

DREW UNIVERSITY

AN A.C.T OF FEAR:
THE MOTIVATION OF WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

AN A.C.T. OF FEAR:

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Good policy begins with meaningful research. This research aims to create a model for womanist leadership which interrogates the experience of fear as a motivational tool. What does it look like for deeply convicted, unapologetic, women to eradicate the blurred lines between *who we are* and *what we do*? How do we acknowledge, but not cower to, the fear inducing intricacies of being both women and leaders in a male dominated field? How do women in leadership move past the crippling nature of fear to understand it as a part of our human existence? This study reveals how acknowledging fear and confronting perceived social limits transforms fear into a constructive tool for molding a triumphant life of confident productivity. Thus, female Christian leadership is an A.C.T. (acknowledging, confronting, and triumphing) over fear.

Though the outcome of this study benefits all women in leadership, it focuses on the testaments of female leaders who also happen to be African American and Latina. The peculiarity of our existence as leaders offers an extreme capable of informing the general. For instance, consider the descriptor “assertive.” Generally, leadership requires assertiveness; however, when this quality is exhibited by women it is often labeled “domineering,” or “overzealous.” This is a common experience for African American women. Our assertiveness is not just domineering and overzealous, it is labeled “angry” and “aggressive.” These labels do not consider our life experiences which often led us

into historical, ethnical and societal exile. The testimonies of the African American and Latina women in leadership interviewed for this study demonstrate how our challenges, weaving a thread of resilience through each experience and reshaping our attitude concerning fear, uniquely prepare African-American and Latina women to handle the demands of responsibility and accountability while assertively leading others.

Further, each interviewee's ability to share their intimate stories without resentment/anger/bitterness establishes a deeper awareness of what it means to lead as women in a male-dominated society. The inherent force within these African American and Latina women fuels their purposeful navigation through fear and opposition toward selflessness. In the words of the late Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, "What does one do when told that our refusal to split, to dichotomize from God's presence in the daily fabric of our communal lives makes us a liability to civilization?" The women interviewed for this study answer by defiantly embracing their vocation to lead and confidently refusing to be silent when their voices need to be heard.

These women, chosen by God to lead, represent womanism at its finest. Because of their faith in divine providence, they are determined to destroy the wall of androcentric dominance, brick by brick. Circumstances no longer define them. Instead resiliency inflames each woman, while passion and academic prowess qualifies their *call to lead*.

Bolstered by the testimonies of these incredible women, I was led to develop the A.C.T. of Fear Project. This project is designed to provide safe spaces for women in leadership to explore the themes of exile, assertiveness, vocational confidence and womanism. There are several ways in which it will accomplish this goal. First, by utilizing the stories made available through this research as case studies for small groups of women

in leadership to discuss and glean. Secondly, the small groups will become an impetus through which additional stories of resilience are acquired – ensuring this research remains on-going. The additional stories will be compiled in an A.C.T. of Fear Devotional Journal enabling the world-wide multiplication of safe spaces for women in leadership to discuss their shared experiences and for future leaders to glean from their shared wisdom. The long-term expectation is the eventual assembly of women from around the world for the A.C.T. of Fear Conference during which the women who started it all will have the opportunity to directly impart their theories and stories of womanist leadership.

DEDICATION



To my son, Lamont, you have been my source of strength during a challenging time of our lives. I am so thankful to God for blessing me with such an amazing, sensitive and loving young man. Your encouragement and support inspired me to complete this project.
Love you forever!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate my thesis in memory of my parents Bishop Andrew James Ford, Sr. and Elrita Coaxum Ford. My parents were influential in bringing me to a redeeming knowledge of Jesus Christ. They devoted their lives to living out the gospel daily. Their selfless humility, willingness to go above and beyond to help others, consistent prayer life and remarkable resilience during so many losses are character traits I graciously model in my own life. Many lives were transformed and blessed by their incredible fortitude of service to God. I admired their unconditional love for each other which sustained them through the good times and the hard times. They were constant in their example of a Godly couple who exemplified a visual image of “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death we do part.”¹ My mother was the wind beneath my father’s wings. When she departed first, my father was never the same. Two years after his death, I resolve that he passed because of a broken heart – what a testament of unceasing love for God and love for each other.

I also dedicate this thesis in memory of my late sister-in-love, Jean Carol Murphy-Ford who left us too soon. I will always remember, “*Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me² ...It’s only a shadow.*” Since her passing, our family has never been the same.

To my two siblings, Steven (Debbie); Dolores (my ride or die); Courtney, Shanelle (my daughter from another mother), Syreeta (Tim), Niecy (Leroy), A.J., Aaron, Brielle,

¹ Sidney F. Batts, *The Protestant Wedding Sourcebook: A Complete Guide for Developing Your Own Service* (Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 53.

² Psalm 23:4 (KJV).

Britney, Drew, Logan and Pepe. Thank you for your love, encouragement and support. *We all we got!*

Many thanks to the Lay Advisory Committee for their support and guidance; Rev. Dr. Terry Todd for helping a *sistah* out (insider); Dr. Susan Kendall, for her critical wit and pastoral expertise throughout my journey; Latonya Moore, my editor, words are inadequate to express my appreciation for your professional and spiritual insight (*thanks for your encouragement and for praying me off the cliff*); Pastor Patricia Williams for providing much needed guidance during a very stressful process; Rev. Dr. Marsha Brown-Woodard, my mentor and voice of reason throughout my journey of academia; Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne, your still small voice kept me balanced during the raging storms of my life; Rev. Gail Johnson, what can I say, *my sister for life*; Rev. Beverly Hudson, there are no adequate words to describe our connection; Bishop Hazel Mack, a prayer warrior personified, and my constant strong shoulder to lean on; Lady Beverly Bragg, your unwavering patience with me will never be forgotten; Lady Sheila Montgomery, every prophetic utterance, prayer and word of encouragement kept me sane; Bishop Douglas Williams, you will never know how much you mean to me; the late Apostle Robert Evans, who saw in me what I didn't see in myself and it transformed my life; to the many church mothers and fathers who helped me get where I am today; to Serenity Christian Worship Center for their patience and support during my project completion; and lastly, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for granting me the ability to stay the course and complete another phase of what you have begun in me. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

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INTRODUCTION: Why This Project?

I've mastered the art of wearing the "mask." In public I teach, preach and lead as the "mask" conceals my insecurities. It grants me the ability to stand before people, say the right things, and smile all while fighting back tears. However, as I retreat to my quiet place where the "mask" is momentarily stripped away, reality awaits me. I question, "Is this truly who I am? Am I sure of this? In which direction is my life moving?" It is during these moments that I reflect on a conversation concerning my call to the ministry. A distinguished teacher and pastor asked me this question, "*Is your passion about the call or the vision?*" I answered, "*The call.*" He responded, "*Good answer because the vision will come.*"

This study (and the consequential development of the A.C.T. of Fear Project) is evidence of the truth he shared with me that day. Giving witness to my fears and modeling my commitment to traverse them manifested the vision to invite my group of sisterhood leaders to interrogate their fears and inhibitions. My quest is the beginning of a transformational/relational engagement which leads outward to others embarking on their leadership passage. Its aim is to assist female leaders in recognizing that our inadequacies are not merely "aha" moments which unexpectedly flash in our subconscious thinking. Our recognition of them gives us a choice. We can choose to succumb to the limits our inadequacies imply or discover and harness the power they conceal.

Jodi Detrick shares a message to all women who aspire to make a difference in the lives of others. "Leadership for women comes with its own unique set of challenges and

struggles. There are potholes, dead-ends, and dangerous curves galore on this journey.”³ The journey of vision fulfillment is interconnected with an abundance of patience, endurance, and risk-taking. Though these are tensions, through them is a practical reality worth pursuing. Overcoming fear while traversing the road to leadership is an ongoing process. For some, the transformation can be swift, and with others a life sentence. I must confess that throughout my journey, as my hand is attached to my wrist, “fear” has been my friend; it’s abiding presence only intensified by the plethora of exciting dynamics which push against societal norms being a woman in leadership present.

Various cultural norms have changed and so too have the roles afforded to women in leadership. For decades female Christian leaders were confined to a single area of ministry – Christian Education. Despite these societal limits, female leaders discovered how to optimize and use to our advantage the prescribed roles assigned to us. This optimization made women, once viewed as inadequate, examples of the type of creative ingenuity modern leadership roles require. Many women are now out of the box and are helping men to think broadly regarding ministry. Liberation has prevailed and women now serve in various leadership capacities including various forms of ministerial leadership.

Having earned this authority, how do we continue to lead while acknowledging there are still societal stressors which are specific to women? What do those stressors do to and for us? How can we remain true to ourselves and our womanhood while overcoming those stressors and walking in leadership? These questions remain

³ Jodi Detrick, *The Jesus-Hearted Woman, 10 Leadership Qualities for Enduring and Endearing Influence* (Missouri: Influence Resources, 2013), 12.

unanswered. However, to function successfully in ministry one must engage this personal and profound invasion into the existential journey of grappling with unknowns.

For women of faith, especially in Christian leadership, engagement requires us to overcome the nuances and emotions associated with this invasion by recognizing there is strength in weakness. It is the kind of strength needed to break with tradition; a tradition that says women are substandard and African American women are doubly so. Consequentially, deciding to stand at the helm as an African American clergywoman, defies traditionalism at its core. How can an African American woman – with her perceived limits connected not only to her gender, but also to her race – have the audacity to proclaim, *"I am one who has been summoned by God, to carry the gospel, to lead others, to give hope to the hopeless and be the voice for the voiceless?"*

From a personal perspective, this kind of strength only comes through close personal encounters with the Divine. Further, the transparency exhibited by the interviewees in this study exposes a similarity among female Christian leaders. Their similarities create a motif of emboldening encounters with the Divine. Indeed, every encounter with the Divine engenders courage. However, for clergywomen courage is fundamental in both developing and claiming a sense of self. Facing fear cultivates leadership skills, while triumphing over fear provides clergywomen with the validation integral to responding to and accepting a call to lead. Therefore, the A.C.T. of Fear Project (developed as a result of this study) is designed to be a catalyst for facing fear in the pursuit of a Holy vocation.

This study has already benefited a group of female leaders serving the ministry of Serenity Christian Worship Center as they pursue their vocation as clergywomen. For

them the A.C.T. of Fear Project has been both imperative and informative. In a season of societal and clerical freedom for women, the Project is imperative as a tool in the bout against fear; a fight exasperated by the ongoing challenge women in corporate America have breaking the “glass ceiling.” Though these societal stressors add to the frustration, discouragement and sense of failure for women in ministry, this study provides examples of lived-out experiences. Interviewees shared their experiences to empower other women who struggle with the *call* to finally reconcile with moving forward in their corridor of leadership. The Project uses these stories for that exact reason. Small group participants view these stories as parables reflecting the shared reality. The discussion which ensues forces the participants out of their perceived leadership exile into a community of women embracing their roles as leaders. The Project is also informative, clarifying that liberation for women in Christian leadership is not designed to usurp authority or dismiss the biblical principle of God’s order for humankind. Instead this study displays how women of faith are enhanced, giving credence and value to the affirming power of the Holy Spirit who enables women to “raise their voices like a trumpet.”⁴ Instead of silenced, those voices are recorded for the publication of the A.C.T. of Fear Journal. As a part of the Project, the Journal which will inform the posterity of women in leadership and alter how they engage the perceived dichotomy between womanhood and leadership.

In *The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions* (2005), “British researchers Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam discovered that women were more often promoted into leadership when the deck

⁴ Isa. 58:1 (NRSV).

was stacked against them.”⁵ Could this be interpreted as entrapment? If so, the research ironically demonstrates women prevailing instead of failing. Some of these women even knew the odds were stacked against them but, as confident leaders, they willingly entered the process without considering failure as an option. The research reveals a similar determination among women in pastoral leadership who face the same kinds of scrutiny. They were weighted by the unfair bias of their perceived limits, placed in situations their male counterparts would deem unfavorable, but they succeed anyway because they persist with confidence.

For female clerics to prevail we must be confident in who we are and clear in our conviction: God calls us to leadership. Confidence and clarity make it impossible for us to be confined or defined by the thoughts and opinions of others. Purpose insulates us, redirecting entrapments to make us better not bitter. The beckoning “to lead” overwhelms barriers, freeing us to embrace who we were called to be – leaders. As courage replaces constant trepidation, we boldly proclaim “Failure is not Final.”

I am a witness, through my own story, of the transformative power of engaging with the tensions of fear and courage, of being a woman and being a leader. I am humbled to be one God has chosen and honored to be entrenched in ministry during a period of perimeter expansion; during a time of evolution when females in leadership are no longer *seen and not heard* but *seen and heard*. However, I’ve also navigated the barriers resulting from a static state of evolution in many denominations. These experiences uniquely qualify me to truthfully address the seemingly insurmountable fear

⁵ Stephanie Voza, “Solve Female Lead, Solving The Hidden Challenges Women in Leadership Face,” last modified February 26, 2018, <https://www.fastcompany.com/3031374/solving-the-hidden-challenges-women-in-leadership-face>.

associated with responding to a call to lead while exhorting other women leaders to no longer allow fear to repress the power within them.

It is from this vantage that I presume to speak on behalf of many women called to lead in pastoral ministry. I can address how fear, left to metastasize like cancer, can so permeate our thinking that we become consumed by feelings of inadequacy. *Who will listen to what I have to say? What do I have to offer anyone? On whose authority am I speaking?* My hyperfocus on these kinds of questions turned my mind into a kind of psychological war zone. Other women in leadership have engaged in the same mental battle. Winning a war this intense, this personal, requires an intensive and expanded understanding of brave women who have lived with, triumphed and understood their fear. In fact, their fear has served as a catapult and a springboard to achieve greatness. As a result, they lead with confidence.

To harness this greatness, I invited seven courageous women who serve in Christian leadership to participate in an ethnographical study. Their vocations include lead pastor, academic professor, life coach, therapist, and entrepreneur. To conduct the study, I interviewed these women because of who they are. Further, the call they honor supports my primary thesis as all are active in leadership and ministry. Each of these women leads in a different context with a unique point of view and all of them are public figures, dedicated to empowering others. All the women attend different churches, but have become acquaintances through the interviews. To discuss their varied experiences in leadership I obtained permission to use their names and quotes from approved consent forms. Each participant was candid in providing information about personal experiences from humble beginnings to the present. The specific questions are in the appendices. My

emphasis was to hear their story of finding both voice and agency as they began to honor their call. Further, these stories mapped a course for the A.C.T. of Fear Project which aids female leaders in transforming their fears into empowering motivational tools through small group discussions, the sharing of new stories, and the eventual large scale gathering.

In summary, this study includes a fundamental quantifiable design requiring exclusive interviews to explore fear as a concept and feeling. The technique used was audio recorded interviews lasting forty-five minutes to one hour. Afterwards, I transcribed the meetings and included personal quotes in the study. Through dialogue my intent was to encourage interviewees to explore with me their perspectives, their particular frames of reference, and their personal stories of fear. This study is a tribute to all women who will interrogate their intimate stories of fear understanding that resentment can lead to greater fear, while a deeper awareness enhances authority.

CHAPTER ONE FEAR FACTOR

What is a fear of living? It's being preeminently afraid of dying. It is not doing what you came here to do, out of timidity and spinelessness. The antidote is to take full responsibility for yourself – for the time you take up and the space you occupy. If you don't know what you're here to do, then do some good.

Maya Angelou⁶

HELLO FEAR

Fear is a necessary part of human survival. To be human is to experience anxiety which, if ignored, results in emotional or mental strain. Conversely, developing a relationship with fear can be a productive experience when constructively integrated into one's socialization. In other words, consider the possibility of being in a long term, faithful relationship with fear and purposely inquiring of its purpose. Accepting fear as a cause of anxiety while pondering its intent can be useful. Such a process creates a path to transforming anxiety and tension into patience – an optimum condition for the production of self-awareness, resilience and courage.

In 2001 an American game show entitled “Fear Factor” debuted. Each week a riveting pulse-racing episode featured contestants (couples, best friends, siblings or singles) recruited from all parts of the country. The show was designed to test the willpower and endurance of each person while facing their most primal fears. Aided by gameshow staffers, each contestant was given a sequence of over-the-top maneuvers to complete. Participants would advance only if they were able to complete the next most fearful task. Those participating who were unable to advance were overcome by fear of

⁶ Frank Johnson, *The Very Best of Maya Angelou: The Voice of Inspiration* (New York: Ben Berber Publisher, 2014), 3.

the obstacle or task which confronted them. Finally, there was a prize for the winning contestant who was able to meet and overcome every fear inducing task.

In real life, getting to the prize at the end of an inexhaustible list of fears seems implausible. Daily we are bombarded with a litany of historical events which only add to our anxiety. The United States of America cannot ignore the terror attacks of 9/11, especially as media outlets constantly remind us of the unceasing War on Terror. Financially, the volatility of the Dow Jones is a stressor for stock investors while the economic recession continues to affect the real estate market. The opioid epidemic has surged to disproportionate levels ravaging families and diminishing confidence in doctors and their ability to appropriately prescribe medications. The news reports hundreds of stories about pedophilia in our religious and educational institutions, increasingly weakening the faith churchgoers once had in religious leaders. The problem with this unending list of fear inducing troubles is that fear triggers our survival instinct. When in danger, our survival instinct impairs reason. Impelled by unreasonable fear, chaos ensues. “Irrational fear is running amok, and often with tragic results. In the months after 9/11 when people decided to drive instead of fly – believing they were avoiding risk; road deaths rose by 1,595. Those lives were lost to fear.”⁷

Why are we so afraid? Ulrich Beck, the German sociologist and professor at the London School of Economics offers his opinion on terror.

We are more afraid than ever because we are more at risk than ever. Technology is outstripping our ability to control it. The environment is collapsing. Social pressures are growing. The threat of cataclysm looms and people, like deer catching a scent of approaching wolves sense the danger.⁸

⁷ Daniel Gardner, *Why Do We Fear The Things We Shouldn't and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger - The Science of Fear* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008), 2.

⁸ Ibid.

In the years following the 9/11 tragedy, social media provided the means to illicit and escalate fear with specificity by exploiting ethnic and cultural differences. Guilty of publicizing both fact and fiction as fact, social media played a major role in influencing an already fearful society. A 2005 Gallup Poll (U.S.) surveying a national group of teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 questioned what they most feared? The answers varied but were not limited to spiders, death, war, and criminal or gang violence. What they feared the most was terrorist attacks, the future, being all alone and nuclear war.

Scientifically, it is interesting how the human brain perceives threats. Paul Slovic and Daniel Kahneman made several discoveries involving the human mind using two systems of thought labeled System One and System Two.

System Two is Reason. It works slowly. It examines the evidence. It calculates and considers. When Reason makes a decision, it's easy to put into words and explain. System One is Feeling. Unlike Reason, it works without our conscious awareness and it is as fast as lightning. Feeling is the source of the snap judgments that we experience as a hunch or an intuition or as emotions like unease, worry, or fear. A decision that comes from Feeling is hard or even impossible to explain in words. You don't know why you feel the way you do, you just do.⁹

Slovic and Kahneman concluded that most people function on the System One barometer of Feeling. This system is not always the most rational. Conclusions and objectives formed/framed within this system are usually based in wrong assumptions. System One conveys to an individual that something is a threat but bases its notion of the threat on information "I heard about, watched on

⁹ Daniel Gardner, *Why Do We Fear The Things We Shouldn't and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger - The Science of Fear* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008), 16.

television, or social media.” Without thorough evaluation, one assumes the worst and the internal alarm is triggered causing fear.

To be clear, circumstances and situations occur which substantiate feelings of danger and incite fear.

While extremely beneficial in conditions where the threat of direct harm occurs, it is the most draining and treacherous of emotions when presented needlessly. The Industrial Revolution granted humans a new sense of safety from the perils our ancestors confronted concerning the natural world. But as humanity's fear of our environment has decreased, many other concerns have developed to fill the void.¹⁰

Some of these fears are justified reactions to actual threats. However, some, as Slovic and Kahneman’s Two Systems suggests, are responses to imagined things, thus making intimidation the perfect manipulative device in dominating others. After all, “fears are educated into us and can, if we wish, be educated out.”¹¹

An example of this miseducation is depicted in the financial profit of home security businesses. Fear sells. “In 2018, forty-three percent of U.S. households had at least one gun in possession.”¹² Home security system advertisements permeate our media platforms and help to create narratives of imminent danger, thereby increasing both fear and profit as consumers seek to protect themselves. Fearful individuals hope to assuage their anxiety by controlling their environment and are willing to buy anything which elicits the feeling of safety even if it does nothing for their actual safety.

¹⁰ “Fear and Social Control,” Academy of Ideas, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://academyofideas.com/2015/11/fear-and-social-control/>.

¹¹ Gavin De Becker, *The Gift of Fear and Other Survival Signals That Protect Us From Violence* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 292.

¹² “Crime, and Law Enforcement – Gun Ownership in the U.S. 1972 – 2018,” The Statistics Portal, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/249740/percentage-of-households-in-the-united-states-owning-a-firearm/>.

Broadcasting networks gain revenue through on-air advertising. The “crowding in” of the information marketplace means the competition for eyes and ears is steadily intensifying. “The media turn to fear to protect shrinking market shares because a warning of mortal peril – ‘A story you can’t afford to miss!’ is an excellent way to get someone’s attention.”¹³

POWER OF FEAR

Fear is a force which influences society’s view of gender. In the words of Margaret Atwood, “We still think of a powerful man as a born leader and a powerful woman as an anomaly.”¹⁴ In gender cultivation, men tend to view fear as a sign of softness which violates the social expectations of men and boys to be healthy, fearless, and convincing. Males are instructed to conquer and control fear instead of embracing and confronting it. Controlling the feelings of fear without confronting the source of fear is the impetus of toxic masculinity and produces male leaders who utilize fear tactics such as cynicism, intimidation, anxiety, and distrust. The result can be poisonous to any organization or team.

Further, the repression of women stems from the same source: the male desire for conquest and power. The social and cultural roots associated with maintaining the patriarchy often outweigh the relatively respectful relationships men have with their mothers, daughters, and wives. Outside of familial constructs, an assertive woman who is unyielding and unwilling to be subservient is a nemesis. The male authority must “put her

¹³Daniel Gardner, *Why Do We Fear The Things We Shouldn’t and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger - The Science of Fear* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008), 14.

¹⁴ Margaret Atwood, “On Sexism,” accessed December 3, 2018, <https://forwardforty.com/archive/margaret-attwood-quotes/>.

in her place," often rendering her submissive through fear. If she fearlessly combats this act of intimidation, society deems her assertiveness and resilience as unwarranted.

In fact, the history of our humanity asserts that men are THE authoritative figures needed to control our world. Conversely, it deems emotionality, a trait typically assigned to women, as weakness. Therefore, prior to the Second World War, the idea of women working outside the home was not viewed favorably. Instead, the role of homemaker and nurturer was delegated to most women in America. The women who did have the opportunity to work outside of the home were relegated to a few positions such as department store clerks, receptionists and secretaries. Statistically, the data confirming women in the workplace during the nineteenth and early twentieth century appears scarce. "Women's work was often not included within statistics on waged work in official records, altering our perspective on the work women undertook. Often women's wages were thought of as secondary earnings and less important than men's wages even though they were crucial to the family's survival."¹⁵ However, when the United States went to war, the men were called to serve their country, presenting an opportunity for women to work in military and civilian jobs.

The call for working women was meant to be temporary and women were expected to leave their jobs after the war ended. Some women were okay with this - but they left their posts with new skills and more confidence. Women who remained in the workplace were usually demoted. But after their selfless efforts during World War II, men could no longer claim superiority over women. Women had enjoyed and even thrived on a taste of financial and personal freedom - and many wanted more.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Women and Work in the Nineteenth Century," Striking Women/Women and Work, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/19th-and-early-20th-century>.

¹⁶ Annette McDermott, "How World War II Empowered Women," History.com, accessed May 3, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/how-world-war-ii-empowered-women>.

Men returned from the war to a new reality – they would have to compete with women for the acquisition of jobs. If they lost their place of power in the workplace how could they maintain their power in the home? Men tended to debate this moral dilemma among other men. Without any true opposition, they were able to confirm their own bias: a working woman is a threat to the cultural construct. A woman in leadership is a threat to our moral fiber and should be thwarted at all costs.

Psychologists call this confirmation bias. We all do it. Once a belief is in place, we screen what we see and hear in a biased way that ensures our views are "proven" correct. Psychologists have also discovered that people are vulnerable to something called group polarization – which means that when people who share beliefs get together in groups; they become more convinced that their beliefs are right, and they become more extreme in their views. Put confirmation bias, group polarization, and culture together, and we start to understand why people come to entirely different views about which risks are frightening and which aren't worth a second thought.¹⁷

FEAR FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN

Moral anxiety occurs when an inaccurate depiction is consistently promoted with an aim to construct narratives of fear. Fear emphasizes stereotypes and aggravates pre-existent divisions often founded in class, race, and ethnicity.

Slavery is one of the most vivid portraits of moral anxiety. Fueled by the threat of lost control, slave owners dehumanized black people and justified their subjugation by promoting the narrative of slaves being only “three-fifths of a white person when Electoral College votes were apportioned.”¹⁸

Further, our subjugation was not merely justified, but deemed necessary. Ingrained within this narrative was the threat which accompanied any loss of control: a savage slave revolt amplified by the catastrophic loss of white lives.

¹⁷ Daniel Gardner, *Why Do We Fear The Things We Shouldn't and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger - The Science of Fear* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008), 15.

¹⁸ Horace Campbell, *Barack Obama And 21st Century Politics* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 89.

Ruling classes for thousands of years have understood the power of intentionally invoking fear in their subjects as a means of social control. Henri Frankfort, in his book *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* note that between 1800 and 1600 BC a fear psychosis spread through Ancient Egypt, precipitated by the invasion of foreign rebels hungry for power and conquest. Initially, this fear psychosis was justified by a real threat, yet even when these foreigners have successfully driven far away from Egypt, the ruling powers sought to artificially maintain fear among the population – realizing that a fearful populace is easier to control than a fearless one.¹⁹

Among this dehumanized mass were African American. It is difficult to imagine the continual repulsive and degrading treatment enslaved women endured at the hands of fear fueled slave owners. However, our foremothers, like Harriet Jacobs, left behind sacred stories which illustrate the impact of living in the midst of this destructive exploitation. In her slave narrative she writes,

The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. He was a crafty man and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him – where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter where the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men.²⁰

Nowhere is the impact of repressive exploitation more vividly displayed than in the lives of African American women. We have been especially acclimatized to submission. "By a sort of common national consent, she has had no place in the Republic of free and

¹⁹ Dolan Cummings, "Political Philosophy - Fear and Social Control," accessed December 10, 2018, <https://academyofideas.com/2015/11/fear-and-social-control/>.

²⁰ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2018), 36-37.

independent womanhood of America. Slavery left her in social darkness, and freedom has been slow in leading her into the daylight of the virtues.”²¹ The intersectionality between gender and race theorizes a specific understanding of the continuing oppression of African American women and explains the continuing diminishment of our perceived ability to achieve conventional success. Consequently, the standard of socioeconomic development and political consciousness in the free world seems hypocritical for African American women. Centuries of oppression and degradation have cemented in us a type of inferiority syndrome. Therefore, we are constantly nagged by the internal dialogue which tells us we are not good enough: our skin color too dark, our physique too rotund, our voices too loud. Validating our internal dialogue are the subtle and consistent social reminders of diminished worth which corroborate our feelings of inferiority and fuel the fear that acceptance as an equal is unattainable.

Body image and beauty among African American women can only be truly understood within a framework of interlocking systems of “isms” – (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism). According to Black feminist theory, the devaluation of US Black women is rooted in the institution of American slavery. Others profit from black bodies for pleasure without recourse or protection. During the slave era negative, controlling images of Black women emerged.²²

During the segregation era, African-American people were held to be substandard to White people in a similar way that women were considered subordinate to men. “The

²¹ J. B. Gibson, *Progress of a Race: Or, The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro From the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance, and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor, and Trust* (Georgia: J. L. Nichols & Co., 1902), 197.

²² Germiné H. Awad, Carolette Norwood, Desire S. Taylor, Mercedes Martinez, Shannon McClain, Bianca Jones, Andrea Holman, and Collette Chapman-Hilliard. “Beauty and Body Image Concerns Among African American College Women.” *Journal of Black Psychology* 41, no. 6 (December 2015): 540–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798414550864>.

Black women began her life of freedom with no vote, no protection, and no equity of any sort. Black women, young and old, were basically on their own.”²³ Though free, African American women experience the added difficulty of discovering our race omitted us from full entitlement to our femininity.

The vast majority of antebellum black women were impoverished or enslaved and thus could not retreat to the home or expect to lead sheltered lives as wives and mothers. Instead, they worked as men, received no protection from sexual exploitation and assault, and were branded immoral, unwomanly, and naturally lewd, mainly as a result of conditions in which they were forced to live.²⁴

Consequently, African American women do not appropriate the female archetype. This often equates to us being excluded from the exploration of gender unfairness. Plainly stated, when people examine “women's issues,” the focus is on White women. Further, if the discussion focuses on “racial issues” and the examination of racial prejudice, the consideration is on Black men. Black women fall through the cracks because of our lower-ranking in multiple classifications of group identity.

The idea of Black women having to persistently navigate life as a member of two diminished groups is the epitome of the “double jeopardy hypothesis”²⁵ and creates a monoculture of invisibility. This structure of discrimination is not necessarily experienced by White women or Black men. “Their presence is more likely to go unnoticed and their voice more likely to go unheard. To stand out and voice their opinions, Black women have to work even harder than their fellow Black men or White women counterparts.”²⁶

²³ Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon - Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 51.

²⁴ Mia Bay, *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 77.

²⁵ A. K. Sesko and M. Biernat, “Prototypes of Race and Gender: The Invisibility of Black Women,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46, (2010) 356-360.

²⁶ Ibid.

Succinctly put, women of color continuously endure tests of faith and perseverance. According to Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, “African American women survived systems that were intentionally designed to silence and render us docile and obedient, in every sense of the word. These systems were designed to strip us of our humanity, to strip us of our capacity to love and be loved, to strip us of our will to know and be known.”²⁷ Humiliation and helplessness are the constructs of debilitating fear and stops forward progression. Goals stagnate as dreams are left unfulfilled. The ongoing mental scuffle with fear and inferiority silences self-affirmation and propagates negative mental clamor: “You are not good enough!” “You do not have what it takes!” “No one will listen.” As a result, procrastination continues, and the body dies.

That sounds hopeless, but Delores S. Williams, an early African American womanist theologian and professor emerita of “Theology and Culture” at Union Theological Seminary offers another perspective in her award-winning classic, *Sisters in the Wilderness*. In her writing Williams focuses on the biblical narrative of Genesis 16 and argues that Hagar is a prototype for the struggle of African-American women. Intertwining our history of survival with biblical history inspires and gives credence to “the indomitable spirit of Black women and our seemingly limitless quest for and ability to create hope.”²⁸

The biblical text’s hope in correlation to the plight of African-American women is not easily surmised when “it is apparent that exegetes have interpreted Hagar’s anger toward Sarai in Genesis 16:45 with regard for a patriarchal value system operative in the

²⁷ Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades of Purple – Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 132.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

world of these slaveholders – a system that puts final authority in the hands of men like Abram."²⁹ However, if we gaze through the lens of Hagar, the Egyptian slave, “it can be interpreted as an instance clearly illustrating the right of ownership and domination patriarchal law provided for one class of females (such as Sarai, the slaveholder) over another class of females (such as Hagar, the slave).”³⁰ It is here that we abandon the patriarchal devaluing of a woman through sexism and encounter the devaluing of human life, through classism and racism.

In the biblical narrative, Sarai is unable to conceive children and uses Hagar as a surrogate. Because Hagar is considered to be subservient and dominated, Sarai (her slave master) feels free to “give” Hagar to Abram (Sarai’s husband) to be sexually violated. Hagar had no say in her virginity being painfully disrespected to meet the need of another and is, consequentially, involuntarily impregnated. According to Jewish law, Hagar is now considered Abram’s second wife, a position which offers her social elevation. She mistakes social elevation as equivalent to human freedom as equivalents and openly acknowledges her humiliation by despising Sarai. Hagar’s exertion of her humanity angers Sarai, and Abram’s passivity causes him to return Hagar to Sarai to do whatever she wants. Sarai enacts punishment befitting a slave and Hagar runs away, only to discover her destiny fulfillment is attached to her return. Humiliated she not only returns, but submits to the prescribed indignity of her community.

"Women's experience is a complex of events, feelings, and struggles which are shared by women in various circumstances of life."³¹ Hagar's experience epitomizes the

²⁹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³¹ Jacqueline Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), 9.

account of poverty, captivity, sexual exploitation, and meeting with God. Her narrative is similar to the lives of many women. Additionally, it illuminates the saga of African American women from the time of suppression to the present day while exploring the perplexing fear of destiny African American women exhibit when called to lead.

How do African-American women answer the call when fear of rejection supersedes our ability to respond effectively? First, we must realize the fear of rejection often stands between our gifting and potentially life-changing achievements. Rejection convinces us that other people see and are criticizing our flaws. This belief restrains us and the restraint inhibits us from reaching our potential. Further, the fear of rejection influences our decision to create a public persona intended to conceal who we are.

Attempting to control the fear, we commit great effort to this performance and are consequently deemed phony and fake in our own communities – doubling our sense of rejection. This cycle, fostered by our fear of rejection, precludes us from being authentic and establishing real connections with those we are called to lead. The only counter to this endless periodicity is vulnerability. We simply must be open to the possibility of enduring hurt. Openness and honesty about our fear leads to an authentic life of leadership.

Once we have overcome the fear of rejection, we must contend with the fear of retribution. In the Black Church tradition, African American women have been exposed to unethical situations while serving in ministry and the fear of retribution (enhanced by acts of intimidation) by male pastors makes it difficult for many women to seek counsel. Gathering the courage to expose indiscretions and secrets carries the risk of being openly reproved and possibly banished from the church. Consequently, many have been

subjected to sexual misbehavior, but rendered silent by the androcentric system which represents authority but is often misused to wound or injure. Therefore, instead of building the body of Christ, this system leaves portions permanently damaged.

Although damaged, we refuse to be a liability. Therefore, to compensate for these damages, “In many cases, ‘we don’t ask for help because we have internalized this idea that we need to be strong,’ says Zoë Flowers, an advocate who has spent over a decade in the field of domestic violence. This idea of strong black women is rewarded and is something that can even be a source of resilience. But it can also leave us feeling like we have no one to turn to.”³² Feelings of abandonment strongly impede our ability to lead. Further, many women have been informed they should not lead in the church and should never preach. We are gifted yet often rejected – a denial which cuts at both purpose and identity.

Women who dare to explore their leadership gifts are often met with disapproval. I experienced this first hand while pursuing my Bachelor of Science in Biblical Studies. During a lecture, the professor adamantly stated, “God would only use a woman in leadership when a man does not step up and take his rightful place.” I was the only female in a classroom of male clergy. At that moment, I felt that he was baiting me for a reaction. I didn’t give him the satisfaction and remained silent. My purpose at the time was to pass the class, not get into a confrontation to justify my call to lead. However, insults like these are pervasive. I’ve heard women called names like "Jezebel" for simply acknowledging a call to Christian leadership. Insulting women who dare buck against the

³² Sherri Gordon, “Unique Issues Facing Black Women Dealing with Abuse,” September 24, 2018, assessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.verywellmind.com/unique-issues-facing-black-women-dealing-with-abuse-4173228>.

established system only heightens our sense of abandonment by a Christian culture which is to be known, according to John 13:35, by its love.

To further complicate matters, some denominations will not appoint women to pastoral ministry. This does not mean there are not women in those congregations called to lead. Despite their presence, the fears of rejection and retribution sabotage the readiness to embrace the call to lead. Additionally, many women refuse to be perceived as complainers or whiners; therefore, our voices concerning injustices are continually suppressed. Ultimately, by overcoming opposition – even our own – a willingness to strive as devout women who desire self-respect and a seat at the table develops.

Finally, fear can be a “constructive emotion,”³³ which revitalizes, motivates and ignites a transformation. It becomes an undertaking of action, the catalyst for change. During the World’s Fair (sixteen years following the end of the Reconstruction era), black women experienced a new phenomenon. This event convened at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. The annual affair provided the opportunity to affirm that black women mattered. With a representation of fifty cultures and a diversity of people, this was an excellent beginning for change. The irony of this occasion is that it did not suppress the more considerable significance of “white male supremacy in the United States.”³⁴

On May 18, 1893, five African American women leaders were the featured speakers at an event specifically focused on commending the achievements of white men in the United States. Anna Julia Cooper, “the mid-1880s Oberlin College graduate and a

³³ Daniel Gardner, *Why Do We Fear The Things We Shouldn't and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger - The Science of Fear* (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2008), 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

distinguished teacher and the author of *A Voice from the South* (1892,) began a speaking and writing career that highlighted the centrality of educated black women in the broad-gauged reform movements in black communities of the post-Reconstruction era.”³⁵

Fannie Barrier Williams, “an educator, political activist, and women’s rights advocate who worked for advancement opportunities of African Americans. She called especially for social and educational reforms to improve the plight of black women in the Southern States of the U.S.”³⁶ Frances E. W. Harper, “a leading African-American poet, writer and activist. Harper advocated for abolition and education through speeches and publications. Her first poem collection, *Forest Leaves*, was published around 1845. The delivery of her public speech, ‘Education and the Elevation of the Colored Race,’ resulted in a two-year lecture tour for the Anti-Slavery Society. She died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1911;”³⁷ Fannie Jackson Coppin is remembered as:

An American educator and missionary whose innovations as head principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia included a practice-teaching system and an elaborate industrial-training department. In 1869 she became head principal of the Institute; she was the first African-American woman in the country to hold such a position, and she quickly began to direct the course of the school. In 1889, after a 10-year campaign, Fanny Coppin realized her hope to introduce an industrial-training department that offered instruction in 10 trades. To her, vocational training was as important a tool as academic education in the struggle to end racial discrimination.³⁸

Sarah J. Early, “was an African American educator, author and temperance activist. For

³⁵ Jennifer Wallach, “Anna Julia Cooper, American Educator and Writer, The Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-American-literature/The-late-19th-and-early-20th-centuries#ref793509>.

³⁶ Candace Staten, “Fannie Barrier Williams (1855-1944),” last modified March 31, 2014, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/williams-fannie-barrier-1855-1944/>.

³⁷ “Frances E. W. Harper Biography,” Biography.com Editors, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/writer/frances-ew-harper>.

³⁸ “Fannie Jackson Coppin, American Educator,” The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fanny-Jackson-Coppin>.

30 years Early was a teacher and school principal in Ohio, and in the South after the Civil War. In 1866 she became the first African American woman professor when she was hired by Wilberforce University to teach Latin and English,”³⁹ and Hallie Quinn Brown,

An African American author, educator, and equal rights advocate during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. She served as a professor at Wilberforce University and continued her reform efforts, helping organize the Ohio State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, an organization that she served as president of from 1905 to 1912. She also actively campaigned for Republican presidential candidates, including fellow Ohioan Warren G. Harding. Over the course of her life, Brown authored several books, many of which detailed the plight of African Americans.⁴⁰

The voices of these daring women were heard during a time when opportunities were changing for minorities.

At the core of New Negro womanhood was a fundamental transformation in how African American women viewed themselves as participants and authorial figures in the modern World. The activities of clubwomen, black suffragists, teachers in newly established “Colored” schools, beauticians, and domestics, from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, composed the New Negro womanhood experience.⁴¹

Their courage epitomized hope for a community of women accustomed to being treated as useless and insignificant. Their presence pointed to a future of great feats by African American women. They serve as examples of how a people, though marred by controversy and adversity, can surmount perceptions and limitations to become driving forces in the world of leadership. Women will and must lead.

FEAR OF SUCCESS

³⁹ Uchenna Edeh, “Sarah Jane Woodson Early: The First African American Woman Professor,” accessed June 25, 2019, <http://kentakepage.com/sarah-jane-woodson-early-the-first-african-american-woman-professor/>.

⁴⁰ Hallie Q. Brown, “Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction,” accessed June 25, 2019, http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Hallie_Q._Brown.

⁴¹ Treva B. Lindsey, *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* (Illinois: University of Illinois Library, 2017), 3.

Jemele Hill, an African-American sports journalist who writes for *The Atlantic* and formerly hosted ESPN's *His and Her*, opened her TEDx Talks presentation with the statement, "My greatest fear is a success. Why? Because success creates expectations. Success . . . it creates stakes. Success . . . it creates accountability. We've been taught to fear failure, but in truth, we're more afraid of success."⁴² Consider the six social levels in the United States: upper class, new money, middle class, working class, working poor, and poverty. Financially, the first three social classes are assumed successful. For many, the tension with this assumption is that money is not the only measure of success in life.

In American culture the acquisition of accoutrements associated with career advancement is a major measure of success. One could go as far as to deem this accumulation of "stuff" as a customary norm by which accomplishments are measured. While there are those who might agree with the meaning and symbolism of material advancement, the more religious might object to this criterion. The view of success for those who espouse to most religions is often oppositional in relation to quantifiable development standards. Instead the religious place high value in sacrifice and self-denial. A religious American can often be in conflict, holding both perspectives as significant. The same conflict can be seen in women who often develop their sense of self from religious norms which propagate female submission. Submission and success are not ideal partners and often give birth to fear.

The fear of success, an expression recognized in the workforce, was initially attributed to men. During the 1970s, while doing further studies, Dr. Matina S. Horner,

⁴² Jemele Hill, "Success Is Scariest Than Failure | Jemele Hill | TEDxPSU, May 4, 2015," accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjzITnc7PCE>.

psychologist and president of Radcliffe College, determined that all women who pursued success were experiencing the same psychological inhibition. “What is common to people who fear success, psychiatrists say, is the conviction, rooted in the subconscious conflict, that somehow success will bring with it some disastrous effect, such as isolation, punishment or abandonment.”⁴³ Nowhere is this more evident than in the lives of successful women who fear our success will repel potential mates.

Jacqueline Fleming, who teaches psychology at Barnard College, points out the relative differences in behavior concerning achievement among black middle-class and working-class women in "Fear of Success, Achievement-Related Motives and Behavior in Black College Women". Fleming determined “Such fears are especially severe among women and minority groups. A major difference between men and women with such fears,” she says, “is that men continue to work in the arena of vocational achievement, but women often change their lives, concentrating instead on children or family.”⁴⁴

Success is a choice and never an accident. Many of the women who chose to focus on children and family will deem their decision successful. Undoubtedly, there are others who consider it a response to terror and a means of avoiding the unknown. Truly, the ability to achieve success for some can be terrifying, but the results can also be positively overwhelming. Jemele Hill concludes her TEDx Talks presentation about fear of success with two points. “Turn all of your negatives into positives and all of the reasons that you can’t have to become all the reasons that you will.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Bryce Nelson, “Self-Sabotage in Careers a Common Trap,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 1983, <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/02/15/science/self-sabatoge-in-careers-a-common-trap.html>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jemele Hill, “Success Is Scarier Than Failure | Jemele Hill | TEDxPSU, May 4, 2015,” accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjzITnc7PCE>.

To get a better sense of how other African American women have traversed success while grappling with fear, I interviewed several African American and Latina female leaders (interviewees will be introduced throughout). Each interview varied in length ranging from 45 minutes to an hour and covered the multifaceted topic of facing fear while being a woman in leadership. After transcribing these interviews, it became apparent that fear exalts itself frequently in the lives of female leaders. From the initial trepidation associated with answering a ministry call to the daily responsibilities of walking in that call fear must be repeatedly conquered.

First, I interviewed Rev. Dr. Gail Randolph-Williams. She is the Senior Pastor of City Church of Philadelphia and Chaplain at Penn Presbyterian Medical Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Additionally, Dr. Randolph-Williams was formally an adjunct instructor at Eastern University/Palmer Seminary.

Secondly, I interviewed Dr. Chalice Jenkins. She earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services with a specialization in Counseling Studies from Capella University in 2008. She also has a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology from Argosy University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Rowan University. Jenkins has been a Board-Certified Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor (Georgia) and a National Certified Counselor since 2008. She has worked in the mental health field for over 20 years, holding various positions such as a therapist, forensic psychologist, and supervisor. Jenkins specializes in therapy with children, adolescents, couples, families, and women. She integrates a variety of treatments tailored to each client. These therapies include cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, interpersonal and social rhythm therapy, structural family therapy, systems family therapy, group therapy, and

spirituality. She specializes in loss and grief, mood disorders, chronic pain management, and spirituality.⁴⁶

Though we covered the gamut, I believe the responses to one particular question will inspire women who have had similar difficulties in confronting fear.

Out of all of your accomplishments, could you briefly share one that has been transformative?

Rev. Dr. Randolph-Williams began pastoring City Church of Philadelphia several years ago during a time of transition and membership decline. These conditions presented a plethora of challenges. However, the greatest challenge had nothing to do with its state of decline. The greatest challenge Rev. Dr. Randolph-Williams faced was being an African American woman assigned to pastor a predominately white congregation. This scenario presented an overarching difficulty: stand at the helm of racial diversity fully aware of the strong critique she would be subjected to as a confident African-American female ordained minister. Dr. Randolph-Williams shares her “fear of failure” as she describes the landscape of her first pastoral position.

The other fear was the fear of failure here at the church. ‘You ain’t got no people!’ You got a handful of people in this church. You are standing up in here every Sunday – doing worship, preaching the Gospel – every Sunday, and you got a handful of people. The fear of failure! So, I say to my pastor, ‘I’ve never been in this situation before. All of my life, whatever I put my hand to was successful.’ You see, it goes back to the beginning of our conversation of what I define as success. We think we know because we want to be God. The fear of the failure and then coming to that transformational piece of recognizing that you don’t know what success or failure is. You are defining it by measures that other people made up, whether in the

⁴⁶ Chalice Jenkins, College of Nursing and Health Professions, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://drexel.edu/cnhp/faculty/profiles/JenkinsChalice/>.

church or the world. I must be able to recognize success, not by my eye, but my spiritual eye that the Lord gives me.⁴⁷

How does one actuate from a place of comfort to an unexpected position of difficulty? This experience personifies the answer. It all starts with a willingness to accept the challenge. A lack of willingness could have resulted in the closing of a church pivotal to its surrounding community. Instead of abandoning this declining congregation, Rev. Dr. Randolph-Williams tenaciously embraced the fear of failure and reassessed her understanding of success. Her determination to fulfill the call ratified the Spirit within her to possess the land by any means necessary.

Dr. Chalice Jenkins also shared her most transformative accomplishment. Like Rev. Dr. Randolph-Williams, Dr. Jenkins shared a story of fear. While pursuing her Doctor of Philosophy degree she faced challenges in completing her dissertation. She grew up in New Jersey and relocated to Atlanta, Georgia to attend graduate school. One of her goals was to become a professor in Georgia even though the salary was not commensurate to her experience. Further, during her time in Atlanta, Dr. Jenkins married and desperately wanted to start a family. After five years, Dr. Jenkins became pregnant with their first son. She remained determined to complete her doctorate, but wanted to relocate to New Jersey to be closer to her family. Her husband was not in agreement. Dr. Jenkins states:

I kept pushing him and pushing him, and finally, he agreed. At the same [time] as I was going through these challenges, I was trying to write my dissertation. I wrote the first three chapters of the dissertation while pregnant. My son was born on September 22, 2007. The first three chapters were approved. I had to complete sections four and five because I was determined to finish this Ph.D. degree. During Thanksgiving of 2007, I flew home for two weeks. My mother

⁴⁷ Rev. Dr. Gail Randolph-Williams, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 19, 2018.

watched my son every day while I went to the library. I completed chapter four in two weeks. The committee approved chapter four, and I flew home again in December to write chapter five, and after being supported by the committee, I received my Ph.D. in 2008. In April of 2008 I relocated back to New Jersey.⁴⁸

Dr. Jenkins' story is exemplary in her ability to endure opposition within the boundaries of family responsibilities. She multi-tasked with writing, being a wife and being a first-time mother. Having a committed support group was significant in her success. Making the hard choice of pursuing the Doctor of Philosophy degree despite of the challenge of prioritizing family over education, demonstrates that nothing is impossible.

The outcomes of these experiences prove that life-altering inconveniences have purpose. Dr. Randolph-Williams and Dr. Jenkins reacted to their fear of failing by facing the situation and focusing on the task. Wisdom comes from experience – especially negative experiences that inspire fear. Packed with potential, they are instruction manuals for determination – a crucial attribute to developing self-worth.

⁴⁸ Chalice Jenkins, PhD., Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 22, 2018.

CHAPTER TWO CONFRONTING FEAR

Theological Perspective and Analysis in Luke 1:28-30

And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God.”⁴⁹

Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, was chosen by God to be a part of the plan of salvation for humankind. Mary has been esteemed throughout history for her obedience to God. The mention of “Mary,” the mother of the Messiah, generates intrigue while debate ensues as her life and lineage are examined. New Testament scholars portray Mary as the young woman of Jewish descent who God selected to birth the Christ child. Mary was admired for her faithfulness within the first group of believers who ascribed to Jesus’ teachings. “The process through which Mary became so venerated was long and not linear. It accumulated different viewpoints, devotions, and doctrinal formulations that eventually led to a body of beliefs and practices centered on Mary but beyond biblical boundaries. The real, biblical Mary became an *idealized* Mary.”⁵⁰ The real Mary did not possess a family inheritance, had never been a mother, and was socially unfamiliar. In the opinion of those politically deemed the religious right, “young, poor, and female, these qualities made her unsuitable in the eyes of her people to be used mightily of God. But God saw Mary's trust and

⁴⁹ Luke 1:28-30 (NRSV).

⁵⁰ Leonardo De Chirico, “Who Is Mary, Mother of Jesus, and Why Does It Matter,” accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.imb.org/2018/07/06/who-is-mary-mother-of-jesus-and-why-does-it-matter/>.

obedience. He knew she would willingly serve God in one of the most important callings ever given to a human being.”⁵¹

Chosen for a specific purpose, Mary confronts fear heroically. Elizabeth Johnson, “Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University in New York City and a Roman Catholic nun,”⁵² is a significant voice in the discussion of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her writings are much relied upon here to defend Mary as a voice for the modern woman in leadership as Mary contends with fear. Johnson, believing the orthodox perspective of Mary is no longer relevant, removes Mary as a superlative of womankind. Instead, Johnson calls upon her reader to understand Mary as a human being – a sister and companion who partakes in sorrows, joys and fears. Further, Johnson views Mary as a woman who defends injustices for equal rights. This view of Mary is provocative and inspires women to act for justice by discovering both voice and agency for themselves, and for others who endure political, religious and cultural inequity.

Mary’s very existence – a young virgin, an unknown maiden from the despised Galilean town of Nazareth – as an affront to the political, religious and cultural tensions of her time makes her an excellent case study in acknowledging, confronting and triumphing fear. After all, despite all of the admirable virtues currently used to describe Mary, some of the Early Church Fathers were salacious in their undesirable indictments.

Origen, for instance, wrote that ‘the sword which should pierce through her heart was unbelief.’ Chrysostom did not control his ‘golden mouth’ when he accused Mary of ‘excessive ambition, foolish arrogance, and vainglory,’ during her Son’s public ministry.⁵³

⁵¹ Mary Fairchild, “Meet Mary: Mother of Jesus,” Learn Religions.com, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/mary-the-mother-of-jesus-701092>.

⁵² Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Biography,” Fordham University, https://www.fordham.edu/info/23704/faculty/6347/elizabeth_a_johnson.

⁵³ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 94.

Despite the historical backlash, “Mary is given the highest honor bestowed to a woman, and yet even her honor is thwarted to be a deep sense of particular unworthiness.”⁵⁴ Further, “she would have been the last to claim perfection for herself”⁵⁵ primarily because the community in which this young woman lived was not welcoming for a single, uneducated Jewish female. Secondly, Nazareth itself was considered an insignificant town, therefore, the people of Nazareth were deemed meaningless. This is another angle from which to examine Mary’s fear. She not only had to overcome the fear of external retribution, but an internal sense of powerlessness. The world thinks the lowly and different are unimportant. A study of Mary and of the biblical narrative found in the first chapter of Luke transforms that view to demonstrate the folly of man’s limited perspective.

What was significant about Mary? Why was she chosen out of all of the women in Galilee (or the world) for this visitation? Mary had not done anything unique or outstanding that would justify her being the chosen one. There are no lists of accolades accredited to her nor is there an exemplary resume embellished with her exceptional contributions to society. In fact, her internal sense of worthlessness makes her the most illogical of choices. The logical answer as to why Mary was selected does not exist. In summary, God saw something in her she did not see. She was worthy, and God approved. “Her choice by God to be the mother of the Incarnate Son is as mysterious as her conception of Him within her virgin womb.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “All The Women Of The Bible – Mary,” Biblegateway.com, accessed July 2, 2019, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Mary>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 93.

THE GREETING

It all begins with a greeting. The passage opens with the surprise arrival of Gabriel, an angel. This unannounced heavenly being appears and immediately uses honorable language, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”⁵⁷ The solemnity of the greeting exceeded the traditional salutation in that time, “as rank and status within society determined whom one should greet and with what words.”⁵⁸ Mary, a young woman, unmarried and socially unvalued, certainly did not merit the customary greeting ‘hail,’ which was a normal greeting. Because Mary had no social status, “Neither the title ‘favored’ or ‘graced one’ nor the promise ‘The Lord is with you’ was traditional in greetings, even had she been a person of status.”⁵⁹

Mary could have interpreted this greeting as a forewarning of danger and who would have faulted her for doing so. She was looking in the face of an angel – a celestial being. We do not know his form, but we know he appeared. This was certainly a startling experience for Mary. It would be a startling experience for anyone. But to complicate matters for Mary, Gabriel came showering her with praise. Some people are not comfortable with high praise, and what higher compliment could have been afforded Mary than “full of grace.”

When the angel greets her as "full of grace," that does not mean that she in any way earned such recognition or was so full of grace that she could now, as a queenly figure, deign to portion out such grace to others. Instead, Luke's word for "full of grace," *kecharitōmenē*, has a more passive sense and should be translated as "beloved," one who is chosen by God's grace.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Luke 1:28-30 (NRSV).

⁵⁸ Craig S. Kenner, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary – New Testament* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 190.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Beth Kreitzer, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture – New Testament III, Luke* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 1.

The greeting is congruent with “favor,” or approval signifying God’s intention to do something fearfully unusual.

EVERYTHING IS ON TIME. EVERYTHING IS ON SCHEDULE

Today, she is honored as the mother of the Messiah, but this honored place required her to first navigate a potentially dishonorable position. The biblical narrative discloses that Mary was engaged to Joseph. Matthew presents Mary of Nazareth as the fiancée of Joseph, “a just man.”⁶¹ The Jewish custom of marriage included an engagement followed by the actual wedding ceremony. It was like our western custom today, except that the commitment was much more binding and essential than in our culture. The engagement or “espousal” began as soon as negotiations were completed between the groom's and the bride's respective parents or representatives. After this negotiation process, even though the wedding ceremony had not taken place, the bride was considered legally married to the bridegroom. If the bridegroom died during the engagement, the bride was considered a widow. This lends additional weight to Gabriel’s message. It had the potential to cause lasting damage to Mary’s reputation and status.

During the engagement, the bride could be claimed from her parent’s home at any time for the wedding ceremony. The engaged couple did not live together during the espousal time nor did they engage in sexual relations, but they were considered husband and wife. That is why Mary “belonged” to Joseph, even though they were not yet married, were not living together, and Mary was still a virgin.

Although Mary was not yet married, she was betrothed. According to ancient customs, the marriage would have been arranged by her father. She would live at home for a year after her betrothal. Then the groom would come to take her to his house. The wedding feast would last for

⁶¹ Matthew 1:19 (KJV).

an entire week. Legally, the marriage is binding after the engagement.⁶²

Consequently, from the moment she accepted this God-given purpose, Mary confronted additional fear inducing factors. She would need the comfort of God's favor, not only on the day of the pronouncement, but in the difficult days ahead. Such encouragement was frequently offered to God's servants when they faced a particularly daunting task as the one Mary was now facing. To become the mother of the Messiah she would potentially endure isolation, abandonment and humiliation. Johnson argues that "Mary should be considered a young woman who acted according to the call of the Spirit in the particular circumstances of her own history."⁶³ This would be a palatable response for women to appreciate the simplicity of Mary's experience if it were not for the degree of punishment Mary would face as a disgraced woman. If her pregnancy was not connected to the birth of the Messiah she would be considered an adulteress.

One thing made clear from this biblical ordeal of the suspected adulteress is that the Torah gives the male partner clear prerogatives by laying the burden of proving innocence on the woman. And, while both the wife and her adulterous lover were subject to capital punishment if guilty, no reverse ordeal was instituted: a wife suspecting her husband of infidelity had no recourse. The standards were not the same and men were allowed to be polygamous.⁶⁴

Understanding the potential backlash, why would she ever take this chance? God used prophets, visions and other evidence to convey His message to specific people for a particular time. Upon hearing the prophetic utterances of a deliverer for Israel, every

⁶² Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible – A Commentary in Twelve Volumes – Volume IX Luke-John* (Nashville, Abington Press 1995), 51.

⁶³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 42.

⁶⁴ Rabbi Ronald H. Isaacs, *Every Person's Guide to Jewish Sexuality*, (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 2000), 75.

young woman desired and prayed to have this honor. “God looked down on this human race and chose the one, a Jewish maiden from the town of Nazareth, and we ask why? The answer can only be if we exclude the sovereign grace of God, that God looks upon the heart.”⁶⁵ It appears Mary had a heart capable of overcoming fear in service to God.

Further, her acceptance of this new role was largely connected to Gabriel’s pronouncement. He presents himself to this young woman announcing that she would give birth to a son. However, the Luke 1:28-30 passage indicates that Gabriel did not just make the announcement and leave Mary to her ruminations. Instead, Gabriel immediately acknowledges Mary’s initial reaction by saying, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”⁶⁶ Throughout scripture, God’s favor suspends the power of man’s law. An example of this is found in the story of Esther. Although she was the queen, even she could not enter the king’s presence without his invitation. Doing so was punishable by death, but God showed Esther favor, suspended man’s laws and Esther lived to deliver salvation to Israel. Likewise, the punishment Mary would face without God’s favor is suspended with Gabrielle’s pronouncement. Mary can confront the possibilities knowing the favor of God is with her. This frees Mary to triumphantly respond to the call of the Spirit knowing she is secure in her possession of God’s favor.

Naturally, the news was overwhelming; however, Mary surrendered with joy to the assignment. Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is significant when affirmatively responding to a God-given purpose overshadowed by human repercussions. We see this in the story of Moses whose God-given purpose was to obtain Israel’s freedom. It was a purpose seemingly overshadowed by the human repercussion of having to defeat Pharaoh

⁶⁵ Kathy Collard Miller, *Women of the Bible* (Pennsylvania: Starburst Publishers, 1984), 90.

⁶⁶ Luke 1:28-30 (NRSV).

and his army. We also see it in the life of David whose God-given purpose was to defend Israel. His was a purpose seemingly overshadowed by the human repercussion of having to defeat Goliath. Surely, Mary's willingness to respond to God's command was rooted in the knowledge of these stories and/or their like. Her song of praise in the Luke 1:46-55 passage portrays a sensitive spirit of abundant adoration to the Lord for His past showing of strength, scattering of proud, and bringing down of powerful. Armed with God's favor and the assurance of His reputation, the unknown young woman from the scorned Galilean town of Nazareth accepted God's choice for her to bear the Christ Child.

Mary, as a mother, is one of us, but as the mother of our Lord, she is blessed above all women. First, through Luke's character study of Mary, she is illuminated as the fundamental description of a godly woman powerful enough to face down her fears while delivering to humanity the very meaning of God's unwavering love. "She exhibits virginal modesty becoming the maid, the conjugal fidelity and loyalty of the spouse, and the untiring devotedness of the mother. The influence of Mary, therefore, in the moral elevation of women can hardly be overestimated."⁶⁷ Secondly, the gospels and Acts characterize her as a remarkable woman influential in the life of her son, the Messiah, yet a devoted and humble follower of that same son – the Messiah. Regardless of how this woman from Galilee is viewed, whether spiritually, theologically or culturally, Mary's confrontation and conquering of fear in response to the call should be honored.

THE FAVOR OF THE LORD

⁶⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 93.

The Lord's favor is contingent "on His good pleasure and is often a response to decent living and prayer."⁶⁸

Often the bestowal of God's favor comes as an answer to a petition made as people cry and seek mercy. Moses petitioned God to show compassion towards Israel after they disobediently worshiped the golden calf. Corrupt kings such as Manasseh humbled themselves and cried out to the Lord in their anguish, and God kindly showed them favor. However, the Lord eventually withdrew His benevolence and passed judgment on His people. When God's judgment reprimanded Israel for a while, He did not abandon the nation but restored them from exile. God displayed compassion to these people and saved them from their distress.⁶⁹

Isaiah refers to this liberation as the "Time or the year of the Lord's favor, which is linked with the day of salvation in the New Testament. Those who believe the gospel receive the ultimate gift of God's favor: eternal life through Christ."⁷⁰

Mary was the recipient of the benefits associated with God's favor. When Gabriel, the angel appeared to Mary, the term 'favor' was used twice in his message. The first reference 'favored one,' is the initial introduction making a distinction that God has selected Mary. "God has given his favor to one who had no claim to worthy status, raised her from a position of lowliness, and chosen and equipped her to have a central role in redemption."⁷¹ This selection could put her in a unique status of exclusivity. Out of all the women in the universe, this unpretentious woman moves from insignificant to legendary. The implication of selecting Mary was not for recognition, but rather, to indicate to the world that obedience to God outweighs temporary fame.

⁶⁸ Walter A. Elwell, *Entry for Favor, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 714.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Joel B. Green, "The Social Status of Mary in Luke 1,5-2,52: A Plea for Methodological Integration," *Biblica* 73, no. 4 (1992): 457-72, accessed December 18, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42611283>.

In the thirtieth verse of the first chapter of Luke, Mary is told for a second time, that she has found favor with God. What a compliment! The world assumes having the favor of the Lord equates to prosperity and pleasure. In Mary's case God's favor equated to the removal of fear. Not only did Mary have nothing to fear; she had much for which to be grateful. "The angelic visit was not to pronounce judgment; it was to announce God's choice of Mary for a particular purpose."⁷²

What kind of favor did Mary receive? The Lord's favor includes endless blessings, unmerited grace, and experiencing the miraculous, but Mary's life with Jesus certainly did not look like favor. It starts at the end of a long journey to a small town because of the census. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, there is no suitable lodging, and the birth of her child takes place in a stable where He is cradled with the straw of an oxen's crib. They leave Bethlehem only to return to Nazareth and endure years of poverty and obscurity in a village hidden among the hills. The woman who found favor with the Lord sees her baby of Nazareth mature into a man who must live a life of growing danger. Some people embrace his message while others regard him with increasing hatred. Finally, her son is arrested by his nation, taken before the priests and accused before the Roman governor. His punishment is to hang on a cross in the presence of a contemptuous crowd.

What an oxymoronic imposition. The favor of the Lord – endless blessings, unmerited grace, and experiencing the miraculous – also embodies suffering and tragedy. The irony of favor creates a quandary. How can a life of extreme pain and suffering equate to a life of favor? If Mary anticipated unbroken happiness, she was disappointed.

⁷² "God's Message to Mary: To Be God's Instrument," North York Church of Christ, accessed June 19, 2019, <https://www.nycconline.ca/god'smessage-to-mary-to-be-god's-instrument>.

If she calculated God's favor by the volatility of her life after giving birth to the Christ child, it would be an illusion and then some.

Mary was receptive, but how could she be prepared for the enormity of this favor which divinely orchestrated the salvific reshaping of humanity? That was the vocation which would follow the acknowledgment of the angel. "He selected her from the very beginning of eternity for this high honor and from that same beginning made her fit for it. And so, he, therefore, suffered her to be called to it too. For all divine calling has its roots and foundation in eternal Providence."⁷³

THE CALL

"Since a called life is never a finished product, in significant ways we are always at the beginning and renewing stages of answering our calls."⁷⁴

The Luke 1:28-30 passage is part of the Annunciation of the Lord, but can also be referenced as Mary's Call. When reflecting on the call in the theological sense, Mary's calling held great honor. Mary's social condition – poor, politically oppressed, and a woman – never changes, but her call eternally elevates her name. "God saw something deep within Mary that others could not comprehend, and He knew she would submit without reservation in one of the most critical callings ever given to a human being."⁷⁵ However, her submission was not just to the call. By accepting the call, she was also submitting to the unexpected occurrences of suffering which would accompany the call.

⁷³ Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, *Meditations on the Incarnation, Passion and Death of Jesus Christ (The Other Voice in Modern Europe)*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 165-66.

⁷⁴ John P. Schuster, *Answering Your Call* (California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003), 21.

⁷⁵ Mary Fairchild, "Meet Mary: Mother of Jesus," Learn Religions.com, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/mary-the-mother-of-jesus-701092>.

Mary experienced suffering from her engagement almost being invalidated to witnessing the execution of her beloved son.

Certain theology uses Mary's call as a means of advocating submissiveness, "with all of her glory she is always obedient, she is not 'ordained,' she is the busy but submissive, patient and suffering auxiliary who can intercede but not decide."⁷⁶ Women have discovered this customary model of Mary not useful in the critical fight for fairness in family based and political systems for liberation from male dominance. Yes, "Mary was a willing servant who put her trust in God and obeyed His call,"⁷⁷ but God responded to her obedience and faith, not the qualifications that others consider valuable.

For this reason, Mary is both venerated and shunned depending on which theological perspective one wishes to subscribe.

The biblical difference is so real that in ecumenical circles it serves to explain the variety of approaches in different church bodies. Protestants traditionally follow Mark's somewhat negative assessment of Jesus' mother; Catholics take from Luke a positive, personalistic view of her as full of grace and favor from God, a woman who cooperated with the divine adventure of bringing the Redeemer into human flesh; while Orthodox approach Mary in the iconic; and the symbolic manner of John.⁷⁸

"Advocated by the voices of women around the world, a new paradigm has developed."⁷⁹ The call of Mary by God from her place of obscurity into a place of honor in this new season of awareness has initiated an awakening for women. We are

⁷⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 11.

⁷⁷ Mary Fairchild, "Meet Mary: Mother of Jesus," Learn Religions.com, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/mary-the-mother-of-jesus-701092>.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 3.

⁷⁹ Sean D. Sammon, FMS, "In Her Arms Or In Her Heart, The Blessed Virgin in the Life and Apostolate of the Marist Brother," accessed October 30, 2019, www.champagnat.org/e_maristas/Circulares/31_5_EN.doc.

“corporately and publicly understanding the character of Mary from the viewpoint of our struggle to be lively, holy, independent”⁸⁰ and robust. We are evolving from the trenches to a stable posture of complete individuality with distinction. We “are raising criticisms of the ways traditional idealizations of her privileges and perfections have been used to short-circuit women's quest for wholeness. They are also making creative moves towards reclaiming this woman as an ally of women's flourishing.”⁸¹

Consequently, the traditional call of Mary attributes to misrepresenting women's openness, endorsing a limiting model of human happiness, and compressing women's societal positions. Her call seemingly impedes our access to God’s approval in the completeness of our lives. Her traditional call is controlled by the malice of sexism rather than contending with it. Further, when referenced by male leaders and preachers as an archetype for social virtue, Mary remains a hindrance rather than a help for many women.

Women of color who resist the racial prejudice that ravages their communities, economically poor women who struggle daily to raise their children on mean streets, women of different sexual orientations who seek respect for their embodied life, heterosexual women who find their sexual pleasure to be a source of gladness and grace: these and many others now judge this religious symbol to be deficient.⁸²

However, Gordon T. Smith explains the importance of individuals being stewards of our lives first. “Nothing matters more to us than that we are called. It is a sheer gift; an invitation offered to us in the mercy of God to become his people and walk in faith and obedience to his Word. It is essentially, a call to God's salvation.”⁸³ If we would

⁸⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸³ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 9.

confront and accept our own calls first, the present generation of independent and assertive feminists would not struggle as much with the honor of Mary within a faith context. Instead we would relate to the social and political stressors Mary encountered and overcame by accepting her call. “The historical diversity regarding Mary is mirrored geographically today around the world as local churches on different continents express her significance in accord with their own cultures.”⁸⁴ Hispanic communities revere Maria in positive, vibrant ways that build up their self-worth. “Anglicans accept Mary as a model of holiness, obedience, and faith for all believers.”⁸⁵ Mary is understood as a prophetic symbol of the Church.

Finally, when juxtaposed with the stories of systematized oppression experienced by African American women, Mary’s call becomes a guide for the obscure and the unimportant. Mary, living as a poor Jewish woman under Roman oppression, is congruent with the marginalized and poor existence of African American women in a racist civilization and church. In a society subjugated by elitist paradigms, the possibility of being chosen to any position of honor is significantly diminished. The systematization of privilege for the dominant culture and its pervasiveness throughout ancient history relegates an ongoing social construct that prohibits all other ethnicities from leveling the playing field.

The resilience of this Galilean woman is similar to African American women in leadership who are brave and determined. We survive in the face of prejudice and aim for a positive future when others deem the future as bleak because of prejudice. Like Mary,

⁸⁴Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 6.

⁸⁵ “Question and Answer,” St. Pauls Parish.org., accessed June 22, 2019, http://www.stpaulsparish.org/education/documents/mary_ARCIC.pdf.

we do not subscribe to the type of indifference beaten into a woman of low estate. This is not the type of submission Mary is commended for. Her submission represents ethical, healthy behavior in relation to God's calling. African American women in leadership can view Mary's calling as an invitation for the soul to submit to God's commands, and her submission as instructions to live by as we "attach ourselves to a cause that pulls us out of the limits of our personal history."⁸⁶

The relationship between God and Mary demonstrates the transformation process we must all go through to accept our call. We must first be disciples. Discipleship includes a personal connection with God. That personal relationship is demonstrated when God calls Mary by her given name. Secondly, God reveals His plan. The conception of Jesus is presented to Mary as a divine gift. Mary's response is her affirmation of His plan for the salvation of the world. For women who understand God's call, discipleship means being available to God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus. This connection forms every aspect of our lives into a reflection of God's love. His call concerns our particular exhibition of His love to others. And, like Mary, "God will often use the most unlikely candidates to fulfill His purpose."⁸⁷

THERE IS A PLACE FOR US

"As part of this emerging awareness, women for the first time in history are publicly and corporately interpreting the figure of Mary from the perspective of their own struggle to be independent, strong, lively, and holy, that is, from their option of full

⁸⁶ John P. Schuster, *Answering Your Call: A Guide for Living Your Deepest Purpose* (California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003), 14.

⁸⁷ Mary Fairchild, "Meet Mary: Mother of Jesus," accessed July 16, 2019, <https://www.learnreligions.com/mary-the-mother-of-jesus-701092>.

human dignity.”⁸⁸ Johnson believes that like Mary, we too can flourish using our ancestral healing to impact the world. Moses, adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter, led the Israelites out of Egypt. The Gentiles had the opportunity to receive the Good News from Paul, the apostle. We are not all called to be prophets, but we all have a voice and a purpose. Mary’s life clearly demonstrates that a woman’s purpose is not rendered insignificant by her gender.

Unfortunately, “. . . historically practiced, theology, classically defined by Anselm as ‘faith seeking understanding,’ has been exclusively a field of men’s endeavor.”⁸⁹ The pronouncement of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ has advanced through shifting times and civilizations. Regrettably, there is a blemish in scholarly study of theology by “deeply embedded attitudes of men's privileged place before God coupled with the definition of women's inferiority that support practices of exclusion.”⁹⁰ While Johnson is referencing the Catholic view that the priesthood is only for those of male gender, there remains in much of Christianity a similar interpretation. The result of the absence of women has resulted in the silence of voices needed to encourage other women that their faith matters. We require professionals who practice their skill to affirm wisdom for belief and practice in each of their cultural milieus.

Ideally, “women scholars should produce reform through honest and careful dialogue with new theological perspectives.”⁹¹ Redeeming the years of constant stifling

⁸⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 6.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹¹ Sean D. Sammon, FMS, “In Her Arms Or In Her Heart, The Blessed Virgin in the Life and Apostolate of the Marist Brother,” accessed October 30, 2019, www.champagnat.org/e_maristas/Circulares/31_5_EN.doc.

of those silenced is the objective. We have secular examples of modern-day orators who were chosen as change agents to expose injustice, dismantle political correctness and eradicate racism. “Sojourner Truth was an African American women’s rights activist and abolitionist.”⁹² She mesmerized the audience with her impromptu speech on racial inequalities, “Ain’t I a Woman? Presented in 1851 at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention.”⁹³ Mary McLeod Bethune, a person of influence in the African American community is remembered for her advocacy to educate and motivate women of color. “McLeod Bethune initiated the National Council of Negro Women and acted as the president of the National Association of Colored Women.”⁹⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, “author of the masterwork ‘Their Eyes Are Watching God was a fixture of the Harlem Renaissance.”⁹⁵ Dorothy Height, a women's rights and civil rights activist focused on improving the opportunities for and conditions of African American women. These women were called to be informers opposing the inequalities of the world because of racism and give hope to marginalized peoples. Others were martyred for their sacrifice. In their own agency they recognized they were their own source to participate in the history of their time.

In a critically negative step, their diverse methods confront bias against women and their communities based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation – the whole inter-structured edifice of oppression, based on religious belief that allow some to lord it over others and even over the earth. The enemy in every instance is not men as such but systems and thought patterns that disparage and abuse the genuine humanity of women in all their differences along with their

⁹² “Sojourner Truth Biography,” Biography.com Editors, , accessed September 5, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/activist/sojourner-truth>.

⁹³ Paul Halsall, “Modern History Sourcebook: Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman,” December 1851, August 1997, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>.

⁹⁴ Debra Michals, PhD., “Mary McLeod Bethune,” accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/mary-mcleod-bethune>.

⁹⁵ Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Are Watching God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1937), 2.

communities. Women exist in and profoundly sustain complete living systems of interactions.⁹⁶

Women of color agonize from the consequences of racial discrimination.

Marginalized women suffer in economically deprived circumstances. Women of diverse sexual orientations and others confined in abusive domestic and societal conditions are reluctant to accept the submissive Mary. Instead, we claim her as an active participant and a voice demanding to be heard. Therefore, we too insist on the freedom to engage, to be heard, and to add to social discourse.

The same must happen in academic theology. In fact, women are advancing in the academy, embarking in a quest to climb out of the abyss of silence. The brilliance of bringing these interactions into the study of theology is that their inclusion magnifies the full compassion and augments the hope of the Christian gospel for the happiness of the whole human society and the earth. Spiritually, it articulates a desire for justice that includes all women for the help of the entire community. Knowing this, women theologians have turned their attention to the subject of Mary and noted the components unjust to women. Her liberation denies her role as a mere bystander in her own life and casts her as a nonconformist female leader who grapples with the fear of her decisions and willingly participates in the incarnation of Christ.

Moving forward requires thorough analysis of a tradition saturated with “sexist construals of gender.”⁹⁷ If Mary is making the decision and willingly participating then she is in full authority over her body . . . not a man. Johnson emphasizes that the men

⁹⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 19.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 19.

have always been assumed to be capable of exercising authority over the women, and the women are submissive. Patriarchal social structures powerfully legitimize the subservient Mary. However, Johnson's firm argument suggests another way by noting how Luke's narrative highlights Mary as a "powerful example of a young girl's positive response to the invitation of God operating within history."⁹⁸ She continues by arguing that instead of viewing Mary's reaction as a liberating choice of a woman willing to follow God's lead, "patriarchal Mariology interprets it as an act of feminine submissiveness to the will of God, imaged here in literal fashion as a male authority figure."⁹⁹ When the aforementioned sexist gender assumptions no longer exist, male social dominance and female subordination theology should collapse.

Unfortunately, "there is one complexity which still must be addressed before victory can be claimed."¹⁰⁰ For African American women limitations are not just based in female subordination theology. African American women have inherited a plantation theology which justified the slave to their situation "by inculcating caricatures of the cardinal virtues of patience, long-suffering, forbearance, love: the more compliant the woman, the better."¹⁰¹ These true Christian virtues were weaponized on plantations as religious preaching and teaching made the ownership of slaves acceptable. Additionally, slavery for men differed from slavery for women. Both were forced into hard labor, but women also had to clean, feed, and provide sexual pleasure for the males of the house. In

⁹⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 26.

¹⁰⁰ Sean D. Sammon, FMS, "In Her Arms Or In Her Heart, The Blessed Virgin in the Life and Apostolate of the Marist Brother," accessed October 30, 2019, www.champagnat.org/e_maristas/Circulares/31_5_EN.doc.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 27.

the aftermath of slavery, African American women still confront slavery ideologies which reduce them to personal property. Consequently, the idea of belonging and therefore submitting to an external authority is haunting.

Now, Johnson suggests, these qualities should be reexamined in consideration of a woman's need for honor. A different assessment involves a "hermeneutic of suspicion,"¹⁰² to undermine the usefulness of obedience. How is it possible for African American women to bear the "promotion of humble obedience and spiritual surrender of self while endeavoring to live in the liberty of the gospel?"¹⁰³ Living in the liberty of the gospel is freedom from the power and tyranny of patriarchy. Further, it implies a need to bring religion and education together to advance a cultural revolution.

Historic multiplicity concerning Mary is reflected today globally as area churches in different regions convey her meaning according to their particular cultures. Local communities within the United States share in this experience. "In recent decades ecumenical dialogue among Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians has sought a common root in the Bible and creeds for understanding Mary's significance, each making a case for the coherence with the scripture of its traditionally distinct patterns of thought and prayer."¹⁰⁴ For the African American community, specifically in Ferguson, Missouri, a new icon was written portraying Mary as "Our Lady Mother of Ferguson."¹⁰⁵ With the onslaught of gun violence and the fatal shooting by the police of eighteen-year-old

¹⁰² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 19.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ "New Icon Depicts Black Mary as Our Lady Mother of Ferguson," Web Editors, *Sojourners*, July 11, 2016, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://sojo.net/articles/new-icon-depicts-black-mary-our-lady-mother-ferguson.html>.

Michael Brown in November of 2014, “The Our Lady of Ferguson was written by Mark Dukes. It was commissioned by Rev. Dr. Mark Francisco Buzzuti-Jones of Trinity Church Wall Street.”¹⁰⁶ The icon depicts Mary “as a black woman with her hands up. Where her womb would be is a small black silhouette of Jesus in a similar posture, but in the crosshairs of a gun.”¹⁰⁷ Fr. James Martin, S.J., a Jesuit author and priest, posted the commentary and icon on social media.

Our Lady prays for all who are targeted by gun violence: African-Americans, the poor and marginalized, and police officers. All are her children. All are our brothers and sisters. Let us ask Our Lady to pray for us.¹⁰⁸

For many African American mothers, Mary the mother of Jesus is the prototype of all who attempt to keep their sons alive when their very presence jeopardizes their existence because the African American male is assumed a threat to society.

In her book, *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth*, Courtney Hall Lee relates African American motherhood to that of Mary, a single, young virgin and the correlations are glaring. “Black motherhood has always been loaded and laden with stereotypes, hardships, and sacrifices.”¹⁰⁹

The same is true for Mary. Had man’s law not been suspended by God’s favor, Mary would have been stigmatized as many young, single African American mothers are. Though she may have been shielded from that stigmatization externally, she would face it within the family which is often the case in the African American experience. “Between

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “New Icon Depicts Black Mary as Our Lady Mother of Ferguson,” Web Editors, *Sojourners*, July 11, 2016, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://sojo.net/articles/new-icon-depicts-black-mary-our-lady-mother-ferguson.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Courtney Hall Lee, *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth*, (Oregon: Cascade Book, 2017), xiii

the Black esteem for Jesus and the degradation of Black mothers, it would seem that Mary would be a natural ally for Black women. After all, she bore the world a savior. There must be something that Black women can gain from Mary.”¹¹⁰

Her absence for the African American religious discourse is especially disconcerting considering that, according to Lee, most African American Christian women have acknowledged Jesus as their Savior, provider and sustainer, while “Mary has been virtually invisible in the Black religious experience.”¹¹¹

If she were more adamantly interjected into the African American religious discourse, it would be difficult for African American women not to encounter Mary as a compatriot in a rare society; a society in which mothers grapple with the government sanctioned execution of their sons. “Mary, Mother of the Movement,”¹¹² is part of “A Manifesto of a Womanist Mariology,”¹¹³ in which Lee innovatively inspires Black women who have experienced that specific kind of loss by drawing the parallel between it and Mary’s loss of her first born:

Mary’s son was a revolutionary. He was a man who was considered subversive and challenged those in power. He was homeless, a drifter, an itinerant preacher and an activist. In the end, he was executed by the state; Mary had no choice but to watch powerlessly at the cross.¹¹⁴

This movement resonates for the African American mother. It is a gripping perspective in which Mary “represents the marginalized mothers of the movement whose sons and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., xiii.

¹¹¹ Courtney Hall Lee, *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth*, (Oregon: Cascade Book, 2017), xiv.

¹¹² Ibid., 123.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

daughters were misunderstood, reviled and killed. Mary, Mother of the Movement empathizes completely in this particular grief.”¹¹⁵

African American Diana Hayes presses the similarity between the life Mary lived as a Jew under Roman oppression with the poor and marginalized existence of black women in our racist society and church. Like the Galilean woman, black women keep on keepin’ on despite prejudice and hard days giving birth to the future with their very lives. What commends Mary is not her passivity, of the type classically inculcated into slave women, but the way she models strong, righteous, behavior in alliance with God’s liberating justice for her people. Paying a high compliment drawn from the black community, Hayes describes her as ‘womanish.’¹¹⁶

Through the lens of Mary’s autonomy, the African American woman not only sees her value as a leader, but as a contributor to Christian society and theological discourse.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 13.

CHAPTER THREE CONFUSING ROLE WITH IDENTITY

Family dynamics connect and establish relations among family members. Each family structure has its subtleties and unique combined arrangements that are simultaneously beneficial and injurious. Whatever handicap these dynamics afford us, they shape our interactions with the world around us.

Along with roles come certain social and family expectations for how those roles should be fulfilled. For example, parents are expected to teach, discipline, and provide for their children. And children are expected to cooperate and respect their parents. As family members age, they take on additional roles, such as becoming a spouse, parent, or grandparent. A person's role is always expanding or changing, depending upon his or her age and family stage.¹¹⁷

The roles we hold in our families are supposed to change. They are supposed to morph into more complicated variations overtime. Unfortunately, the societal limitations associated with certain roles has at times been perpetuated to minimize and subjugate. This seems especially true for women. Regardless of the status women acquire outside of their homes, their role within the family structure seems cemented. What happens when the roles women play in their homes are incongruent with how they interact with the world around them? Conflict ensues.

I will never forget those harsh words, “*I don’t need a pastor, I need a wife.*” This statement mitigated my identity by holding me prisoner to a role. Is this statement the result of socialized expectations in a context where identity is secondary to social roles?

The capacity to distinguish role from self is one of the gifts of developing a critical, systematic perspective and can yield a useful analysis of what is really going on. It is often vitally important to be

¹¹⁷ Rick Peterson, “Families First-Keys to Successful Family Functioning: Family Roles,” *VCE Publications* 330, (May 1, 2009): 350-093, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/350/350-093/350-093.html>.

able to recognize that what is happening to you is not about you. It is often much more about the issue you represent and the role you are playing in the drama. Roles are formed in the social systems we inhabit. They never perfectly correspond with the fullness of one's humanity.¹¹⁸

Because the role has very little to do with “the fullness of one's humanity,”¹¹⁹ the function of the social role we assume should never supersede our identity. If we return to Mary as noted in Chapter Two, clearly there is evidence of wanting to define her in particular ways. Some minimize her as having no other significance outside of being a mother, but motherhood was only one facet of her identity. She was a mother, a wife, a child of God and one who was in relationship with God. She went on to be a leader and a significant voice in the early church. Mary did not allow her role as a mother to be her only identity. Scholarly interpretations of Mary placed those limits on her.

Likewise, women alone must autonomously reconcile who they are with what they do. Therefore, before I fulfill the role of pastor and wife, I am a woman. I identify as a woman, an African American woman with multiple characteristics defining what that means. How does an African American woman define identity in relation to the wider culture? Charisse Jones, USA Today reporter and Kumea Shorter-Golden, a clinical psychologist completed research focusing on what it is like being a female and African American. The study covered data from 400 African American women of all ages and considered social and economic factors. In an excerpt from their book, the two authors claim:

Black women have so much to offer our country, so many gifts to share with all of us. And yet, as a society and as a nation, we have never entirely stopped to appreciate the truth of their experience, the verity of

¹¹⁸ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught* (Massachusetts, Harvard Business Review Press, 2005), 86.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

what it feels like to be Black and female, the reality that no matter how intelligent, competent, and dazzling she may be, a Black woman in our country today still cannot count on being understood and embraced by mainstream White America.¹²⁰

There continues to be a view that the few who are held up as role models suffices for the whole, but this does not account for the complexity of family, economic disparity and uneven educational opportunities. These authors address the issues of family dynamics as the form of connecting and establishing relations among family members. As social roles are assigned, family placements are incorporated, characteristics are appointed, hierarchies are established, and exchanges within a family are displayed to demonstrate roles crucial in delineating family dynamics. The African American woman must contend with the incorporated family placements, socially appointed characteristics, and racially biased hierarchies to see herself as a meaningful contributor to any discussion while embracing the fact that she will be largely misunderstood.

This describes the double shifting of roles evident in the research. There is a familial role and a social role. Both have a direct impact on an individual's identity. Socially, women have advanced significantly within many societies, but African American women remain at the lower end of the spectrum. Further, compared to men, women's concerns are often given second priority – especially within their own families. As a result, women endure social isolation and discrimination in subtle, but heinous ways. For example, those words, “*I don't need a pastor; I need a wife,*” advocated for my identity to be superseded by my socially acceptable familial role.

¹²⁰ Charisse Jones, Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 2.

This is not uncommon. Consequently, what women do is often limited by who family and society say they are. “By deforming social conditioning, segregation from education, opportunities, and experience, woman have been shaped into a mockery of their potential selves. But once released from this social bondage, the woman can grow back into that equality with men that is still her authentic capacity.”¹²¹ Women with a call to leadership must give ourselves permission to stand in our womanhood unashamed and unencumbered by external perceptions of our roles. Thankfully, I have reconciled who I am with what I do. Before I fulfill the role of pastor and wife, I am a woman. “I am a woman, and that matters first.”

The definition of me: an African American female leader, permitted by myself to stand in my womanhood while bringing awareness to other women who are called to leadership concerning the paramount nature of their identification as liberated women to the achievement of diversity in the academic field of theology.

A WOMAN’S PLACE - How Did I Get Here?

I grew up in a household with both of my parents and observed my mother devote her life to performing the duties of a wife. She nurtured four children, kept our home orderly, and was recognized in the church as “First lady.” My father was the senior pastor and founder of a Pentecostal/Apostolic ministry which started in the early 1950s. I watched my mother assume her various roles with fidelity and precision. She was also committed to helping my father provide for the welfare of our family and, for a short period, cleaned the offices of a Jewish doctor. I assumed this is the model that I was to

¹²¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Subordination and Liberation of Women in Christian Theology: St. Paul and Sarah Grimké,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 61, no. 2 (1978): 168-81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41178075>.

emulate. I did not ask my mother if she felt satisfied. In those times, one did not speculate about feelings. We took things at face value. If I had the chance I'd ask, "Did you function out of obligation as a wife, mother and public figure in the church? If given another choice in life to fulfill a personal goal, would you have reevaluated your decision?" These questions echo the discontent that many women silently ponder.

Historically, African American women in families have been responsible for the care and nurturance of their spouses, children, and aging family members. African American mothers are cognizant of the societal limitations confronting them as they undertake their economic, parental, and household maintenance tasks. They bear the stigma attached to their ethnic status, as well as that of being female, in many cases.¹²²

Reflections of developing womanhood are conveyed from one generation to the next. Women will often follow certain norms of their mothers, grandmothers and influential women in their proximate environment. Even the responsibilities young girls eventually assume were often once carried out by adult females in their early preview. As it pertains to how they will relate to others, young girls begin imitating behaviors of adults. This contributes to their maturation until they start a significant stage of preparation for womanhood: sexual awareness.

The intense sexual awareness the girls and boys experience causes them to relate to each other in a manner that is highly influenced by their knowledge of the roles men and women play with each other. In anticipation of these future roles, the pace is set early for this interaction eventually to take place.¹²³

As in most traditions, African-American women usually associate motherhood with womanhood. However, the connection between the two appears to be more deeply

¹²² Edith A. Lewis, "Role Strain in African-American Women: The Efficacy of Support Networks," *Journal of Black Studies* 20, no. 2 (1989): 155-69, accessed January 4, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784697>.

¹²³ Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 122.

rooted in the African American tradition because of the role grandmothers play in African American homes. “Scholars tend to interpret black grandmothers’ more central and parent-like role in the lives of their biological grandchildren as the continuation of a cultural tradition rooted in West Africa.”¹²⁴ African American grandmothers are influential in socializing their grand-daughters with the resourcefulness that will be beneficial later in life. When older women who function as mentors nurture young girls, the most evident concept of womanhood is the active role that she demonstrates within the family dynamic. A grandmother is not only a mother, but she has the high honor of being a mother of mothers. Her esteemed role, makes her highly influential and her role can be mistaken as a pinnacle. Therefore, we must identify a way of holding the role (with all of its privileges and duties) as sacred while recognizing that the wider issue of managing one’s own calling moves beyond the role. One way is for women to courageously acknowledge and accept shifting roles as callings are acknowledged. Maureen Chiquet addresses this experience shared by women today.

It’s so easy to confuse our identities with our positions, titles, or roles. And maybe they do define us for a time, along with a host of other monikers like a mentor, CEO, wife or mother. We assume and take on all sorts of different labels all the time, and it can be scary when we begin to notice that those once-comfortable suits no longer seem to fit or represent who we are.¹²⁵

For African American women changing the traditional role involves shifting from one of the most commonly held beliefs – a woman’s place is in the home. The fundamental biases associated with this belief and the absence of information concerning

¹²⁴ Dr. Lashawnda Pittman, “Black Grandmothers From Slavery to the Present,” accessed April 3, 2019, <http://www.drlashawndapittman.com/black-grandmothers-from-slavery-to-the-present>.

¹²⁵ Maureen Chiquet, *Beyond the Label: Women, Leadership, and Success On Our Own Terms* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017) 7.

alternate options has fortified a single model for gender-specific family norms and behavior. Too often resulting in a constricted, one-dimensional viewpoint on the role of men and women in society.

However, this does not begin in modern society. For African American women it is rooted in slavery. Our African ancestors were displaced from their native land and, as the enslaved, became subject to masters or overlords who set the standards and treated the Africans as chattel. Selective roles for African women were established and arranged by property owners with the primary focus of childbearing — but without any effort to involve the women in the traditional roles or tasks of the spouse, guide, caretaker or parent. Slave owners profited extensively from the investment of African progeny. Consequently, “Family roles were redefined both publicly and privately. The secondary roles did not resemble the traditional, established nuclear family.”¹²⁶

After slavery the role of progenitor morphed into primary caretaker, directly contradicting the positions and responsibilities of African women in their communities. In fact, the role of women in traditional African communities may be a significant indicator clarifying the ambition of African American and African women today. It is notable that women in various African communities – especially those related to a chief or king – were to be recognized in the work world. Their rank in their culture often established superior admission to specific profitable activities. “For example, among the Yoruba, the king's wives were the premier long-distance traders among the women. Middle-class women were not likely to choose the domestic sphere over the public domain.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Norma J. Burgess, “Gender Roles Revisited: The Development of the Woman's Place Among African American Women in the United States,” *Journal of Black Studies* 24, no. 4 (1994): 391-401, accessed January 11, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784560>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Further, within these communities was a custom of women having real input in community affairs. Therefore, the distinct duties assigned to both women and men were complementary rather than used to contrast the controller from the subservient.

Individual women were expected to “carry their own burdens,” irrespective of gender. As a result, along with respect, some rights, privileges, and responsibilities were accorded without regard for gender. Neutrality in gender roles was a significant part of the lifestyle of African men and women. Changes that occurred with the onset of colonialism appear to be ones that created hierarchical relations between the sexes.¹²⁸

Women from African communities carried their own as they carried the community itself. Heavily involved in the politics of their community their voices helped to shape the governance of thriving societies. “The functioning of political organizations was abruptly disturbed by the imposition of the colonial system.”¹²⁹ This transition severely affected both the communities and the women who served those communities. Before the amalgamation of colonialism, “women held formal leadership roles in matrilineages and were influential in decision-making patrilineages.”¹³⁰ Afterward, the methodical prohibition from any involvement in the establishments set up by the colonist commands robbed the community of strong leadership and robbed women of their voices.

Often frowned upon for their brazen demand for equality, the tenacity displayed by African American women in America has its origin in Africa. Its lasting vestiges guide our refusal to succumb to traditionally and socially acceptable roles and prompts decisions which reflect courage as we pursue leadership positions. “Black women in

¹²⁸ Norma J. Burgess, “Gender Roles Revisited: The Development of the Woman's Place Among African American Women in the United States,” *Journal of Black Studies* 24, no. 4 (1994): 391-401, accessed January 11, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784560>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

America have learned to find humor in heartache, to see beauty in the midst of desperation and horror. They have been both caregivers and breadwinners, showing incredible strength and resilience, unflinching loyalty, boundless love, and affection.”¹³¹

This ability to shift perspectives coupled with the internal drive to build and sustain community can be seen in the life of Dr. LaVerne Adams, a Transformational Leadership Consultant. Serving as a pastor and entrepreneur, Dr. Adams shares her experience of a transformative accomplishments stating:

When I got “that call,” God told me to build a church from the outside-in. So that meant that I wasn't just focusing on meeting the needs of the people inside, making them comfortable, but actually, reaching past the doors of the church and doing something that would make a difference in the world. My mission is personal, social and its global. I started writing grants and going to community meetings to see what the needs were. The congregation became more and more able to embrace this and understood it. We were getting millions of dollars to service all the children with educational enhancement literacy programs through the church. We created the after-school program, the summer camp, and the daycare center.”¹³²

Dr. Adams was successful in developing the Motivational Achievement Program with an after-school Program and the Cathedral Learning Center. Not only was Dr. Adams the pastor for the congregation, but her call also involved pastoring the community. Utilizing the gifts, talents, and abilities she believes God gave her, Dr. Adams discovered her unique method of leading others from the outside-in could be a useful model for connecting with people. The proof of its success was found in the community’s favorable response with many who did not attend traditional worship services claiming this church as their own. Dr. Adams believes that the tradition setup or prototype of church we have

¹³¹ Charisse Jones, Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 1.

¹³² Dr. LaVerne Adams, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 20, 2018.

embraced is no longer helpful in her case. Her motivation to transform an urban community required she overcome the fears associated with bucking against several traditions in favor of transforming a community. Having done so successfully, Dr. Adams wrote the book ‘Beyond Your Doors – Strategies to Transform Your Community,’¹³³ which she had the privilege of using as a curriculum in seminary. She states, “I am now reproducing myself and sharing what I have learned through that material and igniting other leaders to do the same.”¹³⁴

A DISPLACED WOMAN

Dr. Adams’ story displays how overcoming the fear associated with responding to an internal drive by purposefully affronting tradition can be powerfully transformative. However, that same internal drive can be a double-edged sword cutting away at the very freedom (the freedom to choose between role and identity) we strive to acquire. Because we are attempting something that is not generally accepted, we often do it without support. It takes a unique strength to do it all alone and that strength is often misrepresented as a badge of honor. Consequently, it is common among African American women to inadvertently become multi-taskers. Multi-tasking can affect our emotional and physical well-being and sometimes, while the general public applauds our effort, something critical is at stake. Many women are confusing this demand for efficiency and overwork with having it all together.

¹³³ Dr. LaVerne Adams, *Beyond Your Doors – Strategies to Transform Your Community*, (Philadelphia: LaVerne Adams, 2012).

¹³⁴ Dr. LaVerne Adams, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 20, 2018.

Many African American women seldom reveal with transparency our inner thoughts and deep stress. “As perpetual caretakers, StrongBlackWomen spend most of their time and energy caring for the needs of others, promising to reserve the leftovers for themselves.”¹³⁵ Many are suffering from the heaviness of family and community responsibilities and work. The physical consequences compounded by personal occurrences of loss and trauma impede any sense of self and at the core of many women is a pervasive loneliness.

This adversarial mix persists for African-American women. When we exert the audacity of responding to our internal struggle we are often mistakenly judged as being miserable. When we talk about our experiences, we are accused of exploiting our victimization. Therefore, we often silently engage with an antagonistic (sexist, racist, economically flaky) society. Our silence only aids in perpetuating the cycle of frustration and discouragement with which many African-American women cope. In *Batman Begins*, a crucial part of Bruce Wayne's objective for becoming Batman was so he could be an image of something. Often this is the fear induced motivation behind black women adopting the “angry black women” moniker – it is just an image.

Candance McDuffie, a freelance writer from Boston, Massachusetts reckoned with these ideas. As a music journalist, she is a contributor for publications such as Fusion, Brooklyn Magazine, Teen Vogue, WBUR, HelloGiggles, and The Daily Dot. One of her memorable accomplishments was when she was asked to write about being a Black female music writer for Performer Magazine.

Women of color – particularly Black women, are always told by the media, their teachers, their peers, and even their family members that

¹³⁵ Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy A Yoke, Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 66.

we must never pay too much attention to our race or gender. That if we do, those two identities consisting of both blackness and womanhood can never intersect. That the moment they do, we are no longer valid. That our experience, our complexities, our struggles, our achievements, our lives immediately lose their value. That when we voice our opinions about the erasure, we are victims of daily, we are too sensitive. That when we have our femininity and ultimately our humanity mocked, we need to learn how to take a joke. That we need to learn how to be immensely grateful for fragments of attention we do receive.¹³⁶

I believe actions matter more than intentions and the act of erasing the complexities women of color bring to their work erases the plausibility of good intentions. Meaningful effort is required to recognize how our unique experiences are an enhancement and can even reinvigorate interest as new avenues are explored. Most will not exert that effort, but will instead insist on upholding miscalculated, misguided and misdirected tradition.

The pressure among African American women to keep the myth of “being strong” alive while accommodating traditional ideas of subservience and juggling perceived notions of victimization may be subconscious, but it is real and brings up issues of mental health. The hope to include balance among the demands for everything else is misplaced.

In her intimate and family relationships, on her job, and in her church and community, she is the “go to” woman, the one upon whom others depend when they need assistance, counsel or comfort. Driven by a deeply ingrained desire to be seen as helpful and caring, she is practically incapable of saying no to others’ requests without experiencing feelings of guilt and worthlessness.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Candace McDuffie, “Embracing My Identity as a Black Woman, The Ploughshares at Emerson College,” (Blog) January 14, 2019, <https://blog.pshares.org/?s=embracing+my+identity+as+a+black+woman>.

¹³⁷ Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy A Yoke, Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 4.

Unfortunately, out of ignorance many of our sisters are tremendously damaged emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. The inner battle is overwhelming causing a permanent scar within our internal psyches. The vicious cycle of low self-esteem leads to decisions to settle for less. All of it compounds until we feel like we are going to pop. Personal implosion has been averted by including therapy into my self-care regime; however, for some women the stigma of mental health persists. Consequently, antidotes are not always pursued leading to emotional duress, escalated blood pressure, poor eating habits, obesity, and severe depression. If not addressed, suicidal tendencies can appear to be the solution to escape life's pressures.

Our societal norms continue to exacerbate the untruths concerning African American women which can be directly attributed to typecasts based on social class, race, and gender. "From the period of urbanization of World War II to the present, Black women find that our situation is still a situation of struggle, a struggle to survive collectively and individually against the continuing harsh historical realities and pervasive adversities in today's world."¹³⁸ Who can we trust to share our innermost fears and insecurities? Stereotypical images set confusing restrictions on who we imagine we are and what we can become. We are displaced.

African American women hold a unique place at the confluence of the histories of African Americans and women. From one angle, black women faced a variety of constraints in their lives because of private sphere responsibilities bequeathed to them as women. From a second angle, they were consigned grave public responsibilities because of the needs of the race.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon - Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 55.

¹³⁹ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What A Woman Ought To Be and To Do* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 21.

The *Journal of Negro Education* printed an article focused on the dissimilarities in views of African American women versus men staff in institutions of higher learning.

The result is a serious dearth of studies on African American women in academe, whose concerns and perspectives have remained largely unexamined and unaddressed. Our search to locate studies on gender differences among African American faculty and administrators yielded no empirical studies, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that African American women faculty and administrators face dual burdens of sexism and racism and confront special challenges in promotion and tenure. Furthermore, the literature confirms that the rate of promotion and tenure among African American women is slower than that of either African American men or White women.¹⁴⁰

Since the 1995 publication of this article, some institutions have improved and made changes. However, under the current U.S. presidency, institutional sexism seems more prominent and continues to be a problem in many institutions. “Universities considered the locations for the most advanced thinking and practices on these matters are by no means exempt as they still end up reproducing these societal ills.”¹⁴¹ As a result of this “African American women, frequently the recipients of these combined social disorders, are the less favored in these institutional traditions.”¹⁴² In this culture of sexism and racism, “the academy must be a place where interconnected gender biases and male exclusivities are recognized as harmful.”¹⁴³ The change must happen “even if it challenges with the larger racist narratives and practices to an institution’s overall intellectual and social climate.”¹⁴⁴ Further, it must happen if women are to freely and

¹⁴⁰ Kusum Singh, Adriane Robinson, and Joyce Williams-Green, “Differences in Perceptions of African American Women and Men Faculty and Administrators,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 4 (1995): 401-08. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967263>.

¹⁴¹ Carole Boyce Davies, “Top of 2018 - #8 – The Persistence of Institutional Sexism in Africana Studies, *Black Perspectives*,” accessed December 19, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/top-10-of-2018-8-the-persistence-of-institutional-sexism-in-africana-studies/>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

without intimidation acquire the insight needed to successfully navigate the reacquisition of her role in the world of leadership.

Menah Pratt-Clarke, a scholar and social activist, shared a personal story about her growing up in Normal, Illinois. Her experience of racism and sexism influenced her to write about her search for identity and justice as a woman of color. When describing her emerging moment, Pratt-Clarke says, “I was not aware or conscious of my gender identity and role as a Black woman until I experienced sexual abuse and violence as a college student.”¹⁴⁵ This experience made it imperative for Pratt-Clarke to express her discontent with how African American women are unseen and unheard.

Our invisibility and silence were not limited to ancient Kemet
Historical accounts. We were part of abolition and it was not just
Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. We were part of the Civil Rights
movement and it was not just Rosa Parks. We were part of the
women’s movement, the feminist movement, and the Black Power
movement. But our story is not included in the “story” that is told and
in the “history” that is taught.¹⁴⁶

These words motivate African American women to continue to be resourceful. Rather than conceding to fate, I and others have been resilient in creating solutions to overcome a kind of status quo regarding identity and opportunity. “The ability to utilize her existing resources and yet remain a forthright determination to struggle against the racist society in whatever overt and subtle ways necessary is one of her major attributes.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Menah Pratt-Clarke, “A Black Women’s Search for the Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice Model: Encounters with Critical Race Feminism, Black Feminism, and Africana Studies,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5, no.1 (2012), accessed January 4, 2019, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-306514665/a-black-woman-s-search-for-the-transdisciplinary-applied>.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 282.

A significant part of recounting what it means to be Black can be attributed to the Black woman. Therefore, if African American women are to reacquire our roles in the world of leadership, we must persevere through the difficulty of being a member of two understated groups (a shortcoming sometimes signified to as the “double jeopardy hypothesis”¹⁴⁸). The first is a bias that is not experienced by White women or African American men. She is the “carrier of culture oppressed and yet given some small opportunity to negotiate the different demands.”¹⁴⁹ The second is invisibility, especially when a women’s presence goes unnoticed and voice is muted. It is instinctive to put a plan into action which elevates the voices of women in academia, even if it means agitating others. The probability of black women —troublemakers, truth tellers — leading the charge as change agents seems high.

WHO AM I?

The march forward begins with the realization that fear, with all of its negative connotations, can be a beacon on the path to developing our own lives and purposes. We may fear conflict with the established norms, but perhaps such a conflict will dissuade us from the old habit of disappearing. When we remain present, perceptive, and progressive we can begin to empower ourselves in order to cultivate and overcome the malaise associated with powerlessness

I had the opportunity to attend a women’s fellowship, “I Am My Sister’s Keeper,” sponsored by the ministry where I serve. It is an outreach ministry designed to help women keep each other accountable. One of the segments was an exercise encouraging

¹⁴⁸ Neena L. Chappell, and Betty Havens. “Old and Female: Testing the Double Jeopardy Hypothesis,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1980): 157-71. www.jstor.org/stable/4106148.

¹⁴⁹ Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 287.

women to share information about themselves through asking: What is my sense of identity? For some, this may be a challenging question. I have worked with women who function in different capacities for the welfare of others and ultimately lose themselves in the mix.

Who are **you**?’ said the Caterpillar. This was **not** an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.’¹⁵⁰

Who am I? What a fascinating question to probe. Am I an inconsequential personality confined in a body, or am I just substance? Do I have a detached ego separate from everything, or an opening, whirlwind, or space through which the world briefly becomes cognizant, or something else? “Is it likely for me to have a personality that is separate and apart from what Carl Jung deems a public face that I exhibit to the world, or a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual?”¹⁵¹ It may be scary, but as the role and the calling become less divided our identity becomes more whole.

WHAT I DO DEFINES ME

The environment of my nurturing is the foundation upon which my character is constructed. It influences how I assess life’s choices. “What defines me determines how far I see myself growing and the boundaries I won't cross to get there.”¹⁵² Therefore, it is my responsibility to grow and cultivate those choices which harmonize with my inner

¹⁵⁰ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Diverson Books, 2015), 48.

¹⁵¹ Piotr Sadowski, *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare’s Mature Tragedies* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2003), 35.

¹⁵² Oprah Winfrey, “Oprah: What Defines Me,” accessed January 4, 2019, <https://www.oprah.com/inspiration/oprah-what-defines-me>.

self. To deny who I am is to deny the best inside of me, but contentment is living in harmony with one's true self without succumbing to external role related expectations or limitations.

This is my identity. I am a womanist-theologian, I am a pastor, I am an African-American, I am a pragmatist, I am a motivator. I am a sister; I am the mother of a son. These identities and roles are central to how I act, think and live, but do not always agree with social characters assigned to me.

“Social roles refer to the behavior, responsibilities, and expectations we accept in certain situations.”¹⁵³ The exciting process of exhuming our true identities, without a range of social exchanges, usually requires concentrating on one's self. However, individual self-development cannot be detached from social customs, public difficulties, and community encouragement. “Family members, friends, teachers and the exigencies of day-to-day life effectively bound the self and society in pragmatic and idealistic ways.”¹⁵⁴

We each are influenced and live within and at times are controlled by our own cultures. Becoming more enlightened about our own culture benefits how we live and influence others. One of the shortcomings associated with demanding others understand our cultural contributions is our own lack of understanding which is often rooted in our fear of our own communities. Engaging with community specific problems and issues provides cultural cues which should be considered when formulating identity related purpose. By clearly identifying the limits and strengths of our specific culture we are also

¹⁵³ “Social Roles,” Alleydog.com, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition-cit.php?term=Social+Roles>.

¹⁵⁴ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What A Woman Ought To Be and To Do* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42.

able to recognize internal burdens to address them. Consequently, the likelihood of making choices that will change our social unit is probable. A neighborhood is more than a community. “Composed dynamically of a diverse group of people, it was a social institution or an arrangement of people who possessed a common understanding of history, mutual interests in the present, and shared visions of the future for the group and all of its members.”¹⁵⁵ This shared vision greatly influences the view of self as a meaningful contributor to vision fulfilment.

The shared vision for a future motivated African-American women to attain personal, and career success during the era of Jim Crow. The future of their wellbeing depended on their capabilities to work successfully in both the private and public circles. To expand the probability of their accomplishment, concerned persons created activities that empowered them to be accountable for their goals. They simultaneously became representatives of social change. “The progression shaped some prominent frontrunners among black women and had overarching significances in and outside African-American locality.”¹⁵⁶ We do not have a reason to be ashamed of our communities. Everyone’s life is a summation of views, principles, embarrassments, passions, and limitations.

I had the privilege of meeting another woman in leadership over thirteen years ago and she has been a mentor and example faith and resilience. The Rev. Dr. Marsha Brown Woodard is one of the instructors for the Priscilla Institute at the Hestenes Center for Christian Women in Leadership at Palmer Theological Seminary. “She is ordained in the American Baptist denomination and holds ministerial standing with the Christian

¹⁵⁵ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What A Woman Ought To Be and To Do* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Church (Disciples of Christ), and previously served as pastor. She is a staff member for congregations in Pennsylvania and Missouri. Rev. Dr. Woodard also is a consultant to churches, religious organizations, and human service organizations in the area of Christian Education, Discipleship, and administration (especially church administration).¹⁵⁷ Rev. Dr. Woodard is also an author, and her writings are in several publications such as “Church Women Magazine; Baptist Leader and American Baptist Quarterly.”¹⁵⁸ She is the author of *I Was Tired Today*,¹⁵⁹ and *I Choose to Thrive*.¹⁶⁰ Rev. Dr. Woodard responds that what motivates her is loving to serve and impact the lives of others.

Sometimes what might be my best looks different from day to day. But it is trying at the end of the day to be able to say, “I gave it my best shot.” I am grateful that I get to do things that I love doing. In that sense, the work ends up motivating, because it is work and I love doing it. Along the way things happen. I want to give my best and I enjoy when people seem to get a new idea, or something clicks. I don't intentionally work each day saying what can I do that's going to make it click. The motivation is that I want to connect with people.¹⁶¹

Dr. Woodard went on to share some of her experiences about learning to adapt to situations when her gift of preaching was not positively received because she is a woman. During the early years of her ministry, some churches did not permit women to preach or teach. Women were not allowed in the pulpit and were not licensed and ordained. Dr. Woodard was blessed to have a pastor who affirmed women in leadership. Her pastor

¹⁵⁷ Marsha Brown Woodard, Palmer Theological Seminary, accessed June 19, 2019, <https://www.palmerseminary.edu/marsha-brown-woodard>.

¹⁵⁸ American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region, accessed June 19, 2019, <https://www.abcgrr.org>.

¹⁵⁹ Rev. Dr. Marsha Brown-Woodard, *I Was Tired Today*, (Philadelphia, Brown Bridges Press, 2011)

¹⁶⁰ Rev. Dr. Marsha Brown-Woodard, *I Choose to Thrive*, (Philadelphia: Brown Bridges Press, 2016)

¹⁶¹ Rev. Dr. Marsha Brown-Woodard, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 16, 2018.

empowered her to use her gifts to inspire other women to remain faithful to what God called them to do. Faithfulness will initiate change.

Dr. Woodard's ability to overcome the limits of her role to fulfill her call is manifested through her ability to connect with people. As an African American woman in Christian leadership, Rev. Dr. Woodard is passionate about effectively serving to transform the lives of others. She does so by willingly to meeting people where they are without judgment or bias and displaying the agility to respond to the hard questions. She sees the benefit of becoming involved in the lives of others and creatively advocating on their behalf. Dr. Woodard believes the quality time in fellowship with strangers can evolve into memorable events and conversations of healing, reconciliation, and renewal. The ministry of presence makes an indelible impact on the lives of those in the community of our leadership. Her approach may be different in opportunity, but is successful in its application.

CHAPTER FOUR LIVING IN YOUR AUTHORITY

There has been a surge of literature detailing the paths and obstacles of women in leadership experience. The current swell of women in significant leadership positions in higher education, government, and religion are the glimmers of positive change. The 2018 midterm elections were seen as a historical turnaround for women, especially women of color, with 110 Congressional women elected. This new group includes the first Muslim woman, the youngest African American woman (Boston, Ma.), a Native American woman, Somali-American woman, and an LGBTQ woman. There is renewed optimism that the influx of women recently elected to Congressional Seats will promote favorable changes within the government. Senator Kristen Gillibrand gave an interview following her re-election and stated, “Studies even show that when women go to Congress, they get more things done – more bipartisan effort, more bills passed.”¹⁶² Additionally, research has found the recent flood of women running for office and winning elections has significantly impacted the degree of interest younger women have in running for office.

Undoubtedly, the increase of women in leadership roles provides hope for women in a variety of contexts. In the field of higher education, on February 20, 2018, Katherine Anandi Rowe was named the twenty-eighth and first female president of the College of Williams & Mary. “This institution of higher education is the second oldest in the United States (after Harvard College), it was chartered in 1693 by co-sovereigns King William

¹⁶² Jill Terrerri Romas, “Do Women Do Better In Congress Than Men?” *PolitiFact New York*, November 16, 2018, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://www.politifact.com/new-york/statements/2018/nov/16/kirsten-gillibrand/gilibrand-champions-women-legislators/>.

III and Queen Mary II of England to develop clergymen and civil servants for the colony.”¹⁶³ The Ecumenical Catholic Communion ordained Denise Donato, their first female bishop. ECC is an American independent Catholic church adhering to the Catholic custom without being in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Instead, they are a coalition of independent groups established in Europe and the United States. The leaders noted above represent significant accomplishments for women in various positions.

Will there be sustainability and acknowledgement for women and their hard work in their respective fields? Only time will tell, but research has already revealed that the current trend can only be beneficial to society at large. Professor Jenny Hoobler, the Professor and Doctoral Programs Manager from the University of Pretoria (along with her associates) determined that women leaders have improved definite proportions of market enactment and sales revenue. “Our results suggest women’s leadership may affect firm performance in general and sales performance in particular. And women's leadership—overall and, specifically, the presence of a female CEO—is more likely to positively relate to firms' financial performance in more gender-egalitarian cultures.”¹⁶⁴

Sean Dwyer and his assistants completed a study examining how growth was successful with “a positive impact on company market performance”¹⁶⁵ because of gender diversity. However, if companies want to continue to see that growth, they must

¹⁶³ College of William and Mary, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/College-of-William-Mary>.

¹⁶⁴ Jenny M. Hobbler, Courtney R. Masterson, Stella M. Nkomo, and Eric J. Michel. “The Business Case for Women Leaders: Meta-Analysis, Research Critique, and Path Forward,” *Journal of Management* 44, no. 6 (July 2018): 2473–99., <https://doi:10.1177/0149206316628643>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

continue to diversify. “Supporting contingency theory and configurational theory, the results suggest that gender diversity's effects at the management level are conditional on, that is, moderated by, the firm's strategic orientation, the organizational culture in which it resides, and/or the multivariate interaction among these variables.”¹⁶⁶ Other studies show that “female board representation is positively related to accounting returns and that this relationship is more positive in countries with stronger shareholder protections—perhaps because shareholder protections motivate boards to use the different knowledge, experience, and values that each member brings.”¹⁶⁷ Gender diversity which includes female CEOs benefits integral financial conservatism and ethical sensitivity. These investigative discoveries incentivize companies to accept women as they forge forward in their current pursuit of leadership roles.

Although leadership opportunities for women have advanced, opposition remains. “When women hold powerful positions, they have a harder time than men eliciting respect and admiration (i.e., status) from subordinates. As a result, female power-holders are seen as less legitimate than male power-holders.”¹⁶⁸ On occasion, female leaders can be subject to subordinate rejection. They experience a vast amount of undesirable views and occurrences including discrimination, sexual harassment, microaggressions and unconscious bias.

¹⁶⁶ Sean Dwyer, Orlando C. Richard, Ken Chadwick. “Gender Diversity in Management and Firm Performance: The Influence of Growth Orientation and Organizational Culture,” *Journal of Business Research* 56, no. 12 (December 2003): [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(01\)00329-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00329-0).

¹⁶⁷ Corrie Post and Kris Byron. “Women on Boards and Firm Financial Performance: A Meta-Analysis,” *Academy of Management Journal* 2015, 58:5, 1546-1571, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://journals.aom.org/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.5465%2Famj.2013.0319>.

¹⁶⁸ Andrea C. Vial, Jaime L. Napier, Victoria L. Brescoll, “A Bed of Thorns: Female Leaders and the Self-Reinforcing Cycle of Illegitimacy,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2016). 400-414.

McKinsey & Company did an extensive study (2018) of the women in corporate America. Their study depicts how the slow progression of gender diversity within companies stands in contrast to most companies' pledge to embrace gender diversity. Women remain immensely underrepresented on all levels. The studies' results concluded that 64% of women and 71% of lesbians experienced microaggressions in the workplace. "Fifty-five percent of women in senior leadership, 48% of lesbian women, and 45% of women in technical fields report they've been sexually harassed. Being 'the only one' is still a common experience for women. Women who are 'onlys' have a significantly worse experience than women who are with other women."¹⁶⁹ The not-so-nice names used to refer to females during male only conversations are disheartening when overheard. An "only" enters the board meeting knowing these conversations have occurred, yet determined to be seen and heard.

Though women are seeing great successes, women are continuing to sprint over what has been deemed the "glass cliff." When organizations experience crisis the possibility of failure is high. "Results indicate that the likelihood of a female candidate being selected ahead of an equally qualified male candidate increased when the organization's performance was declining rather than improving."¹⁷⁰ In other words, women may succeed in breaking the glass ceiling by achieving higher leadership positions only to plummet off the glass cliff when inherited problems remain, and the organization never recovers.

¹⁶⁹ Alexis Krivkovich, Marie-Claude Nadeau, Kelsey Robinson, Nicole Robinson, Irina Starikova, and Lareina Yee, "Gender Equality - Women In The Workplace 2018," *McKinsey & Company*, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>.

¹⁷⁰ S. Alexander Haslam, Michelle K. Ryan, "The Road to the Glass Cliff: Differences in the Perceived Suitability of Men and Women for Leadership Positions in Succeeding and Failing Organizations," *The Leadership Quarterly* 19, no. 5 (2008) 530-546.

Rowena Nagy, a journalist for the Business Woman Media, wrote a column about the harsh criticism that women leaders face. Her solution is not to allow criticism to affect goals. “We all have to put up with criticism, and sometimes it can be constructive and helpful – pointing us to a better direction and approach. But it seems that women are criticized more than men, especially when they are in high-profile positions.”¹⁷¹ Strong women can be intimidating to counterparts. Women must be aware of this, but not allow it to stop them from accomplishing the tasks set before them. During a panel discussion with several prominent female CEOs, Gloria Steinman, an American feminist, social activist, and journalist responded to what assertive women encounter with their male colleagues. “We are at the critical mass stage, and therefore we are getting more resistance,” she said. “Female authority is still associated with childhood, and the last time a lot of powerful guys saw a powerful woman they were eight, and they feel regressed to childhood by a powerful woman in a way that they don’t feel with a man.”¹⁷²

If Ms. Steinman is correct, then African American women in the business/political/sales arena confront an environment that is even more unpredictable. African American women not only represent a regression to childhood, but a loss of racial dominance and privilege. To combat this, more powerful women of color must prove they have what it takes to succeed, take roles of leadership and continue to exert their demand for equality. This is not a selfish undertaking. Organizations only stand to profit from a wider circle of leaders within an increasingly diverse world.

¹⁷¹ Rowena Nagy, “Women Leaders Face Harsher Criticism,” accessed March 29, 2019, <https://www.thebusinesswomanmedia.com/women-leaders-criticism/>.

¹⁷² Leslie Bennetts, “Beast TV Women In The World,” (Blog), accessed January 15, 2019), <https://www.thedailybeast.com/steinem-female-authority-is-still-associated-with-childhood>.

Traci Alexander discusses in her dissertation the need for an expansion of African American women leaders in higher education. She does qualitative research with statistics comparing the small percentage of women of color holding chief academic officer positions. “Given the statistical forecast, it is evident that overall, the nation’s institutions of higher education need to undergo a transformation, one providing a need for change in the present culture, a shift in the environment, and a need for a new vision; which will ultimately reflect, engage and accommodate a more diverse population, with diverse needs. How will the transformation happen in higher education?”¹⁷³ Alexander concludes her study with how some African American women will continue to progress in the growth of leadership in higher education.

The portion of minority presidents across the board grew to 16.8 percent in 2016, up from 12.6 percent in 2011 and 13.6 percent in 2006. Almost all of the growth came from African-American presidents. The portion of African-American presidents grew to 7.9 percent in 2016 from 5.9 percent five years earlier. The portion of Hispanic presidents stayed roughly steady -- rising to 3.9 percent from 3.8 percent -- as did the portion of American Indian and Alaska Native presidents, which was 0.7 percent in 2016 and 0.8 percent in 2011. The percentage of Asian-American presidents grew slightly, rising to 2.3 percent from 1.5 percent.¹⁷⁴

Her point is that the social identity of any individual can change through education. “We have to do more than other women. Those of us fortunate enough to have education must share it with the less fortunate of our race. We must go into our communities and

¹⁷³ Traci Alexander, “Roots of Leadership: Analysis of the Narratives from African American Women Leaders in Higher Education,” *International Journal of Learning* 17, no. 4 (May 2010): 193–204, <https://doi:10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v17i04/46973>.

¹⁷⁴ Rick Seltzer, “The Slowly Diversifying Presidency,” *Inside Higher ED*, June 20, 2017, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/20/college-presidents-diversifying-slowly-and-growing-older-study-finds>.

improve them; we must go out into the nation and change it.”¹⁷⁵ Bell Hooks, a social critic, and professor believes, “through teaching, one can empower individuals, communities, and nations and have not only the responsibility but also the obligation to educate, the leaders of tomorrow, to inform them of themselves through knowledge about themselves.”¹⁷⁶ It can happen with the African American women who have prepared themselves to lead in the academy with a wholeness that is vital to the success of the academic.

Not only must women begin to flourish in the academy, but in theology as well. Women’s leadership in African American churches is both functional and creatively inventive. The conventional roles for women as leaders include women’s groups, missionary societies, prayer ministry to leaders in parachurch and congregational settings and Christian education. Dr. Sandra L. Barnes, a professor from Vanderbilt University, determined in her research that there is a vast difference in the role of senior pastor for women in the African-American church. The *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, published her article in 2006, “Whosoever Will Let Her Come: Social Activism and Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church.” In it Barnes states “although an estimated 66–88 percent of Black Church congregants are women, men continue to hold the majority of leadership roles.”¹⁷⁷ Across seven denominations consisting of 1,863 African-American churches, “Fifty-one percent of respondents in their study approved of women as pastors

¹⁷⁵ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 23.

¹⁷⁶ B. Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress; Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

¹⁷⁷ Sandra L. Barnes. 2006. “Whosoever Will Let Her Come: Social Activism and Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45 (3): 371.

<http://ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.3838290&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

with the strongest approval from AME, AMEZ, and CME denominations. The Churches of God in Christ and Baptist denominations vehemently opposed women in ministry.”¹⁷⁸

Disagreement on tradition, doctrine, and theology in some denominations are some of the issues contributing to the absence of welcome extended to women clergy. “Women are being ordained as pastors, but not senior pastors.”¹⁷⁹ In fact, many congregations in African American communities prefer male leadership. Even the women are reluctant to accept another woman as their leader.

Though women are gradually entering ministry as bishops, pastors, deacons, and elders, many men and women still resist and fear that development. When our church licensed a woman to the preaching ministry over a decade ago, almost all the male deacons and many women members opposed the action by appealing to tradition and selected Scripture passages. Black theology and the black church must deal with the double bondage of black women in church and society.¹⁸⁰

This preference hinders the gifts that female leadership offers. Leadership by women seeks to change from the model of an authoritative white male leader, or at times black male leader, to various modified leadership styles with an emphasis on being emotionally intelligent, team-oriented and allowing for a collaborative style that is less top-down and considers various views in decision making. I believe a shift is taking place in the African American church as the church recognizes a more collaborative method. This change is spearheaded by audacious “female leaders who are more gender inclusive.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Alexis D. Abernethy, “Women’s Leadership in the African American Church,” Fuller Studio, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>.

¹⁸⁰ Linda Lowen, “The Role of African American Women in the Black Church,” Thoughtco.com., accessed January 16, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/african-american-women-black-church-3533748>.

Churches that are drawing on and informed by the strengths and gifts of their diverse leaders have a greater likelihood of fulfilling God’s call.”¹⁸¹

Despite these differences, women are being appointed as bishops and pastors at growing numbers. “Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie was elected the first woman bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2000. This appointment was a significant exemplar of the turn toward gender inclusivity.”¹⁸²

In the Pentecostal tradition, Rev. Dr. Maureen L. Davis has exemplified the true meaning of resilience in times of transition. She is “a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was consecrated and installed Presiding Bishop of the Gates of Heaven Assembly of Churches”¹⁸³ in 2006. Rev. Dr. Davis is the third generation of pastors and bishops, with a passion for mirroring the reign of God on earth. Her spiritual conversion began at Gates of Heaven Pentecostal Church where her grandmother, the late Bishop Lena Thomas was the founder. Rev. Dr. Davis assisted and was eventually installed as Senior Pastor by “her father, the late Pastor Emeritus James L. Ballard”¹⁸⁴ at the Open Door Mission True Light Church.

Being able to take over the fellowship of churches that my grandmother started has really been transformative for me. Of course, I never ever thought that I would be a presiding bishop. But I know that everything that I’ve learned, my grandmother taught me a lot. Faith, prayer, the ability to have the resistance to stand, to be the woman, that you know, God has called you to be. For me, that was a transformative moment in my life.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Alexis D. Abernethy, “Women’s Leadership in the African American Church,” Fuller Studio, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>.

¹⁸² Alexis D. Abernethy, “Women’s Leadership in the African American Church,” Fuller Studio, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>.

¹⁸³ Rev. Dr. Maureen L. Davis, “Our Pastor,” accessed June 29, 2019, <https://www.odmtlc.org/our-bishop>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Rev. Dr. Maureen L. Davis, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, PA, November 20, 2018.

Rev. Dr. Davis is an astute progenitor of an African American woman in leadership with a keen ability to mobilize an intergenerational congregation with renewed vigor. During my interview with Rev. Dr. Maureen L. Davis, I asked, “As a presiding bishop, pastor, wife, and mother, how do you navigate those dynamics?” Rev. Dr. Davis believes in the importance of *knowing who you are* as an African American woman in leadership. She agrees that fear is part of the progression to grow in your call, but the comfort is knowing God is present in every facet of your process.

African American women pastors and scholars have offered a more vibrant expression of Womanist theologies and Black liberation. There has been an addition of gender-inclusive religious influences making vital contributions in the lives of seminary graduates who are continuing the dialogue. These encounters are essential in the development of a more knowledgeable and complex discourse on the matter of social justice and female equality.

Although African American women are committed to the fight against issues of racism, there remains an intersection of racism and sexism that needs attention. “Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) in their book, *Shifting: African American Women’s Voices Project*, examined the effects of racism and sexism on African American women. This work provides helpful insight for understanding the psychological effects of living amidst racial and gender bias.”¹⁸⁶

SCARRED BUT NOT SCARED

Her damaged heart has traces. Traces of each crushing moment in the past that it took a beating. If only in her younger years she had a quick glimpse into the many milestones that had yet to come.

¹⁸⁶ Alexis D. Abernethy, “Women’s Leadership in the African American Church,” Fuller Studio, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>.

Alexandra Clark¹⁸⁷

A visible scar can be discomfoting and affect one's confidence to the point of disengagement from social situations. All types of scarring (resulting from a genetic condition, acne or a burn) can have severe impacts on esteem. The cosmetics industry, dermatologists and surgeons all offer ways to cover or remove scars, but what about hidden scars? Is it possible not to succumb to the emotional scar of being overlooked because your skin is too dark, hips are too wide, or your hair is too kinky? "For black women, the chains of race were equally as binding as the chains of sex. At the same time, they fully recognized that white America, including most white women, viewed them as black first and women second."¹⁸⁸ The intellectual fight within the realm of ideologies, critiques, and glares can be a reminder that your voice is irrelevant.

Black women have been the most mistreated and scandalized in the U.S. Society and culture as they wrestle both individually and collectively with the triple jeopardy of 'racism, sexism, and classism,' said Stacey Floyd-Thomas, an associate professor of ethics and society at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. 'If that is the case — and I believe it is — it is no wonder that black women, due to their experience of sexism, would seek out their faith as a way of finding relief, reprieve, resolution, and redemption.'¹⁸⁹

Following African American women's fight from slavery to present-day is a daunting undertaking. Bettye Collier-Thomas has gathered a comprehensive array of significant sources, incorporating sermons, private correspondence, and church publications, to demonstrate how within the patriarchal church black women sought to

¹⁸⁷ Alexandra Clark, "Read This Before You Give Up On The Emotionally Scarred Woman," March 6, 2017, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://thoughtcatalog.com/alexandra-clark/2017/03/read-this-before-you-give-up-on-the-emotionally-scarred-woman/>.

¹⁸⁸ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, African American Women and Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2014), xviii.

¹⁸⁹ Theola Labbé-DeBose, "Black Women Are Among Country's Most Religious Groups," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2012, accessed January 16, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/black-women-are-among-countrys-most-religious-groups/2012/07/06/gJQA0BksSW_story.html?utm_term=.810e73215b60.

construct a new identity and role for themselves. Her story mentions notable legendary figures, including Ella Baker, Nannie Burroughs, and Jarena Lee. Collier-Thomas' book also covers more substantial matters such as missionary campaigns, progressivism, interracial Christianity, and denominational polity.

A thorough examination of the interchange between public and religious culture demonstrates the changing dynamic concerning Christian theology and African American political ideology. This methodology enriches our appreciation of how the church operated as a political means for black women. Most of all, the book explains how women navigated through the debatable confines of race and gender to achieve influence in and out of the church. Collier-Thomas focuses on the various organizations that were formed by black women to empower the struggle for equality and to affirm their power within the church.

Women and men established social and religious reform during the nineteenth century. Within this period African American women expressed a political, national and social agenda which was the foundation of the black church – the most influential tradition in the black community.

Focusing on gender interactions, leadership roles, and the strategies women mounted to deal with their subordinate position illustrates how laywomen and preaching women constructed their identities in relationship to men after 1865, and the consequences incurred when they subverted prevailing gender conventions. It reveals the issues and struggles they encountered in the creation of women's missionary societies and conventions, and their efforts to secure laity and clergy rights and formal leadership positions.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, African American Women and Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2014), xxvi.

For many generations thereafter, black men and women formed Christianity into a complex blend of religion and sociology with a critical spiritual view that strengthened their awareness of self-worth, personal dignity, and identity, while underlying their freedom. “Used as sex objects and beasts of burdens but determined to survive, many women viewed the Bible as a source of inspiration. It became an instrument of freedom and survival tool for development of literacy.”¹⁹¹ Inside the restraints of slavery black women established endless devoutness and accepted the Bible as their authority and “Jesus Christ as their personal savior.”¹⁹²

The story for African American women is a narrative of compromise and struggle, loss and gain. Detractors and many analysts remain clueless as to why many black women regularly maintain their loyalties in American culture to social politics, denominations, and churches that intentionally manipulate and reject their identity and work. “Why do many black church women continue to accept second-class citizenship in the institutions they have literally built and sustained?”¹⁹³ Given these societal shackles, “how then did black women in the United States learn to lead within their personal and professional communities?”¹⁹⁴ The responses to these questions are complex.

Several scholars support and detail the activity and input of historical and current women in the formation and work of the church. They are the leading influence in criticizing the repressive habits of the Black Church. Their critique includes the

¹⁹¹ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, African American Women and Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2014), xxv.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., xxvii.

¹⁹⁴ Janet DeLany and Elice Rogers, “Black Women’s Leadership and Learning: From Politics to Afritics in the Context of Community,” *Convergence* 37 (2): 91–106. accessed August 27, 2019, <http://ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lfh&AN=27761024&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

symbolism of the divine, the usage of gender-inclusive expression, interpretations of suffering, the use and exploitation of authority within the church, and the scarcity of leadership positions for women.

“The most strident voices imply that the Black Church is not a place of equality and liberation for women. Theologian Delores Williams cites numerous violations of the African American denominational churches against black women and its membership at large.”¹⁹⁵ Her list of offenses includes the denying of equal opportunity for women in leadership positions, and complicit actions involving the political authorities in America and some African American male clergy. Williams expresses her disappointment of black women who remain in churches believing that self-denial and passionate belief in the male pastor will ultimately change. From her perspective, the cost to women who make this choice of loss of dignity equates to a misunderstanding of self-love and misappropriation of funds to sufficiently attack poverty so much so that constructing new houses of worship is prioritized over the wellbeing of souls. “Williams also cites the church’s rejection of the preaching and pastoral call of women, its silence in the midst of the AIDS epidemic, its incitement of homophobia, and its other-worldly focus and lack of concrete responses to immediate hardships.”¹⁹⁶

Many African American women dedicate everything it takes to encourage their families and support their institutions. “At critical periods in their history when they have been on the brink of achieving the goal of equality and justice in the religious polity,

¹⁹⁵ Daphne C. Wiggins, *Righteous Content: Black Women's Perspectives of Church and Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 68, <http://www.questia.com/read/118079654/righteous-content-black-women-s-perspectives-of>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

they have often capitulated to the male clergy and accepted less than they bargained for.”¹⁹⁷ The church remains the center of black life, and it represents a method of existence. It is more than an institution surrounding the community. It gives inspiration and hope. The research structures the African American women's experience and serves as justification in the continuing conflict to achieve gender and racial justice - to run away is to succumb. To repudiate women's genuine appreciation for the church is to view those women as submissive vessels devoid of the vital abilities to assess the churches in which they help and to minimize black women's capabilities to live in “localities of absurdity.”¹⁹⁸

The Black Church is often discussed as if it's a singular institution or a monolithic gathering of faceless people. In reality, its story is in fact that of the many denominations and female-dominated fellowships dedicated to the construction and maintenance of a sacred world for African Americans. Whether their roles as soloists, ushers, nurses, church mothers, Sunday School teachers, missionaries, pastor's aides, deaconesses, stewardesses or prayer warriors, women are at the core of the Black Church, which could not exist without them. This reality is often eclipsed by the emphasis on the preaching and visionary tasks that define the pastoral office, which males have dominated.¹⁹⁹

The distinctiveness of the Black Church is in its societal origins and its commitment to a redemptive theology of spiritual transformation for individuals. It is a response to the existential fabric of African Americans woven into the larger society. Therefore, it is important to remember “African American Christians were never monolithic; they have always been diverse and their churches highly decentralized.”²⁰⁰ With all of its flaws,

¹⁹⁷ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, African American Women and Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2014), xxix.

¹⁹⁸ Daphne C. Wiggins, *Righteous Content: Black Women's Perspectives of Church and Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2, <http://www.questia.com/read/118079654/righteous-content-black-women-s-perspectives-of>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Marilyn Mellowes, “The Black Church,” PBS.org, accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/black-church/>.

many African American women remain involved in the church because, in many cases, our spiritual and emotional needs are being satisfied. Our devotion and dedication give us a sense of belonging. Most women have been in our particular congregations for long durations of time and are active outside of the worship services and bible study. The ethical factor of our faith necessitates care for our families, ourselves, our geographic and racial communities, and other church members.

The ACT project is an illustration of that. It details how gender as well as racial differences require further attention and refinement within the church. The ACT project initiates a paradigm shift that liberates African American women from the position of fearful to fearless. It does not ignore how preaching and teaching about trusting God can and often has been misinterpreted and distorted by patriarchal leadership to teach women to live in obscurity. It acknowledges how the truth's application, bent to fit a subservient theology, can only be seen as manipulative spiritual platitudes. Further, the ACT project works to unveil the power of the Gospel to all – including women. It is a womanist theology that does not elevate the role of women by crushing men. It compels women to confront our fears while unveiling hidden gifts and together we are affirmed in a safe space, sharing our worries and embracing our fears as a community of sisters.

Robin M. Boylorn, Assistant Professor of Interpersonal and Intercultural Communications at the University of Alabama, authored a book, *Sweetwater, Black Women and Narratives of Resilience*. Boylorn assesses the personal stories of African American women residing in a community called Sweetwater located in the rural South. She uses auto-ethnography throughout this study to reveal her journey and the significance of the interpersonal decisions of the African American women in this

community through storytelling. The research focuses on different narratives which provide a context for a better understanding that African American women embody a broad spectrum of strength and their difficulties do not define them. “The author provides examples of resilience through the sense of communalism that was evidenced by the interconnectivity of the women and their community, the significance of religion and faith that helped to provide women with encouragement and hope, and the ability of the women to transcend and often adapt to stereotypes.”²⁰¹

In research, resilience is a character virtue that African American women trust. They encounter difficulties and hindrances as a consequence of “the intersecting dynamics of gender, race and other circumstances.”²⁰² In a recent study performed by the African-American Student Union at Harvard Business School, sixty-seven African American women were selected. “These women have achieved the position of chair, CEO and other C-Level officers in an enterprise as a partner or senior managing director in a professional services firm.”²⁰³ The question is asked, “How did they beat the odds?” In order to discover the answer careful attention was given to study aptitudes and abilities.

Out of the sixty-seven women selected, thirty were interviewed. The connecting thread during each interview was one capacity: resilience. “The women who were studied cultivated three competencies that were key to their resilience: agility, emotional

²⁰¹ Andrea Smith, 2016. “Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resilience,” *Comparative Education Review* 60 (4): 850–52., <https://doi:10.1086/688484>.

²⁰² Laura Morgan Roberts, Anthony Mayo, Robin Ely, and David Thomas. “Beating the Odds,” *Harvard Business Review* 96, no. 2 (March 2018): 126–31., accessed August 27, 2019, <http://ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsh&AN=128120984&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²⁰³ Ibid.

intelligence, and authenticity.”²⁰⁴ They accomplished genuine leadership through consciousness and an ability to create their own identities. They also demonstrated proficiency in their capability to turn obstacles, as well as self-doubt and examination into ways to learn, develop, and surpass prospects. Through their personal experiences these women demonstrated tenacity in order to move forward and flourish.

Navigating between the extremes of hypervisibility and invisibility can feel traumatic. One is either performing under a microscope or being ignored, and self-esteem can take a hit in either scenario. Having built the capacity for resilience; however, the women we studied were consistently able to maneuver around this paradox, often turning the obstacles it posed into opportunities.²⁰⁵

With Boylorn’s research in mind, the first stage of the ACT project places emphasis on acknowledging negative compulsive mindsets. Feelings of inadequacy are magnified in subtle ways – the voice in our heads, the critical critique of friends and/or family. Whatever the source these feelings have to be addressed by first identifying the dismal experience which formulated it. This requires a stepping back, an introspection, an analyzation of fear’s sources. Acknowledging the fear by exposing its power source redirects the power from fear to the individual facing it. Open confession of what has been unacknowledged and unnoticed can be terrifying, but participants can take comfort in knowing within them lies the ability to transform it. The power is within each of us to divert the negative energy.

Once the cause of fear has been acknowledged, the next stage is to counterattack with the inspirational findings of this research. The facts of this study are infused

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Laura Morgan Roberts, Anthony Mayo, Robin Ely, and David Thomas, “Beating the Odds,” *Harvard Business Review* 96, no. 2 (March 2018): 126–31, accessed August 27, 2019, <http://ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsh&AN=128120984&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

determination, hope, confidence, courage and faith. Acknowledging fear can wear down the will to continue, but surrounded by other women who understand the challenge before them, women have their will reinforced to push forward. Confronting fear while in the process of experiencing the fear, releases the control and opens a new sense of optimism.

Finally, we triumph with empowerment. Participants know what it takes to succeed in their respective fields; however, knowledge without a plan of action is futile. Therefore, participants outline next steps and agree to be accountable to each other. This charges participants for the tasks ahead. The more confident we feel the easier it becomes to see alternative actions that are open to us and our perspectives shift. The outcome is renewed hope in life goals.

This process is called the “A.C.T. of Fear” (Acknowledge, Confront, Triumph fear) and becomes the framework for each new success and the foundation of the next. Through “A.C.T. of Fear” women will observe for themselves how to use fear as a tool to foster resilience (my primary thesis).

ELEVATE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

African American women in Christian leadership should consider the Buddhist philosopher, Thích Nhat Hanh’s statement that "Fearlessness is not only possible, it is the ultimate job. When you touch nonfear, you are free."²⁰⁶ While many might think the pursuit of purpose simply requires optimism, discerning your call is a choice not made in optimism but in faithfulness. My experience is that the more I choose to aspire to my vocation, the more intuitively a positive belief unfolds. In time, I have been able to change my life merely with the strength of my awareness.

²⁰⁶ Gerald Walton and Lakehead University, “Harnessing the Power of Fear,” *The Canadian Press*, accessed October 29, 2018, <http://www.questia.com/read/1P4-2127416554/harnessing-the-power-of-fear>.

The distinction between a visionary leader and a great leader amounts to one term: perspective. Based on the understanding of who I am and understanding more clearly my purpose I, like other African American leaders, am blessed to be a visionary leader.

The 21st century will be the century for Black women in ministry. In ever-increasing numbers, they are announcing their calls to the gospel ministry and making haste to establish themselves in viable ministries throughout this country. Their presence in all levels of ordained Christian service—including preaching and pastoral ministries—promises to reshape our understanding of traditional clergy leadership roles, tilt us even more toward a neo-Pentecostal fervor in the way we have church, and provide us with new and creative ways of addressing problems within the community.²⁰⁷

I asked my last two interviewees to expound on a specific fear they acknowledged, confronted and triumphed? The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, the Senior Minister at Middle Collegiate Church, is an example of a unique visionary with an elevated perspective. Lewis is a preacher and activist defender for economic justice, racial and LGBTQ equality. “Middle Collegiate Church is a 1,200-member multiracial, welcoming and inclusive congregation. Middle Church and Rev. Dr. Lewis’ advocacy has been featured in media outlets such as *The Today Show*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post*, *The New Yorker*, *Essence* and *The Huffington Post*.”²⁰⁸ Rev. Dr. Lewis has also been a recurrent collaborator on MSNBC. “Ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), Rev. Dr. Lewis is the first African American and the first woman to serve as a senior minister in the

²⁰⁷ Cleophus James LaRue, *This Is My Story: Testimonies and Sermons of Black Women in Ministry* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 1.

²⁰⁸ Jacqui Lewis, “Bio — Jacqui Lewis,” accessed January 20, 2019. <http://www.jacquijlewis.com/bio>.

Collegiate Church, which was founded in New York City in 1628.”²⁰⁹ She is the author of “*The Power of Stories; 10 Essential Strategies to Grow a Multiracial; Multicultural Congregation*”; and the children’s book, *You Are So Wonderful!* She is currently writing a book about finding a grown-up God.²¹⁰ In my interview with Rev. Dr. Lewis, she shares some of her stories during the past fifteen years at Middle Church and the fears that she overcame. Rev. Dr. Lewis states:

It’s a fifteen-year moment, so it’s not an episode. It really is a journey. But I have never in my entire life, and I’m fifty-nine, felt so absolutely snugly fit into a Jacqui shaped call that God has created for me. And, it wasn’t instant. I came here fifteen years ago. I came to succeed a White man who was forty-five when he came, like I came when I was forty-five. White, middle-western professional clown, open-minded white straight man, who was committed to hiring a woman to succeed him. He shared ministry with me in a beautiful way for 18 months. It was not without conflict. It was not without stuff. Some black people would rather have a white pastor. Certainly, some women would rather have a man. But this church has grown with me, I mean grown. Numerically yes. From 400 people now to 1,200 people in these years. But like grown, like ‘Let’s stretch out, let’s not just be biracial, but let’s really be antiracist. Let’s make the conversation more than black, white and make it Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, Native American.’ I mean pushing about Black Lives Matter. Feminist, womanist, they have grown with me. My greatest accomplishment in my professional life is growing up with my church here, and them growing up with me. That’s just awesome.²¹¹

The unique expression of Dr. Lewis is canvassed as she confronts her fear of the unknown. She understood the risk and remains optimistic. The undertaking of leading an established institution would have been elephantine for anyone. For this African American to woman exceed the expectations of many – including herself – took poised

²⁰⁹ Low Country MH Conference, accessed January 20, 2019. <https://www.lowcountrymhconference.com/jacqueline-lewis/>.

²¹⁰ Jacqui Lewis, “Bio — Jacqui Lewis,” accessed January 20, 2019. <http://www.jacquijlewis.com/bio>.

²¹¹ Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Manhattan, New York, September 25, 2018.

leadership. She had to embrace her role as a disrupter of normalcy. I attended the Revolutionary Love Conference, a meeting that Dr. Lewis began in 2016. The experience of watching her gracefully captivate an audience with a passion for change was transformative. Dr. Lewis, clearly equipped to establish new concepts for uniting all people, local and global continues to display resilience in ministry.

The final interviewee was Rev. Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne, a Latina ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches denomination and a licensed counseling psychologist. Her call is not only to preach the gospel but also to be an advocate for Latinx pastors within the denomination. She advocates for their well-being in areas of counseling and clergy assessment. The denomination is liberal and ordains women, but in various contexts, the rules of patriarchy are powerful. Dr. Thorne asserts that being fearful is valid and can be used as a tool to lead you to where you need to be.

Sometimes we are called to serve in places that are uncomfortable. Sometimes, we can't make it about us. If we want to limit ourselves, we can do it. God has other plans for you. God has given me authority, I'm to be obedient to it. I'm going to be bold in it because I know who I am. I've got my issues, but I also know that I will be supported as I go along. I will trust the fear. My fears have to rise so that I can address them. Your fears are valid. Fear is there for a reason, don't diminish the fear. Embrace the fear, and to know what it's coming out of. Your fears can be used to lead you to where you need to be. You don't have to be candid with your fear, just acknowledge it.²¹²

Dr. Martinez Thorne provides insight as a counselor and suggests some women may need therapy regarding their fears. As women of faith, we are all confronted with past and present situations. Those memories can preclude our development. One of the most significant examples a woman in leadership can provide is to be able to admit to

²¹² Rev. Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Marlton, New Jersey, September 10, 2018.

others, “I’m processing through my fears.” It’s not a sign of weakness; it is admitting that you are human. In a safe space, this provides an opportunity for dialogue that is helpful. “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”²¹³

²¹³ Proverbs 27:17 (NIV).

CONCLUSION

Throughout my research, Alice Walker's *womanist* term was highlighted over and over in African American literature. "She was clear about her intention to magnify and expand on a theoretical perspective that privileged only women. She saw Black women as bold, courageous, capable, and instrumental in the lives of others. Her analogy of colors drove home the point."²¹⁴ Walker recognizes the strength and beauty of embodied womanhood. "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender."²¹⁵ What I have uncovered in my study is that all of the women who were interviewed including the literary discourse of womanist theologians unanimously conferred that each knew they were called. The call was and is not static and continues to be cultivated like a springtime garden creating the conditions of change.

The commonality of understanding the emotion of fear intertwined with the call initiates an array of coping mechanisms with the resoluteness to submit to God's will. Each of these women found distinct purpose in the surroundings of their own life's pursuit while wrestling with affirming their calls to ministry.

Examining the call stories of professional ordained African American female ministers in the context of womanist theology, therefore, offers a broad perspective of the lives of Black women in the ministry – one that positions them as 'agents of culture and community,' rather than simply as victims of discrimination and opposition considered through a feminist lens. It places their work in a humanist perspective, frames that work in relationship to the Divine, and presents the work as lessons of survival and justice.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Melbourne S. Cummings and Judi Moore Latta, "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010): 666-82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648534>.

²¹⁵ Alice Walker, *In Search Of Our Mother's Gardens* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Inc., 1983), xii.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The responses to fear for each of these women correlate fears experienced by other women exposed to something in her life's work that contests the current state of affairs or the conventional method of seeing the world. Though their experiences varied regarding their formation as leaders, the courage to progressively pursue their vocations and overcome oppositional situations was transformative for each of them. Further, their stories imply the need to learn the significance of how each voice frames her spirituality and points of view.

What is clear is the confidence each interviewee has in their connection to the divine. Within their context, the divine has defined their ministries as transcending the four walls of the church and each of these leaders have responded affirmatively. Rev. Dr. Maureen L. Davis articulates the model for Christian women in leadership who have acknowledged, confronted and triumphed fear. "But this is what God has called me to do. And I'm confident of that. Nobody can take that away from me. So, I'm going to work hard at being prepared, so that when I do step out, I'm prepared."²¹⁷

"Cultural traditions of Africans linger on – especially things like emotions, beliefs, and thinking patterns, evident in the context and structure of call narratives."²¹⁸ Consequently, many African American women in Christian leadership must seek to maintain a complex balance within a colonial system which only values her ability to bear children. But giving life while in persistent pursuit of life – even if it's at the margin – is the very definition of fearless resilience. This is the space of liberation. Our

²¹⁷ Rev. Dr. Maureen L. Davis, Interview with Michelle Ford-Johnson. Personal Interview, Philadelphia, PA, November 20, 2018.

²¹⁸ Melbourne S. Cummings and Judi Moore Latta, "When They Honor the Voice: Centering African American Women's Call Stories," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010): 666-82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648534>.

liberation is a result of the lived-out experiences of the “African American women’s history and pastoral praxis in dialogue with the androcentric interests and perspectives that function as inclusive concepts in Afro-Christian patriarchal culture.”²¹⁹ Being a successful African American woman in leadership is an artform. If embraced, it liberates the entire community in which her success is found.

“Women were leaders in at least some of the New Testament churches, and women today experience the call of God to the ordained ministry as men do. It is a mistake to allow our prejudices to deny them access to the pastoral office.”²²⁰ With our changing culture, it is my resolve that not only African American women, but all women coalesce in using “the womanist voice as one of deliverance from the deafening discursive silence that the society at large has used to deny the basis of shared humanity.”²²¹

MOVING FORWARD

This Project is an ongoing progression with the intent of empowering African American women, especially in Christian ministry to embrace what they have been called to do. Fear exists among women regardless of the call. The nuances that shape fear are experienced differently, as was discovered with each interviewee. Women of all ethnicities struggle with fear; however, one cannot allow fear to undermine the call to

²¹⁹ Katie Cannon, *Katie’s Canon - Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 111.

²²⁰ Deseree Newkirk and Bruce S. Cooper, 2013, “Preparing Women for Baptist Church Leadership: Mentoring Impact on Beliefs and Practices of Female Ministers,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 22 (3): 323–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10656219.2013.845120>.

²²¹ Katie Cannon, *Katie’s Canon - Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 126.

ministry. The Project has already proven to aid women in leadership through this fear as they encounter these stories and begin to re-write their own.

God’s redemptive plan continues to work through women beyond every cultural and ethnic background. “Instead of promoting a womanhood that has been crafted to fit within and follow a certain demographic, our churches can come to the biblical understanding that womanhood is not confined to American middle-class conservative values.”²²²

The work of the gospel needs advancing with women who have the power to speak life to hopeless situations. Churches and communities are waiting to hear the story and theology women bring to voice. In the words of Letty M. Russell:

As women learn to value one another as sisters and grow in relationship with others, they also learn to value and love themselves as children of God. From this experience of self-worth and sisterhood, an experience of coming home to themselves, springs new hope for many cultures in which the full humanity of women together with men can become a daily reality.²²³

Through this project, my challenge to Black women is to recognize there are other women going through this battle and no one is alone. Through the small groups, the journal and the eventual large scale gathering, the Project will create a global network to sharpen awareness of what women face before, during, and after answering the call to Read, Feed and Lead.

²²² Rayshawn Graves, “Black Women and Burden of Strength,” review of *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*, *The Witness*, April 19, 2017, <https://thewitnessbcc.com/black-women-burden-strength/>.

²²³ Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, *The Handbook of Womencare – Through the Eyes of Women, Insights for Pastoral Care*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), xii.

- One of the future goals of this project is to partner with other women pastors and leaders to devise The A.C.T. Conference
- The vision: To engage, connect and empower diverse, vibrant and influential women
- Create forums and interactive programs
- Invite all women to take a seat at the table through the on-going acquisition and publication of the stories of women in leadership through the A.C.T. of Fear Journal.

In summary, The A.C.T. of Fear Project is a direct response to the curriculum associated with Drew University's Doctor of Ministry degree for *Courageous Leaders in a Changing Culture*. This course of study impressed upon me the desideratum for the Church to be relevant in this volatile season for the world. Such relevance requires creative imagination and solid footing. The DMIN track - *Courageous Leaders in A Changing Culture* broadened my scope in demonstrating the importance of confidence and determination in the implementation of programming which adapts to current needs even if it deviates with tradition. Further, the curriculum collectively expanded my understanding of my ministry context with the intent to cultivate leaders, especially women in leadership.

Though the research focused on the experiences of other African American and Latina women in leadership. The A.C.T. of Fear Project was birthed out of my own personal experience as well. The main thread throughout these shared experiences is resilience despite fear of rejection, fear of failure, and fear of success. If I can examine and understand my fear and let it go, I can lead groups of women in leadership to do the

same. We all must simply remember that fear is a useful thing ... fear is not negative and bad, it's the work of the call. As I culminate this DMIN journey, I am clear about my call. I am clear about the value of resilience. I am clear about encouraging other women who are called to lead. There is a place for them in building ministry as well.

APPENDIX

Dr. LaVerne Adams

A Transformational Leadership Consultant, Affiliate Member, Institute of Coaching, McLean Hospital, Harvard Medical School Affiliate, Personality Assessment Administrator, and holds a Doctor of Ministry from Eastern University's Palmer Theological Seminary. She has been recognized by major media for her 25 years of experience in consulting, ministry, and advising high level professionals and organizations, and has helped to transform the lives of countless people to achieve their personal development goals, peak performance, and fulfillment in life.

She is the CEO and founder of Total Life Consultancy, LLC, the only firm that serves high profile professionals and their families with the exclusive CUPID Life M.A.P. to help them effortlessly perform at higher levels while finding significance. Her Total Life Transformation system encompasses personal development tools that are designed to produce meaning and satisfaction in every area of life in a way that ultimately increases the bottom line. She has authored 20 books on personal, social, and global transformation and is passionate about facilitating radical change.

Rev. Dr. Marsha Brown-Woodard

"The Church is called to be a place where we are continually growing to be more like Jesus. It is a place where one can ask the hard questions, even when those questions cannot be easily answered. When the Church is seen as a Becoming Center, then education is where we are stretched and developed."

The Reverend Dr. Marsha Brown Woodard is a graduate of Ottawa University (Ottawa, Kansas BA in Sociology) and Eden Theological Seminary (Webster Groves, Missouri Master of Divinity). She received the Doctor of Ministry degree from Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, PA. The title of her dissertation was, *"Birthing the Birthright: Midwife Leadership Style With African American Clergywomen"*

Dr. Woodard currently serves as the Director of Supervised Ministries at Palmer Theological Seminary, the Seminary of Eastern University, in St. David's, PA. In this position she provides leadership for the congregational and clinical internship programs of the seminary. She also serves as Senior Lecturer in Christian Ministry and Academic Advisor

Dr. Woodard also serves as *"Resident Chaplain"* for the Biblical Institute of the Zion Baptist Church of Ambler, PA. She is heard each Wednesday on Moments of Meditation a broadcast aired on WNAP, Gospel Highway 11. She has served as Pastor or as a member of the pastoral staffs of congregations in Missouri and Pennsylvania. Dr. Woodard has also served on the staffs of the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA), the American Baptist

Churches of the South (ABCOTS) and the Board of Educational Ministry for American Baptist Churches, USA.

Dr. Woodard has preached and conducted workshops, seminars and retreats throughout the United States as well as in Africa. She is the author of *"I Was Tired Today"*, and her most recent book, *"I Choose To Thrive"*. She is the editor of *Making Sense of Your Faith* and has written articles, bible studies, church school and vacation bible school curriculums as well as conference and retreat resources. She was the writer of the *Leaders Guide* and *Student Book*, for the Fall 2017 quarter of *Judson Bible Journeys for Adults*, the Adult Church School Curriculum for Judson Press. Her sermons and meditations have been included in *Christian Citizen Magazine*, the *Women in Ministry Resource* for American Baptist Churches Women in Ministry, *Those Preaching Women, Volume 2*, *Abingdon African American Preaching Library, Volume 1*, as well as other books and publications.

A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Dr. Woodard was licensed and ordained by the Antioch Baptist Church. In addition to her ministerial standing with American Baptist Churches USA she also has ministerial standing with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She is a member of the Saints Memorial Baptist Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania where she serves as Senior Associate.

Rev. Dr. Maureen Davis

Bishop Davis is actively involved in building the Kingdom of God and empowering His people. A great believer in preparation and training, she has initiated many Christian Education and Ministry Development programs, which are currently in place. Not content to merely preach the Word, she is committed to following and teaching her congregation how to follow the Great Commission. This is reflective of her belief in meeting people where they are spiritually and teaching them how to grow in the Lord. She feels strongly that every member of the congregation is a minister and vital part of the body of Christ. Bishop Davis has recently established many new ministries in her local congregation and has instituted the Annual Family Conference, which seeks to strengthen existing families and win new families to Christ.

Bishop Davis received her early education in Philadelphia and graduated high school in Seat Pleasant, Maryland. She pursued her dreams of higher education graduating from the Center for Urban Theological Studies/Geneva College with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Biblical Studies. She continued her education at The Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, earning a Master of Arts Degree in Theological Studies and a Doctor of Ministry Degree in The Renewal of the Church for Mission.

She is a mother, wife, preacher, teacher, organizer, counselor, scholar and faithful, dedicated worker for the Lord. She has proved herself in many ways through the years, but has consistently demonstrated a deep love for God, a thirst for studying herself to be approved, and a constant readiness to be used the more by God. She now stands at the helm of a mighty ministry on the threshold of daily magnificent miracles. Bishop Davis is

currently overseeing a major building project having acquired 9 acres of land in the city of Philadelphia. Her vision is to build a 21st century state-of-the-art House of Worship and the Doors to Destiny Family Life Center.

Dr. Chalice Jenkins, Ph.D.

Chalice C. Jenkins, PhD earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Services with a specialization in Counseling Studies from Capella University in 2008. She also earned a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology from Argosy University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Rowan University.

Jenkins has been a Board- Certified Counselor, Licensed Professional Counselor (Georgia) and a National Certified Counselor since 2008. She has worked in the community mental health field for over 20 years, holding various positions such a therapist, forensic psychologist, and supervisor.

Jenkins specializes in therapy with children, adolescents, couples, families and women. She integrates a variety of therapies tailored to each client. These therapies include cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, interpersonal and social rhythm therapy, structural family therapy, systems family therapy, group therapy, and spirituality. She specializes in grief and loss, mood disorders, chronic pain management and spirituality.

Another area of specialization is the integration of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as Jenkins is a member of CNHP's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Board. Jenkins last area of specialization is the integration of behavioral health into the medical field. Jenkins provides training to students and healthcare professionals on popular topics such as motivational interviewing, culturally competent care, negotiating relationships, and non-suicidal self- injury, etc.

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis is the senior minister at Middle Collegiate Church, a 1000-member multiracial, welcoming, and inclusive congregation in New York City. She is an activist, preacher, and fierce advocate for racial equality, economic justice, and LGBTQ equality. Middle Church and Jacqui's activism for these issues has been featured in media such as *The Today Show*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post*, *The New Yorker*, *Essence* and *The Huffington Post*. Jacqui is a frequent contributor to MSNBC.

Jacqui is the Co-Founder of The Middle Project, which hosts an annual conference to train faith leaders to build multiracial congregations. Jacqui hosted *Just Faith*, a television program available on demand from Shift by MSNBC.com. *Just Faith* gathered diverse voices in a conversation about justice, healing, and faith.

Jacqui earned her Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and earned a M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in Psychology and Religion from Drew University. She has been adjunct professor at seminaries across the country, including Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and the Graduate Theological Union.

Ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), Jacqui is the first African American and first woman to serve as senior minister in the Collegiate Church, which was founded in New York City in 1628. She is the author of *The Power of Stories; 10 Essential Strategies to Grow a Multiracial, Multicultural Congregation*; and the children's book, *You Are So Wonderful!* She is writing a book about finding a grown-up God.

Rev. Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne

Rev. Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne is founder and CEO of Cultivating Wholeness Counseling Associates, where “caring for the whole person matters.” Her faith-based practices, currently in both Pennsylvania and Florida, include specialized services for ordained clergy and lay leaders, and provide secular and faith-based counseling and psychotherapy to adolescents, adults, couples and families of different faiths, races, and cultures.

Dr. Yvonne Martinez Thorne served as consultant for Area Ministry and Communications for the Philadelphia Baptist Association. In this role, she provided executive and pastoral leadership to pastors and congregations that included strategic planning and strengthening of partnerships between congregations and the region. She also served in the areas of conflict resolution, crisis intervention and encouragement of congregational health and wellness. Her work with congregations included a whole-person approach to the development of pastoral and lay leaders, a commitment rooted in her belief that church renewal and the challenges facing the 21st Century Church require leaders who experience spiritual and psychological restoration at a deep level.

Rev. Dr. Martinez Thorne has served as adjunct faculty at seminaries in New Jersey and Kansas and as Assistant Professor of the Guidance and Counseling Program at Hunter College in New York. She has provided executive leadership at a clergy career center in Missouri and a pastoral counseling center in New Jersey.

Dr. Martinez Thorne holds a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Palmer Theological Seminary and Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from Columbia University.

Rev. Dr. Gail Randolph-Williams

Rev. Dr. Gail Randolph-Williams is the senior pastor of City Church of Philadelphia. The wife of Rev. Dr. Christopher Williams attained a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Temple University, a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family Therapy from Palmer Theological Seminary, formerly Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She obtained a Certificate in Drug and Alcohol Counseling from Villanova University, a Certificate in Basic Coach Training from Coaching4Clergy, is

certified in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), and is a member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

Until June 2014 she served as the director of The Priscilla Institute at the Hestenes Center for Christian Women in Leadership and director of Eastern's School of Christian Ministry (ESCM) at Palmer Theological Seminary, the Seminary of Eastern University. She also served as an adjunct professor for both programs and for the Master's program at Palmer. Currently, she serves as Chaplain at Penn Presbyterian Medical Center and Co-Chair of the Professional Advisory Council of the Pastoral Care Department at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and an adjunct instructor at Palmer Seminary. She continues to live out her life's mission, as is found in Isaiah 35:3-4.

The Interview Guide

1. Out of all of your accomplishments, could you briefly share one that has been transformative?
2. What motivates you?
3. Can you tell me about a memorable situation where you used your own initiative?
4. How would you define your journey of vulnerability?
5. Briefly expound on a specific fear that you acknowledged, confronted and triumphed?
6. What would you say to encourage other women who are struggling with their call to lead because of fear and how can they move forward

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