

CRACKING, WIDENING & SHATTERING THE STAINED-GLASS CEILING:
PROVIDING A PATHWAY TO ORDINATION & CONSECRATION
FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

CRACKING, WIDENING & SHATTERING THE STAINED-GLASS CEILING: PROVIDING A PATHWAY TO ORDINATION AND CONSECRATION FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL WOMEN

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Many African-American women today find it difficult to rise to positions of senior leadership within US Pentecostal churches and ministry fellowships. Pentecostal clergymen with the power to select individuals for leadership roles typically favor men over women when making leadership selections, even though there are female candidates equally as trained and qualified as their male counterparts to occupy these positions. As a result, African-American women who seek to occupy higher levels of leadership in the church tend to feel that there are limits to how far they can go in executing the call of God on their lives. Although women have protested such practices and argued for equal consideration over the years, the predominantly male leadership that maintains decision-making power in the Pentecostal church has met their protests with resistance rather than receptivity. This resistance has resulted in strained relationships between men and women in the African-American Pentecostal church and produced a constituency of female leaders who experience feelings of frustration, resentment, isolation and loneliness.

The goal of this thesis is to address the issue of why African-American women continue to be disregarded for senior-level leadership positions in the Pentecostal church. This thesis is driven by two primary questions: If women served as pastors and bishops during the nascent stage of the Pentecostal movement, why are they unable to occupy the

same positions today? Why is there a decline of African-American females in those roles today? This project utilizes biblical texts and extra-biblical and historical documents that highlight female leadership throughout history to argue that women should be permitted to participate equally with their male counterparts as leaders in the Pentecostal church.

The findings of the research suggest that women are relegated to lower-level positions in the Pentecostal church as a result of attitudes grounded in misogyny and sexism. The thesis offers a theological rationale for Bishops and other leaders in the Pentecostal Church to overcome these persistent attitudes and remove the stained-glass ceiling hindering the advancement of African-American women. Recommendations are offered to help African-American Pentecostal fellowships create initiatives to promote women to senior leadership positions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
AMEZ	African Methodist Episcopal Zion
BWCOLJC	Bible Way Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc.
CME	Christian Methodist Episcopal
COOLJC	Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ
COGIC	Church of God in Christ
FDCC	Faith Deliverance Christian Center
LAC	Lay Advisory Committee
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible
PAW	Pentecostal Assemblies of the World
PCAF	Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith

INTRODUCTION

The clergy was one of the first industries or professions that was challenged with admitting women into its ranks, and yet it was among the last to accept the challenge, even reluctant to engage in this type of acceptance today. The first decade in which it can be said that women were admitted to clergy and ordained in numbers considered “significant” was in the 1970s.¹ Records from the U.S. census in 1970 indicate an estimated 3 percent of females in the clergy. Twenty years later, in 1990, U.S. census records indicated this number to be 10 percent.² Although denominations are two times more prone to ordain women today than they were in previous decades, not many notable strides have been made in the ordination of women in Protestant mainline churches since the 1970s. By today, we should be witnessing marked strides among the second and third generations of female clergy.³ However, as of 2019, only 5% of Americans had a female senior pastor as the head of their congregation.⁴

The slow rate of adaptation of U.S. churches to accept and ordain women as clergy, particularly in top-tier leadership positions in churches, denominations, and fellowships, is evident. The first church to ordain a woman, pioneering it as an official practice, was a Congregational Church. In 1853, the Congregational Church ordained

¹ Paul Sullins, “The Stained Glass Ceiling: Career Attainment for Women Clergy,” *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 3 (2000), 243-254.

² Mark Chaves, “The Symbolic Significance of Women’s Ordination,” *The Journal of Religion* 77, no. 1 (1997), 87.

³ Sullins, “The Stained Glass Ceiling,” 254.

⁴ Leah Payne, “Why Foursquare’s Female Leaders Have It Harder Today,” *Christianity Today*, accessed October 9, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2019/may/foursquare-church-aimee-semple-mcpherson-tammy-dunahoo.html>.

Antoinette Brown. As the pioneer of ordaining women, it was expected that this particular denomination would take the lead in continuing to officially ordain women at unprecedented rates that exceeded the national average. However, this was not so. In 1889, 35 years after it ordained Antoinette Brown, there were only four additional ordained clergy female. In 1919, there were 67 female ministers in the Congregational Church, with approximately 20 percent of them pastoring very small congregations, approximately 20 percent of them serving as co-pastor's alongside their spouses, another 20 percent serving as assistants in the church or teachers, and approximately 25 percent of them working external non-church jobs. By 1950, nearly 100 years after it broke ground by officially ordaining the first female clergy, the Congregational Church still only had three percent female ministers.

Today, nearly 170 years after the very first woman was ordained in the modern Christian Church, little has changed. Women are still commonly overlooked for ordination, and in cases where they are ordained, there are limits to the levels of leadership they are permitted to ascend to in churches, denominations and fellowships.⁵ Nowhere is this problem more amplified than in the African American church, where women significantly outnumber men and have made valuable historical contributions that have made the church the strong institution it is today. Yet, they are often deemed unqualified to ascend to the highest levels of leadership and authority in the organization.

African-American women within the fellowship of churches of which I am currently a part and those in ministries that I have had the privilege of visiting and

⁵ Barbara B. Zikmund, "Women's Ministries Within the United Church of Christ," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 68-69.

lecturing to have consistently expressed their encounters with an invisible glass ceiling that has prevented them from being considered for the senior leadership positions in the Pentecostal church. During various encounters with female leaders who feel called by God to higher levels of leadership in their local ministries and within church fellowships, I have listened to countless stories about their frustrations with the male-dominated leadership structure of the church. The vast majority of these women's stories are centered on one primary theme: traditional patriarchal attitudes drive the selection of individuals for leadership positions in the church, resulting in trained, qualified and called women being overlooked for such offices. As a result of these practices, African-American female leaders have shared with me their feelings of helplessness, resentment, isolation and loneliness as their efforts towards advancement are continually met with resistance in the Pentecostal African-American church. Despite the often-blatant disregard for their call and commitment, women remain committed to and vested in the church, continuing to hope and pray that the minds of decision makers at the top tiers of church leadership will reconsider and change their position about female pastors and bishops.⁶ However, for the collective good and future sustainability of the Pentecostal church, the obstacles that hinder women from attaining senior leadership positions in the Pentecostal church must be acknowledged, re-evaluated, actively addressed and eliminated.

⁶ Kwilecki, *Contemporary Pentecostal Clergywomen*, 66.

THE PROBLEM: WOMEN ARE BYPASSED FOR TOP-TIER CHURCH

LEADER ROLES

The problem of women being bypassed for top-tier leadership roles in the Church is a three-fold issue. The first factor is that many denominations still do not allow for the ordination of women to clergy positions. The second factor in the problem is that while a minimal number of churches do ordain women, once these women are ordained, they are not practically accepted in their leadership roles, because their ordination is more of a formality than a church's desire to operate out of principles of fairness and equality. As a result, the female leaders are often relegated to roles considered insignificant or sidelined, functioning in title only with little real authority in the organization. The third factor in the problem is that once women are ordained, they are only permitted to function at a certain level of leadership, being restricted from rising to the top-tier leadership roles within the church, denomination or fellowship. Both factors hinder clergywomen's advancement as leaders in ministry organizations and are thus problematic.

Factor 1: Women Are Not Permitted Ordination in Many Denominations

Throughout the history of the Church, most church denominations have, by official church policy and practice, prohibited women from formally occupying clergy and church leadership positions. Even today, less than five percent of U.S. head clergy leaders are female. The numbers remain extraordinarily low, with women continuing to be significantly underrepresented as ordained clergy and in roles of high-level leadership and authority in the church. Today, less than half of Christian denominations have policies that prohibit women from occupying top positions of leadership within the

organization. However, even though shifts have occurred in policy in many denominations, few shifts have actually occurred in their unofficial practices.⁷ Figure 1 illustrates the major religious traditions in the United States that ordain women.

The Major U.S. Religious Traditions That Ordain Women

YES <i>Group generally allows ordination of women</i>	NO <i>Group generally does not allow ordination of women</i>
American Baptist Church	Jewish Orthodox
Buddhist	Latter Day Saints (Mormon)
Episcopal Church	Missouri Synod Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Muslim
Jewish: Reform and Conservative Movements	Orthodox Church In America
Presbyterian Church (USA)	Southern Baptist Convention
United Church of Christ	Roman Catholic Church
Unitarian Universalist	
United Methodist Church	
Pentecostal Church of God	
Assemblies of God	
African Methodist Episcopal	
Disciples of Christ	
Christian Science	

Figure 1. *The Major U.S. Religious Traditions that Ordain Women*. Pew Research Center, Pentecostal Church of God, General Council of the Assemblies of God, New

⁷ Jimi Adams, "Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible: Organizational Opposition to Women in Congregational Leadership," *Gender and Society* 21, no. 1 (2007): 80-82.

York Times, Disciples of Christ. The Huffington Post, December 6, 2017.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/religion-ordain-women_n_5826422

Fortunately, the lack of ordination in their denominations did not stop most women from pursuing what God had called them to do. Whether or not their denominations officially ordained females, women took it upon themselves to prepare for the call by enrolling in seminaries and seeking professional clergy degrees. For example, following the increase in some denominations allowing women to be ordained in the 1970s, there was also a dramatic increase in women in pursuing seminary training, even though their own denominations did not allow women to be ordained. Although the Episcopal Church did not begin granting full status to women in the church until 1976, by that time, women comprised nearly 14 percent of those enrolled in Episcopal seminaries in order to pursue professional clergy degrees. Similarly, although the Southern Baptist denomination does not officially allow for the ordination of women, in 1987, more than 11 percent of those enrolled in Southern Baptist seminaries were female. The same trend has been observed in Roman Catholic theology schools, in which enrollment consists of nearly 25 percent females. Thus, although the denominational seminaries would permit for the enrollment and granting of professional clergy degrees to women, the denominational churches themselves remained reluctant to ordain the women and dispatch them into ministry.⁸

Factor 2: Women Are Formally but Not Practically Accepted in Church Leadership Roles

⁸ Chaves, "Significance of Women's Ordination," 92.

There is a lack of research that supports the notion that women clergy are being accepted in a practical manner within denominations that ordain females.⁹ After women are ordained, studies show that they are often not practically accepted within the church. This is largely due to organizational dynamics and a church culture that supports the ordination of females in theory (in order to appease the external society that promotes equality of all genders) but opposes it as a practice. Thus, although churches might go through the motions and ordain women, these same women clergy face constant resistance and a lack of acceptance that often results in them being sidelined or not deployed in ministry.¹⁰ Research shows that women tend to occupy positions of subordinate or lower status than men in the church and that the inequality that exists between the two genders in the church is a persistent one, confirming the findings of a number of other studies of similar nature in the church. These findings affirmed that the resistance to female clergy in denominational churches did not diminish over a 20- year period and that they show no signs of shifting in the future.¹¹

According to noted scholar on clergywomen in church leadership, Mark Chaves, who examines the sociology of organizations and how it affects women's ordination:

Denominational rules regarding women's ordination – whether those rules are inclusive or exclusive – often neither reflect nor shape the tasks and roles women actually perform in congregations as closely or directly as might be expected. Rules and practices in this arena are only loosely coupled.¹²

⁹ Sullins, "Stained Glass Ceiling," 245.

¹⁰ Sullins, 246.

¹¹ Sullins, 251-261.

¹² Chaves, "Significance of Women's Ordination," 88.

Chaves argues that when church denominations establish guidelines and policies that permit or restrict women from being ordained, their actions are not driven by a desire to standardize the ways in which the women in their churches generally operate, the roles they will play, the authority they will have, etc. Instead, establishing these guidelines and policies are more about making statements to the general public about how they feel about gender equality. As a result, when denominations institute policies that reflect their support of gender equality, like ordaining women, these actions tend to be more symbolic than practical. It is for this reason that when many women are ordained in denominations, their ordination does not translate into full rights as a clergywoman, more powerful leadership roles, higher levels of authority or oversight, or advancement through the upward ranks of church denominations. Although they hold the office, in many cases, their day-to-day functioning in the church remains largely the same. Therefore, Chaves states, “Acceptance or rejection of women’s ordination is not the same as acceptance or rejection of actual women functioning as religious leaders.”¹³

There are many historical examples of how church denominations would allow women to functionally perform the work of clergy while, at the same time, denying them the formal title and status of ordained clergy, highlighting the clear discrepancies between organizational theory and practice. Chaves reports on what has been considered to be one of the clearest examples of this. In the U.S., there were 300 Roman Catholic parishes, mostly small, low-status ones in rural areas, without a priest. The significant majority of these parishes were “pastored” by females who performed every practical function that a priest would, and everyone from the members of their parishes, to the

¹³ Chaves, 89.

other male priests and bishops, to the Church leadership referred to them as the pastor. However, the Roman Catholic Church did not formally allow women to have full clergy status and enjoy the rights and privileges that come along with ordination. Thus, the women were allowed to perform the work without partaking in the privileges.¹⁴

The same phenomenon can be seen in other denominations like the Church of God in Christ, which does not officially ordain women as bishops, pastors or elders; these are roles reserved exclusively for men. However, this does not stop the Church from using women to perform many of the same functions that are officially reserved for officially ordained male clergy. For example, women are permitted to “teach” the Bible to others, although they are not permitted to “preach” the Bible, as preaching is reserved for male clergy. Women may also be given the responsibility of being in charge of a church when the pastor is absent, indicating that they are entrusted with the oversight of others in the organization. Yet, despite the fact that women are, practically speaking, allowed to engage in the same functions as men, they are not allowed to hold the same titles, offices, and status as men.¹⁵

Factor 3: Women Are Not Permitted to Advance to Top-Tier Leadership

Most churches and denominations around the world have remained consistent in their denial of women to occupy the highest levels of leadership in their organizations. In one of the most recent examples, in November 2012, the Church of England made the decision to deny women from becoming Bishops. The results of a poll conducted to

¹⁴ Chaves, 94.

¹⁵ Chaves, 95.

gauge public sentiment about the Church's decision showed that only 8 percent of people approved of the Church's policies regarding women, and only 11 percent of the population that identified as being Anglican or a part of the Church of England approved of the policies about women in their own church.¹⁶ The same poll results indicated that, among the religious and non-religious populations, people generally felt favorably about women in senior leadership positions in the church, indicating that they thought that their participation in such high-level roles would benefit the Church. This poll result is reflective of a trend that has existed since the 1970s: most people in the general population tend to be in favor of women occupying senior church leadership roles, including the role of bishop, and view it as something that will be of great benefit to the Church.¹⁷ These poll results further highlight the disparity between the people who are a part of the faith and attend the churches and church leadership that holds the authority to make decisions regarding the roles that women are permitted to occupy within the Church.¹⁸ As one scholar, Charles Clarke, noted:

“Clearly there is a dislocation between the views of the public on the issue of women's equality and the views of the churches, and even within the churches a distinction between the views of the people of that faith and the people who are leading that faith – isn't that a problem?”¹⁹

Most often, when women are ordained as leaders in churches, they remain relegated to low-tier, low-status leadership positions that do not carry the same power,

¹⁶ Linda Woodhead, “What People Really Believe about Women Bishops,” *Modern Believing* 55, no. 1 (2014), 15.

¹⁷ Woodhead, “What People Really Believe,” 18.

¹⁸ Woodhead, 22.

¹⁹ Woodhead, 22.

influence or prestige of the positions of their male counterparts. Research indicates that when Black Protestant congregations do allow women to serve as leaders in their congregations the decisions to allow them to do are typically less of a reflection of their doctrinal beliefs about gender equality than a reflection of them trying to meet a need: the necessity of finding someone to occupy the position when a man is not available.²⁰ After performing quantitative analysis on the NCS, a national-representative dataset comprised of congregations in the U.S., researcher Jimi Adams found that the most significant predictor of the proportion of women in the leadership of a congregation was the number of women relative to men in the congregation. Additionally, the results of the research indicated that Black Protestant church congregations are more likely to have a greater proportion of women on their leadership teams than mainline congregational churches, and churches classified as evangelical are much less likely to have a high proportion of women represented on their church leadership teams and are also twice as likely to oppose women standing in the pulpit and speaking on the weekends.²¹

Another finding of the research was that the larger the congregation, the lower the likelihood that the congregation will have a female leader. An additional predictive factor that affects the number of women in leadership include the church being in the south; southern churches are more likely to place women in senior leadership positions, although women are still significantly underrepresented in church leadership positions. Then, Adams' research showed that when a congregation is located in a community that is surrounded by poverty, this positioning significantly increases the likelihood of women

²⁰ Adams, "Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible," 85-86.

²¹ Adams, 93.

being present in church leadership. The same is true for rural areas; when congregations are located in rural areas, they are significantly more likely than congregations in suburban areas to have a woman as their head clergy.²² Altogether, Adam's research affirmed what is known and accepted throughout the church world: if women will be selected as leaders, their appointments will likely be to low-tier positions that offer the lowest levels of power, authority and status in the church, as leadership appointments offering high power, authority and status are reserved for men.

The Five Stages of Ascending the Church Leadership Ladder

Researcher Jimi Adams suggested that there are five levels of religious involvement, or "climbing the congregational leadership ladder": (a) participation, (b) general leadership, (c) seminary education, (d) congregational preaching, and (e) head clergy position. Each of these levels of progression, or stages, comes with its own barriers for women, which Adams investigated through quantitatively analyzing a nationally-representative dataset of U.S. churches.²³

In the first and most inclusive level of religious involvement, participation, research has consistently supported that women make up the largest percentage of those involved in religious activity and comprise a large majority of the general leadership in a congregation. The second level of religious involvement, general leadership, tends to include women at varying levels based on denomination. Because most congregations tend toward homophily, it could be expected that in churches with greater numbers of

²² Adams, 93.

²³ Adams, 83.

women in the congregation, there would also be greater representation of women in leadership. According to research, churches with fewer resources tend to have a lower ability to attract male leaders than churches with relatively more resources.

Consequently, these churches tend to more often attract women as leaders. These churches tend to be located in urban areas, poor neighborhoods, and in the South, and because of such limitations, they have fewer resources, smaller congregations, and smaller staffs.²⁴

The third level of religious involvement as one progresses up the congregational leadership ladder is seminary education. Research suggests that most of the clergy that are hired in denominations possess a seminary degree. Since most seminaries commonly require the student to have the support of his/her local church congregation, denomination or fellowship, it is assumed that those who graduate as seminarians will continue to receive the support of these entities. Nationally, women make up more 30 percent of seminary students, and when segmented by denomination, in some cases, they make up more than 50 percent of enrollments. However, upon graduation, these same female seminarians are not represented in the same proportions in the clergy's congregational leadership. In fact, studies show that women who graduate with a seminary degree have a lower probability of securing a job upon their graduation. Further, in a comparison of women and men, women tend to have higher levels of education than the men who occupy the same or similar positions in the church, a reality that reflects trends in secular society in studies on occupational research.²⁵

²⁴ Adams, 83-85.

²⁵ Adams, 86.

The fourth level of religious involvement is congregational preaching, or speaking from the pulpit to congregants during the preaching/teaching moment in worship services that occur on the weekend. Although many congregations formally prohibit women from occupying such a role in the pulpit, in practice, research has found it to be a common occurrence. The fifth and final level of religious involvement on the congregational leadership ladder is occupying a head clergy position, or other position in a congregation that is considered the highest level of leadership. According to trends identified in research literature, women generally tend to only be selected for such positions as a final resort when the congregation does not have any other options available for head leadership.²⁶

The Stained-Glass Ceiling for Women Climbing the Church Leadership Ladder

Susie Stanley, a church historian, was the first to go on record using the phrase “stained-glass ceiling” as a label to describe the barrier that obstructs the progression and advancement of women in the Christian church, hindering their ability to ascend to the highest levels of leadership and authority in the Church, or head clergy positions. Since its introduction, the phrase has been used by researchers and practitioners to suggest that there is a limit to the levels of power and authority that most Christian denominations will allow a woman to attain, even though there exists a well-documented history of women being ordained in Christian denominations.²⁷

²⁶ Adams, 86-89.

²⁷ Morgan, “Stained Glass Ceiling,” 52.

The stained-glass ceiling, representing barriers that exist between women clergy and top positions of head clergy leadership, is constructed based on the ideologies that religious organizations use as arguments to keep the barrier in place, ideologies typically grounded in both tradition and patriarchy. In fact, the single most positive factor that predicts barriers being present in the advancement of women to senior leadership roles in the church is the ideology that the Bible is inerrant and that it specifically identifies men as the only gender that God permits to occupy the highest leadership positions in His Church.²⁸

One observation that researchers have made about the stained-glass ceiling appears counterintuitive to what is commonly believed about its existence in the church world:

...The occupational literature often describes the barrier in those contexts as a glass ceiling to denote its invisibility. The adoption of the ‘stained glass ceiling’ moniker appears to contribute substantially more than simply the religious nature of this barrier... It actually appears to be the case that congregations, rather than keeping this barrier hidden, may actually attempt to draw attention to it, much as staining a window renders it a point of focus.²⁹

Thus, in Adams’ estimation, calling the barriers that exist to hinder women’s progression in the church a “stained-glass ceiling” may have less to do with the notion that it is a glass ceiling in church occupations and therefore called “stained-glass” rather than simply “glass.” It is possible that a greater meaning is present, one that has stained the glass in the church so that it can be conspicuously noticeable and therefore draw enough attention to be recognized, rejected and removed based on principles of fairness

²⁸ Adams, “Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible,” 96.

²⁹ Adams, 99-100.

and equality. The glass ceiling that exists in the church cannot be addressed unless it is made visible, and it cannot be made visible unless there is some element, like staining, that people can use to identify it and what it represents: gender discrimination in the church against women.³⁰

African-American Pentecostals' Reluctance to Elevate Women in Leadership

Within the African-American Pentecostal Fellowships, that is, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith (PCAF), Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ (COOLJC), Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and Bible Way Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, Inc. (BWCOLJC), there is a reluctance to ordain and install women into the pastorate and an even greater reluctance to consecrate them to the higher office of the Bishop.³¹

African-American Pentecostal clergywomen traditionally encounter a stained-glass ceiling that limits their advancement as leaders in the church. It is a phenomenon that has persisted in the African American Church, regardless of denomination. Although there are instances in which women have broken through the stained-glass ceiling and been promoted to higher levels of church leadership, as a whole, Pentecostal church leaders are reluctant to install them in these more prominent roles. Added to this level of reluctance is a general unwillingness to discuss and map out ways to remove these obstacles that lie in the path of Pentecostal women who feel called by God to operate in

³⁰ Adams, 99-100.

³¹ Susan Kwilecki, "Contemporary Pentecostal Clergywomen: Female Christian Leadership, Old Style," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3, no. 2 (1987): 60-65.

higher levels of leadership in His Church. Further, this is not a “hidden” phenomenon; it is visible and clearly known to those who are a part of the Pentecostal Church, including both males and females, and from laity to leadership.³²

Pentecostal churches and fellowships attempt to justify their reluctance to appoint women to roles of high-level governance and leadership in their organizations by arguing that Scripture offers grounds for evidence to uphold such a position.³³ However, in today’s changing society, leaders in African-American Pentecostal Fellowships are being challenged to re-examine their interpretation of Scripture that is used to justify keeping women out of prominent positions of Church leadership, especially since the fellowships are comprised of majority female constituency.³⁴ As noted by researchers Dei and Osei-Bonsu, tradition and status quo are not good justifications for restricting women from occupying high-level church leadership positions. They argue that just because something “has always been” in the Church does not mean that it “should still be.” That is, just because the Church has been led by men for 2000 years does not mean that this should continue to be. If the Church was to follow this argument, one would reason that just because slavery existed in America for nearly 250 years does not mean that we should continue supporting slavery. Just because people live their lives in sin before coming to

³² Julie Ma, “Changing Images: Women in Asian Pentecostalism,” in *Philip’s Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership*, ed. Estrela Alexander and Amos Yong (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 211-213.

³³ Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “Does the Bible Support Ordaining Women as Elders or Pastors? Part 3,” *A Biblical Look at Contemporary Issues*, accessed February 11, 2019, <http://drpipim.org/womens-ordination-contemporaryissues-46/43-1-does-the-bible-support-ordaining-women-as-elders-or-pastors-part-3.html>.

³⁴ Daniel Dei and Robert Osei-Bonsu, “The Female Ordination Debate,” *Theological Reflections* 11, (2015): 42-56.

Christ does not mean that they should continue in sin. Instead, when we know better, we do better, and we make the necessary changes to reflect our new knowledge. Thus, just because something is grounded in long-standing tradition and is the status quo does not mean it's right.³⁵

Advocates of women being elevated to higher positions in church leadership are leading the call for church leaders to recognize alternative biblical texts and interpretations that allow for the ordination, installation, and consecration of women.³⁶ These proponents of making the selection of women to higher positions of church leadership a standard practice also base their argument on a scriptural examination of how women operated in roles and responsibilities equal to those of men in both the Old Testament and in the first-century church. Rather than simply perpetuating traditional, patriarchal practices that block women from prominent positions of church leadership church leadership, these advocates of female leadership call for the male-dominated church leadership structure to justify why women were considered fit to lead during scriptural times but not in modern times. In fact, the argument that, at its inception and in its earliest and most formative years, the Pentecostal Church grounded its practices in Scripture rather than cultural attitudes, and in light of this, openly welcomed women to occupy prominent positions of leadership is the most compelling claim that Pentecostal women stand upon in the debate today.³⁷

³⁵ Dei and Osei-Bonsu, "The Female Ordination Debate," 56.

³⁶ Charlotte Chinn, "From the Pew to the Pulpit – African-American Women's Struggle to Gain and Maintain Leadership Positions within the Church" (Thesis, Wright State University, Dayton, 2014), 27, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/humanities/13/>.

³⁷ Jory Peterson, "A Study of Female Headship in the Christian Church during the First and Second Century and How This Applies to Female Leadership in the Church Today" (Thesis, Regent

Supporters of female leadership encourage Pentecostal Church leaders to engage in an essential conversation about the dramatic shift in the balance of male versus female leadership in the Church, not only acknowledging that this imbalance exists but taking a close look at what prompted the phenomenon, why it occurred and how it continues to persist, despite the clear protests of a significant portion of the Pentecostal Church population. Above all, supporters of female leadership in the Pentecostal Church urge senior leaders to come together to re-examine their interpretations of scriptures that they have historically utilized to justify the exclusion of women from being appointed to high levels of leadership in the church, and most importantly, to also include historical Pentecostal Church data in their analysis. Through engagement in such critical exercises, church leaders will not only get to the root of when and how the practice of bypassing women for senior leadership roles began in the Pentecostal Church and within their fellowships, but they will also stand to develop a new perspective of its unfairness and seek to make conscious, rational decisions about rectifying the issue.³⁸

The Background of the Problem

Out of all the mainline Protestant denominations, the African-American Pentecostal Church has been one of the slowest to accept and embrace women in leadership. Even today, with all of the advancements that have been made in the Church, there are still Pentecostal entities that will not appoint females to the office of deacon,

University, Virginia Beach, 2010), 1, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global.
<https://jorymicah.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/jorymicahmastersthesis.pdf>.

³⁸ Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1997), 5.

which is considered one of the lowest levels of formal leadership in the Church.

However, most glaringly, the African American Pentecostal Church, as a general practice with few exceptions, refrains from appointing women to the highest levels of leadership and oversight in the Church and affiliated fellowships, like to the roles of elder, pastor or bishop.³⁹

There are anomalies to this phenomenon. For example, in 2017, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), an African-American fellowship, made history by consecrating two females to the bishopric (see Appendix B).⁴⁰ However, oddly, PAW will not appoint women as deacons, ordain them as elders, or install them as pastors, even though each of these offices operates with a lower level of authority than bishops in the Church. As a result of PAW's groundbreaking decision to consecrate the first two female bishops, much dialogue has taken place regarding the motivation and mentality behind the action. Some in the Church have speculated that PAW consecrated the two female bishops to appease its female constituency, which comprises the majority of the denomination. Others reason that the move reflects a major shift away from the traditional, patriarchal attitudes that have kept women out of such high positions in church leadership in times past and believe that it is a sign of an impending movement towards equality within the denomination. Most of all, proponents of women's

³⁹ Estrela Alexander, "The Future of Women in Ministry," in *Spirit-empowered Christianity in the 21st Century*, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2011), 388-391.

⁴⁰ "Two Women Picked as First Female Bishops to Lead Pentecostal Denomination's Dioceses," USA Today Network – Tennessee, last modified July 27, 2017, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2017/07/27/2-women-picked-first-female-bishops-lead-pentecostal-denominations-dioceses/470135001/>.

advancement in the African-American Pentecostal Church maintain hope that these new attitudes will continue to spread throughout the Pentecostal Church in the future.⁴¹

Despite the minor advancements made in the Pentecostal church toward the elevation of female leaders, the predominant mentality that permeates the Church is that women do not belong in the highest levels of church leadership.⁴² Some Pentecostal churches today will still not make even space on the platform for female clergy to sit, discounting their call and disregarding their titles.⁴³ Although the appointment of two women as bishops by PAW and the isolated actions of a select few other local churches and fellowships to progressively incorporate women into senior leadership positions have made minor cracks in the stained-glass ceiling, they represent only a meager amount of progress towards the standard inclusion of females in top levels of leadership in African-American Pentecostalism. More actions consistent with the mentalities that have allowed for the elevation of clergywomen to authoritative positions are necessary in order to widen the crack in the stained-glass ceiling. Completely shattering the stained-glass ceiling will be denoted by a lack of hesitation from any Pentecostal organization to promote female clergy to senior levels of leadership.

Factors Facilitating the Persistence of the Problem

The factors that facilitate the persistence of women being commonly overlooked when church leaders seek to identify and select individuals to fill high-level positions of

⁴¹ USA Today, “Two Women Picked as First Female Bishops.”

⁴² Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 37-38.

⁴³ “Platform” describes the area where the Senior Pastors and Bishops sit in the front of the congregation. Not providing space for females becomes another indicator of objectification of females.

leadership in the Pentecostal Church are considered by many to be driven by archaic, outdated attitudes and patriarchal ideologies that favor male over female leadership. Females tend to be preferred in the Church, but only when they are operating in subordinate, less authoritative roles. For example, the Church generally extends a hearty welcome to women to pray, serve, support ministry, and in some cases, teach and train others, but it does not generally accept them in positions that require ordination or appointments through which they can be elevated to higher levels of leadership within the episcopacy.⁴⁴

Traditionally, male church leaders have led from a place of superiority and patriarchy. Many exhibit sexist and classist behavior, being fueled by attitudes that are not supported in Scripture and that should not exist in the Church. Bypassing females for leadership positions in favor of males is only an extension of these attitudes into the decision-making process when it is time to select the leaders that will govern the local church or church fellowships.⁴⁵ However, ironically, the resistance against females to ascend to senior leadership does not only come from the male clergy. Many clergywomen do not receive support from other females or family members when they express God's call on their lives to function in the role of pastor or bishop.⁴⁶

Researchers have found that the attitudes behind lack of advancement that female clergy experience in the church parallels the ways in which they are regarded in larger society, adding to the persistence of the problem in ministry organizations. In many

⁴⁴ Alexander, "The Future of Women in Ministry," 380.

⁴⁵ Evelyn B. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1993), 3.

⁴⁶ Vashti McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African-American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2011), 37.

cases. although the formal church organizational structure may allow women to be ordained by church bylaws, the informal culture of the church is one that treats them as second-class subordinate's relative to men. According to sociology of religion researcher Paul Sullins:

The position of women clergy mirrors the well-known pattern of continuing female subordination despite legal or formal equality that exists in other areas of American life. Despite fair-wage legislation, for example, women in the workplace still earn less than men do, an average proportion variously estimated from 71 to 91 percent... This resemblance to larger cultural inconsistencies regarding the status of women is buttressed by the striking stability found in the denominational incongruities regarding women clergy.⁴⁷

A lower professional regard for women relative to men continues to facilitate the persistence of the unequal selection of women for top-tier leadership positions in ministry organizations. The clergy profession has historically fallen behind trends of organizational acceptance of women shown in other professions. For example, from 1880 until 1970, women occupied roles as clergy, lawyers and doctors in significantly lower numbers than men. After 1970, the numbers began to rise noticeably. However, the sharp rise did not occur in the same proportions throughout all three professions. By the 1990s, women represented nearly 25 percent of lawyers and judges and 20 percent of physicians, yet they only represented less than 10 percent of clergy. Thus, while other professions allowed for the acceptance and advancement of women once they could participate in the profession, the clergy profession did not. The rate of organizational change in church

⁴⁷ Sullins, "Stained Glass Ceiling," 261.

denominations relative to other professional organizations continues to experience lag today.⁴⁸

Another factor that facilitates the persistence of the problem is that many denominational churches operate according to family-type dynamics, possessing a culture all their own that contributes to the lack of practical acceptance of ordained female clergy, although they are formally accepted in the denominational policies. In light of this, the disparities that exist among male and female clergy in many churches has less to do with the innate differences between the male and female gender than with the congregation's reluctance to shift the common culture with which it is comfortable or to face the congregational conflict that is sure to ensue if the issue of accepting ordained women clergy is raised within the church body. This is particularly a concern when members threaten to withdraw their financial support from the church if the matter is raised, because financial sustainability is critical for the church to maintain its operations while ordained clergywomen are not.⁴⁹

The Context of the Problem: The Black Church

The synonymous terms 'Black Church' and 'African American Church' represent a diverse grouping of churches that reflects the rich complexity of the African-American community itself, including the community's historical and social-cultural significance. The Black Church originated as a result of the co-mingling of western Christianity and

⁴⁸ Chaves, "Significance of Women's Ordination," 90.

⁴⁹ Sullins, "Stained Glass Ceiling," 262-263.

West African cosmology and dates back to the late 1600s.⁵⁰ History records that the African-American Church was central in helping black people in dealing with the oppression and discrimination that they faced from white society. The African-American Church has been the root of social and cultural existence in the black community for hundreds of years. Both historically and in modern times, this vital institution, the pillar of most black communities, has served as a resource for black families to find solace and spiritual well-being during troubling times.⁵¹

However, although the Church has made numerous contributions to the black community, it is not without its flaws.⁵² The same African-American church that has historically served as the primary anchoring institution of the African-American community has also become one of the greatest sources of vexation, dissatisfaction and frustration for black women who have an aspiration to advance further in their call of ministry, for it is an institution that largely prohibits them from doing so. Throughout the history of the Black Church, the Church has been comprised predominantly of women, and the leadership has consisted primarily of men.⁵³

African-American women have proven indispensable to the sustainability of both the African-American community and the African-American Church, although this fact is

⁵⁰ Emilie Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 12.

⁵¹ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 1-6.

⁵² Timothy Douglas, "African-American Heritage: The Role of the Black Church in African-American Culture," *The Labba Mout* (blog), *Fiweh Life*, February 6, 2017. <https://www.fiweh.com/02/06/2017/the-role-of-the-black-church>.

⁵³ Tava Herring, "African-American Women in Informal Leadership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church" (PhD diss., The University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, 2012), 18, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

often erased from the narratives which focus on the male leaders that have received notoriety for their leadership in these areas.⁵⁴ Women have always been integral to the Black Church. According to Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, a researcher on the role of women in the Black Church:

When we say ‘Black Church,’ the women remind us that we must account for its geographical diversity, the multiple relationships that comprise it, the strategies for self-improvement and charity, and the fact that women were and are central to all of that.... Most importantly, when we say, “Black Church,” we must consciously embrace the fact that the networks of women and the support systems that women have created comprise the Black Church.⁵⁵

In light of their contributions, no discussion or research grounded in the context of the Black Church can exclude the role that women have historically played in the building, growth and advancement of the institution.

Potential Future Implications on the Church if the Problem Persists

The growth and progression of the African-American Pentecostal Church will experience significant problems if the issue of restricting women from high-level leadership roles and positions of authority persists. The concerns and issues surrounding the greater inclusion of African-American Pentecostal women must be addressed directly if the community of faith is to move forward rather than remaining stuck in its patriarchal past. Efforts towards the greater inclusion of women must include not only granting them ordination but also allowing ordained clergywomen to rise to top-tier leadership in

⁵⁴ Cheryl T. Gilkes, “My Mother’s God Is Mine: Finally, the Most Powerful Recognition of the Importance of Women to African American Religion,” *The Journal of African American History* 96, no. 3 (2011): 363.

⁵⁵ Gilkes, “My Mother’s God Is Mine,” 364.

denominations and fellowships, and ensuring that they are not only leaders in title but in practice, being deployed to oversee ministries, exercise their authority, make critical decisions, and be treated with an equal level of regard and respect as men are. According to researcher Paul Sullins, although women clergy are formally accepted and yet routinely subordinated to men in the church today, the more routine the ordination of women becomes, the less often gender disparities will be present among church clergy. It is only when these gender disparities disappear that the community of faith will truly be able to move forward on one accord.⁵⁶

Mae Eleanor Frey, a noted evangelist in the Assemblies of God, once said, "...for God-fearing, intelligent, Spirit-filled women, upon whom God has set his seal in their ministry, to have to sit and listen to men haggle over the matter of their place in the ministry is humiliating to say the least."⁵⁷ Leaders must begin to create space for resolutions to be useful beyond the twenty-first century, and these solutions must necessarily involve the voices and contributions of female clergy towards the development of solutions. This is especially worthy of consideration considering the historical and current demographics of the church: the population of women in the church significantly outnumbers that of men. Consequently, largely as a result of their numbers, women play an invaluable role in sustaining and maintaining the church. Without a change in attitudes and intervention, the stained-glass ceiling will continue to be a

⁵⁶ Sullins, "The Stained Glass Ceiling," 243.

⁵⁷ Edith L. Blumhofer, "Selected Letters of Mae Eleanor Frey," *Pneuma* 17, no. 1 (1995): 78.

hindrance to many African-American women who desire to become senior pastors or consecrated bishops, to the detriment of the Pentecostal church.⁵⁸

Pentecostal Church researcher, Sheri Benvenuti, recommends three essential actions that must occur in order to justify the practice of ordaining women and dispatching them into the top levels of ministry of Pentecostal Charismatic churches. First, Benvenuti asserts that Pentecostals need to return to their historical roots. A review of Pentecostal history clearly reveals that at the origin of the movement, women were regularly included and provided with every type of leadership opportunity that was offered to men. Rather than focus on gender, the earliest days of the Pentecostal movement focused on the call of the individual, the evidence of ministry gifting's that were seen in the person's life and confirmed his or her call, and the church community's belief that God was pouring out His Spirit on all men and women in the latter reign during which it was prophetically written in Joel 2:28 that both sons and daughters would prophesy. In these early times of Pentecostalism, the movement operated with a great amount of equality, making no differentiation between the gifts of men and women. However, over time, the Pentecostal Church has forgotten these roots and largely excluded women from positions of leadership in ministry.⁵⁹

Additionally, Benvenuti explains how the "evangelicalization" (a term coined by researcher Cecil Robeck) of Pentecostals has affected modern day attitudes about women's involvement in Pentecostal ministry. Evangelicalization refers to Pentecostals'

⁵⁸ Alexander, "The Future of Women in Ministry," 375-377.

⁵⁹ Sheri R. Benvenuti, "Pentecostal Women in Ministry: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal Charismatic Research* (January 1997). <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj1/ben.html>.

increased adoption of evangelical values. Historically, Pentecostals have offered women in the church significantly greater levels of freedom to occupy roles of leadership, while evangelicals were much less likely to offer such freedoms to women. However, since Pentecostals began increasingly adopting evangelical values, they also began functioning with evangelical ideologies regarding women in leadership, or the prohibition thereof. Thus, there is a positive correlation between evangelicalism and a reduced likelihood of utilizing women who are called and gifted in leadership roles.

Benvenuti's second recommendation for how to remove the barriers that exist between women's advancement as ordained leaders into the top tiers of Pentecostal ministry is to ensure that women in ministry have other women to look to as role models. She highlights the role that Aimee Semple McPherson played in the 1920s, defying the culture that opposed women in the ranks of church leadership and forging ahead to do great things for God. McPherson opened doors for female ministers, founding the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel among many other great accomplishments, and thus has inspired women around the world to continue their own pursuits to walk out their call in a culture that questions the authenticity of their call and largely opposes their participation in high-level leadership roles in the church.⁶⁰ Despite the fact that another female has not been elected president of the Foursquare Church since McPherson founded it in 1923 (men have been elected to the role since that time), and that as of 2019, there were only seven women in national leadership positions among the denomination's 68,500 churches, McPherson remains a role model for women who continue to run for the presidential office in hopes that one day, they will be elected as

⁶⁰ Sheri Benvenuti, "Pentecostal Women in Ministry."

president of the denomination and follow in McPherson's footsteps.⁶¹ Benvenuti also highlights other influential female preachers of the gospel and how they served as role models to women in ministry, including Marie Burgess, who in 1906 received the baptism in the Holy Spirit under Charles Parham and went on to preach and establish a ministry of her own in New York.⁶²

As her final recommendation for how to remove the barriers that exist between women's advancement as ordained leaders into the top tiers of Pentecostal ministry, Benvenuti argues the need for affirmation for Pentecostal women who feel called to roles of leadership in ministry. This affirmation should come from the Scriptures as the foundation for their call, the pursuit of formal theological education in preparation for their call, and opportunities to exercise their call by being engaged in ministry opportunities that are extended to women in the same ways they are extended to men, free of any gender restrictions.⁶³

With this project, in accordance with Benvenuti's recommendations, it is my aim to better understand the issue of the stained-glass ceiling that hinders African American women's advancement to top-tier leadership in the Pentecostal Church and contribute to the development of solutions that can eventually eliminate this barrier.

THE PROJECT

⁶¹ Leah Payne, "Why Foursquare's Female."

⁶² Benvenuti, "Pentecostal Women in Ministry."

⁶³ Benvenuti, "Pentecostal Women in Ministry."

With this project, it was my aim to create a context for discussing the lack of inclusion of African-American women in Pentecostal Church leadership in a manner that acknowledges the problem, examines it from a scriptural and historical perspective and presents potential solutions for overcoming it for the collective benefit of the Pentecostal Church.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this thesis was to spark dialogue among leaders in African-American Pentecostal Fellowships that will create a path for women toward ordination to senior levels of leadership in the Church. This project was developed to create a space for the awareness and assessment of the lack of African-American Pentecostal women pastors and bishops and ultimately increase the numbers of women who occupy positions of senior leadership in the Church.

Goals of the Project

I intended to accomplish two primary goals when undertaking this project. The first goal of the project was to provide a context for fresh, open dialogue about the African-American Pentecostal Church's traditional reluctance to include women in the highest levels of governance and oversight in the Church and its affiliated fellowships. This dialogue was designed to occur not only on the local and state jurisdictional level but also the national level, including the fellowships' executive boards. The purpose of the dialogue was to extend beyond merely increasing awareness about and acknowledging the existence and persistence of the issue; it was for church leaders to make a diligent effort to re-examine the rationale behind the problem, analyze what has

allowed it to persist, and together, work towards the development of potential solutions for remedying the problem for the collective good of the Pentecostal Church.

The second goal I sought to accomplish when undertaking the project was to ascertain the biblical, historical and socio-cultural impact of inclusivity as it pertains to women in ministry leadership. Using biblical texts and extra-biblical texts, I sought to understand the issue at a deeper level from both sides of the perspectives: from the justification of exclusion perspective used to justify keeping women out of senior leadership in the Church and the justification of inclusion perspective used to promote the advancement of female leaders in the Church. The intent of this exploration was to expose Pentecostal Church leaders to alternative ways of thinking about texts that address women's leadership in formative Christianity with the ultimate outcome being a new commitment to accept women into senior levels of church leadership. The goal was not to have these leaders change their position based on social pressure from their female constituents; it was to help them see legitimate justification for taking such action in Scripture so that they would be compelled to relate to women in ministry today in a manner consistent with how they were related to in ancient Christianity.

Scope of the Project

This project was created a catalyst to foster awareness about, create a space for dialogue around, and develop solutions regarding the advancement of women to senior leadership within the African-American Pentecostal Church. It consisted of the identification, review and analysis of biblical and extra-biblical materials that have been traditionally used by male-dominated church leadership as justification for excluding

women from occupying high levels of leadership in the Pentecostal Church and its church Fellowships. Additionally, these same materials were utilized to form a basis for validating and justifying the inclusion of women in senior leadership in the Pentecostal Church so that both sides of the argument could be presented and considered as a part of a fair and well-balanced dialogue about the matter and accomplish the primary intent of this project: to provide affirmation for and legitimize the positioning of women in leadership in the African-American Pentecostal Church in order to make a case for providing a pathway towards their ordination and consecration in senior roles of leadership.

One of the first acts undertaken for the project was to assemble a six-person Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) consisting of three experienced clergy female (one fellowship pastor, one elder, one minister), two experienced clergy male (one fellowship pastor, one elder) and one non-clergy female. The LAC, all of whom were members of Greater Highway Deliverance Fellowship, functioned as a consultative and advisory board that oversaw the formation of lectures, questionnaire distribution and overall project development and process.

Data for the project was collected through pencil-and-paper questionnaires following two lectures I delivered at the GHDM National Women's Conference in Dayton, OH. Lecture participants were invited to respond to questions on a questionnaire that explored attitudes toward women in ministry, relevant scriptural justifications, female subordination within the denomination, and their opinions regarding the consecration of women to higher levels of leadership, particularly the office of bishop. After the lectures were completed, the questionnaires were distributed (see Appendix A).

The questionnaire data was used to produce study findings, and the findings were used to present recommendations and conclusions regarding the research problem.

The Illustrative Context for the Project

As in the case of any systemic problem, there are outliers; some Pentecostal churches have taken the bold step to incorporate women into the highest levels of leadership in their churches and fellowships. For example, the Greater Highway Deliverance Ministries, Inc. (GHDM) is an Apostolic fellowship of churches in Paterson, NJ. It was founded and organized in 1991 by Bishop Liston Page, Sr. and is headquartered at 132 East 111th Street, New York, NY, 10029. GHDM is an example of a Pentecostal Fellowship that has begun the process of revamping its senior and executive leadership structure by including women in its top tiers of leadership. It was founded at a time when African-American Pentecostal churches were not providing space for females in the pastorate. Since its inception, GHDM has been ahead of the curve, helping women to make progressive strides in ministry based on their qualifications rather than on traditional, patriarchal ideologies. GHDM consecrated its first and only female bishop in July 2015. The Fellowship has also ordained women as elders and appointed one female to the pastorate in December 2017. Through its Bible studies, National Women's Conference and National Holy Convocation, GHDM provides classes to prepare women for various levels of ministry within the Fellowship. It is for this reason that I chose GHDM as an illustration for this project.

IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TESTIMONY

My background in the Pentecostal faith provides the basis for me as an African-American clergy male with 28 years in the denomination to speak on the subject of gendered relations in the African-American Pentecostal Church. I received developmental training and experiences at the first Pentecostal church I attended, which was in Norfolk, Virginia. The church was led by an African-American female, Bishop Barbara Amos, who was also the founder of the church, so I possess first-hand knowledge of what it is like to be pastored by an African-American female. The teaching I received from Bishop Amos and other female preachers and teachers, some of the most talented in the ministry world, has been invaluable throughout my years in ministry.

I currently serve as a senior leader in a Pentecostal church and advocate for the placement of women in senior leadership roles. My personal testimony regarding my background in ministry serves as a basis for why I consider advocating and supporting African-American Pentecostal clergywomen as pastors and bishops to be an important matter.

My Formative Beginning in Ministry

The first church experience that I can recall as a youth was attending the Peabody Heights Presbyterian Church on Herman Avenue in Eastman, Georgia. The pastor was an African-American male named Rev. Bridges W. Edwards, and his wife was Bessie Edwards, First Lady of the local church. I admired Reverend Edwards because, in my

juvenile mind, he was the closest representation to God that I knew. He was the individual who exposed and taught me to experience the knowledge of Jesus Christ during my adolescent years up until graduation from Dodge County High School in 1979. My context of ministry was what I experienced and witnessed while attending the Peabody Heights, and it molded and shaped me significantly. Because of my limited exposure, I thought only men could become pastors of churches; the only person I had ever seen preaching and teaching from the pulpit was Reverend Edwards. On the Sundays that he was absent, there would be another male preaching the sermon or teaching the Bible study class. The presence of men as leaders became normative.

In the summer of 1977, I experienced for the first time a woman teaching and preaching from the pulpit at our local church. She would ultimately receive ordination. Minister Etta Ross happened to be a Caucasian woman who was a seminary student and had been sent to our local church by the Augusta-Macon Synod to complete her pastoral internship under the tutelage of Reverend Bridges W. Edwards. Minister Ross was a very caring and kind person. She brought fresh ideas that could be incorporated and used in the local church, and she gained valuable knowledge in working within a rural African-American congregation.

On several occasions, Minister Ross had an opportunity to preach to the congregation on a Sunday morning under the supervision of Pastor Edwards. I could only imagine that the decision to allow her to do so was a monumental one, on Pastor Edwards' part, due to the gender and racial makeup of the congregation. Minister Ross, from what I could ascertain, was in a position where she had to minister to women and men who were not accustomed to having a female preach to them, especially a female

who was a Euro-American. After completing her internship at Peabody Heights, Minister Ross finished her coursework and graduated. She was ordained within the Presbyterian denomination and sent overseas to the mission field for religious service.

The Transition from Presbyterianism to Pentecostalism

In 1979, I left Eastman, Georgia, and joined the United States Navy, where I served until 1989. During my enlistment, I visited many Protestant churches, including Presbyterian, Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal and Methodist. During those visits, I rarely saw an African-American woman preaching or serving as a senior pastor or a bishop. It was not until 1991 that my wife and I were invited to attend a charismatic Pentecostal church in Norfolk, Virginia, called Faith Deliverance Christian Center (FDCC). We enjoyed the atmosphere, and we were astonished to learn that the church was led and shepherded by an African-American woman, Bishop Barbara Marie Amos of Portsmouth, Virginia. My introduction to the Pentecostal denomination was a significant step. I was being taught the intricacies of Pentecostalism from the context and view of an African-American woman who served as the senior pastor and who exemplified all the characteristics of being a caring and loving shepherd. From 1991 until 2003, I attended and worshipped at FDCC. It was there that I was exposed to women serving in various positions of leadership within that local congregation and leading not only women but men, too.

While attending FDCC, I joined the Parking and Security team as well as the Evangelistic Outreach ministry. In both departments, women worked alongside the men,

and at one point, a female served as the ministry head. I also had the pleasure of being ordained as a deacon and worked along with 29 other men and women as deacons. The chairperson and the vice-chair of the Deacon Board were both women. Bishop Amos continuously said, "All positions of leadership are open to both male and female, as long as the person is qualified for the job." She encouraged men and women to participate in leadership and never held an individual back due to his or her gender. I was a member of FDCC leadership team, and I was not aware of any discrimination against women. There were opportunities to excel and to reach one's full potential in the ministry at every level. The ministry provided opportunities for leadership to both men and women in all departments of the Church.

First Exposure to Female Founding Church Denominations

FDCC was a part of a national organization of churches founded and once led by a woman named Bishop Ida Bell Robinson. I remember sitting in a leadership meeting at FDCC, and during this session, we had the pleasure of having the current presiding prelate, who at that time was her grace, the honorable Bishop Amy B. Stevens, who served as the presiding prelate from 1983 to 2000.

Bishop Stevens told us some of her memories of Bishop Robinson. One story that she recalled was the time when she saw a car with a flat tire in an area that seemed deserted in the rural South. There, standing in front of the car, was a black woman singing and playing the tambourine, a scene that Bishop Stevens said she would never forget. The year was 1946, and the singing woman was Bishop Robinson, who soon had drawn an audience. It was her custom that whenever she had an audience, she would

preach. She believed that the flat tire was allowed by God so that the people could hear the gospel. Bishop Stevens discussed how few people today remember Bishop Robinson, the fiery holiness revivalist. However, Bishop Stevens explained, every time someone encountered a congregation affiliated with the Mount Sinai Holy Church of America, they were seeing and experiencing the legacy of Bishop Robinson, our great founder.

The overall impact of Bishop Robinson's efforts on Pentecostalism and the outside community and the world was significant. At its height, Mount Sinai grew to 154 congregations, primarily along the East Coast. By 1996, this number was down to 102, with approximately 10,000 members, including one congregation in Cuba, seven house churches in India, and two congregations in Guyana, South America. Today, Mount Sinai does not resemble the way the progenitor anticipated. The executive leadership of the Fellowship has dramatically changed. Male pastors and bishops now hold those senior leadership positions once filled by female pastors and bishops. A significant shift has taken place, and no one has inquired as to why this happened. Mount Sinai afforded many female clergy opportunities for leadership not provided by other Fellowships, and to see it move back to an entity that does not represent the values of its founder is painful.

When the Lord spoke to her in 1924, Bishop Robinson regarded the vision that she received from the Lord as a direct command to start a new organization that would promote the full ministry of women.⁶⁴ She accomplished this during a time when there were not many women preachers, and the only other denomination in the United States that had been founded by a woman at that time was the Foursquare Church, which was

⁶⁴ Butler, *Women in COGIC*, 38.

founded by Aimee Semple McPherson the year before in 1923.⁶⁵ McPherson was a religious leader in what was known as the “flapper era” in the early 20th century. She faced gender prejudice of the society and law but became a prominent celebrity in her time while founding an organization that is still in existence today. She was born Aimee Kennedy near the small hamlet of Salford, Ontario, in 1890.⁶⁶ However, unlike McPherson, Bishop Robinson was African-American, so this meant an entirely different set of challenges that she had to face.

Connecting with Highway Church of Christ, a Pentecostal Church in GHDM

In 2003, I was relocated by my employer from Chesapeake, Virginia to Brooklyn, New York. My wife and I had to find a new house of worship to continue the charismatic Pentecostal experience we had enjoyed in the south. A friend recommended a local ministry by the name of Highway Church of Christ in Paterson, New Jersey. The Highway Church is a charismatic Pentecostal church in the heart of an urban community.⁶⁷ The community surrounding the church primarily consists of African-American and Hispanic families.

Since being a part of the Highway Church, I have witnessed several shifts in how women are considered in ministry leadership. For example, I was a part of the ministry when the leadership modified its policy to begin appointing women as deacons rather than as deaconesses. I was also present when the pastor submitted the name of Minister

⁶⁵ Charles Barfoot and Gerald Sheppard, “Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion: The Changing Role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980), 5-6.

⁶⁶ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 32.

⁶⁷ The Highway Church Ministries. 2019. www.thehighwaychurchministries.com.

Paula Cooper to the GHDM Ordination Committee to be considered and ordained as an elder. These and other examples of the progressive and female-inclusive mentality of Highway Church have also helped to contribute to my position that advocates for accepting women into leadership positions in the Pentecostal Church.

Today, I serve as one of the senior elders of the Highway Church. I create a rotation list of preachers for the pulpit on Sunday mornings, and I include the female elders in that rotation. I do believe that because of my participation in the ministry as an Elder and my position on the national level as an Overseer of Episcopal Protocol for the Fellowship, I have been provided with a context in which I can voice my concerns regarding providing full credentials and ordination of female clergy to work alongside their male counterparts.

GHDM: A Pentecostal Fellowship Making Gradual Strides towards Female Inclusion

Highway Church of Christ is a part of a fellowship of churches within Greater Highway Deliverance Ministries (GHDM), which was founded in 1991 by Bishop Liston Page, Sr. and operates under episcopal governance (polity), a model of church government that upholds the role of Bishop as having the greatest level of authority and oversight in the denomination. GHDM's vision is to "provide an environment conducive to spiritual growth and development."⁶⁸ Centrally located in New York, New York, GHDM emphasizes the following values: (a) teaching God's Word with practicality, (b) fellowship through supportive Christian relationships, (c) dynamic praise and worship,

⁶⁸ Greater Highway Deliverance Ministries. 2019. www.ghdministries.org.

and (d) passionately reaching non-Christians with the gospel.⁶⁹ “Proclaiming and demonstrating the love of God to the World” is the organization’s mission statement. Founders Bishop Liston Page Sr. and Dr. Hazel R. Page started the Greater Highway Deliverance Temple in 1964 and the Highway Church of Christ in 1972. In 2000, Bishop Page appointed his son, Liston Page Jr., to the office of Pastor at the Highway Church. The Highway Church is in Paterson, New Jersey, the third largest municipality in New Jersey.

I chose GHDM as an illustration for this project because it was founded and organized in a time when African-American Pentecostal churches were not providing space for females in the pastorate. Before establishing Greater Highway Deliverance Temple, Bishop Page had a meeting with Bishop William L. Bonner, who was the presiding bishop of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ (COOLJC). COOLJC was located and headquartered in New York, New York. Bishop and Dr. Page wanted to become a part of COOLJC. Bishop Bonner informed Bishop Page that because the COOLJC Fellowship did not subscribe to the notion that women should be permitted to preach, he could not offer them membership in the organization. From that meeting with Bishop Bonner, Bishop Page forged forward to establish his own church and Fellowship: GHDM.

Several of Bishop Page’s peers did not believe that women should be ordained as elders, let alone elevated to the pastorate. However, he did not allow their patriarchal thinking to influence his decision to appoint the first female within his church to the leadership position of ordained elder in 2003. Fellowships such as the Church of God in

⁶⁹ Greater Highway.

Christ, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ World-Wide, Inc., Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Pentecostal Churches of the Apostolic Faith, Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ World-Wide, Inc., and various other fellowships and organizations did not participate in the ordination of females. Thus, when Bishop Page ordained his first female elder, he was doing something in GHDM that was completely outside of the norm of what was permissible at other African-American Pentecostal fellowships.

GHDM is a fellowship of churches that do not discriminate against or withhold certain positions from women. What GHDM has not yet done, however, is to provide the necessary development and training needed for women to assume the role of pastor. Formalized training does not exist for female clergy who desire to lead local churches as pastors. As a result, even though the women of GHDM have opportunities not available elsewhere, which allow them to serve at various levels of ministry, they do not yet have a path to serving on the pastoral level.

The GHDM upper tier of leadership consists of an executive board that meets quarterly at the National Headquarters in New York City. The board includes bishops, overseers, and ordained elders whose primary function is to ensure the coherence of the ecclesia. Also, the executive board comes together to plan out the calendar of the fellowship and review the performance of the local churches within the organization. Currently, the executive board is predominately male but does have three women, one female bishop and two female pastors. The board votes on episcopates who will direct jurisdictional and provincial territories as prelates. Also, it discusses what local assembly has a pastoral vacancy and reviews candidates' credentials for possible placements. The

inclusion of women on the executive board offers insight about women; only other women can answer and help the board govern justly.

Over the years, since the inception and formulation of GHDM, it has been the desire and goal of the presiding prelate to utilize females in every aspect of the fellowship. GHDM has discovered that positioning female clergy in senior leadership does not impede or denigrate the effectiveness of the mission of the Fellowship. For example, one of the pinnacles and accomplishments of the GHDM fellowship was on August 1, 2015, when the first female clergy to the episcopacy with full clergy rights as a diocesan bishop with territorial responsibilities was consecrated. Additionally, women are and have been appointed to serve as deacons and elders on the local level and serve on the national level with assignments over auxiliary departments. Upon review of these appointments, GHDM leaders have found that having women in these positions not only enhances the fellowship but causes high synergistic energy amongst the rank and file. However, despite the advancements that females have made within GHDM, to date, no female has experienced a pastoral appointment or installation as a pastor.

My Role & Responsibility as Overseer in GHDM

As an African-American Pentecostal male analyzing the tiers of the leadership of the fellowship of which I am a part as well as other Pentecostal Churches and fellowships that I have had the privilege of visiting and frequently read about, I have observed that the senior leadership composition in these organizations does not reflect the diversified gender of the audience that they lead. The representation of women among the upper tiers of governance of the Pentecostal Church Fellowships on the national level is

conspicuously lacking. It is difficult for me to accept that still today in the 21st century, the Pentecostal denomination is so far behind in recognizing and providing opportunities for women on all levels of leadership.

After being a part of the Highway Church for a few years, I accepted the call to ministry and began my journey to evangelizing and preaching the sacred text. I was eventually ordained an elder and then received an episcopal appointment to the office of Overseer of Episcopal Protocol for the GHDM. The role of Overseer entails several responsibilities, primarily communicating directives and information that comes down from the office of the Presiding-Prelate to the ecclesiastical body of the fellowship.

In this position, I am also a part of meetings that concern the installation and placement of pastors within the fellowship. Since I have occupied the role of Overseer, I have not experienced any conversations about preparing female clergy for any of those positions. The normative action has been placing a male clergy in any open pastoral positions that might arise. Thus, although women are permitted to occupy the role of deacons and elders on a local and national role, and even though there is even a female bishop in the organization, a stained-glass ceiling still exists in GHDM to hold the role of pastor, blocking the progress of women who feel called to this office.

I believe that Pentecostal Fellowships should make space for African-American female clergy to participate in all levels of leadership, including being installed as a senior pastor or serving as a consecrated bishop with jurisdictional responsibilities. Yet, throughout my tenure as Overseer, I have been negligent in voicing my opinion and using my authority as an executive board member in advocating for the preparation and installation of females into vacant pastoral slots. Hindsight has allowed me to see I was

not using my position of authority wisely and that I could have been more supportive of the needs for advancement of the female clergy. However, I am determined to make a difference by no longer remaining silent and openly addressing this issue head-on to be a voice for women in clergy whose voices go unheard. Through this project, for the collective good and future sustainability of the Pentecostal church, my aim is to create a context for dialogue that ensures that the obstacles that hinder women from attaining senior leadership positions in the African-American Pentecostal church are acknowledged, re-evaluated, actively addressed and eliminated so that together, we can forge a pathway for ordination and consecration for my sisters in Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE LEADERSHIP:
THE DILEMMA OF EQUALITY IN THE CHURCH

Despite the significant leadership strides that African-American women have made in education, career, politics, and society in general, there has remained a historical reluctance to admit women into the ranks of leadership in the African-American Church. The same women who have proven themselves well-capable of serving as leaders in the education, legal, medical, scientific, arts and nonprofit communities are also capable of providing oversight and leadership in the church, although, as a practice, they are largely prohibited from doing so. Instead, church leadership roles are traditionally reserved only for men.⁷⁰

Historically, within the African-American church, black women have held a robust numerical majority of church membership. However, their large numbers as congregants have not translated into an equally representative number of leadership roles. Instead, there persists a disproportionate representation of men in church leadership and very few African-American female clergywomen occupying these authoritative roles.⁷¹ Further, African-American women traditionally have provided continuous support for the church and served as its foundation for sustainability, generously providing financial support and tireless contributions of their time and talent. Without the commitment and

⁷⁰ Timothy Morgan, "The Stained Glass Ceiling," *Christianity Today* (May 16, 1994), 52.

⁷¹ Cheryl Sanders, "History of Women in the Pentecostal Movement," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 2 (July 1997), 1-2.

contributions of black women, the African-American church, as an institution, would cease to exist. Yet, as a practice, black women tend to be continuously overlooked for leadership positions when churches or denominations are seeking to fill positions of senior leadership. The gender politics within the African-American Church, which have led to the exclusion of women from top-tier leadership roles as a common practice, has resulted in growing levels of discontent and dissatisfaction among the Church's largest constituency.⁷² If allowed to remain unaddressed and unresolved, the problem threatens to derail the growth and progress of the African-American Church. Thus, for the good of the Church, it is more important than ever to engage in open, objective, and dialogue about the issue in order to arrive at solutions that are equitable and acceptable by all.

In order to understand the phenomenon of lack of female inclusion in church leadership with greater clarity, particularly as it pertains to the Pentecostal Church, it is necessary to examine the historical context of the problem, including: (a) the history of African-American women in leadership in society, (b) the history of black women in the African-American Church, (c) the history of women in Pentecostal Church leadership, (d) today's underrepresentation of Pentecostal women in ministry leadership that has resulted from the persistence of the phenomenon. Additionally, in order to fully understand the phenomenon, it is essential to understand the ideologies behind its justification, specifically the biblical texts and extra biblical resources that are used to justify the exclusion of women from church leadership roles and those that are used to justify their inclusion. Finally, because the same Bible is used for both the inclusion and exclusion perspectives, it is necessary to examine how interpretation of biblical texts plays a role in

⁷² Ma, "Changing Images," 211-212.

both sides of the argument. Only through undergoing such a comprehensive examination can one fully understand the existence of the phenomenon of excluding women from church leadership, why it persists and what is necessary to alter it.

HISTORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP OUTSIDE OF PENTECOSTALISM

Although Black churches throughout history have advocated for the social and political equality of African Americans and pursued justice for this community of disenfranchised individuals in American society, its efforts have done little to address the inequalities that exist within the African-American community itself, namely the disparities and power imbalances that exist surrounding class and gender within churches.⁷³ Contributions of Black males within the church tend to be highlighted, whereas the role of Black females tends to not receive much attention. This is so even though the essential programs of African-American churches rely on the financial support of the women of their congregations to ensure the success of the programs.⁷⁴ Several church denominations that are comprised primarily of a middle-class demographic, one of the most well-known being the Black Methodists (e.g., African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal) have less of a track record that is marked by a bias in favor of the male gender when compared to Holiness/Pentecostal denominations. Alternatively, while Black Methodists are much less likely to engage in gender bias favoring males, Holiness/Pentecostal denominations are

⁷³ Dei and Osei-Bonsu, "The Female Ordination Debate," 37-42.

⁷⁴ Tava Herring, "African-American Women," 71-72.

less likely to engage in biases that favor higher class demographics, a bias more likely to be demonstrated by Black Methodists. Holiness/Pentecostal denominations tend to appeal to African Americans of poorer classes and with less education. However, despite Holiness/Pentecostal denominations' lower likelihood to engage in class bias, gender bias still remains prevalent in these denominations, because Black women are still commonly denied the opportunity to fully participate in the denominations in high-level Holiness/Pentecostal leadership. It is a well-documented matter of historical fact that Black women have served as the primary pillar of support for the Black church. Without their involvement, commitment and contributions, whether the Black church would have survived and remained the pillar it is today in the Black community is questionable. The participation of Black women in the Black church has been critical historically and remains critical today regarding the sustainability of this vital institution. However, despite the acknowledgement of Black women's level of significance to the Black Church by historians, researchers, laity, church leaders, and the Black community, this acknowledgement has not resulted in equitable regard and treatment for women in the Church. Instead, the high-level roles of preacher, pastor, Bishop, etc. continue to be primarily dominated by males and largely kept off limits to females who feel called to function in such privileged positions.⁷⁵

The position of the pastor has historically been a springboard for political power and activity in the greater society. Generally, African-American males who hold positions of power and oversight in the Church and in ministry fellowships have had little

⁷⁵ Desiree Newkirk and Bruce Cooper, "Preparing Women for Baptist Church Leadership: Mentoring Impact on Beliefs and Practices of Female Ministers," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 22, no. 3 (2013): 3.

to say regarding the political participation of women both inside of the church pertaining to church leadership and outside of the Church.⁷⁶ This D. Min. project will assess the leadership and governance roles of Black women in Black churches. In the project, I will examine how women are represented in biblical texts with the goal of uncovering how these biblical representations should influence our beliefs on women and the roles they can rightfully occupy in the Black Pentecostal church.

WOMEN IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

Many African-American women have found sexism in their churches, contrary to the supposed tradition of Black political liberation.⁷⁷ I have personally witnessed sexism against female clergy; gifted women purposely excluded from the pastoral selection because of their gender. This exclusivism limits women with inequality of rights and social privilege. The reliance of the Black church on the charismatic gifts of the Black male pastor is an indication that church leadership does not place reliance on leadership qualities or academics but the ability to excite the hearer with oratory skills. This practice is one which many African-American congregations embrace wholeheartedly because of the dominant position held by males in American society. Many male pastors exhibit sexist behavior and mirror the values of our patriarchal society concerning women.⁷⁸

The ministry of women as fully-ordained clergy is, without dispute, a controversial topic. Historically, in matters surrounding the church, men have dominated

⁷⁶ Demetrius Williams, *An End to This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African-American Churches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 1.

⁷⁷ Williams, *End to This Strife*, 1-2.

⁷⁸ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 3.

positions of leadership and authority, making these positions off-limits to women. It is an unfortunate reality that, rather than address issues of gender bias and the unequal treatment of females in the church, Black men chose to ignore such issues, perpetuating a system that continued to favor men over women. This, even though Black church founders established these institutions in the midst of a White society that perpetuated racial biases and discrimination against them. Although they themselves fought against the injustices that White society perpetuated against them, they, in turn, perpetuated the same type of unfair practices against their Black sisters in the church.⁷⁹

Beginning in the early 1900s, it was commonplace for women to be ordained, particularly in the Holiness movement. Rather than the ordination of women being a controversial issue, it was an accepted part of how the Holiness denomination functioned, a standard practice exercised throughout the churches in the movement. Historians refer to denominations that have historically ordained women and allowed them to function in high levels of leadership and oversight as denominations having a “usable past.” That is, researchers are able to use the denomination’s past history or ordaining women as support for why the practice should continue today. Unlike many other mainline Christian denominations, which do not have a usable past of ordaining women and allowing them to hold positions of senior leadership (many only recently began ordaining women), the Holiness movement does have a usable past of engaging in such practices. This denomination’s usable past is now used by researchers as evidence to reinforce the

⁷⁹ Butler, *Women in COGIC*, 32-33.

argument that in the same way ordaining women and allowing them to function in senior leadership was accepted in the past, so should it also be accepted as a practice today.⁸⁰

Recently, over the past several decades, there has been a trend towards the ordination of more women in Christian denominations. However, these advancements have been limited; although churches are willing to ordain women as ministers, any efforts the women might engage in to rise above this level are met with resistance – they inevitably hit the barrier of the stained-glass ceiling. When these women express a desire to occupy a higher-level office or position of authority, like becoming a pastor of a larger congregation or being assigned to a high-ranking post in the church or a church fellowship, they are consistently denied such opportunities.⁸¹

African-American women play vital roles in the communities in which they live. Whatever happens in their community, they find themselves involved and caring for what happens in the area where they live and raise their family. The woes and the throes of their community seem to infiltrate the deepest, innermost parts of these loving and caring women. These overwhelming needs have been overshadowed in many Black churches by a need to preserve the roles of authority and leadership for males. Some who argue that African-American women have made substantial advancements in the Black Church point to the small percentage of women who have gained an almost celebrity status and large followings, being invited to speak at large church conventions, major denominational gatherings and conferences. However, although it is true that some African-American women have gained greater acceptance as public speakers, it cannot be

⁸⁰ Morgan, “Stained-Glass Ceiling,” 52.

⁸¹ Morgan, 52.

said that this has translated into greater acceptance of women to occupy high offices of position or authority in the Church. Instead, African-American women continue to be relegated to “speaking” and “teaching” while African-American males reserve the role of “preaching,” governing and leadership in the Church for themselves. Thus, although norms have changed regarding who can take the platform and have words that will inspire large audiences, the norm continues to assign the voice of authority regarding the things of God to males rather than sharing this voice with females. This has resulted in the development of a noticeable yet rarely discussed division of labor among men and women in the Black Church, one that favors the male voice and position of authority over that of females. However, this gender-based distribution of roles was not developed in a vacuum; it was developed by African-American male leaders who desired to reflect the dominant White culture’s position on the woman’s role in the Church, one in which they used the Bible to justify the exclusion of women from positions of authority and leadership in the Church.⁸²

According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “All bodies, be they religious, social, and political undergird and sustain the inferiority of women.”⁸³ Documentation supports the notion that on nearly all organizational levels, women have not excelled beyond the traditional areas of work. Although women are, on some occasions, invited to sit at the boardroom table to participate in discussions about governance in some smaller churches, rarely are they invited to have such a voice in making decisions in larger, more prominent churches and denominational fellowships. Additionally, although women might be

⁸² Morgan, 52.

⁸³ TeResa Green, “A Gendered Spirit: Race, Class, and Sex in the African American Church,” *Race, Gender & Class* 10, no. 1 (2003): 118.

welcomed to participate as volunteer members or team members of departments and agencies focused on such initiatives as education, missions, or other non-essential areas traditionally defined as “women’s work,” they are generally not welcomed in areas of greater social and political impact; these areas tend to be reserved for their counterparts and are considered “men’s work.”⁸⁴ African-American women receive praise for accomplishments in backbone or supportive roles. However, in many instances, they have been punished for attempting to move to prominent positions by being denied leadership positions, by being questioned about the authenticity of their call to the ministry, and by being ignored in their pursuits.⁸⁵

African-American churches' problematic relationship with women continues, in part, because few of the denominations have undertaken the task of thoroughly re-examining the doctrines of their institutions,⁸⁶ doctrines which have their origins in the cultural norms of the twenty-first century.⁸⁷ Without examination of these types of doctrines, churches cannot adequately address the struggle for freedom of both Black men and Black women. As women in broader society have begun to agitate and advocate equality for women, women in the church have started to do the same. However, Black women remain conflicted, feeling the need to choose between maintaining a sense of faithfulness and fidelity to the African-American community, in which they have “a place,” and a growing unease about their unequal treatment in this same community,

⁸⁴ Williams, *End to This Strife*, 190.

⁸⁵ Williams, 190.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Women in COGIC*, 38-39.

⁸⁷ Russell Huizing, “What Was Paul Thinking? An Ideological Study of 1 Timothy 2,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 2 (2011): 14-22.

which provokes an internal desire to assertively advocate for their rights against their African-American male counterparts.⁸⁸ The fact that African-American women have continued to remain active, committed, faithful and loyal to a church that has historically engaged in gender discrimination against them suggests that there is room for negotiation and hope for the development of an approach towards gender relations that benefits both genders. This new paradigm governing male-female roles in the Church would not be patterned after that which governs the White Church, in which men continue to dominate positions of leadership and authority, relegating women to lower-levels of oversight, power and influence. Instead, the alternative can be one that advances females, but not to the detriment of males in the Black Church, resulting in a win-win approach to gender relations and role assignment in the church that ultimately benefits the institution as a whole.⁸⁹

An examination of how African-American churches originated aids in the understanding of why it, as an institution, largely upholds its current position that excludes women from high positions of leadership, power and authority. This examination begins with the knowledge that most mainline African-American churches did not develop on their own. Instead, they were outgrowths of White denominations, primarily Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Episcopal denominations, that were developed after African-Americans encountered racism and discrimination in these churches. When African-American churches were created as derivatives of these White churches, their worship formats, style of preaching, and focus on African-American

⁸⁸ Williams, *End to This Strife*, 188-189.

⁸⁹ Williams, 189-190.

community issues differed from that of their White counterparts. Additionally, African-American churches considered their focus on the moral issue of human rights to be of greater importance to them than it was to those in the White church. However, aside from a different worship format, style of preaching, and a moral concern for their own community and for all of humanity, there is little difference between the Black Church and the White Church's fundamental convictions about the world. When the Black Churches were developed, although they changed many things about how they conducted their worship and humanitarian focuses in order to differ from their White counterparts, what they did not take time to re-evaluate and change were their doctrinal beliefs. As a result, the Black churches continued to operate according to the doctrinal beliefs of their White counterparts, which included the oppression of women, non-whites, and people of lower classes.⁹⁰

Class differentiation is evident in many African-American congregations. Historically, as African-American congregations become more mainstream and assimilated, their churches became more middle class. Many of these churches lost their appeal to low income or less educated members. As the emerging middle class grew, the less fortunate members consistently withdrew to find or form institutions that were more amenable to their lifestyles and needs. Poor, urban storefront churches exist because of middle-class Black churches' inability to speak to the unique spiritual needs and social position of working lower class African-Americans. Smaller inner-city churches provide an environment and a message that does not marginalize or ostracize the religious

⁹⁰ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 191.

practices and behaviors of its members. These churches allow congregants an opportunity to worship and experience the love of God in a place where everyone is welcome no matter what their economic status and provide their congregations with a spiritual message that elevates and encourages them despite the limitations of their worldly condition.⁹¹

HISTORY OF PENTECOSTAL WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Many Christian communities have taken the challenge of women's leadership to heart and have involved women in ever increasing levels of ecclesial authority. Most mainline denominations ordain women with full clergy rights. A number of these have elected several women to the office of bishop. On the contrary, many Evangelical churches, especially the classical Pentecostal movement, have been resistant to any authentic elevation of the status of women within their ranks.⁹²

With the turn of events, the irony of this is evident when one notes that some observers have characterized Pentecostalism as primarily “women's religion” because of the higher proportion of women to men historically participating in the movement.⁹³ It is even more ironic when one explores women's involvement in the unfolding of this movement, which has come to be the fastest growing segment of global Christianity. Like its antecedent nineteenth-century Holiness movement, the attraction of women to the nascent Pentecostal movement was partly because of the movement’s assurance of

⁹¹ Stacey Tucker, “Unto the Least of These: The Pentecostal Church and Social Ministry” (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2011), 37-38, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁹² Butler, *Women in COGIC*,

⁹³ Herring, “African-American Women,” 18

greater liberties that would allow them to participate in ministry. In the earliest stages of the movement, Pentecostal women took on more roles and enjoyed more freedom than was correct for their counterparts in most branches of the Christian church.⁹⁴

In order to comprehensively understand the current state of male-female role relations in the African-American Pentecostal Church and how the issue can be addressed, it is necessary to examine several factors, including the history of the issue, the potential barriers that lie in the way of women being appointed to high-level leadership roles in the church, how these barriers can potentially be addressed in modern times without disrupting the order and operations of the Church, and a prognosis for the development of win-win male-female role relationships. Within African-American Pentecostal churches, leadership roles available for women have included various areas of responsibility. They have ranged from roles considered to be more traditional in nature, like serving as heads of missionary groups, to being leaders of women's groups in the church. Additionally, over time, they have begun serving in other non-traditional capacities, like leading Christian education departments, overseeing congregational groups, and providing supervision for pastoral ministries.⁹⁵ In the earliest years, there appeared to be absolute freedom for women to pursue whatever course they felt God was leading them to follow. Women pastored churches, served as missionaries, preached, taught, exhorted, and held governing positions in the church. As the Pentecostal movement grew and attempted to gain respectability, women's roles lessened by many formal and informal restrictions in most Pentecostal bodies. Women still had the freedom

⁹⁴ Barfoot and Sheppard, "Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion," 4-10.

⁹⁵ Alexis D. Abernathy, "Women's Leadership in The African-American Church," Fuller Studio, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church> (accessed May 24, 2019).

to preach and exhort. Their governing roles became more limited because these bodies began to emulate the gender-stratified hierarchy they once denounced in mainline organizations.⁹⁶

Even where official dogma was egalitarian, unofficial tradition concerning “male-only” leadership was often very palpable. While official polity may have opened all levels of ministry to called and qualified persons, unofficial tradition saw only men holding top positions, such as presiding elder, district overseer or superintendent, bishop, or other denominational head. Furthermore, within this unofficial tradition, women could not hope to be appointed as pastor of congregations of any substantial size.⁹⁷

The fundamental freedom placed on women in the Pentecostal movement, even when limited, derived from several factors. First, Pentecostal eschatology supported the premillennial understanding that saw the revival as a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy of Joel 2:28a: “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and our daughters shall prophesy.” Early Pentecostals understood themselves as living in those last days, the days that would immediately precede the return of Christ, when He would establish His millennial kingdom on earth. As such, they felt an urgent need to involve everyone in the task of winning as many souls as possible. Therefore, men were not the only ones enlisted to preach the gospel; because of the urgency of the times, women were enlisted, too.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Barfoot and Sheppard, “Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion,” 8, 14.

⁹⁷ Barfoot and Sheppard, 4-14.

⁹⁸ Barfoot and Sheppard, 9.

Secondly, these early Pentecostals held that individuals were empowered through the Holy Spirit baptism to do ministry as the Spirit willed. They believed God supernaturally anointed individuals, without regard to social constrictions, education, or other formal preparation. Proof of one's call lay in the person's testimony to such a request and the perceived fruit of a Spirit-empowered ministry, rather than in a formal ecclesiastical system of selection or promotion. Men or women who demonstrated preaching skill and ability to convey a convincing gospel message, and who displayed charismatic ministry gifts and evangelistic ability received a nod to pursue into action. This radical egalitarianism, coupled with a general disdain for hierarchical church structures and denominationalism, served as the guiding force that propelled the winds of change.⁹⁹

Competing theologies complicated the status of women ministers. Preaching women modeled themselves after their Holiness predecessors, who also took their authority from Joel 2:28 and held a radical concept of the equality of the sexes in ministry. For a substantial number of others, it involved the felt need to follow Pauline restrictions on the participation of women within the church, despite the witnesses of passages such as that found in Acts and the testimony of Jesus' inclusion of women in the Gospels.¹⁰⁰

African-American Pentecostal women who answer the call of ministry and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ find themselves having to navigate an uncertain, perilous path, because although they desire to do the will of God and fulfill their call, they are faced

⁹⁹ Barfoot and Sheppard, 4-6.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander, "Future of Women," 380-382.

with doing so in churches in which they are largely forbidden from doing so. Thus, they must negotiate operating in obedience to Christ with not causing a great deal of disruption to the order of the church in which they live out their spiritual lives. Most African-American Pentecostal women who are called to preach and who desire to be treated in a manner equal with men in the church are not unruly feminist fanatics who insist on having their way, threatening to riot in their efforts to overturn the evils of gender prejudice and discrimination in the church. Most of them neither believe nor promote the feminist belief that God is a divine female or base their demands for equal treatment on this notion. However, they are also not silent bystanders who simply sit back and accept the status quo. Rather than sit passively by as the call of God on their lives is discounted, ignored or overlooked, they push back, respectfully arguing their position with the senior leaders in hopes that they will inspire their leaders to take a second look at Scripture and reconsider their positions. This process, they engage in carefully, understanding that even though they desire to see changes in the church, it is still a man's world, and the men still make the final decisions regarding their acceptance into ordination and high-levels of leadership, power and authority. To make too much noise or too big of a fuss could easily compromise the positions they already hold in the church, so they have grown accustomed to tempering their protests with a great deal of humility. Most importantly, it is essential to note that the motivation behind women who are called to ministry in the African-American Pentecostal Church neither seek to replace, displace or exterminate their male counterparts in ministry, nor do they envision a church world that is dominated by women and that caters primarily to female interests. Instead, they seek a church characterized by equality – the same treatment, regard and opportunities

afforded to women as they are to men. After all, generations of African-American Pentecostal women before them were granted equal opportunities to obey the call of the Lord on their lives by functioning in these offices, so they feel they should also be afforded the same equal opportunities.¹⁰¹

The early Pentecostal movement has allowed for some tremendously anointed and gifted women to move to the forefront of ministry. Anointed women like Aimee Semple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Alice Belle Garrigus, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Robinson, and Mae Eleanor Frey have been lauded in church history for pursuing the call of God on their lives, powerfully ministering by the Spirit of God and changing lives every place they went. Especially during a time where women's ministry was not taken seriously and often not respected, these women still operated in their call to ministry despite the challenges received from their male counterparts.

TODAY’S UNDERREPRESENTATION OF PENTECOSTAL WOMEN IN MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

In today's current Pentecostal fellowship environment, there still exist discrepancies concerning the elevation of women into the ranks of senior leadership, including the pastorate or the bishopric.¹⁰² Two significant movements within Pentecostalism have been apprehensive and reluctant to give space for women in senior leadership: The Assemblies of God (AOG) and the Church of God (COG). However, others have followed their pattern. Within these denominations two academic scholars

¹⁰¹ Peterson, “Study of Female Headship,” 27-28.

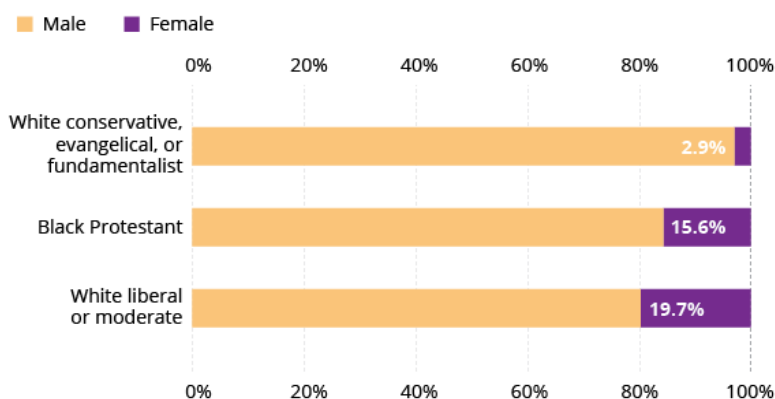
¹⁰² Dei and Osei-Bonsu, “The Female Ordination Debate,” 32.

have written articles for the support of women as leaders in Pentecostal Fellowships: Deborah M. Gill¹⁰³ and David Roebuck.¹⁰⁴ Figure 2, “Women are Underrepresented in Religious Leadership Roles,” is a depiction of the deficit that exists in the religious enterprise.

Women Are Underrepresented In Religious Leadership Roles

Even when groups do allow women to be ordained, not many lead congregations.

If there is one person who is the head or senior clergy person or religious leader in your congregation, is that person male or female?



Note: These data represent cumulative answers (1998, 2006-2007, and 2012) to survey question on gender of congregational leaders, asked only of survey respondents who responded yes to the question 'Is there one person who is the head or senior clergy person or religious leader in your congregation?' The largest denominational groups in the white liberal or moderate category were United Methodist Church, American Baptist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church USA, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, Quaker/Friends, and Unitarian/Universalist. The largest denominational groups in the white conservative category Southern Baptist, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Christian Missionary Alliance, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Church of the Nazarene, Seventh Day Adventist, Assemblies of God and Churches of Christ. "Black Protestant" means that a congregation is affiliated with one of the seven major Protestant denominations that are predominantly African American or that the congregation is Protestant with at least 80% African American racial composition.

¹⁰³ Deborah M. Gill, "The Contemporary State of Women in Ministry in the Assemblies of God," *Pneuma* 17.1 (Spring, 1995): 33-36.

¹⁰⁴ David Roebuck, "Perfect Liberty to Preach the Gospel: Women Ministers in the Church of God" *Pneuma* 17.1 (Spring, 1995): 25-32.

Figure 2. *Women Are Underrepresented in Religious Leadership Roles*. National Congregations Study. Huffington Post December 6, 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/religion-ordain-women_n_5826422

The low numbers of African-American women serving as the senior pastor or bishop within Pentecostal fellowships warrants the time and energy used to research this project to bring to the forefront the issues of clergywomen, as it relates to the process in which they must go through. I wanted to discuss the issue from both an academic and personal perspective. I have served 28 years in the Pentecostal denomination. During this time, I saw many ministries that have not benefited from the gifts and talents of the women. A shift in thinking is required as is the need for conversations with senior male leadership of Pentecostal Fellowships to discuss remedies to rectify the lack of senior female pastors. There is enough work that has been completed, including the Bible, recognized and reputable extra biblical resources and historical documents, to redefine the opportunities that should be available to women in positions of church leadership.¹⁰⁵

The Pentecostal movement formed out of the radical portion of the Holiness movement is not reflected today in terms of modern Pentecostalism. There has been a deviation from the origins of the Pentecostal movement and how it initially started. It seems like the urgency that once enveloped the movement has diminished. The level of responsibility once held by female clergy in the earlier development of the denomination is not reflective of how it was during the Azusa Street Revival period. At that time, everyone experienced an opportunity to work on all levels of ministry regardless of gender or race. From that environment spawned females who led worship, taught Bible

¹⁰⁵ Williams, *End to This Strife*, 71.

study, pastored churches, and even experienced consecration to the bishopric. If this was the trajectory path of the Pentecostal movement with its inclusiveness of women in strategic leadership in the Church, then a conversation with current senior leadership to discuss the causes of the reversal or the overlooking of women in the roles of senior leadership is warranted.¹⁰⁶

There are two schools of thought in the debate surrounding the underrepresentation of women in church leadership: the complementarian perspective and the egalitarian perspective. Complementarians maintain opposition to the ordination of women in pastoral ministry based on a classical perspective if issues related to gender. Their position: “God has created men and women equal in their essential dignity and human personhood, but different and complementary in function with male headship in the home and in the Church.”¹⁰⁷ Conversely, egalitarians support the ordination of women in pastoral ministry. Their position: men and women should be treated equally and have access to the same social, economic, civil and political rights as others, resulting in the abolishment of inequalities and the decentralization of power by any group.¹⁰⁸ Both camps in the debate build their arguments based on religion, theology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history, and due to their passionate stances on the issue of women in pastoral ministry, the contention between the two camps has intensified over recent years. In light of the effect that the debate has had on dividing the church, it is an issue that should be addressed with immediacy.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Morgan, “Stained Glass Ceiling,” 52.

¹⁰⁷ Dei and Osei-Bonsu, “The Female Ordination Debate,” 32.

¹⁰⁸ “Female Ordination Debate,” 38.

¹⁰⁹ “Female Ordination Debate, 32.

IDEOLOGIES JUSTIFYING THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM LEADERSHIP

To strengthen the position of providing space for female clergy to have access to areas of senior leadership, it is necessary to look at biblical texts. Several biblical texts have historically been utilized to justify the exclusion of women from leadership in the church. However, these texts must be approached with a proper exegetical analysis in order to accurately understand exactly what the writer intended to convey to the reader when the passage was written.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the most common passage of Scripture that has been routinely used by Christian leaders to justify the exclusion of women from leadership in the church is 1 Timothy 1:2-11, in which the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his spiritual son in the ministry, “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”¹¹¹ This is a critical passage of scripture that has been used to great lengths throughout history to support the authoritative male doctrine that forbids women to be ordained or occupy senior leadership roles in the Church.¹¹² As a result arguments built upon this scripture, throughout modern church history, women who have desired to work in ministry on

¹¹⁰ Peterson, “Study of Female Headship,” 31-32.

¹¹¹ 1 Tim. 2:11-12 (NRSV).

¹¹² Huizing, “What Was Paul Thinking?” 16-18.

levels that required authority over men were not permitted to exercise their calling and gifts on such a higher level of administration in the Church.

One of the most prominent themes in arguments justifying the exclusion of women from church leadership is the notion of how, according to Scripture, women are to demonstrate submission to males and how this type of submission would not be possible if a woman had leadership authority over males in the church. Joe E. Lunceford, Ph.D., a professor of New Testament at Georgetown College, in Georgetown, Kentucky and a former pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention helps to shed light on this point. As a proponent for the equality of women in ministry, the church that he was a part of pulled out of the denomination, primarily over the issue of the freedom of women to exercise their God-given call to ministry without limitations. Lunceford writes in his book, *Biblical Women - Submissive?*, about how women today are challenged to identify any single notable female in Scripture who demonstrates consistent submission to males.¹¹³ Using the Proverbs 31 woman as an example, he highlights how this woman, who was an entrepreneur business woman and known for her wisdom, had a great deal of power in her household, far from the voiceless, helpless type of submission many men in the church would like for females to demonstrate today. She was capable, responsible, respected, and well-qualified to make decisions in her home. Further, her husband praises his strong, industrious and powerful wife.¹¹⁴ Unless we are acquainted with the cultural expectations of the ancient world in the Old Testament, it is easy to overlook the

¹¹³ Joe Lunceford, *Biblical Women - Submissive?* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), xiv, 35-77.

¹¹⁴ Lunceford, *Biblical Women*, 168.

disparities of Scripture that appear, on the surface, to affirm silent submissiveness, patriarchy and the dominance of women.

Another ideological theme most commonly used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership positions in the church is that of headship. According to this argument, headship is a precursor for being able to provide spiritual oversight for the home as well as in the church. However, in the Bible, the role of headship was only assigned to males; they are the ones whom God tasked with the responsibility of providing leadership in the home and church, not females.¹¹⁵ First, God created Adam before He formed Eve, and for this ideological camp, this order holds vital theological significance. According to their view, Adam was formed first because he would have the responsibility to lead everyone else in the family. God made Adam before Eve because this was His divinely-arranged and intended assignment for the relationship between men and women in the family. They argue that the fact that God assigned the role of headship and leadership to the male and the role of support and cooperation to the female at creation suggests a biblical prohibition for women to have authority over men.¹¹⁶

As further evidence that headship can only be male, this group refers to Old Testament teachings show that the firstborn son in the home received the responsibility of headship. Considering that the earliest church was also in the home, the responsibility for the leadership in the church also lay with the male. Additionally, references are made to the Old Testament from the New Testament concerning the headship-is-male argument.

¹¹⁵ Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Does the Bible Support Ordaining Women as Elders or Pastors? Part 3," A Biblical Look at Contemporary Issues, accessed February 11, 2019, <http://drpipim.org/womens-ordination-contemporaryissues-46/43-1-does-the-bible-support-ordaining-women-as-elders-or-pastors-part-3.html>.

¹¹⁶ Koranteng-Pipim, "Does the Bible Support."

For example, according to Acts 7:38, God considered the nation of Israel to be His “church in the wilderness.” In the wilderness, women are not seen leading Israel; only men were given the responsibility of leadership. Further, only males from the tribe of Levi could serve as priests, a fact that this camp uses, again, to justify the exclusion of females from leadership based on gender.¹¹⁷ Author and researcher Samuel Koranteng-Pipim writes:

...When Paul writes that ‘the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God,’ and that women should ‘not have authority over men’ because ‘Adam was formed first,’ he is not concocting an arbitrary proof to justify his alleged concession to Hellenistic or Jewish cultural prejudices against women. As an inspired writer, the apostle Paul fully understood the theological truth of the headship principle as a divine arrangement instituted before the fall and which remains permanently valid for the Christian.¹¹⁸

Leaders for the exclusion of females from holding high-level leadership positions in the church indicate that there is a lack of scriptural precedence for women occupying senior leadership roles. For example, they argue that in the New Testament, none of the apostles and elders who were given the responsibility of leading the first-century church was female; each of these spiritual leaders was male. In light of what they consider to be this biblical fact (one which is contested by advocates for female leadership in the Church), they assert that headship roles in the church should not change today simply to accommodate cultural changes and advancements for women that are occurring in society.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Koranteng-Pipim, “Does the Bible Support.”

¹¹⁸ Koranteng-Pipim, “Does the Bible Support.”

¹¹⁹ Koranteng-Pipim, “Does the Bible Support.”

IDEOLOGIES JUSTIFYING THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy (Joel 2:28 [NRSV])

Biblical Images of Women in Leadership: The Old Testament

The Old Testament provides clear, unquestionable examples of female leaders, whose presence can also be used to justify the inclusion of women in today's Church leadership. In the Old Testament, leadership and authority allocation were not based on gender, ethnicity or class but on call and qualification by God. Examples of leadership in the Old Testament illustrate how the most unlikely people held the most extraordinary positions of leadership.

The Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah in Exodus 1:18-22 were ordered by Pharaoh to kill all the male children that the Israelite women bore. The females could live, as they posed no threat to the hierarchy. Additionally, their bodies were utilized for procreating more slaves. Pharaoh wanted the male children killed because he knew that they might grow up to fight against him and overthrow his reign. Also, Pharaoh did not want to chance there be a mixing of races that will threaten the pure procreation of the Egyptian race. These two midwives played a significant role in Israel's redemptive history by refusing to be a part of Pharaoh's secret and daring mission to kill all the boys. Among their "saves" was a baby boy named Moses. This child's mother demonstrated great courage when she conspired to save her son from death (Exodus 2). Moses's mother planned and executed the deliverance into the enemy household. The child was raised in

the sight of his birth mother by an unwed foster mother. Moreover, his mother was paid to nurse him (Exod. 2:9). Miriam, Moses' sister, and Pharaoh's daughter exhibited leadership characteristics that kept Moses alive for his future mission of liberation of the Israelite people. Miriam kept silent about her brother and told no one of their family relationships. Pharaoh's daughter could have left the child in the bulrush to die but decided to retrieve the child from the Nile river and raise Moses in the house of Pharaoh as her own.¹²⁰

Deborah (Judges 4-5) is identified as a prophetess who sat under a palm tree that bore her name at a site between Bethel and Ramah. It was where she held court in the open air. She is one of a very few women identified as a prophet in the Old Testament. Deborah was married to a man by the name of Lappidoth. Deborah, a great leader, assisted Israelites against the Canaanites, who were oppressing the people of Israel for many years. Her identity as a wife, judge, prophetess, even as the mother of Israel is notable. There was a song created on behalf of Deborah citing the victory over the Canaanites.¹²¹

Besides Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, the wife of Isaiah, and Noadiah also served in the prophetic ministry. Miriam was ranked equal with brothers, Aaron, and Moses (Numbers 20:1). She was the psalmist who led the women in the songfest and impromptu dance-a-thon after crossing the Red Sea. There is not much information giving the prophet Huldah except that she was married, the wife of Shallum, and she is called a prophet. She lived in Jerusalem, in "the college," where she was the keeper of the

¹²⁰ Margaret de Alminana and Lois Olena, *Women in Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry* (Boston: Brill Publishers, 2016), 62.

¹²¹ de Alminana and Olena, *Women in Pentecostal*, 62-63.

wardrobe (2 Kings 22:14). During renovations of the temple that occurred during the reign of King Josiah, ancient writings were discovered. The king sent messengers to inquire of God about the validity of the literature. The messengers went to Huldah, because she was a prophet, obviously one whose word they trusted. Huldah foretold Jerusalem's ruin and Josiah's escape from trouble (2 Kings 22:15-22; 2 Chron. 34:22-25).¹²²

Both the Old and New Testaments use the words “prophetess” and “prophet.” The term “prophetess” is used to refer to women who operate in the prophetic office, meaning one who speaks to another on behalf of God. Examples of females carrying the title of “prophetess” include Huldah (2 Chron. 34:22) and Anna (Luke 2:36). Men were used by God to speak on his behalf, and they were titled “prophets.” Examples of men who operated as prophets are Nathan (2 Samuel 7:20) and Elisha (2 Kings 6:12). Regardless of the gender of the person who operated from the prophetic office, they were considered leaders and were highly respected.¹²³

It is clear to see that a misinterpretation of the Pauline text and erroneous misuse of the Scriptures by the dominant male Pentecostal leadership helped to foster their stance against the ordination and consecration of women into senior leadership of the church. Women in the Old Testament did not have a problem with leading men, and the men whom they led did not have a problem with them leading. Just think: if the two midwives had listened to Pharaoh, the Israelites would not have witnessed the miraculous power of God by using Moses as their deliverer.

¹²² de Alminana and Olena, 62, 281.

¹²³ de Alminana and Olena, 281.

Female Leadership in the Early Church

Women were vital contributors who played instrumental roles in leading, advancing and growing the early church, resulting in its success. Although this is a well-documented fact, it is one that often overlooked by many contemporary historians and excluded from modern-day writings, leaving researchers and readers today to wonder about whether women played any such role in the early church at all. Women's substantial and noteworthy involvement in the early church began even before the church was birthed; they had an active presence in the life of Jesus from the time He was born until the time He was crucified on the cross. They were highly visible and involved throughout His ministry and at His resurrection. The women who were witnesses of his crucifixion and resurrection are most significant. The male disciples of Christ were not present at His execution and were in hiding. The announcement of the remarkable announcement that Jesus made to the women – even though He could have chosen to make it to His male disciples instead – upon His resurrection speaks volumes about what He thought about them. The angel at the tomb reminded them that Jesus had already advised them concerning His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Once they thought about it, they ran off to inform the brethren. Thus, the witnessing of His resurrection began and is integral to the gospel this very day.¹²⁴

The New Testament also gives evidence of female leadership in several areas of ministry. In the prophetic role are Anna, a prophetess (Luke 2:36) and Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).¹²⁵ The woman at the well exhorted her neighbors (John 4). She

¹²⁴ de Alminana and Olena, 39.

¹²⁵ Lunceford, *Biblical Women*, 92-94.

told them the exciting story of having a conversation with Jesus Christ that ultimately changed her life. Women functioned as fellow workers with Paul in the work of missions, evangelizing, and proclaiming the gospel. Paul mentions Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3)¹²⁶ and Prisca, another coworker who instructed Apollos in the correct doctrine of preaching (Acts 18:26).¹²⁷

The problem created by the Apostle Paul concerning the silence of women in the church is most troubling, but might he also recognize a woman as an apostle? During the past few decades, Rom. 16:17 has been identified as being of pivotal importance in determining what leadership roles women assumed Christianity. It has been used in many debates over the full ordination of women into senior leadership of the church. Here Paul recognizes another couple who has worked closely with him. This time the woman (Junia) is called an Apostle, and Paul requested her treatment as such. The text does not say whether Andronicus is the spouse of Junia. For all we know, Andronicus could be Junia's brother or cousin. It is only assumed but not verified. Junia and Andronicus experienced conversion before Paul was, and they were even arrested and spent time in prison along with Paul.¹²⁸

Elisabeth Fiorenza, in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, argues that Paul affirms female leadership in several ways. First, he asked that each person received proper salutation, and then he described how the women and men co-labored with him in ministry. In Rom. 16:6-12, Paul commends Tryphena,

¹²⁶ Lunceford, 128-129.

¹²⁷ Lunceford, 114-118.

¹²⁸ Lunceford, 125-127.

Tryphosa, Mary, and Persis, who “labored” hard.¹²⁹ Paul admonishes the addressees of 1 Co. 16:16-18 to give recognition and be “subject to every co-worker and laborer.” In Phil. 4:2-3, he states explicitly that Euodia and Syntyche “contend” with him by his side. There are those who say Paul is just acknowledging their hospitality or financial support; however, the word Paul uses to describe their role is *synathelo*, meaning “to fight with.” The word describes an athlete to achieve victory must strain every muscle to succeed.¹³⁰

Fiorenza considers Prisca to be one of Paul's prominent coworkers. With her husband, Aquila, she worked independently of Paul and not under Paul. The couple founded house churches in Ephesus, Corinth, and possibly Rome. When Paul greets them, he greets Prisca first.¹³¹ In fact, each time one reads about the team, Prisca, the wife's name is mentioned first, then her spouse, Aquila. From this, we can surmise Prisca was known more than her husband. While they were in Ephesus, they ran into a Jew, who was a native of Alexandria, named Apollos. They listened to him as he preached the way of the Lord; he was full of enthusiasm and taught very well. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollo aside and enlightened and instructed him on the way of God, helping him to understand it more accurately. From this example, one could see Priscilla and Aquila in the roles of pastor/teacher.¹³²

Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned by Paul on another occasion, in Rom. 16:3. Paul asked the church at Rome to greet the couple who worked with him in Christ Jesus.

¹²⁹Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit, and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities,” *In Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, (New York: Simon & Schuster 1979), 33.

¹³⁰ Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit, and Power,” 33-34.

¹³¹ Fiorenza, 34.

¹³² Peterson, “Study of Female Headship,” 21.

Paul commends them for their service and for risking their lives for the sake of the gospel of Christ. They had even spent some time in jail, along with Paul, because of their belief in the cause of Christ. There are other early church female leaders who appear in New Testament writings. Phoebe, who was a deacon, was a part of the church located in Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). Other notable women in the New Testament included Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), and Nympha (Col. 4:15), among others.¹³³

The Apostle Paul indicates that there were women who operated in ministry and contributed significantly. The switch in the use of women's roles suggests a contradiction in Paul's writings, which presents a problem in the authenticity of his writings. Some biblical scholars question the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles because of the switch in the language of the Apostle Paul towards women's gender and their leadership capacity in ministry. Some scholars have even reported that pseudonymity of the Pastoral Epistles may have occurred, and someone using the name of Paul to advance their writings was a possibility.¹³⁴

Female Leadership in the House Church

There is no indication that women were excluded from leadership or presiding in the house churches in the New Testament Church. Kevin Giles, an Australian Anglican pastor, wrote an article entitled, "House Churches," in which he stated the following:

Most house church leaders mentioned are men, as we would expect in that society, but they were not all men. In at least one case, we have a married couple,

¹³³ Peterson, 21-25.

¹³⁴ Peterson, 25-32.

Prisca and Aquila. In the several references to this couple made by Luke and Paul, Prisca is usually named first, indicating that she had some precedence in the relationship. Paul stayed with them when he first went to Corinth (Acts 18:15), and it seems likely the first converts of that city would have met in their home. Later, in Ephesus, they hosted a church (1 Cor. 16:19), and, still later, in Rome (Rom. 16:5).¹³⁵

Following this, Giles shifts the narrative and points in a direction which is in line with this chapter. He writes, “Then there were women house church leaders. These women would have been like their male counterparts: persons of some social standing and wealth with large homes. Probably in all cases, these women were widows who were heads of households made up of children, slaves, and freed slaves.”¹³⁶

Lydia was a house church leader and owner of a successful business enterprise in Philippi, where she sold expensive purple cloth (Acts 16:14-15). Purple cloth was a rare, costly item that was only purchased by people with wealth, because only wealthy patrons wore clothing dyed in purple or trimmed with purple fabric. The Scriptures are very clear about Lydia being over her household (Acts 16:15). After hearing the message of the gospel and becoming converted and receiving baptism, Lydia insisted that her entire family do what she had done and convert to Christianity.¹³⁷ The Bible reveals more instances where the whole household was saved and baptized. For example, in 1 Cor. 1:16, Paul baptized the entire household of Stephanas. Also, Acts 10:44-48 provides an account of how he baptized the entire household of Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea, (16:33) after converting.

¹³⁵ Kevin Giles, “House Churches,” *Priscilla Papers* 24, no.1 (2010), 6.

¹³⁶ Giles, “House Churches,” 6.

¹³⁷ Lunceford, “Biblical Women,” 130-132.

Lydia was the leader of her household. To further strengthen the argument for Lydia's role as leader of the house church, Barbara MacHaffie states:

Households in the ancient world were places in which women taught, disciplined family members and servants, and managed material resources. Wealthy women frequently presided over groups of visitors under their patronage. Managing the household required the same qualities as serving the community, including humility, sobriety, and a sense of order. Although we cannot be sure of the role women played in the worship and administration of house churches, leadership roles would not have been surprising.¹³⁸

In the twenty-first century, there are small communities in remote places around the globe; women lead the house church model, and many are still being used and directed by women today. It was a common practice for females to lead households, along with their husbands, in the Greco-Roman world. Sometimes females who were not married led households, too. In Christianity, there is space where both females and males could operate in positions of leadership. Because Christianity was multiplying, the apostles could not visit every house church. The leading of house churches needed someone in place, and some capable women were present and operated in leadership.¹³⁹

Another scholar, Dennis Ronald MacDonald, states something different concerning women's leadership in house churches with respect to the Pastoral Epistles. He argues that the author of the Pastoral Epistles wrote in Paul's name in an effort to rebrand Paul's image as it was represented in various stories transmitted by women.¹⁴⁰ The pseudonymous writer of Timothy was trying to downplay the leadership roles of

¹³⁸ Barbara MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition, 2nd Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 10.

¹³⁹ Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 9-10.

¹⁴⁰ Dennis MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 14.

women to which the Apostle Paul commended them on and asked other male leaders to greet them and give them support. Paul mentions several women who operated in leadership roles, one of which was Apphia, whose story is found in Philemon 2. She was the leader of a house church in Colossae along with two males named Philemon and Archippus.¹⁴¹ He also speaks of a woman named Lydia in Acts 16:14 who had been converted by receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ and founded a house church in Philippi. In Rom. 16:1-2, Paul mentions Phoebe as a servant (deacon) of the church. Paul goes on to encourage the church to welcome her with kindness and receive her with a willingness to provide support. Therefore, Phoebe occupied a position of leadership in the church community of Cenchreae. The letters of Paul have been used to deny women access to leadership roles. They have also cited the letters as proof that the New Testament women were prominent leaders in the early church. Paul's letters reveal that women were co-workers with Paul. The women were equal with men, "co-workers," hard workers who risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:3-4, Phil. 4:3). New Testament women were at the crux of birthing new churches. They opened their homes for prayer meetings and used their homes as house churches. During the early church, women taught, prophesied, and even served as leaders in a house church. However, few title designations survived.¹⁴²

THE ROLE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE DEBATE

While I hold the Bible in high esteem and believe that it is God's blueprint for His human creation to co-exist on this planet, I have observed how this same Bible has been

¹⁴¹ MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle*, 37-38.

¹⁴² Peterson, "Study of Female Headship," 14-19.

misinterpreted and weaponized to oppress women in the Church. Considering how critical women are to the mission of the Church, they deserve advocates who are willing to stand against those who utilize the Bible to subjugate them and prohibit them from operating in roles to which God has called them. Those engaging in biblical interpretations influenced by patriarchal ideologies, desires to maintain tradition and self-serving motives to maintain their own positions of power must be confronted with their practices and shown a better way. If not, the persistence of the phenomenon will continue to cause irreparable damage, resulting in called and gifted women growing frustrated, abandoning their call, and falling away from the Church, leaving the institution in a compromised, unstable position that will ultimately threaten its sustainability.

The Liberation and Feminist Interpretations of Scripture

Renita J. Weems-Espinosa, an African-American Old Testament Bible Scholar, views biblical interpretation and perspectives as challenging for African-American women seeking a resource for shaping modern lifestyles. She writes about the antagonistic ways in which people have utilized the Scriptures to impact the identity of females in the 21st century.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Weems states that the challenge for scholars committed to a liberation perspective is to seek ways to explain the phenomenon of how persons from marginalized communities continue to view the Bible in a positive light. Biblical authors do not perceive reality in the same way as marginalized communities,

¹⁴³ Renita J. Weems, "Reading Her Way through the Struggle: African-American Women in the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Interpretation*. ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 57-59.

and the Bible itself has been used by some male clergy to hold back and marginalize those females seeking ordination and consecration.¹⁴⁴

Theologian James Cone discusses the goal of liberation theology being to “analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of the oppressed black people... bestowing on them the power to break the chains of oppression.”¹⁴⁵ Historically, black men have used liberation theology to liberate themselves from oppression and racial stereotypes without recognizing that they were oppressing black women through sexism. However, black women are also oppressed by sexism at the hands of both white and black males. Thus, black theologians must ensure that the message they preach reflects holistic liberation, and this must necessarily include the liberation of black women from gender oppression. When black women are denied the opportunity to achieve higher positions in the leadership in the Church simply because of their gender, this is a clear sign that true liberation is not occurring. Further, in order for the mass oppression of women to be overturned in the Church, black men must support this effort by acknowledging their role in perpetuating it and committing to advancing women in the Church. This is liberation theology in action.¹⁴⁶

Christian feminism theory focuses on the recognition and affirmation of the full humanity of women, allowing them equal and unrestricted access to the same opportunities and privileges as men.¹⁴⁷ The arguments that Christian feminists make in

¹⁴⁴ Weems, “Reading Her Way,” 57-59.

¹⁴⁵ Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Theology and the Black Woman,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 324.

¹⁴⁶ Jacquelyn Grant, “Black Theology,” 325.

¹⁴⁷ Peterson, “Study of Female Headship,” 33.

support of the equal regard and treatment of women in the church is based on the notions of equality, impartiality, completeness and liberty that are espoused in Galatians 3:28, which states, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” African-American churches, in general, have not historically subscribed to this notion in their practices regarding Black women. The failure to realize the vision of Galatians 3:28 in their institutional bylaws has resulted in many churches trying to justify the practice of inequality and suppress the freedom and equality of women.¹⁴⁸

Alice Laffey, a feminist Christian historian, notes that those who hold the Bible as the fount of faith and inspiration must understand the patriarchal prejudices of its authors and later interpreters.¹⁴⁹ According to Laffey, the Bible, which she asserts has been influenced by historical factors with a negative bias toward women and produced by a male-dominated society grounded in patriarchal ideals, should not be accepted as a reputable source when one seeks to build an argument about whether women should or should not receive equitable treatment in the Church. Additionally, she upholds that the more women realize that they have been victims of gender oppression at the hands of males who have historically used the Bible to justify such bias, the greater responsibility they have to fight against this injustice by seeking the truth about women’s historical role in the church and charting a different path for their future in the church.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Peterson, 31-32.

¹⁴⁹ Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ Laffey, *Introduction to Old Testament*, 3.

For the advancement of sound scholarship and for the betterment of the African-American community's interests, it is imperative that scholars in the African-American community re-interpret the Eurocentric presentations of Scripture that have been passed down to African-Americans for centuries. This challenge is an imperative that is as critical to the advancement of the African-American community as feminism is to the advancement of women in our society in its challenges of androcentrism and patriarchal thinking.¹⁵¹

The Womanist Interpretation of Biblical Scripture

Those favoring the ordination of women to occupy higher offices of leadership in the church often interpret the New Testament through a womanist view. "Womanist," a term developed by noted writer Alice Walker, refers to the bold, take charge and confident character typically ascribed to black women. In the womanist view, black women are integral to maintaining the strength, richness and sustainability of the black community, making major contributions to both its social and religious cultures. As such, a number of womanist writers have highlighted the strides that black women have made in helping to grow, advance and maintain the black church.¹⁵²

The contributions of womanist writers are critical to any argument regarding the importance of women in the church, not only in terms of their support and participation

¹⁵¹ Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991): 43.

¹⁵² Clarice Martin, "Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: The Quest for Holistic and Inclusive Translation and Interpretation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6, no. 2 (1990): 41.

but in terms of the voice they should have in leadership. In their writings, womanists ensure that black women are not forgotten when discourses about religion, theology and biblical studies occur. They ensure that the historical role that women have played in the black church, how they have endured racial oppression from the wider society and gender oppression in their own churches, and how they have weathered other types of discrimination, such as classism, are not overlooked. Instead, womanist writers make an effort to infuse the stories of black women into religious narrative in general, and specifically, into biblical interpretation. This is referred to in the literature as “womanist biblical interpretation.”¹⁵³

According to researcher Clarice Martin:

Womanist biblical interpretation, then, has a “quadruocentric interest... where gender, race, class, and language issues are all at the forefront of translation (the science of expressing the original meaning as accurately as possible) and interpretation (the process of bringing together the ancient canonical texts with new, changing situations) concerns, and not just a threefold focus, where gender, class and language concerns predominate almost exclusively, as is often the case in white feminist biblical interpretation and translation.”¹⁵⁴

Utilizing a womanist point of view in biblical translation can make a notable difference in the ways in which various passages of scripture are interpreted, particularly those passages that have historically been used to justify the oppression of women in the church.¹⁵⁵ For example, one of the most often-debated terms used in the Bible is *anthropos*, which is typically translated through male-centered linguistics as “man.” It is assumed that when “man” is used in Scripture, although women are mentioned, they are

¹⁵³ Martin, “Womanist Interpretations,” 42.

¹⁵⁴ Martin, 42-43.

¹⁵⁵ Martin, 43.

generically present, yet invisible. While some may find this acceptable, Martin likens this to the term “Americans,” which presumes to generically include whites, yet places blacks in a position of having to imagine themselves being a part of the group. In the same way, when “man” is used, “women must constantly ‘imagine’ themselves as represented in so-called generic representations of all humanity in biblical traditions that are punctuated by the almost exclusive usage of male-gendered pronouns.”¹⁵⁶

When the term *anthropos* is translated through a womanist lens, however, it takes on a generic meaning that refers to mankind, humanity, or people in general. Thus, biblical phrases like “trodden under foot by men” (Matt. 5:13) and “the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men,” (Titus 2:11) among many others, does not refer to the male gender in which the female gender is also covered but refers to mankind, or people in general. While this might seem like a light matter, it is one that makes a great deal of difference for female Bible readers who desire to see themselves included in the Holy Scriptures.¹⁵⁷

Another part of the essential work undertaken by womanist writers is to dismantle patriarchal paradigms and ideologies that have been historically used to marginalize and institutionally oppress not only females, but all people who have been marginalized and dominated by patriarchy based on gender, race, class or any other group of people that is subjugated.¹⁵⁸ One of the primary ways in which this marginalization and domination are perpetuated is through a patriarchal interpretation of Scripture. However, womanists

¹⁵⁶ Martin, 44.

¹⁵⁷ Martin, 44.

¹⁵⁸ Martin, 42-53.

highlight biblical passages that show the inclusive nature of God, like, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28 [NRSV]). Womanists consider this to be a more liberating, accurate approach to Scripture, intended to dismantle the sexist traditions that have been built up over time using the Bible.¹⁵⁹ Ultimately, “Chipping away at oppressive structures, and identifying those texts that help black women to celebrate and rename incidents involving human unpredictability in empowering ways is at the heart of a womanist interpretive principle.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Martin, 53-54.

¹⁶⁰ Martin, 61.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPREHENSIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter will provide a comprehensive view of the overall project research methodology, how it came to be organized and planned, how the selection of the advisory committee took place and the criteria for serving on the committee. I facilitated two 2-hour class sessions over two days. The name of the classes was the same as the name of this D.Min. project. I will talk about the experience of conducting the class sessions and conversations held with the participants. Upon completion of the class, there was a questionnaire given for each person to fill out. The filling out of the questionnaire provided information that was relevant to the ordination and consecration of African-American woman. The information needed for this project derived from data collected from two sources: (1) the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC); (2) the attendees, considering the conversations and data obtained from the questionnaire given at the end of the two sessions and reviewing me as a communicator of the project.

The purpose of developing this project, entitled “Cracking, Widening, Shattering the Stained-Glass Ceiling,” was not only to highlight the obstacles faced by African-American Pentecostal clergywomen seeking senior pastoral appointments but also create a space for dialogue. The conversation needs to be held to understand the lack of qualified African-American Pentecostal clergywomen in senior leadership positions and how to create a pathway free of roadblocks. I was concerned about whether my fellow brethren would shun me for this endeavor, but I quickly changed that thought, once I considered the greater outcome for the whole of the Pentecostal Fellowship.

It is clear that providing an opening for new dialogue that addresses the reluctance of African-American Pentecostal Fellowships' reluctance to ordain, install, and consecrate women as pastors and bishops and the resources for justifying and legitimizing it would be arduous. Furthermore, through the exploration of biblical texts and extra-biblical resources that demonstrate and validate women's leadership in the early church this project will provide other ways of thinking about the Bible and the documents that address women's leadership in formative Christianity. Furthermore, through this exploration, the project will provide new conditions for addressing the issue of women's leadership in the church today in ways that are biblically faithful and true to ancient Christianity. These items have been instrumental in determining the criteria needed to ensure that persons considered for senior leadership are not only qualified by their desire and zeal but also supported by the authority of biblical texts and church documents.

I requested a meeting with the Presiding Prelate of GHDM and the national president of the GHDM Women's Department to obtain their permission to conduct the project using GHDM as an illustrative fellowship. Once permission granted, I began the process of creating and developing the thesis and continued until its' completion.

RECRUITMENT OF THE LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

I wanted this team of people to consist of experienced women and men in ministry. I desired to have a group consisting not only pastors but people who are professionals who work in the marketplace and could lend viable information and skill-

sets. The task of the LAC was to work alongside me as a consultative group providing foundational guidance and helping me navigate through the rigors of the project.

I provided for the LAC a packet of information that consisted of, but was not limited to: My Institutional Review Board information, and my prospectus, which included my statement of purpose, project goals and introduction. I also made myself readily available via phone, text message, and email. These tools were necessary to keep not only them but me on track with the project.

The LAC was eager to work with me and see the project to the end. They worked closely with me on developing the questionnaire that was presented at the National Women's Conference in Toledo, Ohio. Overall, the LAC team and I worked well together, and they worked well with each other.

LECTURE PARTICIPATION (FEEDBACK)

At the GHDM National Women's Conference, I conducted two seminars for females who are in ministry or contemplating ministry as a profession. The class was open to men also. Just before the completion of the seminar, a questionnaire was passed out to each of the individuals who participated. Once all the participants finished filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire provided an assessment of how the attendees felt about African-American Pentecostal women in ministry, to gather their opinions on the given process that is laid out for ordination to eldership and consecration to the bishopric. A high level of energy and enthusiasm was reverberating in the room; each person looked ready to engage in conversation about the subject matter. One of the participants said, "I am sure happy that I signed up for this class. I have waited for quite some time for a class

that spoke to the needs of female clergy”. A response from a male bishop, who stated, “I am so appreciative for the information concerning the historical background of women serving in leadership roles in the early church.”

From the beginning of each session, the participants had mixed opinions on female roles in both testaments. Many of them had never heard in detail the contributions that women in the early church. After sitting in the lecture and participating in the discussion, many attendees expressed a desire to share the information provided with their local congregations. They thought it was useful for training purposes. By the end of the class, everyone who attended the sessions exclaimed that they had a renewed view on the contributions and the plight of African-American Pentecostal females and the significant obstacles they face when seeking ordination and consecration.

The makeup of the groups was mainly females except for about four males, two of whom were bishops in the Fellowship, and the other two were local pastors. I was appreciative of the willingness of those who participated in the lecture, question-and-answer session and questionnaire completion. I was thankful for a couple of people who asked to volunteer and help me because they felt that the process would have been tedious for one person to handle the groups. I was a little apprehensive at first in conducting these sessions because I did not know what to expect from the participants, especially with such a misinterpreted subject which in its usage has barred women from full ordination and consecration into the senior leadership of the Church. The experience shared with the groups was phenomenal, and their thoughts and opinion were timely.

The people who made up the seminar audiences and questionnaire takers were active members of the GHDM Fellowship and represented various local ministries from

around the nation. The methodological reasoning for using the seminar format, followed by a question and answer session and the completion of a questionnaire (see Appendix A), provided insight into how women and men think about the Fellowship's position on senior female leadership. This research methodology gave me, as a researcher, the ability to receive greater collective insight from participants in one setting than I would have gained from individual one-on-one interviews. It was quite refreshing to sit amongst this great group of people to lecture, and through the question-and-answer session and their questionnaire responses, investigate the reasons they felt African-American Pentecostal women were not given a fair chance at senior leadership roles. The participants demonstrated a high level of interest in the topic, and their enthusiasm was well received.

I found that speaking with these groups was most helpful and needful. I knew that speaking with the participants was key to my project because I would get to hear from females concerning the thoughts on the training of female clergy in GHDM. I also noticed that some in the group did not feel comfortable asking questions or making comments in front of someone that may have been their local pastor or bishop. I suppose the presence of bishops and senior male pastors in the class made some nervous. During the interactive question-and-answer session and on the questionnaires, some people may have felt hesitant to point out problems in the processes that were being used to educate and prepare women for ordination and the pastorate. I advised all participants who felt fearful that what they shared with the class would be held in confidence and not taken out of context. I reminded them that this was an academic project that I was conducting and that their responses would not cause any repercussions or resentment from the upper tiers of leadership. Once I made that statement about being confidential, the people appeared

to be more open to sharing their real feelings, both verbally and in written form on the questionnaire, about the whole process or lack thereof.

I started the lecture by introducing myself and then explaining the reason for our gathering. I then asked each participant to stand up and provide their name and the church that they attended, along with the current position that they held in their church. I began the lecture by giving biblical and historical accounts of females who operated in leadership roles and how these women played an instrumental role in the growth and development of the early church and the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The allotted time provided great space for everyone to have an opportunity to chime in and respond to the lecture and questions in the class. The sessions were very interactive, and the people in attendance were very enthusiastic. As the talk progressed, the people seemed to open and allowed their opinions about the ministry to be very forthright.

It was interesting that the participants had various opinions about the lack of preparation and promotion process not administered in GHDM. My focus was to use the question-and-answer sessions following the lectures and the written questionnaires to discover whether they considered it essential for the Fellowship to promote training for females who had received the call to ministry to the ranks of pastor and bishop. I also wanted to know from them if they felt that the Fellowship was equally distributing open pastorates and making space for African-American females to become bishops in the Church (see Appendix A and B).

After the two class sessions, which were two and half hours in length, each of the persons that participated in the lecture, question-and-answer session, and questionnaire

completion thanked me for conducting and facilitating the meetings. Many of them said that it was very refreshing seeing an African-American male speaking with them about the concerns of preparation and promotion of females in the roles of senior leadership in the church. For once, they felt like someone was taking an interest in their struggle to attain full clergy rights and be represented at the highest levels of the church, whether as pastor or bishop.

DATA COLLECTION

For this project, I relied on the LAC, which was a conglomeration of different ministry leaders versed about ordination and consecration. They understood the audience I was hoping to reach at the National Women's Conference. Together, we developed a questionnaire that contained 10 in-depth questions to be given to each participant. The items were created to gain insights into the experiences of women in the church and to learn about how their experiences impacted their resolve to remain in the church and their decision to accept their call to ministry. Each person in attendance received a questionnaire and was given enough time to fill it out and turn it in before leaving the session.

The questions were open-ended, allowing the participants the flexibility to provide responses about topics and issues that might not have been captured by using closed-ended questions on the questionnaire. This approach offered both advantages and disadvantages to collecting data for the research study. The primary benefit was to ensure that each person was fully aware of the conversation content and the thrust of the project. Perhaps the greatest disadvantage was that several participants changed their minds, re-

thinking whether or not they wanted to place certain information on the questionnaire, due to fears that their answers would be published. While they were open and willing to share in the lecture, they felt reluctant to put their true feelings in writing on the questionnaire. I assured the hesitant participants that everything that was discussed or written would be treated with the greatest level of confidentiality. All information gathered would be solely for academic study, and the final published thesis, which would include none of their identifying information, would be available in the university library and available to the public. Participants were asked to fill out their questionnaires anonymously and were assured that if their names were known by the researcher, this identifying information would not be affiliated with their questionnaire responses or any notes affiliated with the question-and-answer session. Further, all participants were assured that no data or information collected for the study would be communicated back to their local churches or jurisdictional bishops.

LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS (FEEDBACK)

Before meeting with the participants at the National Women's Conference several meetings were held at the Highway Church in Paterson, New Jersey and also at Greater Highway Deliverance Temple in New York, New York. These meetings were part of the planning stages of the project. We came together to see what would be required to implement the D.Min. project during the National Conference. Multiple items of interest were on the agenda for discussion to plan how the implementation of the project would take place.

After the completion of the lecture and classes, the discussion was held on whether the participants were impacted by what took place in the session and my performance within the process. The consensus on the project received a positive review, and there seemed to be no air of negativity during the sessions. Gratefulness is a minor word to express the opportunity to work with a very kind and caring group of people. One of the LAC members said, Overseer Alan Walker, "You have taken on a rather difficult project, one that will cause a lot of commotion!" Another member stated, "This was something that was needed and timely presented, and I am happy that you were bold enough to take on the challenge." Another member of the committee mentioned that while she was on a break after the first session, she experienced a conversation with one of the ladies and the lady told her "she had been waiting to talk about this subject for quite some time." While these assessments from the members of the LAC are excellent and kind-hearted, the total time spent with each person in the two sessions was worth every minute.

Each of the LAC members gave their opinion as to how they felt the project went. I was quite pleased to hear the views and was bracing for the negative but never got a displeasing response. I did receive a comment that had several parts to it which bears repeating:

- The project was a great idea and should be given more attention and not taken lightly.
- The approach used to complete the project was outstanding.

I did not believe the project would have gotten that much traction and participation at the Women's Conference, as it did. I have known and witnessed other

Fellowships who do not allow females to ascend to the senior level of ministry, especially to the pastorate.

CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCHER

LAC provided critiques of me as a researcher and provided their honest assessment of what had transpired throughout the project. In sum, the committee felt that I was very competent and that it was a pleasure to have worked with me on this project. They noted that the degree of knowledge that I exemplified was tremendous and not intimidating. As the leader of the LAC, I made everyone on the committee feel as though they were indispensable and needed to ensure the completion of the task.

One of the most exciting times came when one of my peers who hailed from a church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, asked about my motive behind the raising of the issue. At first, I was taken aback by his question, because I would have expected him to know there was a concern in our Fellowship and that it needed a push from a male clergy that did not have an axe to grind. I asked him, "If the shoe was on the other foot, would not you want someone to speak up for you?" I was especially interested to receive his answer if he could envision himself being in the same situation as women in the Church and using his own voice to call for equality, but not making any progress or achieving the desired results.

The feedback received from the Lay Advisory Committee was outstanding and useful. The articulation from the members was spot on and relative to the project. The feedback from the LAC was needful, especially the timeliness of the project. They commented on how well the participation of Fellowship members and their response to

the questionnaire. It was just a delight to work with such an array of persons from the various ministries represented from GHDM. All critiques and responses were excellent.

SUMMARY

The questionnaire provided an opportunity for those participating in the lectures to offer a glimpse into their thoughts about African-American Pentecostal women in ministry. The first question on the questionnaire, which is the thrust of this project states: Do you believe God calls women to the ministry and pastorate and local church leadership, including that of the bishop? The resounding answers of “yes” affirm that women continue to stand for equality in the church and petition for their placement in the upper tiers of leadership. The women with whom I spoke and who filled out the questionnaire, were confident and sure of their calling to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were not bitter or discouraged. I did not sense frustration on their faces; but what I did notice, they were not giving up on their sense of purpose or call to preach the Gospel.

One thing that struck me was the fact that some women did not have camaraderie with each other while going through the process of preparation for ordination for deacons and appointment as an evangelist. It appeared that a few of them felt alone in the process, and a level of trust had not developed between some of the candidates who currently are candidates for ordination. When going through an ordination process, which will ultimately lead to eldership, a peer confidante is necessary. Something that I concluded was the need to break a vicious cycle in local churches that resists breaking up patriarchal ideologies. In order to advance an agenda of equitable regard and treatment in the church, it is essential that women develop spaces by themselves and for themselves in which they

can openly discuss the challenges and issues unique to females and work to help each other through them. The gain in knowledge from speaking with the participants and reviewing their questionnaires provided invaluable details for this project.

This chapter has shown the completed efforts of work accomplished during the GHDM National Women's Conference. The event proved to be fruitful and sparked terrific conversation and a significant interest in women's development and ascension into the upper tiers of leadership in the church and fellowship. We will now examine and review the Fellowship's policy as it strives for gender inclusiveness in all levels of senior leadership.

CHAPTER THREE

EVOLUTION OF GREATER HIGHWAY DELIVERANCE MINISTRIES:

A GENDER INCLUSIVE MINISTRY

Since the establishment of Greater Highway Deliverance Temple and the creation of the GHDM Fellowship, its founder and presiding prelate bishop, Liston Page Sr., regarded for displaying equality of women and men in the positions of deacons and elders throughout its local churches, with the exception of not installing female clergy in the role of senior pastor. Bishop Page, along with Bishop James Simms, Bishop Gerald Oden, and a few other senior male pastors voted on a resolution to credential and ordain women into the ecclesiastical rank of deacon and elder. They also resolved that women could have full and unlimited access and involvement at all levels of the GHDM fellowship. It is the intention of this project, after being presented to the GHDM Executive Board, to request the development of educational tracks that would prepare female clergy for pastoral assignments and the episcopacy.

African-American female clergy within Pentecostal denominations and fellowships are continually underrepresented. This lack of representation is visible in their low numbers as vocational pastors and is also noticeable through their conspicuous absence from governing roles in church denominations and fellowships. Further, this void of female leadership is present on every level – local, regional, district and national. There is a significant number of females who routinely attend Bible colleges and seminaries that are not given an opportunity for advancement in ministry. Even though academically prepared for senior leadership in the church, female clergy continually

overlooked for pastoral appointments to local congregations. The selection process for the governing and senior leadership positions goes in favor of their male counterparts because they outnumbered the female candidates.

The GHDM Executive leadership understood that, in 1906, Pentecostalism gained momentum because of the event at Azusa Street Mission, which operated without gender bias. The leadership also noted that there were some denominations, such as the AOG, which was organized in 1914. It lists women as constituting nearly one-third of its denominational clergy.

The leadership of GHDM viewed the Pentecostal movement as a fulfillment of what Joel's promise states (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18). Sensing that the current times represented a new day of Pentecost, they also felt it their responsibility to ensure that everyone – males and females – accept and begin functioning in their callings. Keeping in line with this Scripture, Bishop Page and the Executive of GHDM voted to adopt a plan to open the ranks of senior leadership. This new plan meant that any female who is spiritually mature and academically qualified could enter the process for ordination, which can lead to eldership. The board also ratified a decision to consecrate any woman who possesses the required qualifications of a bishop that is set forth by the presiding prelate and the council of bishops. This significant decision by the executive board has set in motion a paradigm shift within the GHDM fellowship. The Fellowship has decided to move out from amongst the other African-American Pentecostal fellowships that have been hesitant in offering pastoral leadership and episcopacy to females.

To continue the evolution of change that has begun at GHDM, the focus-group research I conducted has led me to contribute/articulate five theological considerations to

present to the GHDM Executive Board for their review to add to bylaws of the Fellowship as an affirmation of faith. GHDM has begun the process of being an egalitarian fellowship, and this needs to be noted and documented. To make these up, I consulted a document from the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada: *PAOC Statement of Affirmation Regarding the Equality of Women and Men in Leadership*. In 1998, the voting members of that Fellowship adopted these considerations. Since they were a Pentecostal organization and their doctrinal beliefs are the same as ours, I thought our Fellowship could benefit from their theological considerations. I will advocate and petition the GHDM Executive Board to consider including these as institutional policies to add in the Fellowships Handbook. Equality in the Fellowship is essential for a harmonious relationship of male clergy and female clergy.¹⁶¹

SUGGESTED INSTITUTIONAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- I. The GHDM indeed celebrates the uniqueness of diversification that both men and women bring to the body of Christ, while continually upholding a standard that is in line with an Egalitarian view that will allow females to operate unrestricted in the roles of senior leadership. They will have equal authority to that afforded to their male counterparts in senior leadership.
- II. With this proclamation, GHDM recognizes that other denominations and fellowships may hold a differing position as it regards to the role of women, and it is not their intention to cause divisions and schisms in the larger Body of Christ.

¹⁶¹ Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. "PAOC Statement of Affirmation regarding the Equality of Women and Men in Leadership." https://www.paoc.org/docs/default-source/church-toolbox/position-papers/statements/paoc-statement-of-affirmation-regarding-the-equality-of-women-and-men-in-leadership.pdf?sfvrsn=ce4ce26a_4. (accessed May 24, 2019.)

Nonetheless, while acknowledging these differences, and while continuing to respond with kindness and grace, they unequivocally affirm within the Fellowship egalitarian position that celebrates the unlimited leadership capacity of women in the church. The positional stance held by GHDM with established churches in North American and fellowship churches in Toronto, Canada, and Jamaica, West Indies, will assure that all female clergy will indeed possess credentials that will show them as having full clergy rights of ordination and consecration that is supported by the fellowship. GHDM has committed itself to these actions.

- III. They will encourage local churches and members their Fellowship to intentionally teach and implement and egalitarian position at the local church level.
- IV. They will intentionally recommend and develop resources as needed to assist their local churches in teaching as well as implementing an egalitarianism position.
- V. They will also intentionally celebrate and welcome the anointing and call of God to the vocational ministry on both men and women, at all levels of leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

“Human understanding once it has adopted an opinion ... draws all things to support and agree with it. While there may be evidence to the contrary, it will be neglected and despised, or else by some distinction set aside and rejected.” Francis Bacon¹⁶²

The question remains, why are not there more African-American female Pentecostal pastors and bishops? Perhaps the male-dominated leadership has taken a blind view to the problem, as if concern over the exclusion of women from these roles does not exist. Those questions, along with many others like them, are swirling about in the minds of many clergymen like myself who see that the issues are real, critical and in need of being addressed. In the course of this project, candid conversations with clergywomen and clergymen with regards to the disparities that exist between the men and women in the African-American Pentecostal Church constituted the majority of the discussion. The data gathered from the two classes held at the GHDM National Women's Conference and the local leadership meetings suggest the need to address and correct the disparity. Space needs to be created to provide conversations reviewing the current situation at hand, which is vital, also looking through the lens of biblical, historical, social and theological insights to support concrete solutions.

To summarize the project, I began by establishing the notion that there exists a barrier known as “the stained-glass ceiling,” an invisible barrier that has caused many African-American Pentecostal female clergy to be overlooked and not considered for a pastoral appointment or bishopric selection process. I then argued for the position that

¹⁶² Stephen Denning, *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Communicate to Create Individual and Organizational Change* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2007), 24-25.

leadership in the Church should not be an exclusive “boys’ club” from which women are excluded from participation simply because of gender. I established that African-American Pentecostal denominations have treated female clergy unjustly through their use of discriminatory gender politics. Yet, these same male leaders expect female clergy to remain docile and unscathed by the men’s decisions not to operate based on equality in their selection of individuals to fill leadership roles, particularly those of pastor and bishop. Finally, I created a context in which the governing bodies of a Pentecostal fellowship could dialogue openly about the matter, ascertain the rationale behind their reluctance to become gender neutral regarding the governance of the church, engage in an examination of women in leadership in biblical and Pentecostal history, re-examine their own arguments and ideologies in light of these histories, and work together for the development of solutions to the issue that would be acceptable by all, for the collective benefit of the Church.

The male-dominated senior leadership network within the Pentecostal denomination that opposes the inclusion of women in top-tier leadership roles and those who are in favor of creating space for female clergy to ascend to the offices of pastor and bishop have both built their arguments on biblical scripture, history, and other resources that have informed their ideologies. Yet, it is also clear that, with all their deeply-entrenched theologies, they stand opposed to each other regarding the issue of allowing females to occupy the highest leadership positions in the Church. For this very reason, it was necessary for the two sides to meet, discuss the issue, and work towards potentially amicable solution on the issue of the participation of women in senior leadership capacities within the African-American Pentecostal Church.

In his book, *The Secret Language of Leadership: Inspiring Change*, Stephen Denning talks about an English statesman and scholar Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon was one of the earliest thinkers to truly understand the nature of the mind and how humanity indeed progresses in collective knowledge. Bacon submitted that his research consistently showed that people have a tendency to display “confirmation bias.”¹⁶³ Bacon spoke on this subject, which I perceived as relative to where Pentecostal leaders and those persons who support and push for change in senior leadership. Based on Bacon’s work, Denning states:

Confirmation bias is our tendency to cherry-pick information that confirms our existing beliefs or ideas. Confirmation bias explains why two people with opposing views on a topic can see the same evidence and instinctively, determine that it supports their way of thinking. This cognitive bias is most pronounced in the case of ingrained, ideological, or emotionally charged views.¹⁶⁴

The failure to genuinely interpret information can lead to severe misjudgments. Not understanding the concern or issue places us in a position to learn to recognize or distinguish it in others as well as in ourselves. We should be circumspect of data that appears to immediately support our own perspective. So, when leaders become subjected to transformation, the potential for resistance will always exist because of the ideas and philosophies that have already been embedded in the minds of those being asked to change the way they previously functioned and operated. Confirmation bias has become a significant obstacle to the negotiation of placing of African-American female clergy in

¹⁶³ Stephen Denning, *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire Action through Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 24.

¹⁶⁴ Denning, *Secret Language*, 25.

top-tier leadership roles in the African-American Pentecostal Church and its affiliated fellowships. This is a specific concern that must be addressed.

Until there is a disruption in the status quo, we will not experience nor see a transformation in the hearts and minds of the Pentecostal denomination leadership. Those individuals who are standing on the frontlines for the advocacy and support of African-American clergywomen who desire to be considered when the Pentecostal churches or fellowships are making selections to these high-level offices within the denomination must develop a disruptive posture. I believe that the Apostle Paul was attempting to take a page out of Jesus' playbook on disruptive behavior. I am sure he was working against the grain of the norm because he was co-laboring with women, and at the time, doing so was not socially acceptable. Doreen Bryant states in her article, *Luke's Disruptive Jesus: Harnessing the Power of Disruptive Leadership*, "Jesus disrupted the social and religious norms of his day. He first challenged them, and then he applied his influence to lead his followers to do the same."¹⁶⁵ Bryant further states:

Jesus lived during a time of oppression and unrest in the land. Rather than succumb to the social, cultural, and religious forces, he challenged them and taught his disciples to do the same. To be a disruptor during Jesus' time was radical, and it galvanized a movement that exists today. The invitation to be a member of the kingdom of God is never-ending. How might current leaders apply disruptive leadership in a manner that is similar to Jesus, or that reflects his leadership style? Leaders must think about and respond to unsatisfactory conditions within their organizations and the world. A disruptive leader cannot operate in a vacuum; they must influence others to participate in activities and support their mission. Together they will become change agents and work toward the common good for all. This is what Jesus did, and it is what is needed today.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Doreen Bryant, "Luke's Disruptive Jesus: Harnessing the Power of Disruptive Leadership," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, 159.

¹⁶⁶ Bryant, "Luke's Disruptive Jesus," 159.

For the agenda that supports the ordination of African-American Pentecostal women as senior pastors and consecrated bishops to come to fruition, it is essential to take on the same demeanor as Christ Jesus. Disruption is a good thing, and it keeps the conversation going until there is a resolution.

In the course of this project, the exchange of candid conversations with clergymen and clergywomen regarding the disparities between the men and women in the Pentecostal Church constituted most of the discussions. These conversations provided a clear understanding of the different mindsets regarding the installation of female clergy in the pastoral role within the Fellowship. From the information gathered, the open session lectures held at the GHDM National Women's Conference and the local leadership meetings held at the Highway Church and Greater Highway Deliverance Temple seem to suggest the need to address and correct the disparity. Space needs to be created for dialogue and a review of the current situation at hand. Passing over female clergy for elevation is unbiblical and wholly inconsistent with the history of Pentecostalism. The opportunity to be elevated to the highest roles of Pentecostal leadership is as much the right of women as co-laborers in the kingdom of God as it is for men. Based on what has been presented from a comprehensive review of biblical and historical resources, the decision to promote women as leaders in the Church should be an easy one. However, before this can happen, forward movement of the agenda for equality and a drastic shift in our mental models and perceptions is required. This work must necessarily begin with Church leadership.

Most importantly, it is vital to examine the roles of pastoral leadership and episcopal oversight through the lens of biblical, historical, social, and theological

perspectives. Just by coming to the table of negotiation and developing space for conversation to discuss ways to clear the pathway to ordination and consecration for African-American Pentecostal women, we have begun to see the *cracking* of the stained-glass ceiling. The discussions are a concerted and deliberate move in the right direction to face an issue that has troubled and disrupted the African-American Pentecostal Church for quite some time now.

Through the empowering of African-American Pentecostal clergywomen to interview and be considered for appointment to a local church as senior pastors and to make room for them to go through the training for the consideration for episcopal consecration, we are now starting to see the *widening* of the crack in the stained-glass ceiling. This project provides much information necessary for leaders to make leadership selection decisions to promote females to top-tier leadership roles based on biblical and historical evidence.

Although the stained-glass ceiling has been cracked and widened, we still have some distance to go before completely *shattering* or annihilating the stained-glass ceiling. Until the Church of God in Christ, the largest African-American Pentecostal denomination founded in 1869 and headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, changes its policy on ordaining women as elders and consecrating them as bishops, the work must continue. There are other Pentecostal Fellowships besides COGIC that should come to the table of reasoning and discuss the issues that concern African-American female clergy. The desire for elevation to senior leadership positions within the Fellowships is warranted and necessary for the sustainability of the denomination.

Finally, I researched and studied the biblical and historical sources that support my argument. I have become informed about the social context of the early church and how through time, the information morphed into something different than what the Apostle Paul visualized. It is vital that local churches and fellowships align themselves with the current scholarship to ensure the integrity of the information upon which they base their organizational decisions and that they teach to their congregations. The time for teaching that women are to remain still, silent and subjugated to men in churches has passed. Now, it is time to accept women who have called by God into leadership and allow them to fully live out their call, just as men are welcomed to do, and just as the Apostle Paul did. The Apostle Paul had great respect for women and worked alongside them in the promulgation of the gospel of Christ. If women were to take what the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy regarding women remaining silent in the church, literally, there would be dead silence in the church, both then and now. No one would benefit from that.

This project has enhanced my ministry tremendously; I have a greater desire to ensure that all persons receive the same opportunities to lead and to practice their God-given talents in a space free of bias or prejudice. I have been invited to lecture at the National Holy Convocation of the GHDM in July 2019. My hope and desire is for this thesis's viability to not end only with GHDM but to spark change in any church fellowship desiring change. GHDM had been a remarkable fellowship to be a part of, if I had to do it all over again, I would do it again with them. GHDM is not a perfect fellowship, and they are venturing out into uncharted waters. The fellowship has some ways to go before it can become a template for other fellowships to follow. I believe as time progresses, the fellowship will start a training process for anyone interesting in the

pastoral ministry. This project is just a stepping stone that will guide those fellowships seeking to change their policies on female clergy. Let it reverberate from this time forward, that African-American Pentecostal females can lead and officiate in churches, just like women did in the early church (see Appendix B which contains articles which show the historic move by PAW to consecrate women wholly into the episcopacy).

APPENDIX A

DATA AND FORMS

Questionnaire for Women who are currently operating in ministry or considering ministry

Vocational:

- A. Do you believe God calls women African-American Pentecostal women to pastoral and ministry and church leadership, including that of Bishop? Based on your response, provide a brief explanation as to your answer. Yes_____ No_____
- B. How do you think the religious beliefs and practices you had while growing up influenced how you felt about your call to the ministry?
- C. Are there any groups that you belong to that help mentor you as a woman preacher?

Church Culture:

- A. Do you feel a call to the vocation of pastoral ministry and leadership yourself? To all positions, to one in particular? How have you responded to this call? How have church leaders received this call? Provide a brief narrative of the call experience.
- B. What are the barriers you have experienced in that call (your own and those imposed on you from others)?
- C. Have you ever felt that your religion didn't treat women the same way as men? If so, what your reaction?

Theological:

- A. What were biblical texts and African-American Pentecostal Church traditions pertinent to your call experience? Please explain.
- B. The church and the Bible speak about women in various roles. Did these beliefs influence your willingness to declare your call to the ministry?
- C. Are there any biblical women that you relate to or that inspire you?
- D. What needs to happen in clergy hierarchy to remove obstacles in ministry leadership so you can fully engage as a clergywoman?

APPENDIX B

SELECTED ARTICLES ON ORDINATION/CONSECRATION OF AFRICAN-
AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL WOMEN

**ORDAINING WOMEN BISHOPS: BISHOP CHARLES ELLIS III ADDRESSES
CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT**

Wednesday, August 8, 2012, at 10:07 AM

EEW BUZZ EDITORS in Bishop Charles Ellis, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), Women Bishops, Women Pastors



(Photo: Timothy Moore/PAW via Christian Post)

Bishop Charles H. Ellis III preaches at the PCAF-PAW Unity Worship Service at the Sheraton New Orleans Aug. 5, 2012.

By Y.M. Wyatt/EEW Magazine News Staff.

Though leaders enthusiastically cite the biblical account of Deborah the Prophetess (Judges 4-5), who was the first and only female judge mentioned in the Bible, many Christian denominations are not yet comfortable with elevating women to the office of the Bishop or even the pastoral duties. But Bishop Charles H. Ellis III, who

presides over Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), is questioning the fairness of the exclusion of women from such leadership roles, namely, the Bishopric. According to the Christian Post, Ellis says that PAW will continue its work to give women an equal opportunity to join the ranks of the denomination's leadership.

Though PAW voted to allow women to become ordained bishops just a few years ago, this has not been wholly embraced by the entire body. Ellis asked, "Will we offer access and opportunities in jest? Or will we offer real hope and opportunities of individuals being elevated, especially when they're putting in the work, and they're being used by God in a mighty way, just as many of the men and the brothers are?" Those questions remain unanswered, and the odds are against women in this context, the open-minded Bishop feels.

But it is not just Pentecostal Assemblies of the World that struggles to engraft women into priestly positions of leadership. As recently as 2008, Gospel Today Magazine was pulled off the shelves of more than 100 Lifeway Christian Bookstores across the country, including six in metro Atlanta, because the Southern Baptist Convention does not believe the Bible supports women pastors according to its interpretation of the New Testament.

So is banning women from being pastors and bishops discriminatory or biblical? Some like to invoke Joel 2:28 as a support for women being allowed to minister and impart what God has said. The scripture reads, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions." While some say this text shows that God does not discriminate and uses whoever he pleases—both sons and daughters—others argue that

being chosen to deliver God's word in some form is not the same as women presiding over men in official capacities, complete with titles, which they feel is out of order. The biblical order that opponents of women pastors reference are best represented by 1 Corinthians 11:3. It says, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is a man, and the head of Christ is God."

Note: There are many other scriptures used to disprove any doctrines that allow female ordination, as this article by no means provides an exhaustive explanation of either position.

For individuals who embrace this brand of teaching, going outside of that guideline by placing women in authority over men, defies God's word. Not every leader, however, grapples with this issue. Bishop T.D. Jakes, pastor of The Potter's House in Dallas, TX ordains women and sees no problem with it. Other liberal men of the cloth reject the notion that God is a respecter of persons and find the anti-women-pastors theology absurd. Some preachers, in an attempt to illustrate what they perceive as the uncalled for censoring and restraining of women, quote Numbers 22. In this biblical account, God uses a donkey, referred to as an "ass" in the King James Version of the Bible, to speak to Balaam. Preachers have drawn this conclusion: "If God can use an ass, He can surely use a woman." Though the slighting statement is offensive to some, the point, by many others, is well taken and received.

What are your thoughts on women bishops and pastors? Is it time to move beyond those restrictions on women in leadership roles? Or do you agree that the Bible is evident in its delineation of male and female roles, and mandates that the man rule over the woman, not the other way around?

Article originally appeared on the News from a faith-based perspective
(<http://buzz.eewmagazine.com/>).

TWO WOMEN PICKED AS FIRST FEMALE BISHOPS TO LEAD PENTECOSTAL DENOMINATIONS DIOCESES

Holly Meyer, USA TODAY NETWORK – Tennessee Published 6:00 a.m. CT July 27,
2017

The percentage of adults attending services at least once a week varies widely by the religious group. Kevin McKenzie/The Commercial Appeal.



(Photo: Submitted by Pentecostal Assemblies of the World)

Never has a woman led one of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World's more than 60 dioceses, but that's about to change. Soon, Bishop Mona Reide and Bishop Gwendolyn G. Weeks will become the first and second women to take on the full responsibilities of a bishop in the more than 100-year-old denomination.

"I think it again continues to move us in the direction that we feel our organization should be moving in," said Bishop Charles H. Ellis III, the denomination's presiding bishop. "These will be the first with dioceses. That means they will oversee, and they will govern male pastors."



Bishop Mona Reide during a Pentecostal Assemblies of the World Communion service
(Photo: Submitted by Pentecostal Assemblies of the World)

Reide and Weeks will be consecrated Aug. 4 during the Indianapolis-based Pentecostal organization's annual convention, which is being held this year in Nashville. At least 6,000 people are expected to attend the weeklong event, which starts Sunday at Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center. They will both lead dioceses in Africa. Reide will oversee the Republic of Sierra Leone diocese in Western Africa, and Weeks will head the Eastern Cape diocese in South Africa. They will continue to lead their respective churches in the U.S., too.

"I clearly understand that in the home God has established differences," said Reide, who leads Grace International Outreach Church in Michigan. "But in the work of God, it's an opportunity for men and women to see that gender does not determine God's call on your life or the type of call that God places on your life."

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Women have long served as ministers and pastors in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, but only in the last decade has the office of bishop opened to them.

More: [Houses of worship do some soul searching as their neighborhoods changes](#)

"A lot of our former fathers had a very narrow vision of the Scriptures," Ellis said. "In our generation, we are using every available resource to at least get the context, get the true meaning, get the commentary on the Scripture so that we are not narrowly defining what the word of God says."



Bishop Charles H. Ellis III, the presiding bishop of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (*Photo: Submitted by Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*)

The predominantly black denomination boasts more than 1.2 million members, 62 dioceses and 5,000-plus affiliated churches across the globe. It's also second biggest and the oldest Oneness Pentecostal group, which refers to the doctrine that includes the practice of baptizing someone in the name of Jesus, instead of in the name of the Trinity:

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Pentecostal Assemblies of the World was born out of the historic 1906 Azusa Street Revival, considered the birthplace of the modern Pentecostal movement.

Leadership roles for women vary across Pentecostal traditions, but women have always been a central part of Pentecostal church life, Lisa P. Stephenson, a professor of systematic theology at Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn., said in an email.

"It has always been open to the idea that women can and will be used by God in its midst," Stephenson said. "But this is not without its limitations for some denominations, and those boundaries especially get enforced when making decisions about leadership roles."

Women as Bishops

The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World began formal discussions in 2008, and narrowly approved the elevation of women to the role of a bishop in 2009.

More: [Why these modern hymn writers want you and your congregation to sing](#)

Bishops, the denomination's highest office, typically oversee a geographical region of the church. Duties include administrative responsibilities as well as serving as the authority on church doctrine and other ecclesiastical issues within the diocese.

While a handful of women became suffragan bishops, the national organization didn't select its first female bishop until 2015 when [Aletha J. Cushinberry](#) was elevated to the office. She died in December 2015.



Bishop Aletha Cushinberry during her consecration as the first female bishop in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (*Photo: Submitted by Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*)

Due to exceeding the age limit for bishops, Cushinberry did not preside over a diocese, but she was elevated as an honorary bishop. While not typical for that position, Cushinberry was given both voice and voting power on the denomination's bishop board when she became the first female to hold the higher office.

"I thought it would be very embarrassing after 100 years of the convention to finally elevate a woman and she can't talk or cast a vote," Ellis said. "I said, 'Hold on. We need to adjust this honorary bishop.'"

The debate over women in church leadership isn't unique to Pentecostalism, but spans Christian denominations, too. The heart of the conflict comes from recognizing the special gifts women have as well as the long-standing tradition steeped in biblical

precedent that has denied women access to leadership, said Ellen Armour, the director of Vanderbilt University's Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality.

"That's a lot to wrestle with," Armour said.

Humbled and Excited

In the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Ellis thinks resistance to female bishops has subsided, especially as the older generation retires or moves into emirates bishop status.



Bishop Gwendolyn Weeks, a pastor of Bethel Tabernacle Pentecostal Church in Massachusetts, will be consecrated as a bishop in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World. *(Photo: Submitted by Pentecostal Assemblies of the World)*

Neither Reide nor Weeks have experienced pushback to their upcoming elevation.

"One of the reasons the Sierra Leone council requested me is because of my understanding of African culture," Reide said. "They're not concerned about my being a woman. They are concerned about making sure that the gospel goes forth."

Reide, ordained in 1996 and who founded her church in 2006, has spent years working in parts of Africa, including in Ghana. In 2012, she became the first female suffragan bishop in Michigan as well as the first woman with an international appointment in Ghana.

Weeks leads Bethel Tabernacle Pentecostal Church in Massachusetts, which was founded by her father. She was ordained in 1988 and worked as an international evangelist. She was the first female chairperson of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World's Northeast District Council and served on the denomination's board of directors.

Both women are humbled and excited by the opportunity to lead a diocese. "I know that there are great women who served in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World much longer, harder before me," Weeks said. "I am standing on shoulder upon shoulder upon shoulder. I'm here because of the work they did."

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