

The Role of the National Baptist African American Female Clergy: Shifting the Culture Using
Liberation to Empower the 21st-Century Church

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Abstract

The following research project seeks to challenge the patriarchal stance that exists in the National Baptist Convention Incorporated by utilizing myself and other pastors to bring justice to a community that has been marginalized oppressed and disenfranchised. The purpose is to explore ways that the NBCI would be receptive to the gifts and callings of women in ministry. I emailed and called over 70 churches asking pastors to participate. I told them that they would be receiving a questionnaire that had to be completed and sent back to me. I advised that the first five male pastors and five female pastors who completed the study would be a part of this research and that I would not divulge their personal identity. I used Micah 6:6-8 as a theological framework to show how God is at work in the life of women in ministry. The role of women in the Baptist church in particular African-American women in ministry have faced an uphill battle for as long as women have been in ministry. Furthermore the loud voices of women as experienced in the Bible have long been silenced by critical patriarchal standards. But there has been a critical and yet transformational shift in many of our churches across the United States that have affirmed women and celebrated their voices, but these voices continue to be silenced in the National Baptist Convention USA Inc. God is calling for transformational leadership in the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated hierarchy when it comes to women being in positions of power and the pastorate. I used the works of liberation theologian Howard, Thurman, Jacqueline Lewis, Robert Warrior and others to help structure the foundation and to help with steps of dismantling the patriarchal leadership of the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated.

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Chapter 1-History of Baptists

Why are there not any women in leadership in the NBCI? Why is there no recognition of female pastors for their years of service in the local communities that they serve? As an African-American male and pastor I have been hard pressed in my very being to see women in positions of leadership in the NBCI. I am writing this paper because I want to bring justice by shedding some light on the NBCI that once was thriving, but is now in a decline from its role and stance on the position and role of female clergy in leadership. My goal is to challenge the patriarchal stance that exists in our Convention by utilizing myself, male, and female pastors to bring justice to a community that has been historically oppressed and disenfranchised by using Micah 6:6-8 as a theological framework. The holy writ says, “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

As a young pastor who went to seminary with fellow female clergy, to whom I love and respect, I heard the cry for transformation and change in the Convention. The role of women in the Baptist church, in particular African-American women in ministry, have faced an uphill battle for as long as women have been in ministry. Furthermore, the loud voices of women as experienced in the Bible have long been silenced by patriarchal standards. However, there has been a shift in many of our churches across the United States that have affirmed women and celebrated their voices, but their

voice continues to be silenced in the NBCI. I believe that God is calling for a transformation of the NBCI hierarchy when it comes to women being in positions of power; and in particular, the pastorate. After 138 years of existence only men have the right to preach during the day and night sessions. Women are not allowed to preach at any time during the convention which is one of the reasons why there needs to be a shift in the Convention.¹

According to the NBCI there are approximately 31,000 congregations that make up the convention. However, not one woman holds a leadership role in the Convention, which is another reason why there needs to be a shift. John D. Caputo's book, "What Would Jesus Deconstruct," raises the question that pushes readers to rethink ecclesial ministry for the twenty-first century. This question is critical for my ministry and the ministry of the NBCI as I reimagine transformative ministry in the African-American community, and primarily in the Baptist tradition. "There must be a deconstruction that shakes the foundations of traditional ministry models through persistent re-questioning, diversified inclusion and a commitment to ever evolving, therefore creating a theological montage that is applicable to the practice of ministry."² My suspicion is that in order for the NBCI to start a transformative process in leadership, male pastors must join together with female pastors to address the patriarchal stance that has held an embedded theology in this Convention for over 100 years. There must be a breaking down of barriers that will influence not only the current leadership of the Convention, but also to the masses who attend this Convention year after year.

¹ Fitts, L. A History of Black Baptists. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press 1985.

² Caputo, John D: What Would Jesus Deconstruct. Ada, Michigan: Baker Press 2007

According to Howard Thurman, “Jesus came to Earth to break down the walls of injustice that permeated throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus came breaking through and breaking down barriers. Jesus came letting in those who were locked out. Jesus cracked every glass ceiling, opened the gate, and gave us all access to God.”³ In essence this was Jesus’ mission, ministry, and meaning of Jesus’ message. Jesus is both redeemer and liberator. As redeemer Jesus embraces all of humankind. As the liberator we know that Jesus emancipates all of us and breaks down barriers for all humankind.

Thus, I must give a historical narrative account of the NBCI that may help anyone who may read this document as I pursue justice for the advancement of female clergy leadership in the Convention. The historical account will look to give insight and distinction on what it means to be a “National Baptist “as opposed to the many other Baptist denominations. But before I can define what it means to be “National Baptist, I must first define what it means to be “Baptist”. I am Baptist born, Baptist bred, and will be Baptist when I die. I heard this same, personal declaration from the pastors, elders, deacons and church congregants while growing up. The word, “Baptist” has been embedded in my heart and the hearts of many other Baptists born and bred. Being Baptist is not simply a denominational stance, but it is fundamental to our religious identity of being Christian. Baptist can be defined as a member of an inherent evangelical Protestant denomination marked by congregational polity and baptism by an immersion of believers only. Baptist also means a group of Christian denominations, churches, and individuals who subscribe to a theology of believers’ baptism as opposed to infant baptism; salvation through faith alone, scripture alone as the rule of faith and

³ Thurman, Howard. Jesus and the Disinherited. Boston Mass: Beacon Press 1976.

practice, and the autonomy of the local church.⁴ For the purpose of this paper, I will be using the meaning of Baptist as a member of an autonomous church of baptized believers that adhere to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible as the Word of God.

The African-American Baptist church was birthed out of struggle and segregation; therefore, one of the major pillars of our faith has been learning to recognize God as James Cone calls the “God of the Oppressed.”⁵ Throughout history the African American church has been recognized as the epicenter of the African American community. Out of this center of faith and racial identity grew many denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (formerly known as the Colored Methodist Episcopal until 1957) and many others. All of these churches are strong African American communal churches but we have to go back to the early 1700’s to trace this important movement in the life of the church that would later materialize into what is called today as the African American Baptist Church.⁶

During slavery, when Africans realized that they could not go back to Africa to worship, they relived their native experience by channeling their cultural patterns and rituals in the United States of America. It was not so much about learning and obtaining African theology, but it was about

⁴ George, T.D. Baptists and Their Doctrines. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers 1999.

⁵ Cone, James. God of the Oppressed. Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books 1997

⁶ Fitts, L. A History of Black Baptists. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press 1985.

making music on plantations, villages and desert lands by any means necessary. This was the way that slaves connected to their homeland experience. It was God who gave slaves songs in the night. These were songs of peace and hope in some of the most hopeless situations. It was God who moved in and through the clapping syncopated rhyme and rhythm of their worship.⁷ (The clapping and rhythm reminded me of the “ring shout” Professor Mark Miller of Drew University Theological School taught us as seminary students.) The African slaves’ way of worship in the United States not only tied the African slaves back to Africa, but it also tied my seminary class to this cultural phenomenon.

God, family, and community also defines Baptists. There is an African saying that “It takes a whole village to raise a family.” The idea that a community has a colony, a village, and chief was an honorary title that came with extraordinary power. The Black church emulated the construct of power and sociability, making it easy for Africans to assimilate to a new way of being with familiar notions of cultural identity. With families being separated due to the intrinsic nature of slavery the community of faith reintroduced a new way of understanding the family. God was always first, then the family and finally the community.⁸

The NBCI is simply the name given to a nationally, (internationally recognized) group primarily of African-American congregants of Baptist faith traditions. The foundational principles of

⁷ Paris, P. *The Spirituality of African American People*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1995.

⁸ Mullins, E. *Baptist Beliefs*. Valley Forge, PA. Judson Press 1925.

the African American Baptist Church are not far removed from the majority bodies of Baptists.⁹ Thus the impact of slavery, race, segregation and the discrimination of African-Americans brought about the birth of the African American Baptist Church. Doctrinally, Baptist positions are the same. But there are beliefs and or divisions that are distinctive in Baptists which enabled the beginning of this new African-American denomination. For over 200 years the traditions and practices of a people inextricably wielded to the iron shackles of oppression. This statement cannot be ignored or denied. It is on the national level that African-American Baptists are linked together and classified as a denomination.

It must be noted that all Baptists are autonomous. Autonomous literally means an act of self-government; independence. It is the right to decide one's own course and future. The Baptist church believes that God's providence is what ultimately determines the church's direction. However, because humans have the gift of free will, we also have the ability to make choices within the confines of our autonomy. In other words, Baptists have the right of the majority to rule. Thus, the majority must have sound minds and intentional understandings of the local church to make good decisions for the body of Christ.¹⁰ For example many Baptists believe that women not preaching in the church is a good decision for the body of Christ. I would argue that churches that open leadership to women are more inclined to be rewarded with greater human effort and resource supply. Is it

⁹ Melton, G. J. Nelson's Guide to Denominations. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2000.

¹⁰ Johnson, Lamont. Autonomous: 21st Century Look At The African-American Baptist Church. Newark, NJ: Godchild Publications 2011.

possible that the decision is wrong? It is quite possible. In order to reconcile whether a decision is good or bad in a Baptist church happens over time due to theological teaching and by majority vote. The voting process happens in church meetings where the requirement to get something approved is done by having a simple majority to vote in favor or in opposition. Then, there are other times when there must be a super majority vote that must take place. Such situations are usually defined in the church's constitution and/or bylaws. The church constitution clearly defines the leadership roles and how the leaders are chosen. It further dictates the necessary parameters that are used in purchasing a new building, making changes to the board of directors, selecting a pastor, and in some cases selecting women to be appointed as deacons and or pastors. Furthermore, the church recognizes the right and the ability of the majority to govern. The democratic practice in the Baptist church is a distinguishing feature that differentiates itself from other denominations and from other Baptist churches.¹¹

In addition to the practice of autonomy there has been a historical practice when choosing a leader to take a more patriarchal stance. Many Africans who were brought to the United States as slaves remembered their worship styles that they had in Africa which connected them to God and each other. It was an encounter like no other that an oppressed people could feel in relationship with God. They would hear the preaching of God's Word by the preacher, which would allow them to fall in love with a God of an oppressed people. The African slaves would have worship services down

¹¹ Hudson, W.A. A Baptist Manual Polity and Practice: Revised Edition. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 1997.

by the riverside, cabins, small houses of worship, train tracks, and or in the woods. They would do ring shouts, pray, and sing what I grew up hearing called Negro Spirituals. These songs sung by the African slaves gave them encouragement and hope that one God would bring them through this barren land of slavery and oppression. They would take songs and hymns that were sung by the patriarchal leaders of the time and use them to become their very own. They would lift these songs up in adoration to God and all throughout the community through sounds of praise with the mouth and through many movements of the body.¹² I can remember visiting my grandmother's church in Washington, Georgia as a little boy. It was in Washington where I witnessed so many disenfranchised people who lived on the margins of society celebrate the goodness of God. There were no organs, pianos, or guitars being played in these services. I watched people use wooden instruments and pails that are usually filled with water as their musical instruments as worship to God. The people filled the church and then they would lift the windows for the people on the outside so they could be connected to experience the worship experience. After the music was over a "male" preacher would get up and preach the Word of God, which would be a message that would connect the people with God and God with people.

The impact of my experience at the church in Georgia was similar to what I was used to in New Jersey. The music, fellowship, and overall worship experience was similar. Furthermore I did not see any women teaching or preaching at the church in Georgia. Both houses of worship were led by men. I didn't think too much of it at the time because a male preacher was leading in every

¹² Fluker, W.E. *A Strange Freedom*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1998.

church that we attended. It wasn't until I got much older that I was exposed to female preachers and the oppression that they experienced from the church, and it being sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures. When I was a teenager I saw my pastor turn away females who claimed that God called them to preach. He said, "God does not call women to preach." I also saw women be asked to leave the church because they refused to give up the notion that God called them to preach. It did not matter if I was in New Jersey or Georgia female preachers were not accepted in the African-American Baptist church. In addition to the male pastors lay women were also complaining that women were not called to preach or to pastor. They grumbled that God would not be pleased with women making such claims. Although both churches were filled with mostly women the men were the ones who were in leadership. How ironic that an oppressed people would oppress others within their own race.

As Africans held on to their wonderful religion and worship of their God things would soon change as they were brought onto the American shore. As slaves migrated from the south to the north the slave masters had brainwashed these humble people as they did to the Native Americans with "his" tool of religion and interpretation of the Holy Bible.¹³ I can remember being in church history class and the professor separated the class by regions of north and south. During the class the north region of the room and the southern region of the room were asked to respond to the same question from the Book of Ephesians, Chapter 6. The question was, "What does it mean when you hear the words, "Slave obey your masters for it is right in the Lord?" We all had a riveting class

¹³ Fluker, W.E. A Strange Freedom. Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1998.

debating and exegeting what the Holy Scripture was saying to the north as compared to the south and vice versa. As I learned throughout seminary and research that slaves were taught about Christianity. The slaves were taught a colonial Christianity which did not edify the people but used the African slaves to serve their White oppressor. The White oppressor continued to force their religion on the slaves so that they would always remember that it was a “blessing” to obey their master. Many slaves accepted this faith, but the time came when those slaves understood “their” faith as it was linked to Jesus Christ. Being able to identify with a suffering Jesus Christ allowed slaves to develop a closer walk with Jesus and acceptance of Jesus despite facing hardship, persecution, and pain. The African slave would be able to see Jesus Christ as the one who would not allow them to be slaves alone, but give them a new hope. This became evident in the Holy Scriptures that says, “Whom the Son sets free is free indeed!”¹⁴ Many slaves who believed this text did not live to receive the new law that was passed during the tenure of the 16th president Abraham Lincoln, but by faith believed liberation would one day come. “The African slave was so in love with Jesus that when the Emancipation Proclamation was passed there was a song that was birthed out of the movement entitled, In the Union Jesus Fixed It.”¹⁵ They were excited that Jesus was present with them and that better days were ahead of them.

One of the most powerful connections that whites and Africans have is their fundamental stance on scripture. “The impact of this was seen in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Africans,

¹⁴ Holy Bible NRSV

¹⁵ George, T., Massey, J.E., Smith, J.R., & Eds. *Our Sufficiency Is of God*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 2010.

who are now called African-Americans broke away from the majority white churches moving us from the balcony to the pulpit. The people were exasperated of coming to worship and being shackled at the same time. They could not worship and have fellowship with everyone in the church because the laws of the land did not allow it.”¹⁶ They were confined to worship in the balcony which became the powerful push for African-Americans to separate from the white church. They wanted their independence and they were not going to apologize for having such a thing. As the African-American Baptist church began to flourish there were many similarities amongst churches as well as differences throughout history. The one thing that was prevalent amongst the church was their theological ideology. There are practices that are part of the theological makeup of groups and individual bodies which separate them from the general and larger body.

Historically, it was considered heresy to announce that a woman was called into the ministry or to be considered a pastor.¹⁷ Many Baptist churches would use the Pauline letters or the pastoral epistles of the Bible (KJV) to argue against the notion that God calls women to preach. For example in 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul says, “Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.” If we take this literally, it would mean that women are not allowed to speak, sing, or preach in church nor respond to the pastor if there is a question being asked. I realize that this is a literal interpretation of scripture but many African-American Baptist churches continue to take on this fundamental stance as recorded by the

¹⁶ Anthony, P. *Various Religious Experiences*. Westport CT: Greenwood Press 2006.

¹⁷ Hudson, W. S. *Baptist Convictions*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 1984.

NBCI without honoring what I call the who, what, where, why, and how of scripture, which I will be discussing in chapter 3 regarding my theological response. Furthermore, 1 Timothy 3:1-4 says, “This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of bishop he desireth a good work. A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” The patriarchal writing that is all throughout this text is obviously problematic to those of us who take a liberal approach to scripture but this is the approach that many of our African-American Baptist churches take when it comes to women in ministry. It is very strange to me that a group of believers who have fought against the ills of slavery and injustice would stoop so low into telling the women who fought beside the men for freedom that God could never call them or use them in ministry because of the authority of scripture. I love scripture, which to me is the Word of God but I’ve learned that interpretation of scripture can be helpful or harmful to the people we are trying to serve.

There becomes a danger when a pastor chooses certain texts or tenants of the faith without ever asking the question why; which becomes “heresy”. Any truth that is twisted or turned to fit your own personal gain is heresy. Many churches today, including African-American Baptist churches, could very well be on the verge of heresy and not even know it. No matter the church, the Christian must stand on the fact that Jesus suffered, bled and died so that humankind might walk in freedom. Jesus Christ gives African-American Baptist churches the necessary unction to carry out the liberating work of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, I believe that in order to do the work of Jesus in

the world the work must start at the church. How can we empower our young girls at home that they can be doctors, lawyers, teachers, business women, chief executive officers, directors, governors, mayors, congress women, senators, and president of the United States, but not honor these same women in the pulpit of the Lord's church? I am appalled at what I see today in the NBCI, but I am not oblivious to this theological dilemma because history bears record of this egregious act that has to be stamped out in the same fashion that slavery was abolished in these United States. How can I bring about justice to women clergy who quite frankly have been marginalized and disenfranchised for so long by their own kindred? How can I bring justice to women clergy who have been marginalized by women? Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." I would suggest that includes the African-American Baptist church. Not only did the local church historically take on this notion of Women in Ministry but it was ratified amongst the NBCI.

A "National Baptist" is simply the name given to a nationally/internationally recognized group of primarily African-American congregations of Baptist faith traditions.¹⁸ Doctrinally our positions are the same. However many of our theological beliefs and practices may or may not be the same. It is on the National level that African-American Baptist are linked together.. The theological parameters that I have been discussing in this paper suggests the distinctions of many local churches with their notion of women being called or allowed to preach. It was a theological and "a cultural notion" that was prevalent in our churches that suggested that women were not called

¹⁸ Furr, G. A., & Eds. Ties That Bind; Life Together in the Baptist Vision. Macon, GA 1994.

or allowed to preach. But as time moved forward and people read and learned more about scripture, hearts and minds changed with regards to women in ministry.

Many African-American churches have changed with an abundance of female preachers and pastors. However, this notion has not changed within the NBCI. The NBCI consists of a hierarchy that includes men only. There are no women in leadership that have a voice to share as to how the NBCI should be led and to push the church forward in the name of Jesus Christ. Now there are female divisions within the Convention that have a female president, but that person still does not have the power to make decisions with regards to how the women's division ultimately will be used to serve God and humankind. Also the women's division is not even able to select a female preacher for an all-female service. It has to be a male preacher who has to deliver the Word of God. Again, I ask the questions, "Why? Why in 2020 has there not been a change in the National Baptist Convention with regards to having women in leadership? What is wrong with having women in leadership in the Convention? How can we move forward with making a radical change in the National Baptist Convention that has an embedded theology for hundreds of years?"

Chapter 2- My Story

I've had the privilege of pastoring Mt. Zion Baptist Church of Dover, NJ as their leader and senior pastor for the past 12 years. This has been an awesome, yet difficult task of how God uses humankind to touch the lives of so many. However, when I became the pastor of Mt. Zion and realized the kind of practices that were taking place I was sad, upset, and disappointed. I was not asked any questions regarding women in leadership. Perhaps I was not asked any questions about women in leadership because the church had been searching for a pastor for almost three years and was ready for a leader? If I had known that they did not accept women in leadership I would not have accepted the position. Women were not allowed to preach or hold any major leadership role at Mt. Zion. This practice was reinforced and taught biblically by the former pastor to all the people in the church. Prior to my assignment to Mt. Zion, women were subjected to only doing certain things in church such as working in the culinary ministry, cleaning the church, and teaching the children during Sunday School. Furthermore, I was shocked to see an entire pulpit search committee that consisted mostly of women, rejecting the notion of having female preachers sit in and/or preach from the pulpit which I learned after I was called to Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion was used to following a patriarchal structure that taught, encouraged, and informed the people that this was God's way. Mt. Zion's prior male leadership taught them to follow leadership and in doing so, God would bless them tremendously because of their obedience to leadership. I wondered how a predominantly African-American church who has been marginalized, oppressed, and disenfranchised could allow such practices to take place. I realized that I had much work to do to bring about change. I was afraid to do this work, but I trusted in God to lead and guide me in this process.

Additionally, when I became the pastor of Mt. Zion, I noticed that there was a sense of complacency when it came to dealing with biblical and social issues both in the church and within the community at large. Some people were not interested in talking about different issues such as female preachers, unemployment, racial profiling, inadequate housing, and other ills that has affected us. However, there was a part of the church that was looking for change/social progress. I also noted that the ones who were against change were the ones who held positions of power in the church.

One of the first things I did at Mt. Zion was to gain an understanding as to why they believed what they believed and what issues pressed them. I did this by meeting with the Executive Team. During the meeting, I asked questions regarding their particular practice of forbidding female preachers to preach or hold major positions in the church. In addition, I asked questions regarding the Holy Bible and its influence on their decision making. The response that I received from most of the team was really not surprising to me. In fact, a Team member said to me “Pastor, if you want us to be honest, we were taught biblically that women were not allowed to preach in the pulpit or hold major leadership roles in the church.” Someone also said “God gave all the instructions to men, and that men were supposed to carry out all of the many things that happen in the life of the church.” After I received these responses, I asked them about biblical characters such as Deborah, Esther, Ruth, and Mary and whether they were ever taught about them or mentioned in any preaching or bible study moment at Mt. Zion. I also argued in the New Testament women were the first preachers to come back and testify to the disciples after Jesus was crucified that Jesus had risen from the grave. Unfortunately, I didn’t get a response to my question and the people remained silent. As a result of

their silence I invited a female minister to preach. I invited her because I wanted to create a space that honored and affirmed women and their calling by God. I knew there would be some tension seeing this woman preaching from the pulpit, but I was willing to take the risk.

Therefore I started by taking a poll of the church with regards to their stance particularly on the role and importance of female preachers. The results were very clear and negative with regards to women preaching and being leaders of the church. 70% of the church were against women being preachers and being in leadership. The church at large confirmed that even though women have expressed their calling into the ministry they refused to accept them as preachers based upon the biblical preaching and teaching by the former pastor.

Due to my disappointment over the results and the church's stance at large, I realized that my job in leadership was important and that I must both teach leadership and live as an example of a leader. With this being said, I must admit that Mt. Zion taught me how to pastor and what it means to be a leader. What do I mean by this? I have been given the opportunity to organize a group of people to achieve a common goal. I have claimed the authority of who I am as a leader and at the same time realize that ministry cannot be done without the support and help of others. I learned from my pastor that in ministry it takes the entire church to work together in order for your ministry assignment to be successful and or effective. According to John Maxwell, "everything rises and falls on leadership."¹⁹ To be able to lead people, I have learned that leadership must be developed. I

¹⁹ Maxwell, John C. *Developing the Leader Within You*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc. 1993.

have partnered with members of Mt. Zion to understand our roles in the church individually so that we might develop collectively as a strong witness for Jesus Christ.

Now, when I first became pastor of Mt. Zion, as a leader, I was looked upon as one whose relationship with God was so intimate that I could not make any mistakes because I was always allegedly in constant relationship with the Divine One. The people would look at me as one who flew in from heaven or some divine location on Sunday mornings. Then, when we had any other engagements or outings, I would fly back to heaven once everything concluded. Some members viewed me like a God because I was a preacher, instead of a human being used as a mouthpiece for God. These assumptions soon changed when they realized that I also had a secular job with a family of my own with bills to pay and a family that needed me every day. Somehow, this reality connected me with the people and allowed me to help them, slowly but surely. The effect of this allowed me to increase my time in drawing closer to God so that I would be the pastor and effective leader that God called me to be for the people of Mt. Zion.

As a result, I taught the members to “Disciples of Christ.” What does that mean? The word disciple in my context is learning, developing, and following the teachings of Jesus Christ. Using the Bible, literary sources, and other human relationships helps to develop us as a community to be the leaders of Jesus Christ to demonstrate the unconditional love of God towards humankind. The disciples as found in the Bible were not perfect people, but God used them as conduits to change the world. When I first came to Mt. Zion good leadership was just preaching a good sermon, having bible study and prayer service, and making the people feel good about God until the following week to continue the cycle. For many of them that was all they needed, but I knew there was more to

ministry. I knew that being a good leader meant that a good disciple serves Jesus by loving God, serving the community, speaking out and standing for those who have been oppressed and disenfranchised. Modeling the life of Christ which is a daunting task is what motivates me and many members who want the church to continue to be a beacon light while serving this present age.

Developing as a leader has changed over time for me. Throughout this journey, I have learned that I can make mistakes and be okay with it because God's presence is with me and He forgives me for them. The indicators of God's presence is found within myself and the people that I am serving to encourage me to continue to do the work of the ministry. Furthermore, being transparent and being a leader that leads with a style of humility is of very high importance. Transparency does not mean that everyone in the church knows everything about me, but it does mean that I am consistent about doing ministry by serving God, the church, and the community.

Also, when I became Mt. Zion's new pastor and leader, I did not immediately change the church's way of doing things. Instead, I preached and taught biblical principles about Jesus Christ. I constantly provided biblical examples of how Christ stood up and preached truth to power against political and religious authorities who were intentionally oppressing those who were of a particular social class or social location. Moreover, I continued to preach and teach messages of hope so that God could change the hearts and minds of men and women to be more consciously aware of my responsibility to do ministry outside the physical walls of the church building.

Jesus Christ went around teaching the people and the disciples so that they could create a kingdom that would express a radical love that God had given them. In my opinion, radical love is not love that is just spoken but it is language used to express our commitment to doing work within

the community. It is heart wrenching to me to see and hear people say they love people, but are not intentional on the actions that go along with the word, love. I think if you are going to be a great leader in the church you must have the ability to love people. You have to have the ability to be in a relationship with people as we move along life's journey. Loving people is suffering with people and journeying with them through their pain. Loving people is affirming people for who they are regardless of their social class, social location, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or economic status. The love of God is the considerable factor that allows me the opportunity to be able to implement an educational program that will speak to economic injustice, racial bias, and housing injustice. As the leader of Mt. Zion it is important that I demonstrate the love of Christ not by putting down and or trampling upon people, but rather demonstrating the love of Christ to all of God's children.

God did not bring us together to oppress each other, but to be a place that represents the love of Jesus Christ. How can we be a place of love and justice when we intentionally hold each other down? We have to change the narrative by stretching beyond barriers that might make us uncomfortable. We have to stand with people that we are not used to standing with. We have to stand up for people who may not be able to stand for themselves. We have to stand together to fight against racism and sexism even when it might bring about backlash. This is a great challenge in which I am confident to continue the work.

One way I thought would be a great way to break down barriers in Mt. Zion was to expose the church to a renewal in biblical literacy. I believed that there must be a concerted effort in how we view scripture as one body in Christ. When I examine scripture and biblical interpretation I argue

from the standpoint of source, narrative, and deconstructive approaches to the biblical text in an African-American church context. There are so many approaches to examining texts and understanding scripture and I realize that all of us bring our own baggage or lens when reading and interpreting scripture. I am purposed to use scripture in a way that shapes and frames the theology of the congregation and community of what we think about God, and how God is working in our everyday lives.

I am an African-American man who grew up in a traditional Christian home that viewed scripture as authoritative in conjunction with Jesus Christ. There was an inerrancy point of view that was specific to seeing Jesus Christ and Scripture as being equal to each other. Scripture and Jesus Christ went hand in hand and were elevated over all other sources such as reason, experience, and tradition. We did not question the things in the Bible, we just took the written word as the divine Word of God that was given by the Holy Spirit to human beings written on pages without any errors. As a child I didn't question the things that I heard, rather I received them as they were given to me and to my other family members of the church. We believed in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, and that it was only through receiving Jesus Christ as Savior could anyone be saved. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." If you did not receive Jesus Christ into your heart then you would be damned to hell fire. You did not question this theology in the church or with your parents. It was just something that you lived by and was supposed to honor and pass down to future generations. The Bible was presented as the absolute authority of God's Word. For many years I

accepted what was being taught to me, and for many years it was what I accepted as the final authority.

This led me to begin to look at “scripture” in a different way. Is what I’m seeing on the surface of this ancient text that I was reading the final authority? Do the words that I am reading truly apply to me and to the ministry that I have the privilege to serve? I had a hermeneutic suspicion about the ancient text and as my theology evolves that hermeneutic will continue. Vincent Wimbush of the Institute of Signifying Scriptures invites us to investigate and to interrogate scripture. As an African-American male scholar of the Christian tradition in the New Testament finds it necessary in some cases to raise new and different questions regarding the genre and authority that goes by the name of scripture.²⁰ I like Vincent in this new millennial feel the same way because it gives you the opportunity to ask not so much just any question, but the right questions. Historically as I viewed scripture textually without thinking about the consequences that might have affected the congregation or community that I was disseminating the information to. There were so many do’s and don’ts of scripture that I wondered how in the world any human being could keep all of these laws and not perish.

Thus I saw another scripture or sacred text in Ephesians 6 says, “Slaves obey your masters for it is right in the Lord.” What was happening in this text? God what are you saying about me as an African-American who has grown up fighting racism, discrimination, hate crimes, oppression,

²⁰ Wimbush, Vincent L. *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, NJ. Rutgers University Press 2008

depression, marginalization, and being disenfranchised? Does God want me to be whipped and beaten and declare that it is right? These are some of the questions that I asked myself which began the transition from my conservative theology to a more liberal theology. What does it mean to be chosen and the implications that goes along with that? What does my theology have to say about honoring a God who sanctions, and supports slavery as a way of life, and how can I communicate that message to the church and to my community. I was struggling with these issues and it did not make it any better when I went to seminary. I wanted answers to all of my questions as normal human beings would want, but found myself asking more questions like, “who has the power” became very pertinent in everyday conversations.

The approach in reading and dissecting text can be very difficult and challenging when trying to understand scripture. There has to be a systematic way or method in understanding scripture and how to apply it to our everyday lives. I look at texts differently than I use to look at them twelve years ago. Now I grapple with reading the narrative of sacred texts and while studying I perform my own personal exegesis of the text. I begin with a historical analysis of unpacking the text and bringing to light what the text is saying to the community that it was originally written. My aim is to get to the source behind the words that will help me in my preparation of who, what, when, where, and how of the text. Susan Boorer says source criticism unravels the biblical text to identify its earlier components and if possible, to discern the date and the historical context of the composition.²¹ There may be different authors that may be extracted as well as dates when studying the biblical text.

²¹ Dozeman, Thomas B. *Methods for Exodus*. Cambridge Mass. 2010

Furthermore there may be a more in depth study of the text that requires what Vincent Wimbush calls the excavating of the text. He says this interpretive practice has at its focus not the exegesis of texts, but the fathoming of human striving and behaviors and orientations with fears, aspirations, low points, and high marks as they are represented in relationships to scriptures.²² I have to make sure that as an African-American preacher and pastor that I have to dig into the text and to do it carefully and thoroughly.

I am aware that we all bring baggage to the text, but it helps to demonstrate to the people that I serve that understanding sources and being able to identify the historical context of the sacred text helps us as a community to see the implications and the celebrations that can be “excavated from the biblical text. As I teach bible study on a weekly basis I always start off the beginning of class, “are there any questions?” I do this because I am trying to spark interest in the class, and to get the congregation acclimated in sharing with each other that it’s okay to ask questions regarding the biblical text. I’m also trying to generate a possible ethical dilemma that someone in the room may have extracted while reading and studying the biblical text. If I look at the text again, “Slaves obey your masters for it is right in the Lord,” is very problematic in the church that I serve. For example when asking the youth group and young adults to look at this scripture and share the meaning they first saw it as confusing. They asked if the text that was written on paper was right. One of the teens said pastor this can’t be right especially after we hear weekly about the unconditional love of

²² Wimbush, Vincent L. *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, NJ. Rutgers University Press 2008

Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that abides with all people. I told the teen and the rest of the group what they were reading was a true narrative of the biblical text and many of them were sad. They started bringing up the history of the United States and their part in slavery. How could obeying a slave master be right in the sight of God? This was a great exercise to get the youth group to think as well as get the other adults who were listening to think about this same text and the ethical dilemmas it can bring to a minority community in particular African-Americans who have been marginalized, disenfranchised, and oppressed for centuries.

Many people do not like to talk about racism, sexism, ageism, etc., but these phenomena still exist in the United States and it was very prevalent in the reading and hearing of the “slaves” text. Historically “slave text” has been used to oppress slaves in the south compared to those Africans who were free in the north. Many slaves who could not read, but heard this text thought that they were obeying God because of their obedience to the slave masters. While those in the north were adamant that this text did not speak to their theology, or human experience that Jesus Christ loves all humankind unconditionally. The power of scripture can control an entire community if we do not dig beneath the surface and find out the true meaning for the community. As a pastor I look beyond the veil of scripture by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to speak truth to my community that has been oppressed. I am challenged by Vincent Wimbush because he challenges the community African-American communities to look beyond textual criticism and historical criticism that has been locked away, but we have to understand how scripture functions. Wimbush challenges us to believe all scripture is expansive in nature. The meaning is not locked away somewhere where we do not have access. Wimbush says we are invited to do radical excavation that includes exploitation and

yearnings of humans through time and space.²³ The impact of this allows the need for a deconstructive approach to scripture.

A deconstructive approach as stated by Jacques Derrida says deconstruction involves a careful and detailed reading of a text, highlighting its internal complexity and the gaps and omissions that may be filled in with a variety of different meanings, many of which may be contradictory. Deconstruction involves teasing out and highlighting those details of a text that promote meanings and commitments that are in fundamental conflict with meanings and commitments that appear at the surface of a text.²⁴ After digging deep historically and finding meaning the deconstruction of scripture helps the community that is considered unseen to be seen. The deconstruction approach helps the community to take authoritative texts used by those who have the power to silence the community as a platform to speak truth to power. Why are the groups that I serve being exterminated by the police? Why are African-Americans being killed by police officers for walking down the street in their own communities? Why are African-Americans more likely to go to prison than their white counterparts? Why are African-Americans constantly being marginalized, disenfranchised, alienated, exterminated as a normal practice in the United States of America? I ask

²³ Wimbush, Vincent L. *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, NJ. Rutgers University Press 2008

²⁴ Wimbush, Vincent L. *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. New Brunswick, NJ. Rutgers University Press 2008

these questions while I am serving at the church, in my community, in seminary, and having casual conversations with my wife.

On the other hand there can be repulse with regards to my approach by the constructive approach which opposes the deconstructive approach by allowing the interpreter and the community to forge a sense of collective identity and purpose, a driving goal, or value that they work toward. It results in a form of communal “bonding,” a sense of we-ness.²⁵ I understand constructive approach and the emphasis of understanding ancient texts on their own terms, and seeing the biblical narrative and appreciating it for what it is, but it does not allow for the voices of liberating Christians today. In order to be prophetic in my context of serving an African-American congregation there has to be a deconstruction of the narrative text so that the people in the room will know that God is with them, and they are with God. Furthermore the narrative deconstruction of the text helps my community to ask even harder questions such as what happens to the native people of Canaan when God brings the chosen people into the promised land. According to Exodus 3 the text says that God comes down to deliver the Israelite slaves from their Egyptian taskmasters and to deliver them to the land of Canaan that is flowing with milk and honey. However it does not differentiate or tell us in the narrative what happened to the native Canaan people. This text is problematic when trying to grapple around one group being pushed out for another and according to the ancient text God is at the head of it. The deconstruction notion sees the complexity of the text and allows for more than one single interpretation of the text. Therefore we as preachers have to be sensitive to our context knowing

²⁵ Dozeman, Thomas B. *Methods for Exodus*. Cambridge Mass. 2010

who is in the room so that we might deliver a message that allows the Holy Spirit to do the Holy Spirit's work in a way that is filled with hope and love for the beloved community.

Moreover I am mindful of the fact that as I continue to view scripture in the Exodus story narrative, and am excited about the justice that is provided by God I still struggle with natives of the promised land of Canaan being pushed out of their land. To have something taken away from you by force, and then being rescued and given everything you lost can be invigorating for you. But what happens to you when you already live in your promised land and it is taken from you just because you already live there? Robert Warrior's essay argues that the Native Americans of the United States read the Exodus story through the Canaanite lens. They were pushed off their land by force and some were annihilated by United States citizens in the name of God. These natives were forced to assimilate to another person's identity and were forced to ask this question: Do Native Americans and other indigenous people dare trust the same God in their struggle for justice?²⁶ A powerful question that I wrestle with as an African-American who faces injustice every day.

Robert Warrior says, Christians, whether Native American or not, if they are to be involved, must learn how to participate in the struggle without making their story the whole story.⁷ I understand that we are all different and come from many social locations, backgrounds, theologies, that make up the people that we have come to be. We should use our differences not to marginalize people but to help strengthen each other as people who are all made in the image of God as was stated from the very beginning of the ancient text. I believe if there is going to be change then I must

²⁶ Dozeman, Thomas B. *Methods for Exodus*. Cambridge Mass. 2010

be able to use a lens that views scripture with an open mind that does not condemn but will bring about justice in the lives of the community that is reading. I believe if there is going to be change in the Baptist church and National body then there must be a concerted effort by the leaders of the church to seek justice wherever she may be found that says women are called by God and are able to lead and pastor any church as God so desires.

The impact of the misuse of scripture by many people in the church has caused great damage because of bad leadership. If there is to be change then I think it must begin with the leader. There has to be a radical change in leadership or we might continue to see a consistent decline in attendance, finance, and or social behaviors. I know change happens over time, but this is one thing that I had to institute overnight, and that was to let every woman know in the church that they all play an important role in the kin-dom of God. The days in this church where someone tells you that a particular position is just for a man is now over. The church for the most part was happy about the change and excited about a new fresh environment. But there were some implications from the changes that were put in place. For example, I had two women leading an outreach ministry serving the homeless community within the church walls. This ministry provided the homeless with food, clothes, shelters, and job contacts for those who did not have an address. Some members of the congregation were angry because they did not want to be around homeless people due to their smell and fear that they might be attacked. Although security measures were taken, some people were angry and decided to leave the church. On the other hand, other congregants decided to move their membership to another church because women were now sitting in the pulpit, teaching classes, being ordained, a part of the diaconate ministry and taking much more active roles in the church, which

were originally handled by men. Even though our church finances declined, there was a new peace and joy that swept throughout the community of Mt. Zion. This was evident by the way the remaining members spoke of the peace. They began inviting and telling their family, friends, co-workers, and loved ones about the place where they worship and wanting them to be connected. The people who left made room for new faces who had never been a part of this ministry. People were now starting to join the ministry from all different locations and backgrounds that never considered coming to this church. This was a major moment for me while at Mt. Zion.

Nevertheless, after serving this ministry for the past several years I do believe there is always room for growth. I still face many challenges as a leader and wonder how I will be able to pull through the many challenges and changes of the church. This year has been very challenging for many people. Many have lost their jobs and are not sure under this current presidential administration whether they are going to have healthcare. Many are worried about the rising costs of housing and the increasing costs of education and will there be any funding available to help pay for any of these things? Will God be able to help me through my struggles? What do you do when God is silent? As their leader I empower lay leaders to join me with other churches as we challenge our Mayors and City Council of the inadequacies of jobs and housing in our communities. We are empowered that even in a theological crisis such as God being silent does not mean that God is not with us. We continue to trust that even though things look bad or can be a struggle that the presence

of God is still with us. We believe the Bible where it says, “Lo I’m with you always even until the end of the world.”²⁷

My challenge as a leader is to demonstrate that there may be weeping nights, but joy will come in the morning. God uses humankind to touch the lives of so many people to let them know that they are not alone. The presence of God is eternally with us! When we look at each other as a church and are able to breathe fresh air we know that God is with us. When we look at ourselves and see the church grow in membership, and in relationship with each other lets us know that God is with us. When we stand up in our community together against social injustice lets us know that God is eternally with us. As Jesus Christ taught and took care of so many, we can also witness to people to be active in sharing God’s love and providing resources to help others.

In addition to encouraging people as a leader, I am aware of the possibility of being faced with rejection (fully present, but being told that I am not needed). What are some tools I can use that will help me reevaluate the situation when I am rejected? I think I have to spend more intimate time with God that shows me that even when I feel dejected God will give me strength to what Jacqueline Lewis calls crossing the borders.²⁸ I will continue to stand as an African-American pastor as my pastor and others have done before me to try to make a difference in the lives of people and

²⁷ Coogan, M. D. The Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version. Oxford: Oxford Press 2001.

²⁸ Lewis, Jacqueline J. The Power of Stories: Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2008.

the cities and communities in which we live. I want to continue to be the one crying in the wilderness for women clergy all over the state of New Jersey and throughout the NBCI that women clergy should be a welcomed asset to further lead our Convention.

To God be all the glory, after leading by example, being consistent with teaching, thoroughly explaining scriptures and preaching the Message of Jesus Christ, during my tenure at Mt. Zion, the women began to lead in their own retreat settings, preach in nursing homes, and lead revivals across the state and nation. In fact, Mt. Zion licensed and ordained its first female preacher. She was received by the congregation without doubt or hesitation. Moreover, the head of the Trustee Board and Sunday School are both females. I truly thank God for the growth and the development that has taken place at Mt. Zion under my guidance and leadership. When I think historically about my context, Mt. Zion has come a long way. Because I have witnessed what God has done at Mt. Zion, I am hopeful that women clergy will assume the same roles as male clergy at the Convention.

Chapter 3- God's Justice Text: Micah 6:6-8

What does it mean that God is a God of justice? First, let's look at the term justice. Justice is to be made right and righteous in the sight of God. Justice is how God views me as one of God's children. For the purpose of this paper I will be using the word justice in this way.

All of humankind deserves the right to receive God's justice. According to the pericope from Micah 6, the prophet challenges the people of Israel by adhering to the commands of God. The prophet reminds the people that through their times of slavery and through the places of Gilgal it was God who redeemed the people by His own justice. God reminds the people that it was because of God's divine justice that the people were made right before a "just" God. God commands the people to be just, love, and diligently practice kindness, compassion, and walk humbly with your God by setting aside any overblown sense of importance or self-righteousness. God's justice is available to all humankind which is why it is problematic when we think about how people are systematically oppressed, marginalized, and disenfranchised in this American society. Many people choose to do injustice because they are prideful and self-centered. They would rather focus on taking advantage of others for their own personal gain. Some people think unjust actions will bring happiness, peace and satisfaction. But they don't. A lust for power or control is never satisfied. It always wants more.

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said five scores years ago a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one year later which is now 150 years later the Negro still is not free. The life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. The Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself, or herself an exile in their own land. This is a shameful condition. They wrote and signed the

Constitution and Declaration Independence as a promissory note that all Americans would be heirs. But instead of honoring their sacred obligation America has given Negroes a bad check which has come back marked insufficient funds.”²⁹ Is this God’s justice?

According to the Washington Post “a black teen could be sentenced to life in prison for killing a White man who forced her into the sex trade. Chrystal Kizer 19, was told by a Judge in Kenosha Wisconsin that she must face life in prison after killing a sex trafficking man by the name of Randy Volar. Chrystal was 16 years old when she was raped multiple times by the 33 year old man and was also filmed during this heinous crime. She was forced into sex trafficking when she was taken to hotels and forced to have sex with numerous men. In February 2018 Chrystal allegedly shot and killed Randy Volar and set his body on fire. It was also found by police that Randy Volar had done this vile act with several other girls who were as young as 12 years old.” Is this God’s justice? “The police also discovered that there was over \$1.5 million in Randy Volar’s bank account while sex trafficking young girls. Prosecutors charged Kizer now 19 with arson and first-degree intentional homicide that carries a life sentence in Wisconsin.” Is this God’s justice? “Wisconsin has a law that gives sex-trafficking victims an affirmative defense if they can prove at trial they committed a crime because they were being trafficked. If the victims can prove that they were forced into sex-trafficking they can be acquitted of all charges.”³⁰

In addition the judge claimed that acquitting Ms. Kizer would set a dangerous precedent. Is this God’s justice? I guess this can be God’s justice for some groups depending on how you view

²⁹ King Jr. Martin Luther. *Why We Can’t Wait*. New York NY: Signet Classic 1963

³⁰ Washington Post Newspaper. Washington D.C. 2018

God and what is right in the sight of God. I believe God's justice makes things right in the lives of humankind. Again, I ask the question that if God's justice makes things right or brings about righteousness, then why should a woman who has been subjected to abuse and violence by a man spend her life in prison because she was protecting herself? If it's God's justice then why do Black and Latino women in 2020 still have to fight for pay raises that their white male counterparts already have as their starting salaries? If it's God's justice then why do African-American and Latino neighborhoods continue to be infiltrated with guns and drugs, and yet we don't own or have the manufacturing plants that produce these items? If it's God's justice then why do we have an American government that is filled with corrupt senators and congressmen that continue to fight against themselves instead of seeking to create a government that was founded on democracy to be fair and for the people? These are not acts of God's justice but rather acts of injustice that continue to permeate our land and our society.

As a church leader I am challenged to do God's justice at Mt. Zion and in the community in which I serve. I am called to address and correct injustices that affect my community and in particular women clergy as leaders. Despite having women pastors all throughout the state of New Jersey I have discovered that women clergy are still being marginalized and oppressed by the NBCI which I think is very hurtful and harmful to women and to the body of Christ. The NBCI would rather declare that we are liberated by God through God's Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the same voice declare that women clergy are not qualified to be leaders. NBCI It seems to me that although it's okay to preach and pastor in your local city it becomes taboo to ever think that such a thing will ever happen in the NBCI. There seems to be a structural injustice that

has taken place that is irreversible, intractable and overwhelming and I believe that it will take God's justice to bring about change.

I begin to wonder how a preacher like myself can bring about change to a society that has been fighting against such a thing for so many years. As I stood before my bible study class discussing women clergy and their role as leaders in the church and in our Convention, one of the students in the class asked, "How can there be change in an institution like the National Baptist Convention that has been steeped in tradition regarding male pastors as being the authoritative figure in our national body? Can there be change inside the NBCI as was done here at Mt. Zion?"³¹ "Perhaps!" I responded. I think these are great questions that can be addressed through the Word of God.

Preaching the biblical text is very important to Mt. Zion and to the churches where I have had the opportunity to preach. I recognize the need to be in tune and in touch with the world around me. Being able to recognize God's presence in every aspect of human existence is essential. I have to be aware and mindful of the social, political, educational, and economic surroundings which strengthens preaching, and shows God at work in the life of humankind. As a result I've seen God working through scripture by the Holy Spirit change human minds as it pertains throughout our local churches and state conventions. Therefore, I believe that the conversation has to begin with God speaking to us with regards to women clergy being equipped to lead the National Baptist Convention just as well as their male counterparts and to get rid of this seething injustice that continues to permeate the

³¹ Leonard, B.J. Baptist Way: A History. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 2003.

NBCI. I know that Mt. Zion is not a mega church with thousands of members, but why not start the conversation with us and let it spread through our witness in our local community, the state, and beyond. “Jesus says if we are faithful in little God will make us faithful in much!”³² I believe God wants us to use our voices to be a clarion call crying in the wilderness!

How do we do this? What is God requiring of all us as we watch and witness this phenomenon that has taken place against women clergy? First of all we must begin to have conversations of how this was a huge barrier in Mt. Zion Baptist Church when I was called there in 2007, and possibly some of the same challenges that were overcome here can happen in the Convention. This brings about a theological conversation that is apropos regarding the prophetic Book of Micah. This Book is a biblical text that glows with hope and encouragement. It opens in Chapter 1 with a magnificent display of God’s coming to the children of Israel. Micah (He who is like Yahweh), prophesies in this powerful book these loving words that I love in Micah 6:8, “Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” These are profound words uttered by the prophet who finds himself in a terrible landscape that is filled with catastrophe and destruction. The wealthy and the privileged people of the time have oppressed and defrauded, the least, the lost, and the left out from their personal inheritance while the wealthy reap the benefits. It reminds me of the political climate of today in the United States where those in power in particular our political leaders believe since they have power they can get away and do whatever it is they want. The destruction and degradation of people is done in the bright of day and there is nothing that anyone can do. You would think that those in power and wealth would reach down to help, but according to Micah chapter 3 the privileged people hated good and loved evil. I believe anytime there is evil and

³² Holy Bible NRSV Luke 16:10

injustice in the world then God will send the necessary Word that will bring forth life and liberation to an oppressive and disenfranchised people.

God says plead your case before the mountains. What are the mountains? According to the Holman Bible Dictionary many important events took place on mountains. God called Moses to do God's work at Mt. Horeb. God also promised that the Israelites people would worship their God on the mountain, as well as receive the Law of God. Other biblical characters such as Aaron's death, Moses' death, and Elijah's defeat of the prophets of Baal happened on a mountain. As a matter of fact, much of Jesus' ministry took place on a mountain. Jesus' most famous sermon was done on the mountain which is found to be called the "Sermon on the Mount." So for me, the mountains must be the place where you and I can call out and reach God. The text is clear by saying to get up, plead your case to the mountains and let the hills of that mountain hear your voice. The prophet Micah is requesting us to stand up and use our voice that God has given us. I believe the voice is imperative in bringing about hope and justice to an oppressed people. According to Dr. Cleo Larue, Professor and Chair of the Preaching Department at Princeton University, "African-Americans are people who come from cultures with a high oral residue and consider the spoken word to have great power. All oral utterance that comes from the inside living organisms is dynamic. Black preachers rely on the power of the living voice to bring full expression to what they hope to accomplish in the preaching event."³³ Dr. Larue further says, "African-Americans know intuitively that there has to be a certain

³³ LaRue, Cleophus J. More Power in the Pulpit. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2009.

energy and conviction to the spoken word when proclaiming the gospel. Ultimately their ability to evoke, empower, challenge, and change comes not through that which they have written but through the spoken word-through articulated sound.” So, there is a prophetic request to use our voices to get God’s attention.

History tells us from the Exodus story that when the Hebrew slaves cried out to God, He heard their cry and sent them a deliverer, Moses. The crisis of segregation, racism, and discrimination in the 1950’s caused African-Americans to cry out with their voices and God responded by sending Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. God used Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to lead a movement to dismantle systemic racism in America. I am convinced that since humankind is made in the image of God and that God breathed life into all of us then God is always present. The prophet says when we plead our case to God allow the hills to hear our voice. In order for there to be change then our voices have to be heard in our local churches, our state, and in our Convention. In order for there to be a beginning of justice then a request has to be made. Perhaps in our local ministries and communities we should all come together and use our collective voices to cry out to God? Sometimes when we cry out to God we give room for the Holy Spirit to work on and through the people to bring about change in a place where change has been non-existent. In Psalm 77:1 the psalmist cries out to God for help and God hears the psalmist and guides the psalmist by the hand. It is now 2020 and women clergy continue to be pushed to the margins of leadership in the National Baptist Convention USA and it is time for us to cry out to God on their behalf. If justice is to be done then we have to learn how to act. We have to do something. When something is just wrong

then we have to cry out God to be present and active in bringing a solution to an unjust and disheartening situation.

After we make a request to God, then we have to wait on a response from God. According to Micah 6:2-5 the children of Israel had found themselves in a place of disobedience to God. God had delivered them out of slavery and brought them into the promise land that was flowing with milk and honey. The children of Israel were living a life that was pleasing in the sight of God until they decided to reject God. Since they rejected God; God allowed them to be punished because of their iniquity against God, but God never left them alone. Even though they had turned their back on God, His grace was always present when the children of Israel turned back to God. What is interesting to me about this text is that there is a sense of repentance that must take place in order for justice to continue to manifest in the lives of God's people. Perhaps as my church comes together to pray we must also ask God to forgive us for the injustices and oppressive acts we may have committed throughout our journey. Sometimes we think that it's always other people who do things that are considered wrong or just not right, but before we can do justice in the lives of other people we have to take a look in the mirror at ourselves. What is our theology when it comes to children leading and serving in the church? What is our theology when it comes to having women deacons in the church? These are just some questions that I continue to consider while serving and doing this kind of work. The text says in Micah 6, "Hear O you mountains, the Lord's complaint, and your strong foundations of the earth: For the Lord has a complaint against the people. How can we expect to make change in the National Baptist Convention when we refuse to make spiritual and physical

changes in the local church? God says I will bring about justice as long as the people are committed to do my work.

Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly is the mantra that I am focused to follow, but perhaps I have to repent for some sins that I have done in the sight of God. I believe we all have some sins that we want God to make clean. But what is wonderful about Micah's writing is that God redeems God's people. We are God's people who God loves unconditionally so if God loves all of us unconditionally before we reject anyone regardless of race, creed, sexuality, and or gender we should start with a response of love. I believe that our theology should always be evolving. F. Johnson Willis says, "We should have a deliberative theology. It is a theology that we intentionally craft as we grow and mature spiritually. By intentionally developing our own theological perspective, we are forced to grapple with the complexities and messiness that embedded theology too often ignores. The deliberative process forces us to live our faith, listen for the voices and experiences of the unheard."³⁴ This can become difficult because I have to look at my own shortcomings and see that the extraordinary power that we have does not come from us, it comes from God. Second Corinthian 4:7 reads, "But we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." It is mind boggling that while being entrusted by God with the daunting responsibility to pastor and to preach, I am faced everyday with my own humanness. These verses help me to remember that God has made me perfect for God's purposes. It is insane that God runs the risk that the world will come to know God

³⁴ Johnson, F. Willis. Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community.

through all of my imperfections. This is humbling and it authenticates my heart and mind to ask God for forgiveness. Sometimes we try to figure out what it is we need forgiveness from. We know and at other times we don't know. But whatever the case I believe forgiveness and reconciliation with God is always something I should strive towards. I am not perfect but I thank God that God says in Psalms 139:14, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

According to Genesis, Chapter 1, God made male and female and called them good. Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". The prophet Joel 2:28 says, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." The same Word that intimidates me in my weakness affirms me through God's Word and empowers me to empower others. Furthermore, God wants me to do what is right in a world that is filled with so much hate and injustice towards anyone and any group. I am so grateful that God uses people who have frailties and failures to do God's perfect work. God does not work around my frailties but God works through them. Therefore, I ask that God transform me and others around me to be a pastor and people that affirms women clergy not just in the National Baptist Convention but everywhere where there is injustice against the calling and leadership qualities of women in ministry. Furthermore, I pray that as God responds to me and others, that He allows me to receive what He wants me to have through the power of the Holy Ghost. God has affirmed women and men since the beginning of the biblical narratives and God affirms God's Word through the prophet Micah that we have a continued responsibility to carry out the assignment that God has placed in our hands.

I don't ever want to cause harm to anyone serving in the "kin-dom" of God and as an African-American who has been historically oppressed by White colonialism in the United States I think it is imperative that I do not practice those same hateful principles as it pertains to women clergy. Jacquelyn Grant's essay "Black Theology and the Black Woman," examined the invisibility of black women in black theology, arguing that black women cannot continue to be treated as if they were invisible creatures who are on the outside looking into the theological enterprise.³⁵ If there is going to be justice then my African-American male pastors and colleagues who are anti-racists must also be committed to anti-patriarchy. In 2002 I attended for the first time the Hampton Ministers Conference located in Hampton Virginia. It was predominantly all male pastors and they had just elected their first female president. As I walked into the conference many of the male pastors walked out of the conference because they did not agree with the election of a female. But there were men and women who stood together to ensure that the conference would be a place that would honor male and female clergy. Another example is when a male pastor friend of mine was rejected by his association of churches because he accepted women as female clergy. He said, "I refuse to get in the way of what God is doing in the life of the church." As God responds to us in our failures then it is our responsibility to respond in faith back to God. I have discovered that it is hard to respond to God when you have a sin issue. "Sin is anything that encroaches upon, impedes, or ignores another's inalienable rights and nature to be not only free but also whole and alive. Injustice

³⁵ Grant, Jacquelyn: Black Theology and the Black Woman: A Critical Essay. 1979

and inequalities of any make or model are sin.”³⁶ Thus another female clergy friend of mine was told to leave her church because her calling to ministry was not going to be acknowledged. She was hurt and upset but she did not give up on her ministry. She did not leave the church but stayed and continued to be faithful to God and the church. Approximately a few years later she was given the opportunity to preach by the same pastor who rejected her in the past. She said, “I will not hold on to the past because God’s justice has prevailed in my life.” When people hurt us we cannot hold onto hate or it will have the ability to take over us and control us to the point that we might lose our own consciousness. We may forget who we are as one of God’s children who have been called to restore, renew, and regenerate those who have been oppressed, marginalized, and disenfranchised. I have to stand with my sister clergy to restore, renew, and regenerate the minds of my fellow male pastors who have allowed a patriarchal and conservative approach to scripture cause them to continue to be insensitive to the very fact that God calls and uses women for God’s service for the “kin-dom of God.

The final thing I see in this passage from Micah 6:6-8 is that there must be a recommitment to God. The prophet asks the question, “What does God require of me?” Shall I bring God burned offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give up my children because of the faults that I have made before the Lord? God then responds to humankind by saying do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God. God has made it

³⁶ Johnson, F. Willis. *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017.

plain how we should live. God is looking for men and women to do what is fair and just to our neighbor. God wants us to be compassionate and to be totally submissive and committed to God. God wants us to stay committed to doing justice while being compassionate to the beloved community with a fervent commitment to God. My theological framework is to have a recommitment to this work of doing justice alongside my sister colleagues who are well deserving to lead in the NBCI. I know whoever reads this work may ask the question, "So, what?" Doing justice should create a safe and sacred space that honors women clergy instead of tearing them down. As an African-American male pastor I recognize the need for partnership with my fellow African-American women clergy and scholars who are crucial for church vitality and empowering theological curricula. My commitment to interpreting scripture focuses on the plight of and prospects of women. My commitment to God's work is to work hand and hand with women clergy having a theological lens that is open to an ever open door that has a growing desire to forge dialogue and collaboration between both men and women. I am passionate about this work to the point that I get emotional as I watch African-American women continue to get dismissed by their male colleagues at NBCI. I've watched two personal colleagues of mine, the first African-American female moderator of the state of New Jersey and the first African-American female state president of the Baptist Convention of New Jersey be elevated to lead their respective ministries in the state which is a great honor. But once they went to the National Baptist Convention to represent New Jersey they were not even recognized by the leadership team which is composed of all men. They were not surprised that they did not receive any recognition from the National Baptist Convention leadership, but it did not stop them from their commitment of serving God and the community. For years this kind of response has taken place and there has been a great decline in membership to the NBCI. I believe that the NBCI

will continue to decline and ultimately fade away unless there is a radical change of justice that is filled with love and compassion while humbly walking with God.

I have watched my church grow from being a sacred place that oppressed women's gifts in pastoral leadership to a place that is now committed and recommitted to empower women clergy at Mt. Zion and beyond. I am very proud of this fact to see my wife who is a preacher flourishing and doing well in her ministry which gives me great joy. It was not easy trying to get people to use their personal lens to view scripture with an open mind that allows the Holy Spirit to come in and speak to our hearts. But through much prayer and open and honest conversation change came about. I know that some of my fellow brothers may not agree with me or quite frankly are upset will distance themselves from me because of my stance on women clergy. I am okay with it as long as God's justice is manifested in the lives of God's people.

Chapter 4 - Research Data Achieved
Questionnaire for African-American Clergy/Pastors

The purpose of this research is to have the local church to be used as a conduit to introduce conversations and to receive feedback on the possibilities of change coming in the near future. My goal is to broaden this work and to bring about transformation and full partnership with African-American women called by God to full pastoral ministry and leadership roles. Ten ministers took part in this study. Five male and five female ministers respectively were used in this study. Questions Approved by my Academic Advisor Dr. Susan Kendall

Respondent #1(Female Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach?
A lack of female mentorship delayed my call to preach.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? Transformational biblical preaching and prayer can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? I believe male pastors fear the notion of females being able to pastor and lead a church.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained?
The obstacles that hindered me were unfounded excuses of others with the power to move me forward through the ordination process as to why I may not be ready to be ordained.
5. How old are you? 43
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? No. I was born and raised in the African-Methodist Episcopal Church
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I am not a pastor and have never been told that I would not pastor a church
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I am not a pastor but I have been asked to consider pastoring a church

9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: No
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: I've never attended the National Baptist Convention USA. Incorporated.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? I am a member of the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated.
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? I will have to attend regularly for an extended period of time before I can make recommendations regarding the same.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? It is important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention to remain relevant.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I feel whatever the Convention has to offer has to be relevant to me, my family and community.
15. Do you think "Male" clergy are afraid of seeing "Female" clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: Yes. With regard to historically black churches, the church has traditionally been a place where Black men can serve in positions with power and respect. Female clergy pose a threat to this position. Besides the home, where else can Black men serve and be treated with respect, attention, and adoration
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders "Female clergy" from being in positions of power? Women are still expected to serve in the home as their first and major priority. Women have so many roles which causes me to consider these questions when thinking about the ethical dilemmas that hinder female clergy. Does pastoring conflict with this priority? Is it okay for the female clergy to visit men who are sick, counsel men who are struggling in their marriage, baptize men in the baptismal pool and give hugs? Will the female clergy be viewed as weak if she cries in the pulpit? Can the female clergy still be the emotional being? Is the spouse of the female clergy okay with being the "First Man" since "First Lady" is so common and readily acceptable?

Respondent #2 (Female Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? I was the first restriction in delaying my call to ministry. I was followed by restrictions from my father who vehemently suggested that I stay away from the preaching ministry. My father didn't want me to go through the scrutiny he saw other female preachers experience.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? I believe male pastors need to understand female pastors are working alongside them and not against them. We all have a calling to fulfill.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? I believe male pastors reject the notion of female pastors because they see us as emotional and weak. Male pastors have dominated the church in power and leadership. It's just hard to accept change.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? Fortunately I did not have any hindrances. The pastor I was serving at the time recommended me for ordination. I received the documentation that was necessary for ordination, sought out a mentor and completed the process.
5. How old are you? 49
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? No, I have not been Baptist all of my life. I have served in the Pentecostal church as well.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I was told I would not be considered for Youth Pastor many years ago because I was female and I didn't have a doctorate degree.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) Yes there were many times as an associate minister my pastor expressed that one day I would pastor a church. I was told that there would be obstacles in my way but my pastor believed that God would create the space where I would pastor God's people.

9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: No I have not held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: Sometimes I attend the National Baptist Convention USA Inc.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? Yes
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? I would have more relevant classes as opposed to general worship services that would speak to transformational leadership in the Convention and in our local churches.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? The methods of ministry are always changing and we need to be prepared to do ministry in our churches and communities.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I've only been attending for a short time however I think the inclusion of women needs to be something that's definitely addressed.
15. Do you think "Male" clergy are afraid of seeing "Female" clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: Yes I do because they think women want to "take over" when most women just want to serve and be accepted in the role God has called them to.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders "Female clergy" from being in positions of power? Female clergy are considered to be good as teachers, stewards, missionaries, but not perceived as having the authority to lead because of gender. Female clergy are still in some aspects viewed as a weaker link. In our society some still believe that only men can lead and possess power.

Respondent #3 (Female Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? I did not have any obstructions that delayed my call to preach.

2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? One transformational factor I believe to shift pastors' view is to understand the time in which we live. Many male pastors and their churches are merely behind the times or have been unduly influenced by a "patriarchal" society. Another transformational factor is for male pastors to really study the Bible and the true content of scripture. Often time's scripture is taken out of context to support misinformed views and tainted theologies. A final transformative factor is relationship. We all must have a relationship with the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit can give us the wisdom and knowledge that we need to discern the call. If male pastors would spend time and formulate a relationship with the Holy Spirit, then the women who they are leading would be able to discern and understand the calling of the women and what they have been chosen to do.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? I believe that the rejection of the notion of females pastoring and leading a church by male pastors is widely due to their exposure and experiences. Depending on how they were raised and who raised them will determine their understanding concerning the topic/notion. Many who don't believe were raised in a tradition/denomination that taught them is not correct. They really have no true understanding or have studied to find enough evidence to make their notion valid. For me I believe that many have not taken the time to explore a notion that seems to be passed down from generation/pastor.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? Age. I was the youngest of my class to receive both of my ordination orders. Many times people looked at my age and not my experience or my call.
5. How old are you? 42
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? I have not been Baptist all my life. I am also affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Church of God In Christ.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) No, however I was supported to learn everything that I needed to become an effective pastor.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I was not told necessarily that I would pastor however I was groomed into the pastorate. In the AME church pastors are made. Therefore we are required to go to school to become a life-long learner, do the work of missions, honor the work of the

church, attend to sheep and be reflective in what we are doing to make sure that we are meeting the needs of what we have been called to and chosen for.

9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: I have not held a leadership role in the Baptist Convention.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: I have not attended the National Baptist Convention.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? No, I am not a member of the National Baptist Convention.
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? I would develop areas/ministries where women can serve as leaders. Then I would provide women pastors opportunities to work in additional gifts besides shepherding and administration in their local body. Finally I would create a space for women leaders to succeed by including women pastors in the leadership and decision making process.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? Since it remains to be the place where the church universal comes to receive guidance and direction it is necessary for this entity to be transformative if we would like to see the denomination grow and live.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? The Respondent did not answer this question.
15. Do you think “Male” clergy are afraid of seeing “Female” clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: To an extent, I think so. I think that some men will never grow beyond the fact of having a female lead them. Some men just can’t take having a female lead them anywhere. I think that it is notions/judgment like that which causes fear to enter the heart of the male pastors and cause them to be fearful of letting women lead.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders “Female clergy” from being in positions of power? The ethical dilemmas I believe that are in play are societal dilemmas where women are still degraded and treated as less than a man. Access to information would be other dilemmas that I would say is plaguing us as “female clergy.” We do not study enough to show ourselves effective. This hinders us because we do not show forth our best selves at times and therefore our male counterparts judge us and determine our worthiness based on the lack thereof. We

have to do much more with our study time. Finally, personal friendships would be the last dilemma to mention. I think at times we as females are able to separate our personal relationships from our professional relationships. This hinders us when it comes down to movement to higher levels because it creates a trust factor. As female clergy we must do better with using wisdom and knowing when a relationship is supposed to be personal or when it is only professional.

Respondent #4 (Female Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? I did not have any obstructions to hinder my call to preach.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? The Respondent did not answer the question.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? The Respondent did not answer the question.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? The Respondent did not answer the question.
5. How old are you? 61
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? Yes I have been Baptist all of my life.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I accepted my call and I was informed that I should not expect to be ordained because ordination was done when individuals are called to pastor. I was also told that Baptist churches will not call a female to pastor a congregation.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) The Respondent did not answer the question
9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: I am currently the state president of the

United Missionary Baptist of Convention of New Jersey and the 2nd Vice Moderator of the North Jersey District Missionary Baptist Association.

10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: I have attended only one time.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? Yes I am a member of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc.
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? The Respondent did not answer the question.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? The Respondent did not answer the question.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I currently have mixed feelings about the National Baptist Convention. I appreciate the Convention's work when it comes to serving in the community and doing foreign missions. But I am displeased with the Convention's ineptitude when it comes to mentoring female leadership within the Convention's setting.
15. Do you think "Male" clergy are afraid of seeing "Female" clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: I have no comment about this question. I think you should ask male clergy.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders "Female clergy" from being in positions of power? I don't think there is an ethical dilemma that hinders female clergy. I think the dilemma is more social and political when it comes to females advancing positions of power.

Respondent #5 (Female Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? Initially I was working in corporate America and making good money and I was enjoying that lifestyle and knew it would be a drastic change.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about

justice and community in the church? I think the main thing is to be faithful yet assertive because in Baptist polity pastors get to decide when it's time to bring about a new preacher. If it seems like you are pushing your own agenda too much that only delays your process. I think it's best to be faithful, prayerful, committed, and be present just doing the work of ministry. I say being patient and persistent is the key. It is more open in the northeast as opposed to the midwest and the south in regards to women preachers. It is interesting that a man who knows what he wants is pastoral, a woman is considered bossy. It takes a much longer time to establish relationships so you have to be patient.

3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? Many male pastors lack of biblical understanding reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church. One transformative factor that can help transform male pastors' rejection of females is being educated in the biblical text. When people begin to understand that the text was written in a certain time, within a certain culture there can be change within a context. Another transformative factor is having a strong prayer life which allows room for the Holy Spirit to do the Holy Spirit's work in a particular setting.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? I was the obstacle. I can be impatient. I thought it was very unfair that I was in seminary with a couple brothers from the same church. I graduated with honors and before them and they got ordained while I watched. That was hurtful, I spoke about it, and I believe because I said something it delayed me another year. It's hard to get people to wrap their minds around something when it can actually be a woman.
5. How old are you? 54
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? Not really! I was Presbyterian for about 6 years. The Sunday school classes were very informative with a chance to ask many questions.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I was not explicitly told I would not pastor. I was encouraged to bloom where I was planted and aspire to be someone's executive minister. It would be difficult to pastor. One of things I told myself is that I did not see too many healthy churches with female pastors. I thank God that things are changing that we have churches with men and women that have female pastors. But the models that I had seen with female pastors were mostly female. Most churches have more women than men anyway but these churches were even more so.

8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) Yes I have been told by women that I would pastor. Early on in my ministry it was just one male. Then I was told that I need to go start at a small church and work your way up. That to me is part of the misogyny in the National Baptist Convention. Some guys because they have a penis can be candidates for “nice” churches, and then I with all of my qualifications should go for something small because I am a woman.
9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: No: I also reached out to the state president and have not received a response.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: Sometimes: I find it very disappointing that in the 21st century there are no women in leadership in the National Baptist Convention. And there are no women on any of the preaching platforms.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? Yes
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? I think it should have younger leaders and females. It should not be an all-male bastion. Men are preaching at the Women’s Auxiliary session. I think we need to survey member churches when it comes to this issue based upon what happens in our local churches compared to the Convention. There is a big difference which does not make sense. I think the men who are buying into this notion makes it a problem.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? If male pastors who honor female pastors in the local church take the same stance at the National level then that can bring about perpetual change. No one is pushing because they will have to rock the boat which may cause a loss in engagements, fellowships, and possible friendships with other male pastors and their churches.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I am saddened to some degree that the Convention is becoming extinct. Every time I attend it is grayer and smaller. To me it is like many churches that are changing and keeping up with the times so you become irrelevant. We are not big on social justice especially with everything that is happening to Black people in America.

15. Do you think “Male” clergy are afraid of seeing “Female” clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: I don’t think male clergy are aware that they are afraid. I don’t think anyone will ever use the word afraid but the challenge is with all the years that the churches are predominantly women would unite men could be left out on the cold or on the side. I think what has been done to minorities has been done to women in the church. As long as women bicker against each other men will continue to maintain that power.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders “Female clergy” from being in positions of power? There are a few: 1. Issues of Sexuality 2. The male pastor may have to give up some things if a female comes into a position of power. The invisibility of black women in the church. We become invisible even when we occupy an office because of its cognitive dissonance. We do not see or recognize women in these roles.

Respondent #6 (Male Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach?
There were none in my answering the call except my pastor. He challenged me to see if I had the grit for ministry. When I expressed my calling to preach, he asked me, “What is preaching?” I gave my answer and he said “Wrong,” and sent me to study. He then began to speak to me differently and treat me like a preacher though he never gave me a date to do my initial sermon nor any public acknowledgement. Ultimately after I spoke on the topic of salvation on a platform service, he said, “Here’s your date!”
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? I believe it starts with men. I believe that centuries of patriarchy have created systems of oppression in churches and siloes of biases that make it challenging for women to engage in ministry. I think honest conversation about our biases have to be undertaken by men who are not afraid to push the envelope and who do not fear some threats of isolation because they stand for justice. I think that honest discussions about our views of gender-based authority in light of biblical text is another factor. Many of the Torah texts as well as the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline texts are used to support and reinforce centuries of oppression. I think understanding male pastoral leadership and how we see ourselves on the liberal vs. literal spectrum would assist with bringing justice. Finally, I also believe that lay women (non-preachers) have to look internally at themselves as I have found some of the biggest opponents of female clergy and supporters of male clergy are lay women. I have heard a number of lay women speak vehemently against female leadership, citing everything from the Bible to the emotionalism of women to the presence of the menstrual cycle making women unclean for church leadership.

3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? Most male pastors distance themselves from females being called into ministry based on the biblical texts such as Timothy and Titus. The teaching is that if women are to be silent and can't have authority over a man, then how can they pastor?
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? There were no obstacles that hindered my path towards being ordained.
5. How old are you? 43
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? I have been Baptist all of my life. I will continue to live as a Baptist and I will die as a Baptist.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I have never been told that I would not pastor a church.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) Yes I have been told by many males and females that I would pastor a church. The rationale usually fell along the reasons that I am a natural leader, love people, love God, and a good preacher.
9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: Yes I am currently the state director of Christian Education. My responsibilities include building the capacity for Christian Education at the local district and church levels. I am responsible for developing classes at the semi-annual sessions, as well as coordinating a leaders and worker's conference. I am also the Co-Director of Summer Assembly Youth Development, a week long retreat for teenagers designed to develop their talents and inherent leadership skills while also providing them with an uplifting spiritual experience that's transformative empowering, as well as one that equips them to lead change in their local churches.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: I sometimes attend the National Baptist Convention and on occasion I am asked to serve and preach at the Convention.

11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? Yes I am a member of the National Baptist Convention.
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? I would create relevant classes that teach strategies that are transferable to churches across diverse demographics. I would also have younger and more inclusive leadership in all departments. Finally I would make changes to the mode of worship from liturgy to worship song selections, more resources for churches, and financial literacy.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? It's the largest denomination of African-Americans across the country. If the Convention dies it impacts millions of church goers across the land.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? Not great. I don't think the tiers of leadership are willing to engage in change. It has been too many years of the same methods of ministry without any intentions of a transformational shift within the Convention.
15. Do you think "Male" clergy are afraid of seeing "Female" clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: Yes. There is a certain ethic we see in women in the Black church, that is often absent from men. I think it makes many men more uncomfortable.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders "Female clergy" from being in positions of power? I honestly don't feel there is one. I feel that we have centuries of sexism to unpack. If we can do it, it will allow for more equitable opportunities for women. I support women leadership, but I also strive to recognize those parts of me that resist it. I work on them because I am committed to not being an oppressor. I think if men take that mentality, things will get better.

Respondent #7 (Male Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? There really were no restrictions, obstructions. I felt I was not ready and was comfortable directing the church choirs, and serving as the church administrator. That was good enough for me, but God did not allow me to stay comfortable for long.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about

justice and community in the church? The first factor is to continue to see that the church is female dominated. In every black church in America you see at least 80% female in my opinion. So that could mean that they raise the most money, make most of the decisions as lay members, and they are the ones who compel others to come so that the local churches can grow. Females are even taking the step now to further their education. Many female pastors and ministers have enrolled in seminary training, leadership courses and they are getting tools to help enhance their presence in the church. I believe that they are literally moving to the forefront to becoming the leaders of the church that God has sanctioned them to be.

3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? I believe male pastors reject the notion because of traditional boundaries that have been placed in their minds for years. I believe that some of those traditional boundaries come from misinterpretation of scripture, using certain verses of scripture of context, and also the fear of losing the presence of masculinity in the church.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? I had no obstacles hindering me from being ordained.
5. How old are you? 40
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? I have not been Baptist all of my life. I was born into the Pentecostal Church. A denomination where my maternal side of the family is heavily involved which is called the Church of Christ Disciples of Christ.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I have never been told that I would not pastor a church.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) Yes. As a child I was very involved in the church and loved going to worship services with my grandmother. The worship service would spill over into our home. I was known to “play” church with my cousins and I always had to be the Pastor! No one could preach but me. At that point my cousins would say I would be a great pastor when I grow up. My grandmother who is a great woman of faith would tell me that there was something different about me and that the Lord’s hand was on me from the womb and I would spread the gospel. Others would suggest it because of the love I had to hear other preachers preach.

9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: Yes I have a role in the Progressive Baptist Convention. I served as the Youth President of the state of New Jersey and the Eastern Region of the Progressive Baptist Convention. I was the youngest person to hold these offices and had not been called to pastor a church at the time.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: Sometimes I attend the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? Yes
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? The need for inclusiveness needs to take place immediately within the Convention in order for there to be transformative leadership. I also agree that there should be a necessary push that all humankind use all the gifts that God has given to the body and not be looked as non-Baptist. Finally I would also suggest more ministry that reflects a more postmodern approach.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? It is important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention because people are losing interest in our denomination. They are going to Non-Denominational and charismatic churches who are not afraid to take a risk and move forward aggressively with change.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I feel that the Convention needs a lot of help. It should be more than a time of fellowship, but a time of mentorship, partnership, and impartation. As a Baptist I should not have to attend any other conferences because I should be able to get what I need from the Convention.
15. Do you think “Male” clergy are afraid of seeing “Female” clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: Yes. I believe a lot of male pastors are afraid of female clergy being in positions of power because it messes with their ego. I believe it makes some feel that they cannot dominate and or be in charge just because they have a penis.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders “Female clergy” from being in positions of power? I believe some ethical dilemmas that hinder female clergy are that they do not

want to have to do things such as sleep their way into a position, or lose sight of who God called them to be to appease someone else's ego.

Respondent #8 (Male Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? The Respondent did not answer.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? The Respondent did not answer.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? The Respondent did not answer.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? The Respondent did not answer.
5. How old are you? The Respondent did not answer.
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? The Respondent did not answer.
7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) The Respondent did not answer.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) The Respondent did not answer.
9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: The Respondent did not answer.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: The Respondent did not answer.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? The Respondent did not answer.

12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? The Respondent did not answer.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? The Respondent did not answer.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? The Respondent did not answer.
15. Do you think “Male” clergy are afraid of seeing “Female” clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: The Respondent did not answer.
16. 4. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders “Female clergy” from being in positions of power? The Respondent did not answer.

Respondent #9 (Male Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? I had no obstructions or restrictions that delayed me from answering my call to preach.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? I would say adjusting male pastor’s lens from a historical patriarchal stance to a more inclusive lens that is helpful, hopeful, and not harmful.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? Many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead a church because they have a strict conservative approach to scripture.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? I had no obstacles that hindered me from being ordained.
5. How old are you? 54
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? I have been Baptist all of my life.

7. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I have never been told that I would not pastor a church.
8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) Yes I was told that I was a born leader called by God to lead God's people and to spread the gospel.
9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: I am the Moderator of the North Jersey District Missionary Baptist Association. My role is to lead a group of 70 churches that are joined together to fellowship with each other, provide education, economic development, mission projects, develop leaders of all ages and genders to impact this state and the nation at large.
10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: I do not attend the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated.
11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? I am not a member of the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated.
12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? I would look to make the Convention a more relevant Convention that addresses this present age in particular the social ills of injustice that continues to affect this society.
13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? Transformative leadership is important because it creates a sacred space so that younger generations will feel welcome, and that they can lead and be a valued piece in the building and future of the Convention.
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I feel that the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated is a dying institution that is in dire need of relevancy.

15. Do you think “Male” clergy are afraid of seeing “Female” clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: Yes I think they are afraid of the possibility of losing their position of power if women have the opportunity to move into these positions.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders “Female clergy” from being in positions of power? I think there is an ethical dilemma of male sexism that has to be changed in order to bring about change in justice regarding female clergy. Otherwise I believe this dilemma will continue to manifest in the Convention.

Respondent #10 (Male Minister)

1. What obstructions or restrictions delayed you from answering the call to preach? The obstructions or restrictions that delayed me from answering the call to preach was me. I felt inadequate because I was only 13 so I did not answer the call until I was 21. My pastor was very supportive of me before and after I answered the call to preach. I’ve been in ministry 44 years and 41 of those years pastoring.
2. What are some of the transformative factors that can be used to shift male pastors from oppressing and discriminating against female pastors which could bring about justice and community in the church? I think I was one of the pioneering pastors that recognized my first daughter in ministry. She happens to pastor a Presbyterian church. She was licensed in the 1980’s and ordained in the 90’s. My transformations came through studying the scriptures and by hearing the preaching and prophetic ministry of a woman that really transformed my life and my ministry.
3. Why do so many male pastors reject the notion that females can pastor and lead the church? I think tradition. It’s not scripture. No biblical basis. It has everything with intimidation with women being equal to men. It is also the negativity of women that some women are defiant and negative towards men.
4. What obstacles if any hindered you during your path towards being ordained? There were no obstacles that hindered me towards being ordained.
5. How old are you? 72
6. Have you been Baptist all of your life? If not please list any other Christian denomination you may have been affiliated with? I have been Baptist all of my life.

7. 9. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you would not pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) I have always been encouraged to pastor and to serve God's church.

8. Although you are a pastor have you ever been told that you will pastor a church? If yes please explain: (Be Specific) Yes. I was told I would pastor a church. I didn't have the aspirations to pastor, but God opened the door for me to pastor. I was the total opposite of my pastor but he groomed me to pastor anyway.

9. Have you ever held a leadership role on the state level of the Baptist Convention? If yes please explain your role and position: I served as General Secretary in the state Convention of New Jersey. My roles were to administrate and to be the executive minister over 460 churches in the state of New Jersey. I was over 400-600 thousand black Baptists. I represented our churches at the National Baptist Convention.

10. Do you attend the National Baptist Convention Annual Session? Every year, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, or Never: I serve on the Board of Directors overseeing the Northeast Region so I am always in attendance.

11. Are you a member of the National Baptist Convention? I am a member of the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated.

12. What changes would you make in the National Baptist Convention that will make it a Convention that represents community and transformative leadership? The problem with the Convention is that it is stuck in tradition. It is not a 21st century Convention. Many of us who are 20th century preachers trying to exist in the 21st century realize if we do not change our Convention to address the millennial generation and the generation between baby boomers and millennials our churches will lose their influences in society. Therefore the changes that should be made is that the leadership should be seeking younger leadership that should be a part of the board of directors. There is no one on the board that is about 200 members that is under the age of 50. There are no females on the board. The Convention has suppressed young preachers and women who make up a large population of the Convention. Thus they are producing an angry population of people who would like to make a difference in the Convention. Within the next 10 years you will see an irrelevant Convention that is available as a place for only fellowship. It is not recognizing 21st century issues that need to speak to the ills of society. The Convention has to change or it will die. Major female preachers are in the cities that the Convention convenes and are never considered to be a part of the planning committee or an outlet.

13. Why is it important to have transformative leadership in the National Baptist Convention? It is important to have transformative leadership so that it will address the needs of the local churches. When you do not fulfill the purpose of the Convention and association to do greater work in mission, education, and fellowship is why there needs to be transformative leadership. What we cannot do individually we can do collectively. These things are not pushed by the leadership!
14. Moving forward, how do you feel about the Convention? I believe it has to awaken. Young pastors will have to be courageous in pushing leadership to engage in transformative leadership so that it may become a relevant Convention in the 21st century.
15. Do you think “Male” clergy are afraid of seeing “Female” clergy in positions of power? If yes please explain: Yes. It is clear as the nose is on your face. If you know who you are then you don’t have to be intimidated by someone else. If you don’t know that then anything can intimidate you.
16. What is the ethical dilemma that hinders “Female clergy” from being in positions of power? I feel that some women think they have to compete with men on their level. I suggest that women be the women that God has called you to be.

Chapter 5 - Data Research Results

In this chapter I will discuss the results that I found from the questionnaires that were posed to the 10 pastors that participated in this study. Here is how I began the study. I sent out information via email or social media to local Baptist churches in the local area and in the local district churches of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Dover, NJ. The churches who responded had female and male leadership. I was not aware if these churches were for, or against having female leadership in the NBCI. My goal was to have both perspectives in order to address the issue more effectively. I gave them thirty days to respond to the documents that provided them with the information for the study, and where to sign if they wanted to participate. I used the first ten, signed questionnaires that were received (from five female pastors and five male pastors). I was excited about this study because I really did not know how these men and women were going to respond. My belief was that this group of pastors would have a lens to see that change is necessary for the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated to move forward in the twenty-first century.

Thus I was able to find three major themes from the questionnaires received from the respondents. The first theme was whether the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated is a relevant institution or not. The second theme focused on fear of the unknown and the effects that it has on NBCI. Finally the third theme was based on the authority that scripture has regarding the decision making of the NBCI.

The first thing I found from the questionnaires is that the NBCI is not a relevant convention. 90% of the respondents in the questionnaire stated that the National Baptist Convention USA

Incorporated will die if it does become a relevant convention that addresses the social ills of society, young people and in particular women in ministry. Relevancy is defined to mean the quality or state of being closely connected, or appropriate at hand. Thus ask the question “Is the National Baptist Convention relevant and what can Mt. Zion do to bring about community and justice as it pertains to women preachers as becoming leaders in the Convention?”³⁷

I was hoping to find some data that will give me tangible evidence on the possibility of seeing change in the NBCI Incorporated. My hope was that the evidence found would be the beginning shift that would be necessary to bring about change in the NBCI. The NCBI was created to speak to the tenants of Christianity and what Jesus stood for while living on this Earth and to carry out his mission. According to Luke 4:18 Jesus' mission is to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to those in bondage, to give sight to those who are in darkness, and to free those who are oppressed. The data from the questionnaire suggests a relevant change needs to happen and needs to be pushed forward. There is a theological stance that is prevalent within the National Baptist Convention that is more concerned with being Baptist than it is with being a Christian. I will talk more about this in my final chapter.

The Nelson’s Guide chart below is a previous look of what the NBCI population looked like taken from the numbers listed from 2015. According to the NBCI website there are approximately eight million National Baptists in the United States with 70% of that population being women. There is not a lot of research that is available regarding the Baptist population but as you review the

³⁷ Taylor, G. C. The Scarlet Thread. Elgin, IL. Progressive Baptist Publishing House 1981.

charts below you will see a decline in church membership based upon oppressive systems that cause people to not want to be a part of an “organized religion.”³⁸

al Baptist Population	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Population	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
e Population	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

Nelson’s Guide to Denominations. 2007-Key Population Square Represents Pop. Of 1Million

These numbers show what most of the churches in the United States are seeing on a weekly basis. The Convention continues to strive based upon the large population of women continuing to show up at these meetings. According to Christianity Today there has been a decline in attendance at the NBCI because women are getting tired of not seeing a representation of leadership that “looks” like them.³⁹ But it also says that since women continue to support the convention the male leadership are more inclined not to change to support women clergy.

Women clergy do not have a voice at the National Baptist Convention and its shaming because many of the local churches that the women attend in their home states recognize and acknowledge women as pastors and leaders. This illustrates that the data received from the

³⁸ Furr, G. A., & Eds. Ties That Binds; Life Together in the Baptist Vision. Macon, GA 1994.

³⁹ Christianity Today Magazine. Carol Stream, IL 2017

questionnaire confirms that women are called by God just as the men. Therefore, not only will the Convention be losing women clergy, but also other women who are not preachers that have been attending the Convention for many years.

According to Pew Research shows the religious landscape of what is currently transpiring amongst the Christian Church. It is indicative of the decline that is currently happening with the National Baptist Convention. According to the Pew Research Center, Americans were asked about their religion in 2018 and 2019 and 65% of them described themselves as Christians. This is a 12% decline from the previous decade. There is a steady decline in the Christian church and what is currently taking place in the NBCI. The word relevant in the case results of this study says that the NBCI is becoming an irrelevant institution that is consistent with a patriarchal theological ethic that mimics its founding “fathers” from the late 19th century under the leadership of Dr. E.C. Morris.⁴⁰ I don’t think changing the perspective on women clergy is enough to stop the decline in the NBCI, but I think it helps. Acknowledging that the NBCI will have female leadership will bring the possibility of growth to the convention. Furthermore creating meaningful places to serve where people feel like they are contributing and not just consuming are ways to grow a church and a convention.

All questionnaire respondents, with the exception of one, answered one of the questions by stating that the NBCI needs to become a relevant institution that meets the needs of all humankind. This is important because the Convention was a place that convened based upon a need for autonomy

⁴⁰ Mullins, E. Baptist Beliefs. Valley Forge, PA. Judson Press 1925.

from the national stages of predominantly white Baptist churches.⁴¹ “Until 1895, the Negro churches in America were observed and handled as Home Missions. African-Americans never received respect, flexibility or the autonomy that was required as a respectable National Baptist organization and Convention. Missions and evangelism is the fire that keeps the Convention burning even though it began as an advocate for social equality.”⁴²

The fervent desire and thrust for the Convention was to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and do missionary work whether it was at home or on foreign soil. The people worked together towards their mission but tension began to rise because of a theological stance with the National Baptist Convention participation in the civil rights movement. The leadership decided that the Convention had no need to fight against what was going on in America. The opinion of the NBCI was that African-Americans should remain neutral from being involved in anything regarding the civil rights era of the 1960’s. The Convention was forging its own path and forgetting the tenants of faith that made it a relevant Convention in the first place.⁴³

One of the former presidents of the NBCI by the name of Rev. J.H Jackson tried to stay true to why NBCI came into existence. He stood on the theological stance that “Our idea of God inspires

⁴¹ Knight, A. R. *The New Life: A Baptist Perspective*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 1993.

⁴² Knight, A. R. *The New Life: A Baptist Perspective*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 1993.

⁴³ Washington, J. M. *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power*. Mercer University Press 1986.

us to work for the establishment of social justice for all the citizens of the nations. We participate in the struggle for first-class citizenship, under the guidance of the law of the land, teachings and eighteenth century prophets and the message of Jesus. We believe God is on the side of the Right, the Just, and the Good. Our faith encourages us and our theological position allows us to feel a sense of obligation to help break the chains of the oppressed.”⁴⁴ This was a historical decision for the Convention that somehow did not last. However, there was a split within the Convention that did not agree with the theme of the Convention but was more interested in evangelism and mission work which became a priority. Furthermore, there was a shift in the mindset of many leaders in the Convention to want to separate and start something new like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker who realized the importance of Civil Rights and fighting for injustice for all humankind.⁴⁵ This is important because the social-ethic that the NBCI displayed for women clergy became an oppressive mantra from within. The Convention actually used its own power and privilege to oppress those women who faithfully joined and worked beside them to make sure that it was and it would be a vibrant Convention for many years to come.

The second trend that I see from the results of the questionnaires is “fear of the unknown.” There were seven out of ten of the respondents in the study who stated that male clergy are unwilling to receive women clergy as leaders in the National Baptist Convention because they are afraid that they will lose their roles in leadership. Which is why I think the following questions are important

⁴⁴ Washington, J. M. *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power*. Mercer University Press 1986.

⁴⁵ Taylor, G. C. *The Scarlet Thread*. Elgin, IL. Progressive Baptist Publishing House 1981.

when it comes to trying to address the issues of “fear” as it pertains to women in ministry. What will happen if women clergy of the Convention have a voice in a leadership role? What will happen if women clergy are found preaching on any of the platforms of the Convention? What will happen if a woman is elected as president of NBCI? My hope is that if a woman is elected president she would be received in love like the other women who serve as leaders in other denominations. She would be given access to lead and to serve NBCI with the support of her male and female colleagues. At the same time she might receive internal resistance from folks who are not willing to change and accept a woman as a leader. The hope is to spark change, thoughts and behaviors where needed.

The implications of electing a female president in the NBCI is similar the way African-Americans were treated in the United States due to racism and discrimination. This study shows that there is systemic racism and discrimination against African-Americans when it comes to getting a “white collar” job, and or “good job” in America as is discussed in chapter one. Furthermore the Center for American Progress, says African-Americans continue to face systematically higher unemployment rates, fewer job opportunities, lower pay, poorer benefits, and greater job instability. This correlation is similar within the NBCI when comparing women clergy to male clergy who are discriminated against and rejected based upon their female gender and calling by God.⁴⁶

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The persistent differences such as lower pay, poorer benefits, and job instability as shown by the Center for American Progress reflect systematic barriers against African-Americans is downright evil. This is evident as it pertains to affirming and honoring women clergy in the NBCI. Male clergy are afraid that they will become extinct by extending an invitation to women clergy to use their calling and gifts within the convention that God has equipped them.⁴⁷ These African-American men have always found the church as a place where men can lead and exercise authority. I have seen it through my own lens of how these men love being in these positions of authority and power.

When I asked one of the respondents whether male clergy are afraid of women clergy leading in the 21st Century indicated that male clergy fear the unknown. The respondent stated that there is a fear that if the church where I serve and the Baptist churches within my community that honors, supports, and affirms women clergy as pastors and leaders would come together united as one body then I believe that a greater change will take place within the Convention.

The third trend that I found from the questionnaire is the focus or lack thereof on the authority of scripture. Nine out of the ten respondents all agreed that scripture and the authority of scripture is a major role in determining whether there should be women clergy leaders within the NBCI. African-American Baptists believe that scripture is the Word of God. It is the only authority that Baptists stand by. There are no books of disciplines or creeds that Baptists are aligned to. They

⁴⁷ Hopkins, D.N. *Black Theology of Liberation: Introduction*. Maryknoll, NJ: Orbis Books 1999.

are simply aligned to the Word of God.⁴⁸ Scripture becomes problematic based upon the lens of the interpreter who can actually make it fit one's personal agenda. My New Testament professor Dr. Melanie Johnson-Debaufre shared a biblical text from Romans 10:17 which says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Dr. Johnson-Debaufre challenged the class to ask some critical questions when reading and studying biblical text. "Who is speaking? Who are the hearers? Who is in power or the leading authority of the present time? The ones speaking are making systematically theological statements based upon one's experience, culture, and social location." If there is not a concerted effort of exegesis of the scriptures then how will we ever know what the text is actually saying?

Many of the male clergy look at scripture on the surface level using such texts in Timothy and Titus that identify pastors as being all male. The implications are that nowhere in scripture does it say that God calls women to preach and certainly not to pastor because the scripture says so. There must be a disruption in the study, preaching and teaching of scriptures. When a disruption of the scripture takes place someone will receive a new thought, change priorities, ask a new question, be comforted, feel forgiven, or be compelled to go about their own ministries with a renewed vigor and zeal. Jesus came to disrupt life so that a space can be created, a space in which the Holy Spirit can work, a space in which the community can rethink, revisit priorities, or receive. Disruptions are

⁴⁸ Hudson, W.A. *A Baptist Manual Polity and Practice: Revised Edition*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 1997.

things that irritate, but at the same time can stimulate something new.⁴⁹ There has been such a patriarchal theological stance on scripture that has hindered women clergy at the Convention since its inception and their “God-Talk” (theology about God) remains consistent. Now as far as the male clergy is concerned their “God-Talk” is consistent with the scriptures so in no way are they being oppressive to women clergy in the Convention.

It is hypocritical when it comes to many of the churches that participate and honors women in their home states but are silent at the Convention. When we are silent we are actually speaking and saying that we agree with the status quo. It is time for a disruption to take place within our local churches beginning with the church where I pastor and every church that affirms and honors women clergy that justice is done. The preacher hopes for change. This might be a change that takes place suddenly. On the other hand, it might be incremental or sequential or a process. Disruptions can also influence us; and perhaps nudge us in new and challenging directions. Furthermore, those who speak and those who listen find the common patterns of their lives disrupted as they are called forth to “newness”. The Old Testament prophets interrupted the world with a word; voice slices silence.⁵⁰ God used the voices of Old Testament prophets to slice through the injustice and marginalization that many tyrannical kings had over the people living in that nation. The prophets used their voices to

⁴⁹ Johnson, F. Willis. *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017.

⁵⁰ Johnson, F. Willis. *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017.

Speak truth to power for the unheard, the least, the lost, and the left out. The impact of women clergy's voices must be heard. It's going to take courageous women and men clergy who are willing to stand with each other regardless of how ugly the circumstance might be. It is not about removing male clergy from leadership roles, but it's about honoring male and female by the power of the Holy Spirit that God will lead us and have God's way to make the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated to be a vibrant and holy Convention that honors God and all of humankind.

Chapter 6 - A Threat to Justice

As I conclude this research paper I want to say that I am encouraged by what I found from the Respondents who participated in this study. They want to see justice when it comes to women clergy leading and having a leadership role in the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated. In addition, the results of the survey showed that there must be a shift in the National Baptist Convention theological stance on scripture that will create change as it pertains to promoting and honoring women in ministry. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. so famously said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” This statement influenced me with the desire to see change and make a difference within the Convention.

As I think back to the beginning of my journey serving at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, justice within the church and community has always been my passion. Mt. Zion has been at the forefront of the Dover community by protesting against police brutality. Mt. Zion has extended its doors to the homeless citizens who needed a place of refuge, clothes, godly love, spiritual guidance and food. Furthermore, I am most proud that Mt. Zion is a household of faith and hospitality that honors and affirms women clergy as leaders in the local church, and on the national level. As previously mentioned, the thought of having a woman preacher in the pulpit was non-existent when I came to Mt. Zion in 2007. The people refused to accept that God called women to preach and pastor. Unfortunately, the church’s theology at the time was based upon the previous pastor’s theology, teaching and preaching.

The threat to justice also challenged me on a personal and intimate level. When I started pastoring at Mt. Zion, my wife was already dealing with the call of God on her life. Consequently,

she was worried about how I was going to navigate through Mt. Zion's theological dogma. Even though the church knew my stance on women clergy their subtle behavior/beliefs against women clergy continued to be a loud presence within the church. I was in prayer many nights wrestling with and asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me as to how to make this sacred space a place where women clergy, including my wife, would feel empowered to serve.

After much prayer and study of the scriptures I was led by the unction of the Holy Spirit to teach and to preach sermons and stories regarding women as recorded by the scriptures and how God calls men and women to be preachers and leaders in the 21st century. The gospel Message is supposed to be a Message of Good News and hope, but yet the Message was sometimes received with opposition because of my position on affirming women in ministry. At times when I felt afraid, I stood still and allowed room for the Holy Spirit to move on the hearts of the men and women. With the unction of the Holy Spirit, I knew my setting and was willing to do what was necessary to bring about change within Mt. Zion. "Clergy do not lead in a vacuum; they work in context and in a culture that is often counter to the gospel. In other words the vision we are called to, is to tell a story that is often met with resistance that needs to be navigated. "We must learn to cross cultural borders and break down resistance to a radical ethic of welcome."⁵¹ In other words, when I preach I must share a gospel Message that invokes a spirit of welcome for women clergy that will promote change within the church. I want the congregation to see that as I promote and affirm women in ministry that I am doing the work that God has called me to do.

⁵¹ Lewis, Jacqueline J. *The Power of Stories*: Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2008.

The work that I am doing is to follow after the writings of the prophet Micah and that is “to do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God.”⁵² I know that teaching on the affirmation of women in ministry can be uncomfortable, but I have to continue to preach and teach on this matter so that there might be a cultural shift within the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated and Mt. Zion. In order for change to take place barriers must be torn down.

After two previous pastors at Mt. Zion with almost 50 years of combined leadership denouncing and opposing women clergy I knew my job was going to be daunting in trying to create a theological shift in the church with regard to the acceptance of women in ministry. Notwithstanding, I realized that I could not be “silent” regarding this issue. God was pressing my spirit to address this issue in the church and I believed that God would be with me as I faced this challenge. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said “there are three things that men and women should do as we are fighting for freedom and justice, and that is to “remember, love and act!” We should remember that we are not doing this kind of work without God being the voice that leads and guides us to do ministry. Then he said, “We must love as we fight for freedom. If we love during the fight for freedom and justice, it is the only force capable of transferring an enemy into a friend.” Finally, Dr. King said, “We must act.” In other words, I must stand with women clergy as they fight against the negativity of their call to ministry and help to stamp out any injustice that has been embedded in the hearts and minds of women in ministry. This is evident in how prophet Micah encourages

⁵² Coogan, M. D. The Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version. Oxford: Oxford Press 2001.

humankind to act with justice. My journey at Mt. Zion has allowed me to share my convictions regarding the scriptures, disrupt some deep embedded theologies and open some new lenses that can see the possibilities of a God working in us and through us for God's glory and the transformation of humankind.

After several years of teaching, I saw a complete transformation in the minds of many of the congregants with regards to women clergy. Many people who did not ask questions about women in ministry began asking questions. I was excited to see the transformation of people moving from a traditional patriarchal look at the scriptures, but now seeing women leaders throughout scripture and the work that they did to advance the "kin-dom of God." Justice was being done in Mt. Zion in such a way that now the little girls, including my young daughter, can see women preaching from Mt. Zion's pulpit. It is such a great sight to see both men and women serve at Mt. Zion. The congregation has witnessed an increase in women preachers each year and without hesitation because of this transformation in the ministry. As I think about the transformational shift in the culture of Mt. Zion, I believe that the same shift can be made on the National Baptist Convention level.

Following much prayer, I spoke to a team of members of Mt. Zion who agreed that Mt. Zion could be used as a sacred location that would allow conversations from neighboring churches regarding their convictions and beliefs on women clergy and the National Baptist Convention. Since the conversation has to begin somewhere, why not begin with us?

There are over 460 Baptist churches in the state of New Jersey. The ten questionnaires returned to me represent .02% of the population leaders which is just a small sample size. As a result, 90% of the Respondents were in agreement that it was time for a necessary change to take

place at the Convention. The study was beneficial because I could see each participant telling their own stories. Their ministerial experience, whether good or bad, was being expressed during this process. Also, it was helpful for me to see that I, along with Mt. Zion, was not the only one thinking about this possible and needed change.

The impact of this survey allowed me to share what I was doing with the association of churches within northern New Jersey, the North Jersey District Missionary Baptist Association (NJDMBA). The NJDMBA consists of between sixty to seventy churches. The Moderator of the NJDMBA of churches began to express his passion on how women clergy are still being marginalized in many churches and at the NBCI. He expressed that it is now time that we as one body should come together and speak out against the injustice that continues to manifest against women clergy. There were some leaders that did not agree which is to be expected, but there were many men and women who agreed that we need to do what is right.

Now what was problematic for me is that one of the questionnaires that I received was sent back as completed but said, "Not Applicable". I'm not sure if the Respondent did not want to participate, or felt like the study was not important? I don't know? It did help me to realize that there will be some opposition from many of the leaders I know in both the State Convention and the NBCI. In fact, I have strong relationships with many of them. Regardless, I am at the point in my ministry where I have to do what's right even if I lose preaching engagements or teaching assignments to appease other male pastors.

This paper is also beneficial because it opens up the conversation about being inclusive within the leadership ranks. It begins the conversation of "So what will happen if women clergy are placed

in leadership roles in the NBCI? What will be the economic impact of the NBCI if women clergy are placed into leadership?” Theologian Howard Thurman, co-pastor of the Church of All Nations in San Francisco, California wondered if the church was “sufficiently religious” or open enough to the Spirit of the Living God to do work breaking down cultural barriers.⁵³ What will happen if we see these barriers broken down? I am anxiously working to see this paper come to fruition.

I agree with theologian Jacqueline Lewis who says, “Many congregations have the commitment and are open to the Spirit of God yet need to develop leadership capacities for embracing and managing cultural diversities.”⁵⁴ That is my hope in bringing about this research paper. I believe that a shift in the culture of the NBCI has to be intentional by male pastors who are not fearful of being rejected by other male pastors, but will instead do justice according to the Word of God by standing with women clergy as faithful leaders who want to see a safe space that brings about community and justice for all.

The process of bringing about justice is hard work. It is not easy work trying to create change in the NBCI that pertains to women in leadership, but if I continue to work along with the church and community we can achieve progress. The church is a beautiful place with people but in those sacred spaces they are spiritually barren. Some of these sacred spaces are beautiful, but practice some “ugly religion.” When churches seek to protect riches over righteousness—that’s some ugly stuff. When church constitutions and people contradict God’s covenant using politics to

⁵³ Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston Mass: Beacon Press 1976.

⁵⁴ Lewis, Jacqueline J. *The Power of Stories*: Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2008.

paralyze the pastor and make puppets out of prophets; placing tradition above the word of God—that’s some ugly stuff.⁵⁵ I will also add when churches seek to oppress women from being obedient to the call of ministry on their life because some misogynistic man says no; that’s some ugly stuff. I believe our churches and Conventions should be sacred spaces that do not harm us, but rather nourishes us, affirms us, and empowers us to claim and walk in the authority that God has designed for all of us.

Standing up for the rights of women in ministry can be challenging but it reminds us that God is always present. Knowing that God is present with us makes a difference in my life. Since this is hard work I am encouraged that the presence of God is always with me. Jesus said in Mathew 28, “Lo I am with you always even until the end of the world.” God’s presence helps us to be in right relationship with humankind. When I don’t depend on God then I feel like I am alone and that no one cares for me, but when I trust that God is present with me I am able to push forward because I am in right relationship with God. Dr. F Willis Johnson says that our churches should be centers of right relationship. Right relationship has constructive power; it must be encouraged in our church spaces and in our church communities. Relationships are shared intimacy. Relationships are common and consistent communication. Relationship requires surrendering the self, submitting, to

⁵⁵ Johnson, F. Willis. *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017

another, sacrifice, and service.⁵⁶ Once we are aligned in a “right” relationship with God then God can provide us with a transformational reality.

Shifting the culture in NBCI is going to be a great challenge. Why would any woman be motivated to enter the profession of Christian leadership? I found that most women enter the profession of Christian ministry because they were called by God to do so.⁵⁷ The second biggest reason was their personal perception that their ministries needed to be substantiated.⁵⁸ As a result women continue to stand on their calling by God despite the obstacles that they have encountered. I contend that there must be a space that is open for reflection, critical dialogue, and action. The Barna Research Group surveyed women churchgoers and found that despite the low number of women serving in pastoral roles, 84% of the women supported the idea that women can be church leaders if they were encouraged and allowed to do so.⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “We have to walk by faith and not by sight.” We have to believe in the actual possibility before it even happens. My daughter wants to be a scientist when she grows up and she believes that it is possible because she has so many female examples in our church and in her school who are teaching, leading, and investing in the lives of young girls. She is not worried about her male counterparts getting in the way of her dreams because she believes that it will come true. She believes that all of the hard work

⁵⁶ Johnson, F. Willis. *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017.

⁵⁷ Washington, J. M. *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power*. Mercer University Press 1986.

⁵⁸ Rose, S. D. *The negotiation of gender in a charismatic community*. *Sociological Analysis*, 1987.

⁵⁹ The Barna Research Group. August 2012. *Christian women today part-1*

that she is doing and achieving excellent grades will pay off. She encourages me every day, without even knowing it, not to give up on this paper no matter how long it takes. I am reminded by her and others that someone has to plant the seed of justice into the minds of those who are continuing to push against women clergy and their role in leadership. Someone else can water the seeds that have been planted, and let God bring about the manifestation of the seeds.

Justice is being threatened and I believe a faithful voice crying in the wilderness is what is necessary to activate change. The Holy Bible calls crying a form of lament or wailing. Who is wailing or lamenting in the community in which I serve? Wailing is the primal cry and expression of pain, of abuse, of separation. It is a refusal to be silent when the world systematically denies your existence and humanity.⁶⁰ I cannot be quiet about fighting for justice for women in ministry, and I pray that Mt. Zion continues to be a voice. I also pray that the NJDMBA will not be silent because when one is hurting then we are all hurting. So, sometimes we have to lament because in that act the people listening can become more human to our situation and hopefully be intentional about their response or about being open to change.

Women clergy are asking the NBCI for an opportunity to serve in the convention as leaders and use their gifts and talents as God sees fit for them to use. I challenge myself and others regardless of gender that we become more sensitive to our personal biases that we do not harm people. I also do not want to harm people because of my biblical interpretation of scripture. But I

⁶⁰ Johnson, F. Willis. *Holding Up Your Corner: Talking About Race In Your Community*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2017.

want to stand with women clergy to bring about justice within the NBCI regardless if I am opposed by fellow male clergy. I know challenging a traditional entity like the NBCI can be ugly and messy work, but I am challenging myself and others to stand with me and to take on this fight with women clergy. The passion that I have to see women clergy advance in leadership within the NBCI is the fuel that continues to burn within my soul. Thus I will stand alongside women clergy as we walk humbly, love mercy, do justice and allow the Holy Spirit to create a space that God will be glorified through the work of women and men working together in godly love.

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