succeeded.

For the first time, I learned that good enough really is good enough...that I didn't have to achieve anything, I didn't have to be successful...I didn't have to do anything to earn my acceptance or my value. And I had grown up and even to this day, when I'm with my parents, and they don't mean anything negative by it, I think they mean the exact opposite by it, but I'm always..."this is our daughter who..." then rattle off a bunch of stuff and that's how I grew up. "This is our daughter who went to Japan as an exchange student in high school or she studied in France as an exchange student in college or who was

valedictorian or who won this prize at the college" or whatever and I had interpreted it as that is why I was loved and that is why I was ok because I did all of these things.

The other participants expressed gratitude toward their families of origins and reflected feeling supported and nurtured by them. It appears significant that all five of the women were reared in church-going homes. They could be considered "daughters" of the church. In fact, one of the participants was raised in a family comprised of pastors. She reported being nurtured, empowered, and mentored by older and younger family members in her pastoral role.

Husband and Children

Four out of five women reported meeting their spouse during their college years. One woman did not mention her marriage while telling her life story. The researcher noted that this woman served in ministry before being married. She specifically mentioned thinking that marriage was not an option for her because of her calling to be a pastor.

One woman mentioned that she felt very clearly called by God to marry a certain man and have a family with him. In the beginning, she admitted that she was a bit jealous of those who had not made such commitments. She was embarrassed to admit these things because she knew that she also felt very strongly that marriage and children were going to be first priority, at least in the early years of marriage. She spoke about God giving her a sense of peace. She found great joy in being a wife and mother and wholeheartedly embraced that season of her life.

Another woman felt called from a young age to adopt children. She conveyed that the discussion of adoption happened when she and her husband were dating. She shared:

And adoption had been something that was part of our conversation from the very beginning when we were dating. I remember being a young girl, probably 8 or 9 years old, sitting on my bed knowing in my heart of hearts that God had called me to adopt. I knew that someday I would adopt a child from this one place. I had a clear vision in my mind, um, now I know that the vision was of a church in red square, to my eight year old mind, it looked like a castle. But just having that vision and knowing that one day I would adopt and it was a God thing. I had no friends that were adopted. And in the seventies, adoption was hidden and not talked about and kids that were adopted usually didn't know until they were eighteen and then their parents would sit them down and say, "Susie, we have something important to tell you." This was something completely out of the blue, if you will, that God had put on my heart. And so Phil and I had talked about adoption even when we were dating. We knew that one day, we would grow our family through adoption...we didn't know where or what it would look like. So, as we started our family, adoption was always there, part of the conversation.

All of the clergywomen had enthusiastic support from their husbands. It was significant that four out of five women mentioned mutuality as an important aspect of their relationship with their husbands.

One woman said that after fifteen years of following her calling as pastor, she challenged her husband to find his calling. She expressed deep gratitude for his support and the continual sacrifices he made for her ministry. In several stories that appear in another section, there are stories told of their husbands being key supportive persons during times of stress or conflict. One participant repeatedly used the word "together." Among the reason that Moses' life resonated with her was that he admitted the need of others to bear the burden of leadership with him. She also had an early role model of ministry as being "together" in a youth ministry, male and female couple, who ministered together. This woman also debated with college professors who asserted that a woman leading in the home and in the church was not Biblical. She asserted:

So, I remember raising my hand in my systematic theology class and saying "wait a minute, what about women leading with men, what about if you're the youth pastor and not the senior pastor or what if you are a co-pastor," ... "no" because in my mind, from what I had modeled for me and from what I saw in the garden of Eden... "well it seems

like men and women are supposed to lead together and they should be a team. That reflects the full image of God."

This value of serving together was found repeated in her story. She expressed heartache regarding a phase of her ministry when, due to financial need, her husband felt like he had to work on Sunday morning and that they would not be physically present together for a worship service. She also placed a high value on having healthy relationships. She said that her husband challenged her to re-evaluate a certain relationship with an authority figure because, in his opinion, it was unhealthy.

Mentors and Those in Authority

All of the women in the study mentioned those who had contributed to their lives, discipleship, and early ministries.¹⁷¹ The two significant stories feature what women had experienced before choosing the Free Methodist Church. The woman who had been Free Methodist less than five years reported feeling a significant lack of discipleship in her early life. She had a significant experience at camp and did not feel like her family of origin or her home church provided nurture for her faith journey. She stated:

But, again, I couldn't put my finger on it and we didn't talk about it at home. And so, it never went anywhere. So when I came home from church camp, I was all excited and on fire for God and my parents picked me up and we were on our way home. It's two and half hours' drive home. And of course they are saying, "How was camp?" And I said, "I accepted Jesus in my heart." And my mom turned around and she looked at me in the back seat and said, "I can't believe you learned THAT at THIS camp." And that was the end of the conversation. Case closed. That was the end of that. "Hey, look at those pretty trees." So that was it.

That was junior high and I had this significant experience, but then I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't have any way to grow or people to go to, necessarily, in my life. I didn't have any mentors in my life so I just sort of continued on in my life and I was the

¹⁷¹ Those who served as part of their support network and who were not also serving in supervisory capacities appear another section. For organizational clarity and due to the nature of the how these data serve to answer the research question, those who serve in judicatory capacities appear in the next section.

kid that was the overachiever and the good kid that was good at a lot of stuff. I never was in trouble. I never went down any wrong roads. So, I just kind of kept on doing that. Kind of a go-getter. And it kind of just fell by the wayside because I didn't know what to do and how to continue it. I didn't know what to do with it next. All through the rest of junior high and high school, I still was involved in church. I still taught Sunday school with my mom, but there was no significant spiritual, faith filled experience.

For this clergywoman, she said that she received mixed signals about faith and remained ambivalent until some point in college. She reported that she started dating someone who was not a Christian and had no church background. Her desire to share with him jump-started her initiative to grow. She grew because she shared and she knew that she needed to grow in order to share. She said:

But this other guy had never been to church and had never been exposed to the gospel and so here I was knowing very little, next to nothing, and, but I would witness to him. We dated for three years and I brought him to my church, I went to the university in my home town, where I grew up and lived in the dorm. I didn't want to go to school in the same town, not because I was rebellious, but because I was ready to stake out on my own. And I was ready to move on and do something independently and my parents said well, we will pay if you go to the University of Paducah, but if you go anywhere else, you are paying. University of Paducah is good and both my parents said, but we promise that if we see you in the grocery store or whatever, we will pretend that we don't know you because they knew I just wanted to be this like independent, on my own person. So I was living in the dorms. I was witnessing to this person for three years, telling him about Jesus, like teaching him things about God and what it meant to be a Christian and I brought him to the very church that I had grown up in all of my life. It's the first time, you know, when you look back on your life as a kid and you have new insight and perspective that you didn't have when you were like right in the moment. That's what it was like for me going back to this church. And it was like seeing things through new eyes. So, it was significant to me. There was something in sharing with him and kind of sharing "my church" with him that somehow, it became a little bit more significant for me. Because I was like talking it up; not falsely so, but all of a sudden it was significant to me so I was sharing it with him.

Another woman reported having a great connection with her youth pastor while in High School. She was gifted in evangelism and was recruited to be a leader. She reflected:

Then when I was in High School, we got a guy who was a new youth pastor who had a heart for outreach and evangelism. Really, and I was one of his team leaders. Although, I

think the boys were called leaders and the girls were called secretaries of the team. Well, this was a long time ago, it was in the mid-seventies. And my team grew and a lot of people came to trust Christ. And the ministry grew to about 200 teens. This had been a pretty small church but it was rapidly growing by the time I was finishing high school. And my senior year, I won the leadership of the year award. And I think that if I had been a boy, someone would have said "might you have a call to ministry?" But I was in a Baptist church, nobody was even thinking in those terms.

This youth pastor continued to serve as a mentor and person of authority for this woman.

He moved to a different part of the country and welcomed her to be part of a church plant there. She was given many opportunities and broad responsibilities at that new church.

She served on staff there in various capacities for eleven years and enjoyed growing in her ministry. Toward the end of that time, the church faced conflict and this participant was caught in the middle. She states:

About a year before I left the staff, the pastor, this was a non-denominational church, decided that he didn't think that women should be leading men. And, I should say, that before he did that, he came back, I think he was tired of being in Willow Creek's shadow, he came back and he had gone to a Rick Warren seminar and came back and really wanted to completely change how we were doing ministry. And the staff hadn't signed on for that. And the staff basically said "you have known him the longest, you have to convince him that we're going the wrong direction." Because this guy was no Rick Warren. You know, Rick Warren has this whole vibe and this guy was not all that. So the staff was like "he is having a midlife crisis and he is sick of being in Willow's shadow and would you please convince him?" And in that process, he suddenly felt that women shouldn't be in leadership over men and... I had a number of people who came to me and say "you just tell him that he is right" and I would say "but he's not." So, ugh, it became unbearable, basically, it was a weird situation because people would come in and ask "where are you on women in leadership?" Well, here is Mae she is on our management team, she oversees half the staff. And people would come in and say "we don't think women should be in leadership" and we would say "look, we have all male elders." So they were playing both sides of the fence. And I was willing to do that at that point in my life. I was the "director of" and not the "pastor of" and so they were in that awkward position because if they made it public that I was not going to be overseeing men anymore, there would have been a lot of people who would have said, "I'm out of here." We were playing this game of...anyway, it was not healthy and I knew it was time to go. At that time, through a whole series of things, I got connected to the Free Methodist denomination.

It is noteworthy that this woman was attending seminary during her first few years at this church. Initially she didn't realize that the seminary she picked also discouraged women in senior leadership.

Three out of five participants found their seminary experience to be empowering. Agnus, who was planting a church during her seminary years, found supportive mentors. There were both men and women who validated her call and valued the contribution she offered. Elyse also planted a church during her seminary experience and similarly found mentors for her journey there. Her undergraduate college had not provided a supportive environment for women in pastoral ministry. She chose the college because it was close to her Free Methodist Church and she was interning there. She stated:

And I didn't know, I knew that we were the first Free Methodist Church of the area, but I didn't know really what that distinctive meant. I didn't know anything about what that meant for women in ministry even though I had had women models in multiple staff roles throughout the church. But the college I went to was a Baptist College, at the time, it was local and close to my house. And I thought, "It's Christian, I'm a Christian, I want to be trained for ministry, and uh, I'm going to go there and so I did." So I learned what Baptist was and I learned what Free Methodist was a little bit more. I discovered that they wouldn't let me take certain classes [preaching]. I didn't know anything. It was just my church until I went to college. Then it was like really fundamental, in some ways, ummm, education. It was a lot of fill-in-the-blank kind of systematic theology.

Having grown up having solid life and ministry role models, with a husband and wife serving together in youth ministry, she found a void of support in college. She noted:

I was kind of on the outs and I remember saying in my car while I was in school while I was being a youth pastor "I will submit to no man." It was just kind of an oppressive space. I didn't date anyone at my college and I felt like I was kind of an outlier. I had enough credits going in that I was able to finish a year early. I pushed myself. I was done in three years. It wasn't an excellent experience for me. It wasn't home. It wasn't a fit theologically and it wasn't a fit communally so I didn't spend a lot of time there. What I did is I invested heavily in my church and in my community and in my other job.

Another woman mentioned that she was well disciplined and mentored by her family early on in her journey toward being a pastor. She had several family members

who were ordained and had served in various ministry capacities. It is important to note that the mentors in her life and those she learned from are long-standing. These mentors were also the ones she mentioned most as being her strong support during times of difficulty or crisis. She was also the only woman who specifically mentioned learning from those who were younger than she.

Judicatory Officials

The relationships that are addressed in this section are those of district leaders, conference committees, conference superintendents, and bishops. As a further measure to protect the identities of the participants, the generic terms authority or judicatory official or committee are utilized.

Participants said that there was resistance towards them from judicatory officials regarding hearing dissonant opinions or perspectives. There is not equal opportunity or access to be heard, especially as women. One woman was asked by a leader from another denomination why she didn't think she would ever be considered for denominational executive positions such as conference superintendent or bishop and she responded:

You don't understand, I don't know if I have the gifting for it or not, but that is irrelevant, I do not have a Free Methodist legacy, I didn't go to a Free Methodist college, I don't have a Free Methodist name, I didn't marry into a Free Methodist name. I don't have a Free Methodist legacy. And I still believe if we are ever going to have a woman bishop, it's going to have to be a person who has a long history in the denomination.

One pastor in the study expressed profound gratitude toward an early mentor who continued relationship with her throughout the duration of her ministry career. There were phases of her ministry when this mentor served as her superintendent and in various other capacities. She was also the only woman in the study who had a close female pastor as a mentor in her early life. She was grateful for this mentor also, though, in her final

assessment, she expressed how disappointing and disempowering this relationship ultimately was.

The woman who was most recently ordained spoke of how supported and valued she has been in the Free Methodist Church. The welcome and valuing began, as she told it, at a Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Conference. She recalled:

I went to the conference and didn't know a soul. The whole weekend I'm joking like, "my conference back home would just roll over if they knew that I was at a clergy conference for women." And I kind of took delight in that in that snarky way. I ended up getting paired with a roommate, at random, Gretchen who is Free Methodist. There is a day at the conference where all the denominations get together and I jokingly said, "Well I'll have coffee by myself." Gretchen said, "Come on, you can be a Free Methodist for a day." [Several Free Methodist clergywomen at the gathering were friendly and said "We are going to work on you being Free Methodist"]...My flight was cancelled to go home at the end of the conference and so I ended up staying for another day and kind of hanging out with the board. Sharon came alongside of me and she was considering going to my seminary and so I was able to share with her about that. I was not even aware of it at the time, but I was looking for another denomination. Several of the women shared with me about the Free Methodist Church. So by the end of the end of the conference weekend, the superintendent in the Midwest had e-mailed me, he said that he had two e-mails from women saying, "This woman is coming to your area and you need to get to know her." The chair of the religion department near our new home soon had also been e-mailed. Soon enough, there was file opened for me as someone interested in the process of ordination. So we moved, I met all of these people when we came down here to look for houses, and they said, "We've heard about you." Literally, the day we pulled up in our moving truck, we signed papers on our house at 7 a.m. and within an hour of that one of those people whom I just met picked me up and we drove to annual conference. I had not slept one day in our new home. And I was there knowing nobody and knowing next to nothing about Free Methodists...except that there were all of these people saying, "We've heard about you and we want you."

One participant relayed the story of a visit with a judicatory official. He inquired about the reasons that she was not attending a Free Methodist Church while she was in seminary. She expressed her desire to be a part of a church that was comprised of and served those who were poor and powerless. To this he said, "Maybe it is time for you to consider finding another denomination." She was shocked and hurt by this. She was not sure if the judicatory official acted dismissively toward her because of her gender or

because she espoused priorities that he did not. She eventually changed conferences and was appointed as a senior pastor of a church that saw itself as a mission outpost.

Another woman noted that the conference committee explained to her that if she was appointed as a senior pastor then she would no longer be able to be a good wife to her husband and that her children would be neglected. A spokesman for that opinion added that because it was considered a good appointment, a “family man” deserved it. This thread was also found in the hopes and fears of other clergywomen in this study. One questioned whether or not having children was a good decision. She noticed that having children somehow made women less likely to be appointed as senior or solo pastors.

Two women used the word “abusive” when referring to the relationship between judicatory officials and themselves. One woman explained that the authority figure was trying to get her to be him. He diminished her and manipulated her. The other woman reported having a “champion” as a judicatory official when she was first welcomed into the conference. However, when there was a change of judicatory official, this ceased to be the case. In referring to the subsequent judicatory official, she stated:

It started off slightly, subtly, I knew from the moment he started that he would not be the champion that my last one was. But I didn't know how bad it would get. It was abusive. And it happened gradually...you know you just are sort of sinking. It started off with minor things, small questions, and I knew, I knew Jim didn't get me. I don't remember the order of all of this. [There was conflict in my church]...I mentioned in a meeting that there was conflict and that people were complaining that our church was growing so Jim asked "Well, if you want, I will come up and talk to the people" and I was a bit hesitant. But I thought, “Ok, this has worked before because in the past when the conference stepped in and said yes, you need to make this change, yes, you need to in this direction.” They responded. So Jim came up. Two things happened. I'm going to call it his counseling gift...I'm going to try to be gracious. And people whined and he gave them a listening ear and he nodded. He felt their pain, but never turned the corner with them. Then he gave them a presentation....a presentation I had seen him give before and had he told me he was going to give that presentation I would have told him not to. He

had this whole column thing showing sizes of churches and he said that if a church is wanting to grow then you need to be doing the things in the next column. Well, I had never been part of a small church before, so we were already doing all sorts of stuff...all the stuff in the other column. Everything we needed to do. Jim gave this presentation and everyone looked at me and said, "We don't know what your problem is we are already doing everything we need to. We don't need to change." They were thinking of everything programatically. So that was the beginning of the end...that was...I think we might have grown a little more after that but, Jim dis-empowered me...un-empowered me, he took away my authority in that church. Then as the church size started to shrink, he started to say things like, "Well, the problem is you." In fact, one time, I said, "Well you know this congregation had the same pastor for thirty some years who did everything." I learned that the hard way. The neighbor said to me, "You're not mowing the lawn." I said, "What do you mean, I'm not mowing the lawn?" They said, "Yeah, that pastor mowed the lawn." So I came back to the board and said, "Did the pastor mow the lawn?" And they said, "yeah, yeah," That pastor had to chair every committee, nobody could be saved unless the pastor did it. So, I was fighting a lot of culture. I said that to him. Jim said, "No, no, you've been there long enough, the culture is your problem." And then he started saying on a regular basis to me, "You know what your problem is: you're a small church pastor, you're a small church pastor; you think like a small church pastor." The example that he would always use was that we made announcements. That is small church thinking. Well, I was part of a mega church and they had announcements. How else was anyone going to know what was going on?! Part of me was able to go, "This is stupid...this is crazy...he doesn't know what he's talking about." But what got draining was not only the dis-empowering me in the congregation, but that he would say things publically. So, there was one time during an annual conference when he was giving a story about a pastor...how horrible a pastor was...how stupid a pastor was. I sat there thinking, "Why are you shaming someone? This is inappropriate."...he came up to me and in the midst of other pastors and he grabbed my arm and said to me, "You know that it was you I was talking about." So I was dealing with that kind of thing. I was incredibly discouraged.

She went on to say that it was possible that he had felt threatened by her. There had been a rumor at one time that she might be among the people being considered for Jim's position. She wondered if this was among the reasons he treated her the way he did. It was soon after these events that it became clear to this clergywoman that she would be leaving the church she had been pastoring. At that time she knew that she would not be considered for another appointment. It was possible that she would be considered for smaller and more dysfunctional churches in the conference. She considered leaving the Free Methodist Church at that time. She claimed that strong bonds with other clergy were

among the reasons she remained. The stories in a subsequent section will outline the factors that contribute to the resilience of these women. Another woman said that she struggled with sustaining enthusiasm about the Free Methodist denominational identity. She served on a national committee and was angered by the lack of integrity she saw in some decision making processes. A decision was made that hurt someone very dear to the participant. She said:

We are just a little bubble, this little tiny aquarium in this big sea, how do we not see the big picture that is around us?... It just disturbed me. I tell my husband every time that I come [home from a meeting] that I make no impact. All I do is get myself so stressed out because I so badly want to see things be different. I so badly want the Free Methodist Church to be a church that my children will choose to be a part of....and they don't have to agree with me. All I want is to get a respectful listen. And I can't get it. I can't get it. Well, they tore someone very dear to me apart. They said he was arrogant and said all of these kinds of things. That was so inflammatory. I just can't handle this, I just can't handle it. And he said, if you are right, then you know the old story that people believe what they first hear so it really won't do any good to correct it anyway...It seems that the best thing that I could do was to walk away from it. Being resentful is not a place that I want to be, I don't want to stay there. Having said that, my mistrust of the official church doesn't come from being a woman even though I have gotten silenced there, it comes from the fact that power does seem to change people...They want things to go their way.

Mentees and Those Over Whom She Has Authority

Two women shared stories about how much they enjoyed being mentors, especially to young women. One stated, “One of those women, when I ended up leaving, became the youth pastor after me, she took my spot which was awesome because she just got ordained recently. It was so exciting. We were sisters and peers but I was also a mentor.”

Another woman expressed her desire for life to be easier for those who come after her. She was training young women and young men in her local church. She discusses with the young women additional obstacles that they may face especially as women.

The women in this study view their relationship with God as a most basic and important one. These women spoke frequently about how God called them, and answered their prayers for provision, discernment, guidance, and empowerment. Nevertheless, they did not use the word “relationship” for their interacting with God. Therefore, their relationship with God is addressed in the Resources section.

Resources for Fruitfulness and Resilience in Ministry

The five women in this study showed great strength and perseverance. This section features the stories that they told about their persevering and thriving. These women told many stories about lessons learned, conflicts negotiated, and opposition faced. As previously mentioned, these women frequently mentioned their calls and their prayer practices as primary resources for their work and lives.

Measuring Success

The women used various internal and external gauges in order to measure the fruitfulness or success of their ministries. Agnus mentioned that she recognized her ability to be strong and in charge has, at times, caused her to be a bulldozer (or at least appear that way to others). She saw herself as most fruitful when she opened up room for others to lead and invited them to be heard and exercise their leadership. She frequently asks herself how well she is including others. She desires to have many voices heard during any decision-making process.

Mae was passionate about evangelism and outreach and commented that she has grown from narrowly defining success by an increase in attendance or membership. She had previous experience with a mega church that utilized an attractional model for

everything they did. In that environment, the definition of success was always numerical growth. She shifted her thinking. She stated:

I think that, as the church, we need to be having a lot more conversations because people are much farther from Christ. So, if somebody doesn't know the first thing about Jesus, they are not going to become a Christian coming to an event. You know. At one point, this was the second to the last year when I was at the church before I church planted, I was really crying out to God, "I don't...I know you promised a fruitful life and I do not feel fruitful." And in God's grace, in rapid succession gave me assurance that I was being obedient.

Success cannot be reduced to numerical growth according to the clergy women in this study. The pastors desired numeric growth because that indicated that people were coming to faith and finding a church home. Nevertheless, they refused to reduce their success or fruitfulness as pastors to that. The quantifiable gauge that these pastors used was whether or not there was transformation happening in their ministry settings. The gauge for transformation or growing in Christlikeness was relational. This litmus test of fruitfulness could be observed. They knew when they were impacting their environments.

Several women talked about fruitfulness measured by how they were feeling about their situations. For instance, one clergywoman said that she frequently asked herself if she was at peace and if she was finding joy in what she was doing. She found that when there was dissonance or questioning in her soul about what she was doing, then she did not feel successful. She added:

I know when I am walking in my gifting and finding fulfillment as I live out my calling – personally and spiritually. Also, seeing others' lives being transformed and growing by the work of the Spirit through me in their life. Finally, seeing blessings such as provision financially, open doors of opportunity, and growing relationships with other leaders and community members helps me recognize my effectiveness in walking out my call.

Another pastor mentioned transformation; she said that she often asked herself if people or institutions were being transformed by Jesus through her presence. The word

“transformation” was used as the goal at which women were aiming their efforts. Two women highlighted the presence of authentic, healthy, loving relationships with others as the litmus test for fruitfulness in ministry. An example of this from one participant was stated, “But if you are a great leader, the people around you are the people who love and respect you the most because you have walked slowly enough for them to walk with you.”

In summary, the female pastors spoke of a number of different factors in measuring their own success in ministry. The themes of transformation in the lives of others and health in relationships was common. Finally, it was also common for the pastors to gauge their success by how content or peaceful they were feeling in their settings.

God’s Grace

All five women repeatedly spoke about how God is intimately connected with their lives and ministries. All of them had early experiences of God and found ways to grow and share these experiences with others. Many stories already present in this chapter feature God as the main character. Prayer, presented by these women as conversation and interaction with God, was pervasive in their lived experiences. They spoke of God answering prayer for discernment, empowerment, guidance, healing, mercy, power, provision, and stability. At crucial times in their ministry lives, these women turned to God in prayer. They gladly shared how God answered them. Two stories not yet mentioned showcase how intricately woven God’s activity was in these clergywomen’s stories. One pastor stated:

There was a crisis of character growing inside of me and like a weed, the roots were being exposed. I was unable to stand up straight on the inside not because of others

treatment of me, but because of my own lack of character and ability. The time was ripe for me to confront my own unprocessed grief, anger, and rejection. God had my undivided attention and I was desperate enough to dig down and uncover with massive honesty some things that I had been running from my whole life... Jesus would become my teacher and the ordinary day things of life would be the laboratory in which I would learn. It was a journey home. One moment of healing came when I was praying for a friend of mine. She was caught in a cycle of destruction (self-harm and excessive alcohol consumption) and was in my prayers a lot. I wanted to do whatever I could to help her, but was despairing about what might be helpful. "God," I prayed, "why doesn't she see how precious she is to you?" Now in tears as I thought about how her life was riddled with every possible kind of abuse. Very softly and tenderly, God spoke, and I thought it was going to be about my friend, but it was about me. "I don't know, why don't you see how precious you are to me?" I imaged that just as I wept because of my great care for her, God had been weeping for me. It wasn't because of disapproval toward my behavior, but because I hadn't understood, trusted, or accepted God's delight in me. Returning to find my home in God has made it possible to embrace my vocation... Because I was not at home in myself, I was not at home being a pastor.

Another woman was retreating at a monastery with a group from her church. At this time she was serving in the role of pastor of assimilation and spiritual formation. She remembered:

There was a group of women who would go on monastic retreats...men and women...while we were there we broke up into gender specific time at the end. I realized that I just didn't believe that God loved me and I just didn't believe that I was worth it. It was so ground-breaking to me to admit that, and I didn't even realize it until I was on the retreat. To admit that to these women who I was supposed to be the pastor of...I was on staff. It was really hard. I just felt ashamed. And they received me and that was life changing for me because then they became part of a support group that re-affirmed who Christ says I am.

Both of these women mentioned that it was being at home in herself and trusting the unfailing love of God that made it possible for them to offer wholehearted ministry to others. One of these women spoke of her most fundamental calling to be creating a community that is safe and healthy and that empowers and trains leaders for ministry. The other, similarly, saw her essential calling to be life with those who are seen as disposable to the world. She saw herself as embodying and proclaiming God's grace. She said that she is able to live now as God's heir and proclaim this same truth to others. She

wanted others to see that their rejection is over. God sees and hears those who are treated as disposable. She said that God makes them delightful, beautiful, and irreplaceable.

Calling

The theme of calling appears in all of the stories. It is a dominant thread in two of the women's stories. At times, it was expressed as a touchstone for persevering. At one point on her journey, Elyse was hurting and struggling with her situation. The church that she had planted was closing and she felt brokenhearted. She stated:

[She was not working in a church during this season after experiencing a difficult situation] And I was so broken, I was so wounded already that I thought, "I cannot do ministry...I have no vision...I didn't know...maybe I'm not fit...maybe I'm not even called." That was then right before, so I'm working at the dentist office, at Starbucks and living in Glendale...[and a few months later] I got a call that summer from a pastor who was on the west side of the city and he said, "I've been watching you from afar and I want to talk to you about ministry and the possibility of working with us here." And I had called another Free Methodist pastor in the area, I was desperate and had asked if there were any openings and he said, "No, I don't, I'm sorry." So I went to that church on the west side and I checked it out. I was like, "Yeah....no, I'm not going here, I'm not going to do it" ...Then a few months later, I thought, I need to go back, I need to check that out, maybe, I thought "this is killing me." I wasn't doing anything....I mean I was volunteering, I thought, if this is what I'm called to do I need to do it. I was still broken in a lot of ways, but I also had some good space.

Her call was a primary feature in her persevering in ministry. In the other stories, it was implicitly connected to resilience. Generally speaking, the pastors in this study expressed fervency in obedience to their calling. The women connected their early experiences of ministry with the early planting of a call in their lives. This was the case for one pastor who was raised in an environment where church and ministry were central. Family members invited her to accompany them to nursing home visits and services. She stated:

And so I would go. So we would go to rest homes. And I would always sing to the people... I was invited to be the one to pray with the people. And I learned so young the amazing power of God's word and God's people. And it was like, I would watch their response as I came into this room... I felt this incredible gifting and power from God. I would have never have called it an anointing. I felt this incredible gifting and power from

God on my life and I knew that I was doing something really significant and I didn't ever want to lose that. I could see calm come over a room when we would sing, when we would share and when I would pray, any of that. You could just see incredible things happen. So, I was part of that from a very young age.

It was interesting to note that this woman's early seeds of call were connected with her immediate and extended family. She repeatedly mentioned that it was close and strong family support that enabled her to persevere in ministry.

Another woman expressed her call emerging as she had graduated from college and entered the field of business. She longed for congruity between who she most fundamentally was, and what she "loved" and what her career was. She felt dissatisfied in her new career and discovered that making money was not her top priority. She asked herself, "What is it that I love?" and the only answer that resonated in her depths was ministry.

So that began the process of me feeling a call to go to seminary. That is all I was saying is that I felt called to go the seminary. I was not saying I was going to be a pastor or be in leadership. I was just going to go seminary. My dad short circuited. He said, "You are going to starve." He was not happy with me. And he was not happy for a number of reasons. Even now, today, he says, "You missed your call, you should have been in the business world." At one point he said, "Do you feel like God has called you to do this?" and I said, "Yes," He said, "Huh, I guess I can't argue with God." When I tell people that my dad was opposed to this, they usually think that he doesn't think women should do this, but he has always thought that I should be making money in the business world. He thought, he knew it would be a hard road for me. Part of my process with trying to figure out where to go to seminary was the realization that I really was more interested in being in ministry than actually going to seminary. So I needed to be at a seminary where I could also be doing ministry.

Three others stated that their lack of female pastor role models contributed to their slowness in discerning their calls. One said:

The interesting thing is: I never saw a female pastor. It never occurred to me that I would be a pastor. It never occurred to me that I would not be a pastor. The interesting thing is that it never occurred to me that I would be pastor because I never saw it. I had met women missionary nurses...So when I was young, I figured that I would be a missionary

nurse. Then, when I was in high school, I worked in the hospital one summer and I couldn't take it. All that blood....blah! So not me.

One pastor stated that she was very slow in owning her call. She had plenty of opportunities to teach and lead, however, she would not have categorized it as ministry or ministry leadership. She was filling a gap that was present. It took years for her to grow into her calling. She began the process with confidence that she could be useful in church by “making coffee.” Eventually she was able to own her calling. She is now confident that she was gifted and called to preach, teach, and lead.

Another woman remembered:

During my college days, my call was affirmed by others as well. There were many people surrounding me, offering opportunities to preach, teach, and lead. Originally, when I first heard God calling me, the call had little definition. The setting of my initial call into ministry was at church conference affiliated with a church tradition that is not at all friendly to the idea of women being in any kind of “senior leadership.” It was not clear to me then exactly what that meant, I simply courageously obeyed. Perhaps it was also the grace of God that allowed my calling to be so nebulous at that time in order to spare me the humiliation of announcing that I was called to be a pastor in the midst of people who would not have welcomed the idea.

One pastor made an explicit connection between her call and having empowering role models. As mentioned previously, this pastor had a team of role models: a husband and wife team for youth pastors.

We were invested in by both the youth pastors. It was a husband and wife couple. They led...he was the student ministries pastor and oversaw the whole thing, college, high school, middle school...she was the youth, high school I guess. But they led well and together. I thought that that was fabulous. I love seeing them work together. I saw that modeled and thought that it was fabulous. I never saw one that was more or less than the other....they just had different gifts and different roles. They accentuated one another's gifts in our church. After going on a mission trip, I thought, “gosh, if I can love people like they do and be crazy like they are and get paid, I want to do that.” So, it was a bit of influence from them, I don't know if it was....I think it was the beginning of a calling. They were seeing things in me and asking me to step up and lead. But it was also me taking a risk, "I want to be a youth pastor." Like I couldn't figure out what I would want to do more than that.

It was later that she discovered that she could also lead adults as well. She discovered that she had gifts in vision casting, leadership development, and team-building. She felt called to lead in entrepreneurial ways: planting a church along with starting a center that aims to help people find their own calling.

One woman told about a conversation with her husband that made it possible for her to embrace her call. Until this point in her story, she had served in supportive roles while being a homemaker and raising her kids. She told this story with tears in her eyes and a catch in her throat. She reported that her husband began the conversation when he said,

"Don't you think it is funny that even though Cody (her brother) was an all-American in tennis, he is so good at every sport...Have you ever thought how unusual it is that he still can't beat me when we play?" I said, "No, I have never thought of that before." He said, "I'll tell you why it is. It is because I played first. I did everything first. It is because I was his hero. He looked up to me. Now that he is better than me when he plays me, he chokes. Because to him it feels disrespectful to outdo me because he loves me. Do you know why I am telling you this story?" and I said, "Yeah, I think so, but I need you to tell me." He said, "My greatest fear is that you wouldn't do what you are called to do. I admire your commitment to me so much, there is nothing more beautiful than your desire and willingness to take a backseat to me." He said, "But you are equal to every pastor that I know, every pastor in your family. You surpass them in many ways and I'm so afraid that you will choke. I'm so afraid that you will think it is some form of disloyalty to me or to other pastors in the family to have people love you more than me, to have people enjoy your preaching more than others, to have people want you to do their weddings and funerals. I'm afraid that you will not flourish, you will not achieve what God has put you on this planet to achieve and you will think that you are doing this because you love me and all the preachers around you, because you're loyal to others. It would be the worst day of my life if I ever discovered you did that."

She then commented, "That freed me up. He opened the door to my life for me. It made it easy for me...it made it easy to thrive." This permission-giving gesture by her husband had an empowering effect and confirmed what God had already planted in her. It took an incredible amount of courage for this pastor to embrace her call to senior leadership. She stated that there was a man who stood up during her ordination service and spoke in

opposition to her being ordained. She expressed the heaviness of expectations that was laid on her as she was the first woman to be appointed as senior or solo pastor in that conference. The significance of it was obvious to her even though she stated that she only thinks about being a female pastor when it is thrown in her face. She feels like the essence of her call was to be a great leader. She was a catalyst, she said:

I have been blessed with opportunities. [Several people have told me]...that if I were a man I would be leading a church of a several thousand. But because I am a woman, I am not permitted. And there is no law that says that I'm not permitted, I'm just not permitted. Can I use a word that is?...All right, when a woman is a strong leader, she is a bitch¹⁷² and when a man is a strong leader, he is courageous and noble, and all of that and, so, I have had my moments and I know that God's hand has been upon me and there have been times when I like, "You are so responsible before God" because he has brought you here for such a time, I have always felt, ever since I was a little girl, I didn't know how to describe it then, but I knew. [God said] "You are a catalyst, a catalytic person between generations and between people." And I believe, I was called to do that, I believe fiercely.

Strong, catalytic leadership was evidenced in the stories that this woman told about ministry. Early on in her tenure as senior pastor, there was a mass exodus from the church she pastored. She expressed that this was very painful and that she feared that this would confirm her inability in the minds of some conference committees that had doubted her. It was a very painful time for her. While praying about the situation, she felt like God was showing her that the exodus would help her lead the people through and into a new phase of ministry. She walked the people through a vision casting process. She noted that after the mass exodus and the process of forming a vision for ministry, it was clear to her that the church was healthier than before. It was interesting to note that after an initial adjustment period immediately following this female pastor's transition, there

¹⁷² This word has been intentionally retained from the transcript for two reasons. The word is admittedly offensive. There is great offense when it is used or implied in speaking to or about women, especially Holiness women, who were generally unaccustomed to swearing. The other reason was that the researcher chose to offer the women's stories in their own, uncensored words.

was church vitality. It may be understood as extracting disease in order that the body may thrive. She began to see how important it was for her to be very connected with those who were older than her in her congregation. She wrote letters and cards to them. She visited with them. She challenged them to think about whether or not their grandchildren knew Jesus or came to church. She said:

I asked them to think for a moment about where do your grandchildren go to church. And write it down and I'm going to bet that you don't know and that the reason you don't know is that most of your grandchildren don't go to church. The church has not had a place for them until all of their youthfulness has been spent on the world. And I want your grandchildren to love the church and to love Jesus. And so, we are going to do things that your grandchildren will like and you will hate. But I'm asking you to love Jesus and love your grandchildren enough to put up with the things you hate. And, honestly, our people rose to that challenge so well....that is what I try to do. I tell them ahead of time so that they are not taken by surprise.

She recognized that she needed additional help from a person in the older generation. She remembered:

One of the men in our church, who was a crusty, old, Navy guy, chauvinistic, he still is...he still has a hard time seeing women across the board as the same as men, but he was, I asked him, "Felix, I need someone in your generation to help me with this....with this generation....would that be you... would you help me...would you be my visitation pastor? Would you do that? [He is 80] Would you do that?" He said, "I'm not a pastor" but I said, "You are a lay minister and you have the power to do this." He was the president of Men's Ministries International for our conference at that time. He said, "Let me think about it." So he came to see me. My office was at the front then. We didn't even have this part here at that time. I didn't think that, I thought that he was coming to talk to me about that. When he came in, he had a basin and a towel and a bucket of hot water. He said, "I can't serve with you until I humble myself to serve under you so that is what I'm going to do." And so, through the difficulties that we have had, he is of a different generation than me, he is crusty, chauvinistic, his kids adore me, his wife does too, and he does too. He cries now and says, "Oh, I'm so sorry I gave you any trouble" because he has from time to time. What I always tell him is that, "Felix, you know." When he retired, he became ordained, he got that, I helped him do that... Well that was a really cool thing. After he officially retired, he became an appointed pastor under me. I asked him to do that. He served after that until he could not do that anymore because of his health. He still would help me baptize and do those kinds of things. But we had a really big day for him that day. That was the Felix day at the church...it's a really big day. On that day, I remind people...everybody knows the story here because I have told it numerous times. He was, he was sort of a John the Baptist for me, paving the way. By him being who he was and

doing what he did, it gave me confidence. I have just had men who have stepped up at the right time which has been very affirming to me. So that happened and we decided that we would just move forward.

The factors in the female pastors' resilience and faithfulness were told through their stories. They found that God's grace was always available to them in difficulty. They courageously obeyed and followed their calling in the midst of resistance. They persevered in life and ministry. In light of this, it is fitting to explore expectations placed on female pastors that are somewhat unique from most male pastors. In their stories, we find that there are, indeed, peculiar expectations that are placed on clergywomen.

Expectations Peculiar to Female Pastors

Some argue that expectations of pastors are high, in general, whether they are male or female. One participant in the study stated that young women clergy are more strident than was necessary. She bristles against anyone labeling her a feminist. It is her opinion that many women clergy do not succeed, not because of opposition due to their gender, but because they cannot handle the work. To summarize, she stated, "It is a demanding job!"

That being a pastor was demanding was acknowledged either implicitly or explicitly by all the participants. However, four participants told stories of additional expectations communicated either explicitly or implicitly to them that they perceived as being peculiar to their gender. It is important to note that all of the participants were often uncertain about the nature of the opposition that they were facing. In general, conflicts were attributed to individual and not social factors. These female pastors were not quick to assume that the treatment they were receiving was due to their gender. They have felt

isolated, shamed, criticized, unseen, ignored, and underutilized. The brokenness that their stories convey, sometimes just below the surface, was palpable.

One woman named a perceived expectation that as a female pastor, she would be especially attentive to children (more than her male colleagues). She responded:

There was some expectation that I would pay particular attention to children's ministry, women's ministry, and kids' Sunday School when I first started serving there... to counter that I purposely had NOTHING to do with these things...as an Associate Pastor. I was already seen in my role as being the "helper" to the lead pastor. I bristled against that because it strikes me as a female-expectation/demand, and I honestly don't know how much is related to my particular job or my gender. I responded to this by clearly communicating that I was not going to take on certain "helper" jobs.

Three women were not happy with the expectation that males in their congregations would either not feel comfortable confiding in them or that males would feel emasculated by them as strong women leaders. One woman reflected that it was hard for her to cope with having an insecure male in authority over her. She perceived that he felt threatened by her and thus erected barricades that prevented her from advancing to another church.

Two pastors expressed confusion when those in authority who blockaded their advancement were women. In short, the pastors were troubled by what appeared to be opposition toward their leadership perpetrated by other women. During a decision making process regarding one woman's placement as senior pastor, she noticed that the women did not support her advancement. She stated:

And the women just caved....they just caved, they were on our teams, as I look back on it, there are several of those women, are, who are my friends today. And as I look at it and as I try to figure it out, why did you do that, why did you cave? Because I think, you know me, you know who I am, I think that women tend to be people pleasers by nature, it is kind of the role that we have picked up in our culture. We try to keep peace...keep things calm and that kind of stuff. And I think that, perhaps, it was seen as being even handed and fair that they were willing to listen to the men. That may not be it. But that is the kind of, that might be what I invent to keep me...maybe that makes it easier for me.

Another aspect that female pastors noticed in negotiating their roles and compensation is that committees assume that they do not need to be paid a living wage. One participant remembered a board meeting where a person assumed that her husband was the primary wage earner in the family and therefore that meant that she didn't require as much compensation. This left this woman feeling undervalued and underappreciated.

After feeling frustrated with her own lack of wisdom in leadership, Betty reflected that there was something like a double-bind that she didn't see at the time. The congregation had communicated that they wanted a strong leader, a leader who would be courageous and be willing to take risks even if it meant that not everyone would be happy with the decisions. However, she reflected that after exercising such leadership that they might have responded differently to the decision if it had been a male pastor instead of her. She noticed that there were many of her male colleagues who made similar decisions and that these decisions did not have the catastrophic impact as hers did.

Similarly, other participants also expressed the additional stress that comes along with representing their whole gender. One woman said that those in her church had no additional exposure to female pastors. She felt like perfect performance was expected of her because, if she made a mistake, it would be projected onto female pastors in general. This pastor stated that, "I cannot give anyone a reason to declare females shouldn't or can't be pastors." Being the only female pastor on a committee or in a district or conference or at a ministerial association meeting increases the likelihood that women will feel this heaviness of being "the token." Moreover, if a woman had been placed in a senior or solo appointment as the first woman to occupy that role, she felt that she was

required to be perfect or have near perfect performance in order that the spot remain open and friendly toward female pastors in general.

Several churches that the female pastors in this study had served witnessed a mass exodus upon their arrival. One of the participants stated that around one-fifth of the people left the congregation almost immediately after her arrival. Another woman told about a prominent long-time Free Methodist leader in the congregation excusing himself every time she filled the pulpit at the church where she eventually became the senior pastor. She said:

I was excited to be the pastor. I warned everyone during the processes of my taking this post that there would be people who would be unhappy and some that would leave. There was this family that had lived and worked here for almost a decade. When it was announced that I was going to be the pastor, he made it clear to everyone that he didn't agree with it. He decided that he couldn't remain (at his job, community, and church) because of his conviction that women should not teach, preach, or hold authority over men. His whole family, four kids and all, left because of me and I feared that everyone would blame me for that.

The height of expectations that are peculiar to women in ministry weighed heavily on the women in the study. There are some expectations that are not clearly communicated. The women told stories about how they were unsure whether or not they were meeting an expectation as they aimed to fill their roles. However, there were a few occasions where it was very clear that the expectation that they were violating was that they were both pastor and female.

In summary, this chapter described the process of selecting participants, data collection, and data analysis. In coding and analyzing the data, many important themes emerged from the stories of female pastors in the Free Methodist Church, USA. Those that are particularly pertinent to this study were presented in this chapter. They were: the

role of the pastor, relationships, resources for fruitfulness and resilience, and unique expectations of female pastors.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative dissertation explores the lived experience of female pastors in the Free Methodist Church, USA. The previous chapter featured a review of themes that emerged from the data. Chapter six will discuss limitations of the study along with implications for further research regarding clergy women in the Free Methodist Church. Overall themes that emerged from the research will be interpreted. Finally, recommendations for church, conference, and national leaders will be made.

Limitations of this Study and Implications for Further Research

The researcher is aware that there are limitations to this study. Because of the relatively small sample of women who offered their stories, it is clearly not intended to represent the full scope of female pastors' experiences even in the Free Methodist Church, USA. Obvious limitations provide questions that can be explored by future research.

There are many other aspects of the lives of women clergy that need to be explored. The most obvious need for future research would be to gather information from the vast majority of women ordained in the Free Methodist Church that do not meet the qualifying criteria of this study, because they have never served in senior or solo roles. Areas that are suggested for further exploration from the findings of this present study are as follows; the congregational culture present in congregations pastored by women; the relationship between women feeling underutilized and beginning their own ministry initiatives; clergy women and their marriages and families; the phenomenon of churches

planted by females; and longitudinal studies that compare future experiences of resistance toward women in pastoral leadership ministry with those of the present.

Congregational Culture

Compassion appeared to be a high operational value for these female pastors. Moreover, these pastors claimed that compassion was a high value in the culture they were creating in their churches. A study of congregations pastored by women could investigate the operational values of these churches, including the value of compassion. It would be useful to study the congregational and cultural dynamics in order to paint a more distinct picture of the contribution of women clergy to the church in general in regard to this specific operational value.

Creative Initiatives

All of the women in this study had, at some point in their lives, begun a ministry. As mentioned, only one of female pastors expressed a causal link between feeling underutilized and deciding to begin something herself. It would benefit the church to know if there is a causal link. This study could investigate their individual callings. What are the hopes, dreams, and goals as leaders approach a new ministry initiative? Along with this study, it would be fascinating to do a longitudinal study, perhaps doing as Charlton did with pioneer clergy women. This study could gather call stories of women who are entering the ordination process regarding their motivation and then, after fifteen years, compare how their hopes and dreams had become reality or not.

Marriages and Families of Female Pastors

There are interesting dynamics present in the marriages and families of female pastors. It would be interesting for those studying family dynamics to do research regarding this. The possibilities of this research abound; however, from this researcher's

perspective, it would be particularly interesting to gauge attitudes regarding mutuality in marriage and how these attitudes impact the function of the family and family dynamics.

Church Planting

It would be worth studying congregational longevity of Free Methodist Churches that have been started by females. What methods and strategies do females use when church planting? How does one measure fruitfulness and success? How do those strategies and methods compare with churches that are planted by males? Are churches that are planted by females adequately supported and funded as compared with those planted by males? A study that investigates these dynamics would prove useful, especially if the Free Methodist Church, USA, continues to utilize women as church planters.

Additional longitudinal studies could be done with female pastors such as those in this study. For instance, it is interesting to note that the newest clergy woman to the Free Methodist Church, USA, faced only minimal resistance to her ministry. If it is true that there is progress being made, then her experience expressed in future interviews would be expected to continue to show little resistance. One might also predict that the other women clergy in this study would experience less resistance to their ministries as time goes on.

Interpreting the Lived Experience of Female Pastors

There is a wealth of life and ministry experience embedded in the stories of the five female pastors in this study. An initial assumption regarding the research was that these women had not been asked to share their wealth of life and ministry experience.

This assumption was absolutely true.¹⁷³ The stories featured plenty of pain and triumph. The female pastors were eager to share from their ministries and lives. They did not emphasize the inequities that they faced. They emphasized how they had pursued their callings, how they had gladly filled vacancies as they discovered their callings, and how they had created their own opportunities when no traditional appointments were available to them. They faced resistance due to their gender at every level. Sometimes, they faced it at the local level having mass exodus happen briefly after their senior leadership was announced. Some faced resistance at the conference level where they were simply ignored because of the insecurity of conference level leaders. Some faced being blockaded from ordination before transferring to the Free Methodist Church, USA.

The participants were informed in advance that telling their stories might cause emotional distress. Three participants found that humorous. Three participants also initially thought that the goal of absolute privacy protection for participants was not necessary. Nevertheless, they chose pseudonyms or, in the event that they could not think of one, the researcher offered suggestions. Picking pseudonyms and protecting privacy seemed humorous at the beginning. However, the humor was replaced with seriousness as the stories unfolded. Each of these pastors verbalized that speaking certain things could cause them future damage. One pastor said that she feared that her story getting out would be damaging or that it might be misunderstood or misused.

¹⁷³ Participants commented that they had never shared their life stories before. Three of them also made comments that communicated that they had gained new strength or insight in the process of sharing their stories. One participant said: "I appreciated being able to share my story and felt that there was a continuity I had not realized previously in the way the Lord has provided throughout my journey with Him."

But it is the candor in the stories that seemed to bring the most power to them. In telling their stories, even protected and anonymous, these women clearly felt empowered. They felt heard and valued. It is not an exaggeration to present these stories as “war stories.” Joy Charlton, in her longitudinal study, presented the stories of pioneer clergywomen who were not shy about articulating how difficult ministry was as they were “told directly and indirectly” that they did not fit in the ministry.¹⁷⁴ She called them war stories because they “embodied a contradiction.”¹⁷⁵ In similar fashion, Ingersoll chose “war stories” as a lens through which to look at the stories told by evangelical Christian women who feel called to the ministry.¹⁷⁶ It is not that these women suffer from or claim a victim mentality, because they do not. It is not that they harbor anger or malice toward church or even toward individuals who caused them harm. Indeed, as this study demonstrated, these women have courageously forgiven and have decided to respond to their pain in a gracious manner. Three of them specifically addressed a process of healing that led them to forfeit a defensive or apologetic stance toward their callings. But, the wounds that they have suffered deserve attention. To ignore these wounds or dismiss them as mistakes of the past would be to neglect the immense amount of learning that is possible through them. These five women have survived, have lived to tell about it, and are now, more than ever, strengthened to share their contributions with the church and the world.

¹⁷⁴ Joy Charlton, “Clergywomen of the Pioneer Generation: A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (December 1997), 603.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 601.

¹⁷⁶ Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

Evidences of Gender Bias

There were stories told by the female pastors in this study that were clear examples of gender bias. A man stood and spoke out against the ordination of one of the women. This action represents explicit resistance and sexism. However, there were far more stories told that featured situations displaying implicit or latent gender-bias. For instance, implicit gender-bias was present when female pastors attended pastor and spouse retreats and all of the activities available were stereotypical masculine activities. Even more subtle and complex situations involved women being told directly or indirectly that there were not positions open for which they fit. These subtle and complex situations invited interpretation by those who first experienced the events. Then, subsequently, the stories invited interpretation as the female pastors told their stories to the researcher. The participants in this study were not quick to interpret more subtle forms of gender bias as discrimination. The participants expressed uncertainty about the cause or complex causes of resistances they experienced. It is clear, though, that the women expected to be seen, heard, and appropriately utilized to the full extent of their gifts and abilities. The clergywomen were disappointed with the lack of support they received and were left wondering if it was because of their gender or if they were not supported because of some personal shortfalls. Research by Zikmund showed that women who entered the ministry after the pioneer generation in the 1970s “honestly believe that the worst forms of discrimination are over” and because of that they are less able to recognize more subtle forms of gender bias that still exist.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, Zikmund

¹⁷⁷ Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 112.

stated that due to relative isolation, clergywomen often personalize the difficulties that they face.¹⁷⁸ These findings are consistent with those found in this study. Women who felt the most underappreciated and underutilized were also the most isolated. They suffered in silence because what they had experienced was not heard by others. In such cases, they blamed themselves and were often blamed by others instead of blaming the inequities that remain in the system.

Considered in isolation, one might wonder about the presence of gender inequity in the Free Methodist Church, USA. However, considered together, there are significant patterns of inequity that emerged. It is the hope of this researcher that the truth in these women's stories will be heard.

Interpretation of Common Themes

Practices that are good for clergy women are also good for the church as a whole. The lens through which I interpret the data collected in this study is Biblical feminism. The first section addresses the female pastors' call to lead and expectations of female leaders. The following sections address issues of relationships, support networks, and the desire for wholeness in the lives of female pastors and the churches they serve. The final sections feature their philosophies of ministry and how they understood the role of the pastor. There are implications given in each section. Finally, there are recommendations made for the Free Methodist Church, USA.

Called to Lead

It is undeniable that these women had a strong sense of call. Among the most important aspects of their call were their gifts and abilities to lead. They saw themselves

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 113.

as leaders and frequently used the word “leadership” as synonymous for their ministries. The researcher noted that three women chose Moses as the biblical character that most resonated with their life and ministry. All of these specifically noted that Moses was a strong leader. All of them mentioned that Moses had his challenges and that, in leadership, learning and growing is part of the journey. This motif elevated progress over perfection. Two of the pastors stated that team-building was one of Moses’ strengths and that they saw that in themselves as well. One woman mentioned that Moses’ obedience in spite of his challenges most resonated with her.

In presenting their chosen biblical characters, the researcher noted that two of the women were unsure about settling on Moses and only Moses. It is possible that even as they spoke, they were discovering and negotiating the tension between feminine and masculine models of ministry. The women were aware that there could be social consequences to them for choosing a character that was too masculine. Furthermore, women also offered additional feminine characters. This could mean that in the telling of their stories, they were defining for themselves what it means to be both female and leader.

The female pastors used tentative language when speaking about Moses as their ministry model. Words such as, “maybe” and “I think,” conveyed uncertainty. Definitive speech, such as “I know,” was less common. Their tenuous responses may indicate that they were struggling to claim a Moses’ type of leadership as their own. Two of these women had faced the challenge that they defined as “finding their voice.” They were modest about their leadership abilities and perhaps a bit fearful of claiming too much. It is possible to see this as a lack of confidence. For this research it is important to consider

their tentative speech to be conditioned by the feminine ideal. It is possible that even as these women spoke, the gender roles in which they were reared made them question if the agentic leadership of Moses actually suited their leadership.

Courageous Leadership Requires Self-Awareness

The pastors in this study demonstrated great strength and fruitfulness for ministry in general. They saw themselves as courageous. Indeed, simply to use their gifts and be obedient to their calling involved risk-taking.

For instance, Zikmund found that an early call to ministry did not equate to an early acceptance and pursuit of the role of leadership.¹⁷⁹ This was the case for female pastors in this study. Each woman discerned her call in a unique way. Opportunities were given to them early on in their lives. These opportunities were extended to these young women, either because there was a need or because others saw leadership potential in them. There were occasions when the opportunities were granted with intentionality. In such cases they were explicitly invited to explore ministry and ministry leadership and by doing so, discovered their individual giftings and calls. These women understood that those who intentionally mentored them in ministry were taking risks also. They expressed gratitude toward others who invited them to take on leadership roles.

One woman explained that she lacked confidence in her own ability to be a leader. “I would have never called it an anointing,” she said. However, it is clear from the fruit of her ministry that she was anointed. At the crux of her struggle to possess and speak confidently of her own authority is her fear of being categorized as pushy,

¹⁷⁹ Zikmund, et al., *Clergy Women*, 159.

aggressive, or a “bitch.” She had been socialized to modestly present herself, and as she said, “don’t say it with too much authority.”

These women’s lived experience suggests that there remains a perceptual conflict in being a female leader in the church. A lack of vision of themselves as leaders and a lack of female pastoral role models caused the road toward embracing their own leadership to be a steep one. Without recognizing it in the moment, these women and their perception of leadership was influenced by gender norms. The agentic stereotype of leadership as ambitious, inconsiderate, self-confident, and independent was distasteful to them. For one pastor who attested to “learning how to trust my voice,” her journey of self-awareness culminated in seminary. It was then that she was able to recognize the gender role struggle that had kept her ignorant of the call that God had on her life.

Expectations Regarding Marriage and Family

Three women said that at some phase of their lives, they had serious concern about getting married and having children. These three women had internalized the message that it was less favorable for them to be married and have children as a clergy person. This is particularly interesting because it appears as though men entering ministry internalize the message that it is more favorable for them to be married and have children. For women, the expectation is for them to be “supermom and super-wife and super homemaker,” as one female pastor in this study said. This created tension for the women who had a greater desire to be a pastor than to be a super homemaker. It was communicated to them that they would have to choose between these two roles. All three of these women eventually decided to get married. However, for Mae, there was a clarifying moment and a subsequent journey of self-awareness that brought her to that

decision. She told the story of the important moment when she faced the restrictive nature of her own gender bias. She admitted that she was embarrassed. She was not married when she entered the ministry and had thought that by choosing ministry, she was choosing singleness. She said, “It was just one of those deeply held things.” She confronted her own bias during a Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy gathering. She was attending the Free Methodist denominational meeting and observed that all the other women leaders besides her were married. Noticing her singleness as peculiar in that moment, she said that she heard God ask her, “Well, do you want to be married?” and her honest response was, “Well, I don’t know, I hadn’t ever thought about it. I guess I’ll think about it.”

Internalizing Negative Labels for Women Leaders

Clergwomen need to be aware that their own perceptions are clouded by such implicit gender bias. It is important to consider how insidious gender norming is for men and women and for our relationships together in the church. Both genders suffer when negative stereotypes regarding women leaders persist. It is necessary for both genders to honestly and explicitly address these matters. Women have internalized subtle gender biases. If gender biases, even those held by female pastors themselves, remain unrecognized as such, they stifle women. The double binds are real. The notion remains that in order to be a good leader, one must be assertive and confident. However, there are negative labels used for women who are assertive and confident. The struggle for self-awareness is real. For instance, one participant in this study was telling a generic story about pastors and continued to use masculine pronouns. She presented the “normal” pastor as male. In short, she thought “pastor” and she thought “male.” She was puzzled

over how it was that there were females on a committee who resisted the decision to place her in the role of senior or solo pastor. She was also the clergywoman in this study who most fiercely opposed being called “feminist.” She acknowledged that ministry was hard. She stated that those who have authority over her were easily contaminated by being in power. She longed for a healthier denomination, one whose leadership at all levels would admit when they make mistakes, would be willing to listen to others, and would refrain from coercive tactics in order to get their own ways.

Women also wrestled with taking responsibility for their own stories. Perhaps this is due to women being conditioned to define themselves by others’ definitions of them. This wrestling for their own definitions of identity was evident in their use of derogatory labels for themselves. They have been told by others that they do not belong. Words such as “reject,” “bitch,” “cantankerous,” and “whistle-blower” have a way of deforming the inner lives of women. These can be considered lies or false narratives that must be confronted. As demonstrated by women in this study, one cannot lead well when defined by such labels. When women acknowledged that these labels had impacted their ability to lead, they were able to forge new, more true and empowering definitions for their lives and ministries.

It is also important that those who are in positions of authority recognize these leadership challenges in context. For instance, if a judicatory official hears a report that implies that a female pastor is being “abrasive,” it would be wise for that official to gather more information. Given the gender bias still at work in our culture that labels identical behaviors in women and men differently, an identical behavior in a male pastor that might be labeled “strong” is likely to be labeled in a woman as “abrasive.” Beyond

this reaction, it would also strengthen the church for such leaders to challenge the subtle sexism that motivates such evaluations that emerge in our use of language. Such conversations would be opportunities to expose the labeling of women for what it is: oppressive.

The labels that harm women are weapons of patriarchy, which aims at silencing the female voice. Sidonie Smith's research suggests that women who claim full human identity invite censure.¹⁸⁰ This certainly appears to be the case for women in this study. The notion of having to borrow identities is also linked to these clergy women feeling like they have to borrow space. The subtle and undeniable fact that these women attested to was that church leadership is a space claimed by patriarchy. When one woman stated that her goal was creating an environment of support for mission and for courageous leadership, she was saying that it is an altogether different kind of environment from that which she had experienced. The women in this study had a definite sense that their very presence as female and as pastor inserted friction into clergy environments that were all or predominately male.

According to research done in organizations, it is clear that diversity in leadership increases effectiveness. "Organizations that create a culture of equal opportunity are better able to attract, retain, and motivate the most qualified individuals. Reducing the obstacles to women's success also reduces the costs of retention. It increases employee morale, commitment, and retention, and decreases the expenses associated with

¹⁸⁰ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 7-8.

recruiting, training, and mentoring replacements.”¹⁸¹ Gender equity helps organizations be more effective. More women in leadership would help, not hurt, the Free Methodist Church, USA.

Healthy Relationships

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the women in this study emphasized the importance of relationships in their lives and ministry. Their relationships with their families, husbands, their clergy colleagues, those in authority over them, and those over whom they have authority were mentioned. The female pastors also accentuated that God and God’s action in their lives provided resources for surviving and thriving in ministry. There is recognition among women clergy that every opportunity that they had was a gift. They were grateful for being entrusted by the church to lead.

Those who had given opportunities to clergy women were male and female advocates. Mentors, senior pastors, and professors affirmed these women, their lives, their gifts, and their calls to lead. According to the women in this study, these relationships were decisive in their ministry trajectories.

Supportive Husbands and Families

Loyal and supportive husbands were these women’s greatest champions. One woman mentioned that she felt particularly blessed to have a husband who was willing to move in order to follow her calling. It is important to note that another woman would not have received an opportunity for a senior pastor position had it not been for her husband who was also a person of great influence in that conference. He opened the door for her.

¹⁸¹ Barbara Kellerman and Deborah L. Rhode, editors, *Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 16.

Four out of five women were raised in households with two parents. It is important to note that these female pastors had good models of marriage in their families of origin. They were raised to value marriage and displayed a commitment to building good marriages while serving as pastors. It also appears that these female pastors valued their role as mothers. They expressed concern that their children would grow up and leave the church because of damage caused by ministry. These fears have not yet materialized. The few adult children of the clergywomen also demonstrate love and dedication to the church.

It is also instructive that one woman assumed that because she was not either born or married into an influential family in the Free Methodist Church, USA, her opportunities would be limited. This came from her observation that most of the women who served as superintendent or who served churches of substantial size were the exceptional women who were well connected to an influential Free Methodist family. Three of the female pastors in this study mentioned how much they treasured the church as family. However, this close knit family feel can have an isolating effect on those who perceive themselves as being outsiders. It is possible that the close, connectional family atmosphere of the church prevents the church from seeing and investing in potential leaders who do not have pedigree.

Support Networks

Strong support networks are among the factors that prevent clergy burn-out. Isolation is an occupational hazard in ministry. It appears to be particularly true for clergywomen. Four women mentioned that there were seasons in ministry when they served in settings as the only or “token” female pastor. Being the only female pastor in a

town, a conference, a district, or on a board, was common for the women in this study. One woman mentioned feeling as though no one on a conference board knew her and that while serving on that board, she was underutilized.

In their work regarding excellence in the practice of ministry, Jones and Armstrong address friendship as a key element in clergy health. They state: “Holy friendships have a larger purpose beyond the friendship itself: holy friendships point us toward God. They allow us to discover and reveal the abundant grace of God at work in our lives and in the world.”¹⁸² These kinds of friendships are crucial to fruitful and sustainable ministry. Women must recognize how important a strong support system is and prioritize it as such. Being the only female in certain settings forced female pastors to be intentional about finding and cultivating friendships.

Self-Advocacy and Advocating for Other Women

The women in this study found it difficult to advocate for themselves and to advocate for other women. They had been told that this was selfish. In order for there to be pervasive culture change regarding gender in the Free Methodist Church, USA, this needs to change. It is important for female pastors to talk about gender-bias and to create safe environments for other, new, and younger women in ministry. There is no longer a place for women to opt out of discussions about gender equity. For instance, creating safe environments will require male and female leaders to recognize and correct language that is demeaning to women. Micro-aggression cannot be tolerated. Exclusively masculine language used by leaders needs to be examined and rectified. Female leaders who neglect to raise gender-related concerns have done so to avoid conflict. They do not want to be

¹⁸² Gregory L. Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 78.

labeled, dismissed, or censured. It is understandable that these women feel that “all too often, the risks outweigh the rewards.”¹⁸³ Yet, creating a new way forward means raising awareness, including acknowledging the language and practices that continue to marginalize women.

Among the main purposes of this study was to invite women who had all too often been silent to share their stories. As mentioned previously, it is in the telling of stories that women are strengthened. Furthermore, proclamation is built in to the call of pastoral ministry. Women tell stories about God’s action in our lives. These stories include, but are not limited to, matters of gender. Women are called to embody and proclaim the work of God in salvation for the world. The world needs this proclamation in female and male voices. The task is to give witness, male and female—in harmony—together.

Measure of Fruitfulness is Wholeness

Female pastors recognize that others may evaluate ministry in terms of church growth; however, they are more interested in wholeness. God provides all that is necessary for the needs of pastors and the needs of the church. Prayer expresses confidence that God can be trusted for power, guidance, clarity, life change, healing, stability in the life of ministry, and for discernment for times of decision. They want health and wholeness in their own lives and in their relationships with others. They have negotiated, sometimes floundering, as they bring their whole lives to God. They learn and grow and experiment along the way. Wholeness includes work-family balance for them and for those who serve with them in ministry. They long for congruence between who

¹⁸³ Kellerman and Rhode, *Women and Leadership*, 19.

they are as people and what they do as they function in ministry. This emphasis on wholeness challenges measuring success in ministry by numerical growth only. Shifting away from success in ministry defined as church growth to fruitfulness in ministry defined by healthy and whole people, healthy relationships, and healthy systems would benefit not only women but the church in general. Longevity in ministry is not possible if clergy consistently work between fifty and sixty hours a week.¹⁸⁴ Because of family demands, female pastors are unable to work such hours. Perhaps having those in leadership promoting self-care for clergy would benefit the whole church. Better balance between ministry and family could help all clergy, whether male or female. It is possible to reward and celebrate pastors who regularly practice Sabbath-keeping and retreating. It is possible for districts and conferences to fund sabbaticals for pastors. As Armstrong notes, this would be a “prime opportunity to expose church to capable clergywomen.”¹⁸⁵

Finally, healthy leaders will promote and produce healthy systems through the church. A church that operates out of strength and vitality, remembering that ultimately church and ministry belong to God, is healthy. In the event that wounds are discovered, health entails facing situations with integrity and grace. Perhaps, as a system, the church is ready to face wounds that have long been ignored.

Female Pastors’ Philosophy of Ministry

Early in their lives these women knew God to be active and present. Their early experiences of God through people, and at times in the absence of people, were

¹⁸⁴ For further analysis, see Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, Kindle Edition, 2012).

¹⁸⁵ Beth Armstrong, “Promoting Clergy Gender Equity: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of an Egalitarian Evangelical Denomination” (PhD. Diss., Gonzaga University, 2015), 221.

significant. These women were raised in the church and attest to being converted or making a decision to follow Jesus early in their lives. They spoke about church being home. They spoke of their most supportive relationships coming from those in their families of origins and from their church families. Some of their spiritual formation came through Sunday school teachers, pastors, and youth pastors. For instance, both Mae and Elyse had fond memories of being used of God in the lives of friends. It was in a youth group, being taught and mentored by a youth pastor, that these young women discovered that God would use them to lead others to Jesus.

The missional nature of the church was central for the female participants in the study. They expressed passionate concern for those who do not yet know Jesus and are not yet connected to the church. In conjunction with this passion was the priority of wholeness. A resounding thread through all of the stories was that pastors are called to lead the church in mission in the world. For these pastors, the church exists for those who are hopeless, marginalized, and not yet aware of the abundant life available in Jesus. The church was conceived of as a compassionate community offering the good news for a hurting world. Redemption and transformation was intended and offered to all. Therefore, the philosophy of ministry presented by the women in this study was one that paid particularly close attention to those who have the greatest need.

Evangelism and Compassion

A wide variety of methods or means of outreach were present in these women's stories. Three words appeared most often: present, compassion, and community. There were three participants who started ministries featuring this three-pronged focus. These creative initiatives were outside or alongside traditional church ministry. Observing a need and feeling called to meet the need, these female pastors courageously stepped into

grand challenges. One pastor commented, “It was there when I felt most alive and in touch with Jesus. This is the kind of creative embodied compassion for which I am wired.”

It is worth noting that two creative initiatives and one church planting project occurred during seasons in ministry when the participants were in transition. It is a possibility that the participants created their own opportunities after experiencing frustration with judicatory officials finding appropriate placements for them. It is also possible that after having been told in explicit and implicit ways that ministry among the marginalized was not important, these women decided to try it on their own. During one such season, one clergy woman remembered that her judicatory official made it clear in public that he did not understand what she was doing. His dismissive comment, “yeah, I just don’t get it” will ring in her memory for years to come. This pastor’s creative initiatives were not celebrated. Her story represents what can be observed in many other stories told by clergywomen. Lack of support communicated that she was not understood; she was an outlier in the system. She thus ended up calling herself a “rebel.” In several other cases, there was not substantial human or economic capital invested in projects of female pastors. This left them feeling ignored or under appreciated.

It is essential that the Free Methodist Church learn from these experiences. There are many gifted and passionate clergywomen who invest their lives in risky entrepreneurial ventures. According to the findings of this study, in the stories that were presented, these ventures were not celebrated and resourced. In the case referred to above, the conference, the clergy colleagues, and those in authority squandered an opportunity. This particular pastor is gifted in evangelism, leadership, and team building.

Gauging from her previous success in ministry leadership, this innovative church start not only needed to be understood, but celebrated and duplicated. The potential fruit of this ministry was unseen because of an insecure judicatory official, from the clergywoman's perspective. This clergywoman was dismissed because she was competent and presented a threat to higher level leadership. It is impossible to project how much and of what variety of fruit might have come from such a ministry if it had been celebrated and supported.

Secondary Positions

Previous research also showed that women in the ministry often occupy roles, such as associate pastor, youth pastor or children's pastor. This was consistent with the findings of this research project. Indeed, as stated in the previous chapter, it was difficult to find women who even qualified for this study because of a lack of senior pastor leadership experience. It was disappointing to even find that out of eighty women gathered for a denominational meeting held in Charlotte, North Carolina in April 2015, at the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Conference, there were only five who met the qualifying criteria for this study. The one criterion that disqualified the majority of the women was having experience as a senior or solo pastor. According to research, the percentage of women in solo and senior roles in the Free Methodist Church, USA, is actually decreasing as of late. In 1997, 20% of women reporting served in the role of senior or solo pastor. In 2015, 16% of women reporting served in the role of senior or solo pastor. Additionally, 19% of females in ministry report desiring a full-time position, but that a position was not available to them.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶Armstrong, "Promoting Clergy Gender Equity," 149ff.

The clergywomen themselves may not view their particular situations as the result of discriminatory practice, but what they are sure about is that they often feel isolated, feel unseen, feel unheard and feel underappreciated. These realities are heartbreaking and exemplify the “double sadness” that Creegan and Pohl addressed in their research of women in ministry.¹⁸⁷ The initial wound of being rejected is compounded by being silenced. However, the extraordinary part of these woman’s stories is that they did not choose to leave ministry. They lamented and grieved, but they also courageously persevered. Perhaps we will know we have reached a measure of wholeness in terms of gender equity when there is a “normalcy” regarding being female and being a pastor.

Ministry among the Disenfranchised

The Free Methodist Church vision statement is “to bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches.”¹⁸⁸ There are nine strategic priorities set forth by the church that will facilitate this vision becoming a reality. Two out of the nine speak directly toward multiplying, funding, and celebrating ministry initiatives to the poor and disenfranchised: “We will improve our reach to the poor and disenfranchised and create a normalcy for multicultural ministry by rewarding and celebrating churches that minister to the hurting, broken and people unlike themselves.”¹⁸⁹

Given the findings of this research, the Free Methodist Church, USA, will improve outreach to the world by better utilizing and resourcing the ministry initiatives of

¹⁸⁷ Nicola Hoggard Creegan and Christine D. Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 115.

¹⁸⁸ Free Methodist Church, USA, “Mission, Vision, Strategy,” accessed January 14, 2016, <http://fmcusa.org/missionvisionstrategy/>.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

clergy women, who most often find themselves in such ministries. The passion and experience of clergy women will benefit the church in meeting this goal. The converse is also possible. If women clergy, their passion, and experience are ignored or underutilized, then it is likely that the church will not improve in reaching the poor and disenfranchised because it is not supporting ministry of this kind that is already occurring through women clergy. Women need this to be a strategic priority of the church. At a fundamental level, this strategic priority ceases to be a strategic priority when the voices of women are ignored or silenced.

Creating Community

Along with making personal sacrifices in order to reach the poor and disenfranchised, the pastors in this study demonstrated a steep commitment to empowering others. Their stories show that they successfully created communities that rewarded and celebrated compassionate ministries. Those who create compassionate communities also multiply leaders who do the same. In advocating for resources for competent women who create and multiply compassionate communities, it may appear that this research is advocating for a gendered leadership which favors pigeonholing women into traditionally feminine roles. This is far from what this research suggests. There was a repeated theme of compassion, but this theme played out in a variety of ways. It would not be wise to assert that nurturing is a primary gift of these women or of clergywomen in general. They hold compassion as a primary characteristic of the church. The church as the people of God is a community of care.

In fact, having the role expectation of nurturer was a restriction that at least two of the participants in the study fiercely rejected. As the research of Lehman suggests, there is very little difference between men and women in terms of how they view their role as

pastor. The female and male pastors in his research show only minor differences in terms of style of leadership.¹⁹⁰

Recommendations

The church needs to hear these silenced stories. There is much to be learned from the lived experience of female pastors. The recommendations that emerge from this research fit into four imperatives: (1) the church must acknowledge that gender-bias remains; (2) the church must commit to creating an environment in which female pastors can be heard; (3) the church needs to aggressively resource female pastors; and finally, (4) the church needs to intentionally diversify mentorships.

(1) Acknowledge the Problem

Those in authority must recognize that their authority is both a gift and a responsibility. It is imperative that denominational executives humbly sit and listen to the stories of women clergy within their care. A basic assumption of this study was that female pastors find resistance to their leadership and this assumption was proved true in the lived experience of women in this study. Those who have power and privilege would do well to listen to the lived experience of women. After listening, there is a need to acknowledge that there is a problem and to confess culpability in it. If leaders do not understand the culpability of those in power within the institution, additional education may be necessary. Institutional change is possible as awareness of the problem increases. Awareness and confession alongside humbly listening to those who are impacted by injustice in the system begins the process of change. It is possible that there exist many

¹⁹⁰ For detailed analysis, see Edward C. Lehman, Jr. *Gender and Work: The Case of the Clergy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

potential advocates who are simply not aware that persistent barriers remain for women in the church. Female pastors need those in leadership to preach, teach and lead the church into a season of growing awareness of gender inequity that still exists. It will require compassionate listening along with bold communication regarding the existing egalitarian policy in order for change to come. It is the responsibility of those in leadership to set the course for future discussions and for creating an environment of support for female pastors.

(2) Environmental Change

Awareness needs to be a basis for environmental change that will make a tangible difference in the lives of female pastors. Several things may assist in changing the ministry environment of the Free Methodist Church, USA. There needs to be education regarding the power of language. Gender-biased language must be addressed directly, because it is formationally powerful. Exclusively masculine pronouns used for pastors needs to cease. This kind of micro-aggression must be noticed and corrected. Those in authority need to refrain from tactics such as shaming and humiliating as a means of training or disciplining pastors. In practical terms, this means that there must be advocates among the clergy that will speak up when damaging tactics are used against female pastors. Environmental change would include female clergy becoming more aware of their own gender bias and using their influence to advocate and empower others. According to the research, male advocates were especially crucial for the empowering of individual female pastors. In addition, male advocates that serve as superintendents and bishops have influence to make positive changes in a way that could change the whole church. Such leadership has the ability to create a culture where gender bias is readily

addressed and women feel empowered and honored. This research suggests that every male pastor, superintendent, and bishop, see it as his job to make room for and actively encourage the female leadership that already exists around him

Conferences can also make it a goal to equip committees that oversee female clergy to become safe environments where stories of pain and disappointment are heard. For instance, the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board may need to be trained by a Christian counselor or a spiritual director regarding patient listening and discernment. Skills such as empathy and coping with discomfort when listening to the pain of another can be learned. These skills would be extraordinarily helpful in creating an environment that is supportive of female pastors, as well as male pastors. Another possibility is to learn and implement a technique called “appreciative inquiry” that might replace the more problem-focused methods often used.¹⁹¹

The findings of this study suggest that the Free Methodist Church, USA, would be wise to intentionally create and develop environments that support women in leadership. For instance, the church needs to intentionally recruit and employ females in leadership roles. Educational institutions such as colleges and seminaries affiliated with the church need to make an intentional shift toward this as well. It is clear that the lack of examples of women in leadership generally reinforces the perception that women do not belong in leadership. It is possible that examples of strong women leaders in church and academia would expedite a cultural shift and result in young women having less trouble imagining themselves in leadership roles. This would include making room for their stories to be

¹⁹¹ For more information see: Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hope and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004); and Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

heard and responded to with respect. It would require intentionally inviting women into ministry, especially when they are young. As research suggests, women who struggle with accepting their call to ministry may not begin their ministry careers until mid-life. This means that female pastors may be significantly disadvantaged compared to male pastors, because female pastors do not have comparable years of experience to male pastors and are thus considered less desirable candidates for positions. This reality adds weight to the suggestion that institutions such as schools that are affiliated with the Free Methodist Church, USA, need competent strong women leaders in key positions.

(3) Aggressively Resource Female Pastors

Females who are called into the ministry require resources that are intentional in supporting them on numerous levels, especially in terms of networking and social support. Women may not realize that gender-bias has had an impact on them. They may struggle to identify their difficulties as gender related. Awareness of gender norming and the ill-effects of gender bias are difficult to negotiate, especially if the female pastor does not have female peers or mentors with whom she can process such experiences. As mentioned previously, women are not often given the tools to identify social and power dynamics related to gender. Subtle messages about gender were internalized by the women in this study. This norming was injunctive, meaning that it affected decisions even when the female pastor was not fully aware of it. It is not enough for a conference to offer occasional district meetings or resourcing days. Clergywomen need a variety of supportive networks. Superintendents and those who supervise female pastors need to recognize that support networks will be different for women in the ministry than for men,

because women clergy have some different needs than clergy males.¹⁹² Intentionality in providing a network of support for women is crucial.

Practically speaking, resources such as the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Conference must be promoted and scholarships need to be available to expedite women's attendance. New or young female pastors who move to a different conference need help finding and building support networks. In addition, conferences may consider providing a list of Christian counselors or spiritual directors for new pastors in their conferences. In conjunction with these efforts, those who are in authority over women in ministry need to encourage women to cultivate a small group of people who can support them in prayer and in processing the issues that they face. It is possible for these groups to cross denominational or conference lines. There is a paucity of women clergy in many locations. If a woman is serving in a geographic area that is sparsely populated, such as eastern Kentucky, then she may face a geographic barrier to cultivating and maintaining close friendships with other clergy women. Thankfully, communications technology can really help provide a means of connection for women in this situation.

Additionally, those who have authority over clergywomen must see that peculiar pressures exist for female pastors. Women may feel the demand to be "super mom" or "homemaker." They may be told directly or indirectly that serving as a senior pastor means that they are abandoning their families. Superintendents, Bishops, and committees who interview need to consider speaking to both men and women in the ministry about work and family balance. If committees are going to express concern about marriage and

¹⁹²Armstrong, "Promoting Clergy Gender Equality," 231-245.

family with female pastors, then it is also wise to express such concerns with male pastors. It is also important to have clearly stated maternity and paternity policies.

The action steps presented by Armstrong in this regard are excellent and timely. She suggests implementing women's leadership development initiatives and creating a center for gender equity.¹⁹³ From her research, she concluded that women have different leadership development needs than men. Furthermore, she advocates for more intentional resourcing of potential female leaders. She gives an example of a leadership program that includes bolstering courage and confidence in women and allowing the women an opportunity to see how they have been enculturated. Given the findings of this study, aggressively resourcing female leaders would advance gender equity in the church and would be good for the church.¹⁹⁴

(4) Arrange Mentorships

This leads to the suggestion that intentionality is necessary regarding both formal and informal networks of relationships. Here, the recommendation is that every leader should choose to support or mentor a person who is unlike himself or herself. It is a priority of the church to multiply leaders. This research presents the challenge that it is the default tendency for leaders to invest in emerging leaders who are demographically very similar to themselves. Thus, very intentional efforts must be made to call out and equip all who may be gifted and called to ministry, especially those unlike ourselves.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 231-245.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

This also brings to the fore an interesting matter of male-female mentor and collegial relationships. Close relationships such as these have long been discouraged because of fears of sexual impropriety. There needs to be more intentional training regarding healthy boundaries and ethical practices within such professional relationships. It is also necessary to broaden understanding about different structures and complexities within relationships between genders. Appropriate and respectful relationships are possible and need to be the goal, as is clear from the success of such relationships in other helping professions, such as medicine and counseling.¹⁹⁵ The practical impact of limiting male-female mentorships is that women will continue to have limited access to mentoring and leadership development. This is not acceptable. At all levels, male-female relationships should model Christ-like respect and love. To settle for less is to diminish women and men and the transformation that is possible in relationships as we enjoy everything that it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

Conclusion

.....It is important for the church to face gender bias that remains. In order for change to occur, there must be an acknowledgement that gender bias causes much pain for female pastors. There is great need to change the environment, to aggressively resource, and to arrange mentorships for women in church leadership. It is time for the church to grow into greater faithfulness regarding gender equity. This will result in greater health and effectiveness not only for women clergy, but for the Free Methodist Church, USA, as a whole. This is a wholeness that is intended by God for the church.

¹⁹⁵ It is instructive that other helping professions have established codes of ethics, so that appropriate boundaries are maintained in a way that does not preclude mentoring relationships with people of the opposite sex.

EPILOGUE

The stories of these female pastors had an enormous, positive impact on me. As the researcher, I warned those sharing their stories that they might experience emotional distress and most of them initially found this humorous. However, during certain interviews, there were tears on both sides, as the emotional distress impacted both the clergywoman and me as the researcher. I also wept as I watched, transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data.

There were several times that I prayed for simply the strength to be with these women in their stories in a way that honored their lives and ministries. I have been changed in a positive way in the process of doing this research. I am now able to notice more subtle forms of gender bias in my own life and relationships. I have been empowered to speak with grace and candor regarding matters of gender. These stories of courage, healing, perseverance, and humor have the power to change people and I believe that hearing such stories also can change the Free Methodist Church, USA. I feel privileged to have loved these women by allowing their stories to live.

APPENDIX 1
Consent Form for Interviews

Informed Consent

Introduction: My name is Roberta Mosier-Peterson, and I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Northeastern Seminary. I am conducting an ethnographic study for my ministry project. My telephone number is: (606)666-5422, ext. 164. Dr. Rebecca Letterman is my project advisor and her phone number is: (585)594-6572.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to examine the life stories of clergywomen serving within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. It is my goal to investigate how clergywomen negotiate their ministry roles and gender roles.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be asked to provide your life story as a clergywoman. I will make a video or audio recording of this. There will be a few brief follow-up questions. A transcript of your life story will be available to you upon request.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours. Follow-up interactions will require 2-3 hours.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this interview. However, it is possible that you might feel distress in the course of the conversations. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your story of being a clergywoman. It is possible that you will also gain valuable insight about your ministry and life. It is my intention that these life stories will benefit those who participate as well as the church in general. My hope and prayer in this is that there will be increased awareness and dialogue about the practice of ministry by clergywomen.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the recording and the only person who reviews/transcribes. In the written portion of the study, I will use pseudonyms as well unless directed otherwise.

If you wish to choose your own pseudonym for the study, please indicate the first name you would like me to use for you here: _____ .

Sharing the results: I plan to construct a written account of what I learn. This will be submitted to the DMIN dissertation committee at Northeastern Seminary.

Publication: There is the possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

Before you sign:

By signing below, you are agreeing to a video or audiotaped interview for this research study. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

Participant's signature: _____ Date:

Print Name:

Researcher's signature: _____ Date:

Print Name:

APPENDIX 2

Follow-Up Questions

If participants did not provide basic biographic information, they may be asked to answer the following questions. This may include: birthplace, birthdate, information about parents, early experiences of God, college, marriage, children, and call to ministry story.

Questions about functioning as a female pastor:

1. Are there expectations or demands placed on you as a pastor that are peculiar to your gender?
2. What Biblical image for being a pastor most resonates with your life and experience?
3. What criteria do you use to evaluate your own success or fruitfulness?
4. What are insights that have helped you negotiate challenges and conflicts peculiar to being a female pastor?

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