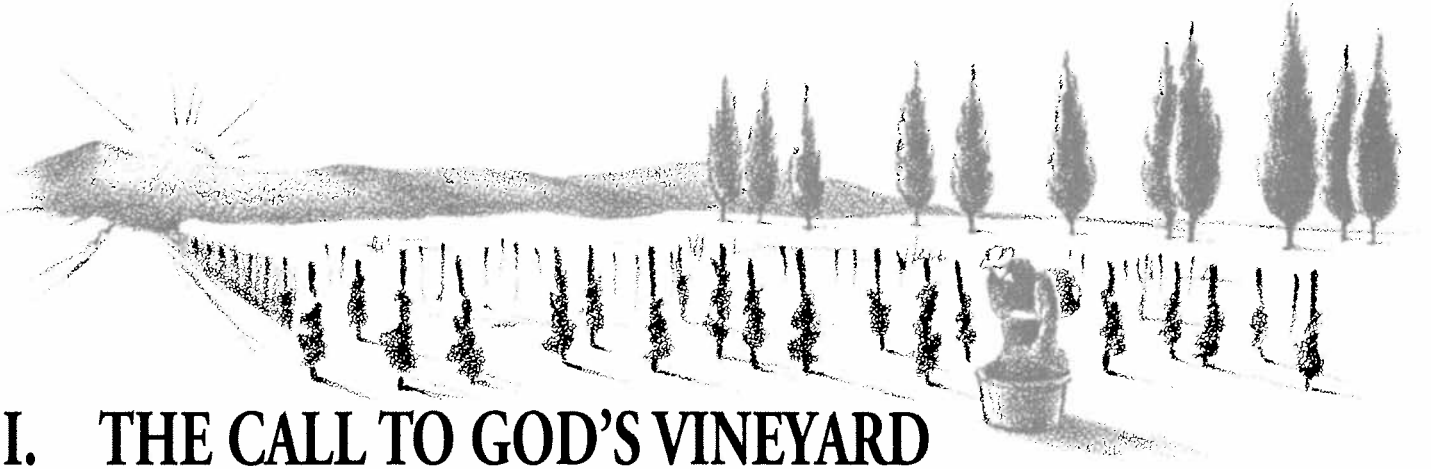


CALL THE LABORERS

A Congregational Resource on Women and Ordained Ministry



*ELCA Commission for Women
Prepared by Mary W. Anderson*



I. THE CALL TO GOD'S VINEYARD

A Parable of Ministry

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for the vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, the landowner sent them out to work in the vineyard. At about nine o'clock, seeing others standing idle in the marketplace, the landowner said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. The landowner did the same at noon and then again at three o'clock. And about five o'clock the landowner went out and found others standing around; and said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said, 'Because no one has hired us.' The landowner said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to the manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' The landowner replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am so generous?'

Matthew 20:1-15 NRSV (adapted)

❖ After the annual congregational meeting, some members gather outside and grumble that Max Wilson was just elected to church council. Max was received as a member through adult baptism less than a year ago. Before her baptism at age 42, she had been unchurched all her life. It had been a "tradition" in this congregation to elect members to council only after they had been members for six years or more. Only then could they be entrusted with this kind of leadership.

❖ Near the coffee pot at the back of the synodical assembly, two pastors reminisce about their days in seminary nearly 40 years ago. They talk of how so much has changed, and share with each other how they sometimes feel that their years of faithful service are discredited, their experience discounted. The church seems to overlook them for leadership positions in favor of women, persons of color, or younger colleagues. So much for hard work and dedication! they think.

When a Lutheran congregation has a pastoral vacancy, one of the first steps taken after the farewell reception for the former pastor is to establish a "call committee." This committee is a task force that guides the congregation in extending a call to a new pastor. Often in the ELCA we use the term *call* to refer to the written contract between a clergyperson and a congregation. When a clergyperson does not have this written contract, they are said to be *on leave from call*. But the word *call* is much broader than this administrative use. We speak of people being called by God to take certain actions or to live a certain lifestyle. Most commonly we refer to clergy as having been called by God to enter the ordained ministry.

In recent years a broader understanding of God's call has been rediscovered. Martin Luther greatly assisted the church in restoring the fullness of the call and vocation, which, by the 16th century, had been severely limited to mean a call to the religious orders of the church. The theology of 1 Peter 2:9 emphasizes the breadth of God's call: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Luther taught that this "priesthood" was composed of all baptized men and women, not only the ordained. For Luther and for Lutherans, baptism is where priesthood begins, not ordination. The call to priesthood, our vocation, is lived out in our daily lives



no matter what our occupation may be. Luther, in his writings on the nature of ministry said, “[A priest is] born not indeed of flesh, but through a birth of the Spirit, by water and Spirit in the washing of regeneration.”¹ He goes on to say that if it is maintained that the rite of ordination is what makes a person a priest, then “you would have to confess that neither Christ nor the apostles were priests,” since they did not receive these ordination rites.²

This theology of God’s call to each of us in our baptism for ministry was developed early on in the church, as is reflected in 1 Peter. In light of this understanding of the Christian community, the parable of Jesus found in Matthew 20 is an interesting story to study. Years before the church could articulate the priesthood of all believers, Jesus was planting seeds in the minds of the people about the kingdom of God.

In this parable of laborers in a vineyard, we hear a tale of the call of a variety of people to ministry. Here Jesus illustrates the breadth of God’s grace and goodness and demonstrates how this wondrous generosity can sometimes present itself as a stumbling block. The parable is crafted to drive both these points home.

God is represented in this parable as a landowner who hires laborers to work the vineyard. Laborers are *called* to the vineyard beginning around 6 a.m. and they continue to enter the vineyard to work at 9 a.m., 12 noon, 3 p.m., and even 5 p.m. When all are paid at 6 p.m., the grumbling and complaining about equal pay for unequal work begins. Although every worker receives exactly what she or he agreed to, it just doesn’t seem fair. The landowner reminds the grumblers that the money over which they are quibbling was never theirs to distribute. This point is a two-edged sword for all of us. On the one hand, we rejoice in God’s bountiful grace and generosity; on the other hand, we know that there may be times during our labors in the vineyard when we are the ones who feel exhausted, burned out, cheated, and jealous.

As with all of Jesus’ parables, this story serves as an illustration of God’s intent for humankind and of God’s character. The community of God is one of abundant diversity. In this particular case, the diversity is shown through laborers working a variety of hours. Once again, the gospel is preached, tearing down the barriers established by human plans, policies, and systems of justice. To those who first heard this parable, the story must have seemed ridiculous and the grumbling totally justified. But the points are pressed that the diversity in the vineyard is united by the one God who has so generously called them all, and that this unity is sufficient.

As a Christian community united in our one baptism, we are called to value the diversity among us in this one body of faith. Our human-made systems of justice, our dividing walls between men and women, between cultures, between clergy and laity, and between rich and poor are not acknowledged or

affirmed by the generous God who has called us all. In God’s vineyard, the diversity of laborers enables each of us to use our gifts and experiences for the benefit of the whole community—here we do not need to be all things to all people. In God’s vineyard, this diversity is a gift to be treasured and utilized; it is not a problem that needs to be overcome or tolerated. These gospel principles can often feel threatening and can cause us to grumble, too. When we place limits on our relationships with each other and use our human-made systems to judge each other, God’s generosity does become an intimidating threat. When we establish relationships based on tradition, race, culture, gender, education, years of experience, physical abilities, or economic status, we can experience great vulnerability when these systems are shaken. Valuing diversity can feel risky, because it calls us to reexamine and reorder those things which in human institutions give us power, advantage, status, and worth—education, years of experience, financial gains, or positions of leadership. The laborers in the vineyard grumbled at the landowner, “You have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” It is this equality, which is part of God’s design and purpose for us, that becomes a great stumbling block. In our human systems of justice, equality must be earned; but in God’s dominion, equality is bestowed.

Celebrating this equality and valuing this diversity can be a struggle. Embodying God’s grace, living out the “priesthood of all believers” in our communities, and valuing the gifts of our neighbors are often difficult and sin-stained endeavors. As God’s laborers, we are each called in our baptism to join in the work of the vineyard. Our struggle to live out our God-given equality and diversity becomes our witness to the world of God’s amazing grace and bountiful love.

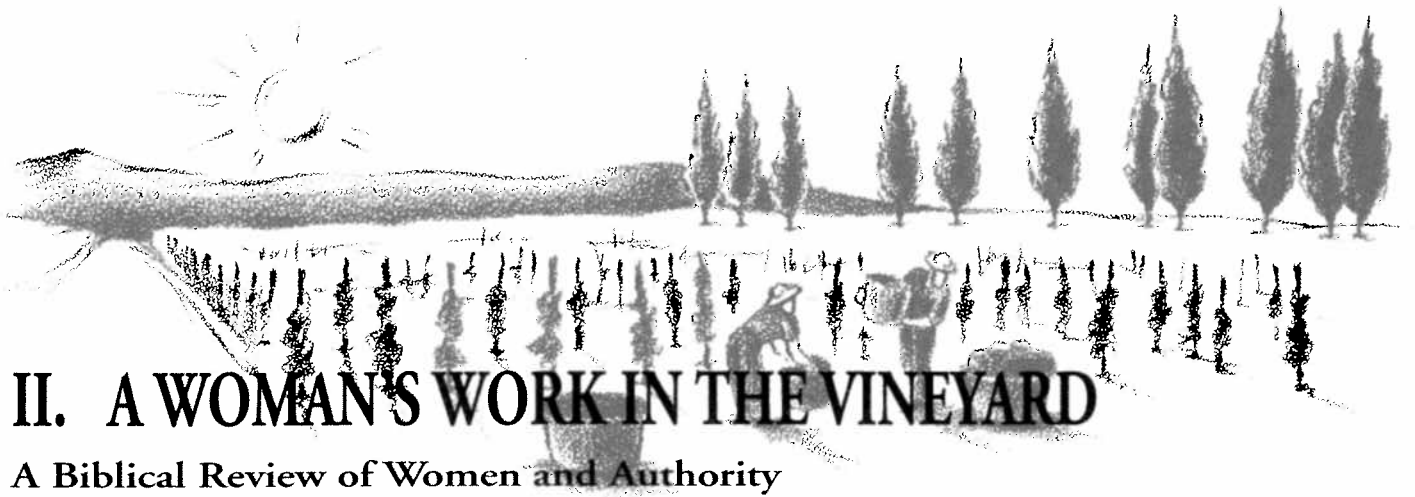
In exploring the issues related to women in ordained ministry, it is helpful to reflect together on some common understandings about the call to ministry we all share and to discuss our own stumbling blocks in laboring and living together in God’s vineyard.

Reflection Questions

- ❖ At this moment in your life, or in the life of your congregation, where do you see yourself in this parable?
- ❖ Think of a situation that caused this kind of grumbling. What insights or actions do you think could have helped ease those feelings of injustice?
- ❖ Women in ordained ministry may sometimes be seen as laborers called at a later hour of the day. What difficulties do you think this creates? How might we use our rich understanding of “the call” to assist us in easing these tensions?

1. Conrad Bergendoff, ed. *Luther’s Works*. Volume 40: “Church and Ministry.” Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958, p. 19.

2. *Ibid.* p. 20.



II. A WOMAN'S WORK IN THE VINEYARD

A Biblical Review of Women and Authority

During the meeting of the Worship and Music Committee at Resurrection Lutheran Church, a proposal was made to begin a program for liturgical assistants in the worship service. These persons would assist the presiding minister, read the lessons, and assist with the distribution of communion. As the committee started to develop a list of women and men in the congregation who might be willing to serve in this way, a member of the committee stated that she thought the program generally sounded good, but she opposed using women as liturgical assistants, since the Bible has clearly said that women should be silent in church. She then recited passages from the Bible against women's leadership and authority in the church and in worship. How would you respond?

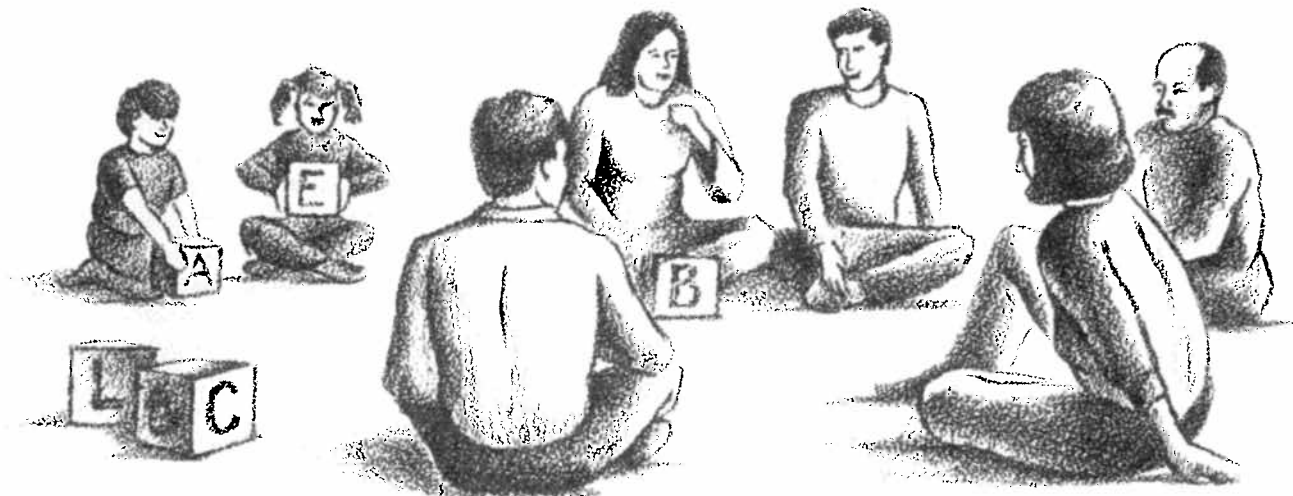
Interpreting the Scriptures

This discussion has taken place in many congregations in a variety of forms; each time, as people of faith, we are challenged to interpret the scriptures with our neighbors. Christians do differ over what certain scripture passages mean, or what the Bible as a whole means for us today. One reason that Christian people can have different interpretations of the Bible is that any interpretation is done in two parts. One part is to understand what the scripture *meant* at the time of its writing, centuries and centuries ago; and the other is to understand what the scripture *means* for us today. How you walk this journey from the past to the present depends on your assumptions. If your assumptions differ from your neighbor's, at some point

along the journey the two of you will come to a fork in the road.

How one understands the origin of scripture is an important place to begin. For some Christians, it is a fundamental belief that the Bible is a single revelation from God that is apart from any human response, history, or culture. For other Christian communities, including many Lutheran communities, scripture is a true witness of God's purpose and work and it is the authoritative word for all our faith and life. But these communities also assume that scripture is a beautiful tapestry woven from a variety of encounters with God and from human responses to those encounters.

Through biblical study, many Christians have come to appreciate the diversity of contexts, languages, cultures, places, and times in which these words of scripture were inspired and written. Just as Jesus, the Incarnate One, was God among us clothed in the human context of a particular family, place, and time; so does scripture, the Word of God, come to us clothed in a variety of diverse situations, cultures, languages, and struggles. New Testament scholar Charles Sigel puts it this way: "Early Christians did not have authoritative, timeless directives dropped down out of heaven any more than we do. In fact, they had no more to guide them than we do: on the one side, God's original intention for creation; on the other, the working out of that intention in the



ministry of Jesus and, in between those two goalposts, the playing field of everyday life within which they struggled with issues important to them, always keeping one eye on the field and one on the goalposts.”¹

Students of the Bible quickly come to know that scripture contains many different kinds of writings addressing a variety of circumstances, problems, and cultures. Readers of the Bible also recognize that scriptural passages often contradict each other. While Paul says in Galatians 3:28, “there is neither male nor female”; it also says in 1 Corinthians 14:34, “women should be silent in the churches.” Both are scripture, but which is “right”?

Biblical scholars use a helpful distinction in their study of the many law codes in the Old Testament. They distinguish between two kinds of law which are intertwined in the Old Testament and which continue into the New Testament and into our very own time. The first is called “apodictic” or “normative” law, which establishes the boundaries or limits within which human relationships exist. These laws are absolute and apply to all peoples in all times and places. The second kind of law is called “casuistic” or “programmatic”; it formulates laws that relate to human societal behavior within a particular place or time. Therefore, programmatic laws are bound to change as the people, times, and places change. Both normative and programmatic laws are the Word of God, but whereas the normative laws are timeless, the programmatic laws will change and are expected to do so. An example of this difference can be found in the Book of Exodus. A well-known set of normative laws are the Ten Commandments, as found in Exodus 20:2-17. An example of programmatic law can be found just a few verses later, in chapter 21 of Exodus, including such ordinances as, “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be punished; for the slave is his money.” (Exodus 21:20-21). Obviously this ordinance of God, this program, is no longer applied in our Christian community.

In our daily lives we use these same principles. We teach our children the law, “You shall not steal,” and let them know that this is a rule for their entire lives and for the lives of everyone else. We also have other house rules, such as “Pick up your toys before bedtime” or “Don’t watch TV before your homework is finished.” These latter rules are in response to particular situations--toys have been left all over, homework hasn’t been done. Although parents are serious about these rules, too, they only expect to make use of them until these particular problems are solved or until the children are older and more responsible.

These principles of interpretation are also helpful tools in interpreting many of the texts that speak against the leadership roles of women in the church or ones that have historically been used to support this

position. Using these principles, we will examine several of the scriptural texts that have been connected to the ordination of women.

Stories of Creation

Yes, *stories* of creation! You probably have already learned in your own Bible study that in Genesis there are actually two accounts of creation. One is in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, and the other is in Genesis 2:4b-25. Each account had a different author and was written at a different time in history. We begin at the beginning, not only because it is here that the relationships between woman and man are established, but also because the creation stories are sometimes used as a rationale for woman’s subordination to man. In the first account in Genesis 1:26-30, man and woman are created at the same time. Both are created in the image of God, both are given dominion over the rest of creation, and both are blessed. There is no subordination here, no ordering or hierarchy. The second account has been used to rationalize women’s subordination. In Genesis 2, the man is created first but he is alone, and God calls this “not good.” All sorts of animals are created, but still the man has no helper and creation is still “not good.” As the final act of creation in this story, the woman is created and the creation becomes complete. A joyful Adam exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). The woman in this story provides the climax to the creation and brings it full circle, back to the beginnings of humankind. The woman is not better than the man, but is his complement, his full partner. Some have argued that the description of the woman as the man’s “helper” describes subordination. This is a case in which a knowledge of the original biblical language is very helpful. The Hebrew word here is *ezer*. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this same word is used to describe God as Israel’s “help” (Deuteronomy 33:7, Psalm 33:20) or to describe God’s relationship to Israel. With that in mind, it becomes difficult to argue that in the Old Testament the word *ezer* refers to a subordinate.

It is clear from both accounts of creation that from the beginning it was God’s intention that woman and man be equal partners. Subordination is nowhere to be found. It is this responsible relationship with God and with each other that is foundational and *normative* to human existence. This is how God intended the world to be.

The wonder of creation is quickly clouded by the pain of human disobedience, resulting in a broken relationship between God and human beings (Genesis 3) and also between human beings (Genesis 4). Through these acts of disobedience, the goodness of creation is broken. One of the results and signs of this brokenness is the subordination of woman to man. The subordination, however, is not God’s intent, but is a consequence of disobedience and the resulting punishment. The man and the woman are equal in

their sin and in their punishments. Nobody gets off, and it is these broken relationships that are the real rotten apples that spoil the lot of women and men for thousands of years.

Jesus and the New Testament

With the incarnation of Jesus, it is God's intent to restore these broken relationships--to set things right again as they were at the beginning. In the ministry of Jesus, we see glimpses and hear stories of what this right relationship between men and women is to be like. In Christ we have a new creation, a rebuilding of the relationship intended and designed by God in the Garden.

In the New Testament, Jesus' attitude toward women is instructive. Often against the culture of his day, Jesus treated women equally to men, listened to them, discussed theology with them, and received them as his followers. Jesus also used female imagery to teach us about God--the woman sweeping for the lost coin, the image of the mother hen. It was women who discovered the empty tomb and to them was given the mandate to "Go and tell!" the Good News.

Some argue that the calling by Jesus of the twelve (male) disciples demonstrates that it was Jesus' design for all clergy to be men. The gospels do mention women who followed Jesus, but the twelve *named* disciples also served as a symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel, each of which was headed by a patriarch. However, there was no effort to establish or repeat this pattern. As the apostles died, the twelve were not replaced, but the ministry of the church was guided by both male and female leaders. The new creation was beginning to show its face.

Paul writes about this radical nature of the Christian community in his letter to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). This passage was written during a time when some Jewish men were expected to thank God every day that they were not born Gentiles, slaves, or women. The inclusive membership of the Christian church was a radically new concept to the Jewish community, which defined a synagogue congregation by the number of circumcised males present. In the letters of Paul, women in authority and leadership are named and given titles. Women such as Phoebe, Prisca (Romans 16), Euodia, and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2) were named and applauded as laborers with Paul in the work of the gospel.

We are bound to ask, "If it was God's intention in creation that women and men labor and live as equal partners; and if Jesus' life, ministry, and death were meant to restore this right relationship; and if women and men shared ministry equally in the daily life and ministry of the early Christian community; then why are there passages in the New Testament that speak against this relationship, and why were women gradually excluded from Christian ministry?" The

answer lies in using the categories of things normative and things programmatic.

God's intention for the relationship of women and men at creation and the way this intention is stated by Paul in Galatians 3:28 are normative for our community. They set up the boundaries and the relationships of our life together in all times and in all places. But as the Christian community sought to survive and to establish itself in its culture and in its time, it struggled to put these theological norms into practice. Gradually, this radical new inclusive ministry was one of the areas in which the church began to compromise its principles for the sake of organizational peace and cultural survival. Male leadership began to be an established program of the church. As we move chronologically in the New Testament, we can witness the gradual solidification of this practice and overhear at least some of the conflicts and controversies that brought it about.

Paul and the Early Church

Paul's writing of the letter to the Galatians, in which he makes clear statements about his understanding of law and gospel, probably took place around A.D. 52. Just a few years later, Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth was stormy. The congregation was divided over many theological and practical issues, especially those related to the worship service. In this letter, Paul attempted to assist the congregation in their conflicts in working out an orderly program for worship. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-12, Paul addressed a concern about women preaching in the worship service. "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head . . ." One possible concern for the people at Corinth could have been related to the cultic practices of their neighbors, who included sexual activity as part of their ritual. Paul did not want the Christian worship service to be misunderstood in this way.

The specific circumstances of the day are not clearly known. Paul maintained his argument for an orderly worship by pointing out that women and men are interdependent, but not the same. Woman came from man and man is born of woman, but all things come from God. The interesting point here, too, is that women were discouraged from mimicking men in their preaching--that is, by preaching with their heads uncovered. Instead they were instructed by Paul to present themselves as women of the day, with a shawl on their heads as was the custom, and to preach in this manner. Women were certainly allowed to preach, but they were instructed to do so dressed according to the customs of the Corinthian community.

However, 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 speaks quite

differently when it says, “As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” This passage obviously contradicts 1 Corinthians 11. Many scholars believe that this particular passage was written by another author at a much later time and inserted into this chapter, where it clearly interrupts Paul’s discussion of prophesying. These brief, but abrupt, verses seem to come out of an unknown set of circumstances and tend to raise more questions than they answer. For example, what kind of speaking were women not to do--speak in tongues, preach, chat during the service, teach? Was it only married women who could not speak and who were to ask their husbands at home, while single and widowed women were allowed to speak? Whatever the case may be, this later writing demonstrates how the practice of limiting women’s participation in public ministry was solidifying.

By the turn of the 1st century A.D. when 1 Timothy was composed, the young church needed to develop long-range plans and structures, since it appeared that Jesus’ return might be delayed longer than they had originally thought. It is in this letter to Timothy that we read, “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (2:11-15).

It is evident that only 100 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, practices in the church managed to reinstate the broken relationship between men and women that existed between the creation and the new creation. These verses from Timothy provide an example of the early church’s struggle to accommodate this new Christian faith within their secular community. The church was searching for worldly structure and stability. They believed strongly that God was a God of order, not chaos. They adopted a pagan ordering system (Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:6) that gave, among other things, lists of household duties. Within these lists, a woman’s place was definitely in the home. Structures and practices such as these were a good way to show similarities between this new religion and the society around it.

As important, perhaps, were the influences of some powerful women of the day, who were considered to be heretics. Around A.D. 95, Revelation 2:20ff tells of a woman, “Jezebel,” who had led a congregation in Thyatira away from orthodox teaching. Two other women around A.D. 140, Maximilla and Priscilla, joined the charismatic (and eventually heretical) movement of Montanus and were prophesying with him. The early church was also doing theological

battle with another popular heresy, Gnosticism, which allowed women to participate fully. These negative experiences, plus the constant pressures to survive and thrive, eventually moved women out of leadership positions in the church and significantly decreased their public participation.

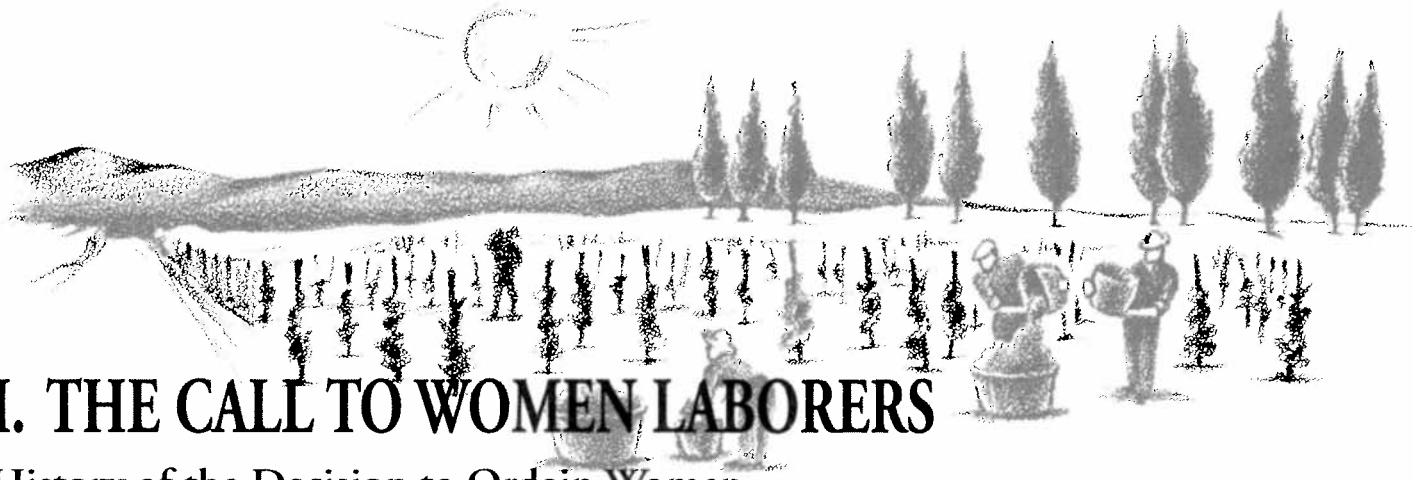
It has only been in the last two centuries that the Christian community, through its historical and critical study of the Bible, has begun to rediscover God’s intent for women and men established at the creation of the world and recreated in Christ. This rediscovery of God’s intention for us and of God’s grace is our own sort of 20th-century Reformation. We are all constantly in the struggle to live out God’s intent and will in our daily lives. In order to do this, we construct rules, practices, concords, and theologies to assist us. Much of Jesus’ teaching, and most of his conflicts with the Pharisees and scribes, had to do with his pointing through and beyond the detailed religious rules of the day (programmatic law) to the intent of God for our life together (normative). This is no easy task--and an impossible one to do alone.

Each congregation, too, struggles to be faithful to God’s will in its ministry to the community. The vision for the partnership of women and men in the church is one example of how we strive to live in right relationships with each other. In our creation at the beginning of the world and in our re-creation in Christ Jesus, God has manifested to us life made whole and complete through sharing, through partnership, and through a responsiveness to the needs and the gifts of our neighbors.

Reflection Questions

- ❖ How do you discern what God intends for you in your life? How do you interpret scripture for your own guidance and instruction? What texts are “normative” in your life and faith?
- ❖ What experiences have you had personally or as a congregation that relate to these texts and to the issues about women in church leadership?
- ❖ What does it mean for women and men to be full partners in the workplace, in the Christian community, and in families? What elements are needed to preserve such a relationship?

1. Charles Sigel, “Women, Authority, and the Bible,” in: *Women and Men in the Body of Christ*, Division for Mission in North America, LCA, p. 44.



III. THE CALL TO WOMEN LABORERS

A History of the Decision to Ordain Women

A minister of this church shall be a man person whose soundness in the faith, aptness to teach, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the constitution, . . . (Minutes, Convention of the Lutheran Church in America, 1970)

Recommendation of the Church Council: To recommend that women be eligible for call and ordination in The American Lutheran Church. Action by the Convention: To adopt. (American Lutheran Church, Report and Actions, 1970)

Resolution: That we respect the full personhood of women and joyfully welcome its complete expression in all areas of life, including service in the church and full participation in any of the church's ministries. That we reaffirm our belief that, as all persons are equal in Christ, considerations of race, ethnic origin, or sex have no place as qualifications for participation and leadership in the structures of the church. (Board of Directors to the 1976 Convention of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches)

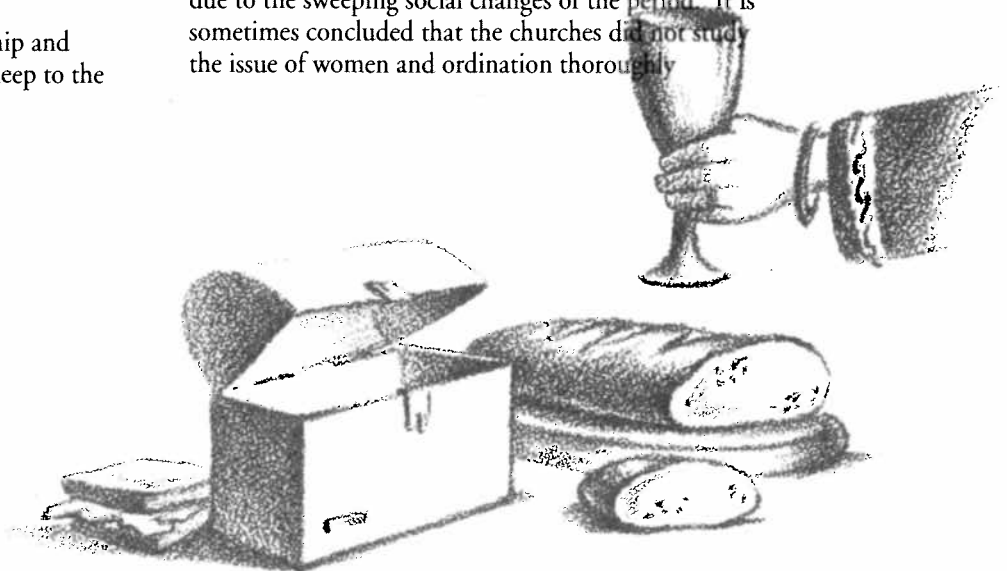
These succinct constitutional changes and convention resolutions were the deciding actions that initiated the ordination of women in North American Lutheran churches beginning in 1970. But behind these final words lay a long history of discussion and debate, meetings and reports, and small group meetings in seminaries, congregations, and homes; as well as individual women and men who, in a variety of ways, worked for the full participation of women in the leadership of the church.

The historical roots of women's leadership and participation in the Christian church run deep to the

center of our faith. From the resurrection stories told by the women at the tomb, to the early house churches, to the Reformation, to 20th-century American Lutheranism, women have been called to labor faithfully and fully in God's vineyard. As we study the history of our church in light of our theological understandings, we come to see that the various limitations placed on women's participation and leadership were barriers firmly planted by human devices and doctrines. We have come to understand that God has been calling women to service continuously since the beginning of the faith, but that as sinful human beings we have sometimes hindered and have not always heeded God's call.

For Lutherans, the 20th century has been another reformation period as we have reviewed and renewed our understandings of vocation, leadership, and the roles of men and women. First, the Church of Norway approved the appointment of women pastors in 1938. Later in 1958, Krister Stendahl led the Church of Sweden in New Testament studies on this topic. The Lutheran churches in North America watched these developments closely and soon felt their impact at home in Lutheran seminaries and in churchwide publications.

Critics of the decisions by Lutheran Church bodies in 1970 and 1976 to ordain women argue that the churches were pressured and rushed into this decision due to the sweeping social changes of the period. It is sometimes concluded that the churches did not study the issue of women and ordination thoroughly



enough, especially with regard to scriptural and confessional teachings. These criticisms, however, are not strongly supported by a study of the history of this decision or by reading the denominational documents leading to the decision to ordain women. Lutheran teacher Gracia Grindal, in her studies of this decision, has concluded:

Though the late 1960s were years of unprecedented social upheaval, Lutherans studied and debated women's ordination on the grounds of the Confessions and Scripture. Only at the end of the debates did the women's liberationists have much impact on the discussion . . . Even though arguments for the ordination of women were to some extent based on claims of equality or argued to the delegates in both the ALC and LCA conventions, theologians of the two churches repeatedly resisted such reasons for the change. When conflict developed, it focused, in fact, on questions of biblical interpretations which were to send Missouri on its own course, . . .”¹

The foremost question before church theologians at that time was, “Are there any biblical or confessional reasons why women should not be ordained?” This question was studied and reviewed over and over again in the documents published during those years and was consistently put before the churchwide conventions. The texts of the stories of creation, various passages from the letters of Paul, and the lack of women among the twelve disciples were all studied and analyzed. Also highlighted for study were the definition of ministry in its broad context, the history and significance of women's role in the church, and the practical and ecumenical implications. Once it was established that no biblical or confessional reasons could be uncovered to prevent the churches from ordaining women, the social movements of the day assisted in highlighting the practice of inequality that had already been revealed through study of the scriptures.

To some degree, there was a tone of sorrow and regret that women had for so long been prevented from serving the church as ordained ministers. The Lutheran Church in America's Commission on the Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine of the Ministry reported to its 1970 convention:

. . . it is already too late for the church to exercise its genius for the role of pioneer, but not too late for the church to provide creative responses to a volatile situation it inadvertently helped to create, does not fully comprehend, and is now rather frantically trying to investigate . . . The point has now been reached where a responsible church has no choice but to participate in the movement toward a greater freedom of thought and action for women . . . It also seems obvious that the Holy Spirit is attempting to tell us something.²

In the 1960s both the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church were conducting studies on the office of ministry. Many issues related to the ministry of the church were being studied, such as defining the differences between ordination and commission, understanding the role of each baptized person as a member of the priesthood of all believers, and working on an understanding of episcopacy. The issue of women and ordained ministry became a gradual part of these studies, but was not their original purpose.

In 1964 the LCA established a Commission on the Comprehensive Study of the Doctrine of the Ministry to make recommendations about the nature of ministry and the church. The issue of women's ordination was one of several studies they were to conduct. Progress reports were made to the 1966 and 1968 conventions and a final report and recommendations were made at the 1970 convention. At that time the commission recommended that women be ordained. To the minutes from that convention was attached a position paper from the subcommittee working on this issue titled, “The Role of Women in the Life of the Church.”

In the ALC, the impetus for study and debate arose from the growing presence of female students at its seminaries. Knowing that requests for ordination would soon come from some of these women, in 1967 the ALC Church Council requested a study of the ordination of women from the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.'s Division of Theological Studies. The Lutheran Council included the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In February 1970, the report of the Division of Theological Studies was made to the Lutheran Council. A condensed version of the theological papers, titled “The Ordination of Women” and prepared by Raymond Tiemeyer, was distributed to all pastors of the Lutheran denominations represented in this council. The ALC Church Council appointed a study committee for the report, and it was this committee that brought the resolution for ordination to the Church Council and ultimately to the ALC convention that year. By 1972, the Church Council asked that a study document be prepared for congregational small groups on women's ordination. This study guide, “Can Women Serve in the Ordained Ministry?,” dealt largely with the biblical texts, and was prepared by ALC scholar Joseph Burgess.

In 1976 the AELC, which was the new denomination that had left the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, spoke to this issue at its constituting convention. Their decision-making process did not require denominational agreement, but allowed for such decisions to be made synodically. Though the causes of the AELC's break with LC-MS were many, that status and authority of scripture were central. Many AELC members, therefore, had already struggled long and hard with the LC-MS interpretation of the biblical

passages about women. The AELC convention resolution acknowledged that the LCA and the ALC had made ordination of women possible, expressed solidarity with the LCA and ALC theological and ecclesial positions, and commended their individual synods and congregations to take the same action in their areas of ministry.

While much of the studying and discussing was being carried on by male clergy, women were also involved in these crucial processes. Women were enrolling in Lutheran seminaries; by their very presence and voice in these communities, they nudged the churches toward some conclusions. Also at work were the women's organizations of the ALC and the LCA, which, individually and collectively, were urging and encouraging their denominations to ordain women. The Lutheran Church Women of the LCA, "vigorously supported women's ordination and the development of materials that would be persuasive to the church."³ Individual women who served on churchwide study committees and who published articles and documents on these issues were also very significant forces in this process. Most notably, leadership was given by Margaret Wold, Evelyn Streng, Constance Parvey, LaVonne Althouse, and Margaret Ermarth, in addition to many other women who served on committees, and task forces, or who expressed their views in publications and in speeches.

In matters of scripture and the confessions, Lutherans in North America are largely satisfied with their interpretations of these faith documents on the issue of women in ordained ministry. The most tender spot remains the ecumenical one. The method of biblical interpretation that led to the decision to ordain women is an interpretation that ultimately separates the ELCA and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It also creates one barrier between the ELCA and the other Lutheran and Christian churches around the United States and around the world who do not permit women in their ordained orders of ministry. Nevertheless, the ELCA remains firm behind its conclusions that neither scripture nor the confessions prohibit the ordination of women.

In the decades since the 1970s, the Lutheran Church has continued to grow in its understanding of vocation, of ordained ministry, and of the value of diversity and inclusivity as we labor side by side in God's expansive and changing vineyard. The implications for the church continue to surprise us. In the early 1970s many Lutherans speculated that the decision to ordain women would have little impact on the church. It was assumed that women would choose marriage as their chief vocation, with only a handful preparing for the ordained ministry. It was difficult for the church to imagine that within a few decades seminaries would be reporting that 50 percent or more of their entering students were women.

In the 1960s and 1970s the church satisfactorily concluded that the scriptures and confessions neither prohibited nor mandated that women be ordained.

Therefore, in our Christian freedom, more practical choices were left to us. As dialogue, study, and prayer have continued in the Lutheran community beyond the ordination decision, we have begun asking and answering deeper and more extensive questions. Ordained women have had a significant impact in the past few decades on the life, ministry, and teaching of our church. Together, as men and women in partnership, we have been moving beyond the theological positions of 1970. Our reasons in 1970 for the ordination of women concluded that scripture is not specific in forbidding it, and that therefore it is a practical, institutional decision that can be made within our freedom as Christians. As we have shared together our lives of faith, our experiences, and our understanding of God, we are seeing this issue with new eyes. There are strong, positive reasons for the ordination of women, based on what scripture teaches us about partnership, about God's gifts, and about the community of God's people. As Lutherans, inclusiveness is at the heart of our understanding of the priesthood of all believers. As we have been exploring more seriously the gospel-centeredness of community, partnership, and diversity, we are growing in our awareness that inclusive leadership is not a choice, but God's command and purpose of this Christian community. As the calendar records the years, we will continue to leave a historical record of when, where, and how we struggled, succeeded, and failed to put these theological principles into practice in our daily lives.

Reflection Questions

- ❖ Do you remember when the decision to ordain women was made? What was its effect on your congregation?
- ❖ Are the reasons for ordaining women different from the reasons for ordaining men?
- ❖ What experiences have you had (individually or congregationally) with women in ordained ministry?
- ❖ Has your congregation encouraged any of its women to consider ordained ministry?
- ❖ Think about the history of women's leadership (lay and ordained) in your congregation. When did women begin serving on the church council, on committees, and as worship leaders? What events, circumstances, or people enabled inclusive leadership to happen? Think about the steps that still need to be taken and the ways in which your congregation can be encouraged toward these goals.

1. Gracia Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," in: *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, edited by Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, p. 161.

2. Minutes of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America, 1970, p. 441.

3. Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," p. 171.



IV. LABORING SIDE BY SIDE IN A CHANGING VINEYARD

The Changing Roles of Women and Men

❖ *The church council members of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church were surprised when their pastor announced that a new baby would be in the parsonage in six months. The pastor presented them with a proposal requesting time off for the birth, two full weeks off with pay followed by a part-time schedule for three months. Some members of council thought this was totally unnecessary, since "he's not even the one having the baby!"*

Most of us grew up with a well-defined understanding of the distinct roles of men and women. Although we often casually identified women's work as "work inside the home" and men's work as "work outside the home," the implications of this division of labor usually went beyond the physical location of the day-to-day tasks. Assumptions were also made about the respective value of a woman's work and a man's work. It was taught and reinforced that men's work was the important work, while women's work was unimportant. Women provided the support functions to men as men carried out these important functions in the political, social, economic, and religious arenas. The role of women was to keep men happy and comfortable. Although women were often thanked for their supportive efforts ("I really could not have done this without the support of my secretary and the love of my wife"), it was not assumed that these same women possessed the talents, skills, or information to accomplish the same work as men.

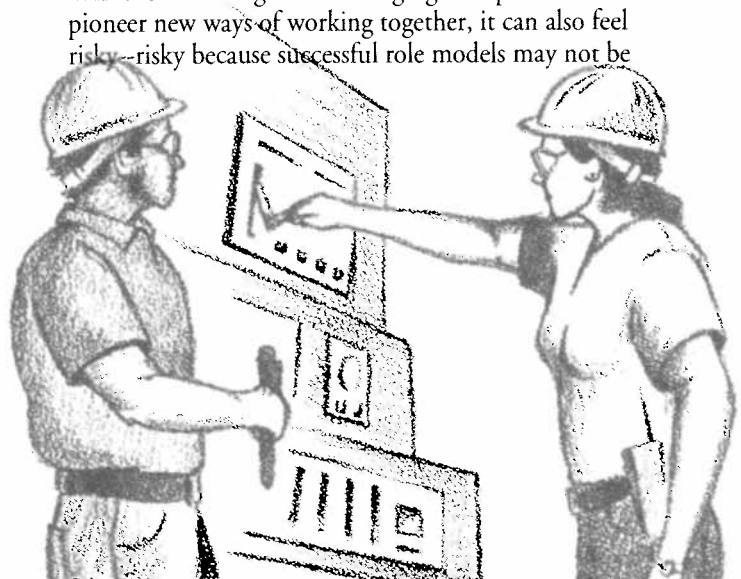
Today, more men and women are sharing and exchanging these work assignments. Even more important, both genders are learning to value and appreciate the work and perspectives of the other. Women and men are growing in partnership. This growth, most commonly discussed in the contexts of the workplace and the home, also has a profound effect on congregational life as well as on the pastor-parish relationship.

Certainly the call to pastoral ministry is grounded in God's mission through the ministry of the church. A pastor is called to a congregation or specialized ministry to use her or his education, experience, and talents in this professional setting. This mutual call to ministry that the pastor and congregation share is a partnership that exists for the sake of the gospel. Gender, marital status, parenthood, or other lifestyle

issues indeed should not direct or interfere with this mission. Why, then, is it necessary to reflect on the roles of men and women in the context of the ordained ministry?

The tasks and value of men's work and women's work connect with the pastoral office in two ways. One way is within the context of the congregation as the pastor's "workplace." In this context we are faced with assumptions about the maleness or femaleness of the occupation of "pastor." Second, the congregation is a unique workplace for the pastor, because unlike in a business office, in a congregation one's work life and personal life become blended. The members of the pastor's family (even extended family) are known and involved in the pastor's "workplace." This unique blending of work life and personal life for the pastor means that the changing roles of women and men, which are currently affecting the corporate world as well as the world at home, are all combined and concentrated in the pastor-parish relationship.

As men and women labor side by side in God's vineyard, they are slowly building and discovering the right relationship God intends for our laboring, loving, and living. Nowhere is this effort more focused and challenging than in the congregation. Nowhere else is there such an opportunity to create new models of leadership and partnership. It is this opportunity for education and creativity in the parish setting that make reflecting on personal or family issues relevant. While it is exciting and challenging to experiment and pioneer new ways of working together, it can also feel risky—risky because successful role models may not be



readily available, or risky because we are afraid of failing or offending someone.

The advent of women in ordained ministry has caused the church to rethink its image of the pastor. It needs to be clear that the current transitions in gender roles and the new models of family life are not only women's issues, but are issues for everyone. Many male pastors today also present the church with examples of how times and roles have changed. Male pastors are often members of two-career families and are faced with both the pleasures and struggles that this new lifestyle brings. Because we are in transition between the former and new family models, individuals and congregations often still view the woman as the family member with the ultimate responsibility for child care, family scheduling, general housework, parental involvement in schools, and so on. Likewise, we may not consider that the male pastor is also working hard to balance family duties, and that he is sharing half of those responsibilities at home. We are coming to realize that pastors who are fathers need (not just want) time with the new baby, too.

Pastors of the 1990s are in many ways quite different from pastors of the 1950s. Not only do pastors in the 1990s come in both genders, but today's lifestyles affect other aspects of the pastor-parish relationship. For example, the career demands of a pastor's spouse may make it more convenient for the pastor to live outside of the parish community. If the pastor's spouse is also a pastor, the couple may need to decide which parsonage will be their home. While members of a pastor's family may often become active members of the congregation, there also may be instances where this will not be the case. Clergycouples serving different parishes often struggle with their level of involvement in their spouses' congregations. If the pastor is not accompanied by active family members into the parish, there may be a real sense of loss in the congregation. The congregation will need to acknowledge this feeling of loss while evaluating their expectations of the pastor's family. Since there are few role models (or even stereotypes) of the "pastor's husband," a congregation may be confused about the role of the pastor's spouse. Be open and honest about expectations. Discuss them with the pastor (for instance: "I was disappointed that your family decided not to join our congregation").

Women pastors and women candidates meeting with a call committee often find themselves responding to questions and concerns that their male colleagues are never asked. Congregational members sometimes ask how a female pastor will balance her responsibilities as a wife and mother with those of the pastoral office. If the pastor is a younger married woman, she may be asked if she plans to have children soon; if she already has children, she may be asked if she plans to have more; if she is single, does she plan to get married--women never get off the hook! Concerns about the personal lives of single women are also an issue and may be even more sensitive and less

verbalized than concerns about the personal lives of married women. Younger single women may be stereotyped as incomplete, lonely, or vulnerable.

No matter what a woman's personal family situation, she may be asked to respond to concerns about balance and stress. These concerns are most frequently expressed during call committee interviews or during times of change in the pastor's family or personal life. How will she "do it all"? One of the lessons that partnership is teaching us is that no one person in a family or a community has to, or is expected to, "do it all." Men are no longer burdened with the sole responsibility of earning all the family income. Women are no longer burdened with the sole responsibilities of parenting and housekeeping. But, for many, figuring out how to divide up the duties and responsibilities that may come with being a two-career couple with two children is still in the experimental stage. Pastors who are single parents also face questions about priorities, balance, and stress.

The variety of family models emerging in our American culture is a great and challenging opportunity for ministry in local congregations. As families today work on creative ways to manage their lives together, the church can provide role models, encouragement, and support.

Many assumptions about the roles of men and women directly affect the workplace. Gender roles may be more apparent in a congregation staffed by more than one pastor or in congregations staffed by a clergycouple. Do we make assumptions based on gender, such as: the clergywomen are best suited to education/Sunday School, youth work, and counseling, while the clergymen on staff are more suited to stewardship, administration, and property concerns? These kinds of assumptions are unfair to both genders. They also may pressure a pastor to succeed in an area in which he or she is not personally equipped or trained. Although stereotypes sometimes hold true, they do not serve us well as a foundation for creating a job description or for building staff relationships.

Change is not always easy, but it is essential for growth. Satisfying and productive pastor-parish relationships are more easily achieved when assumptions and stereotypes are laid aside in order to discover a pastor's actual gifts, abilities, interests, work style, and preferences. Once these are known, the pastor and congregation can together create ways to make the best use of these gifts.

Reflection Questions

- ❖ What male/female role changes have you observed in your congregation? How has the remodeling of the "traditional family" affected your congregation?
- ❖ Are there assumptions about your pastor's abilities and work preferences that are largely based on gender stereotypes?
- ❖ How do you relate the growing partnership of women and men to our Lutheran understandings of baptism and the priesthood of all believers?



V. LOOKING FOR THE LABORERS

Tips for the Call Committee

Congratulations, you have been selected for your congregation's call committee! This committee has the important task of working with the synod, the church council, the congregation, pastoral candidates, and the Holy Spirit to determine who will be the next pastor of your congregation.

After your congregation has completed its self-study, the local synod will supply the committee with a name or names of potential candidates for pastor of your congregation. These candidates may be recent seminary graduates or pastors with years of experience in the church or in business. They may represent various ages, backgrounds, and cultures. They will include both men and women. Although it is tempting to say that a call committee or a congregation is simply seeking the best person to fulfill its present needs, it remains a reality in our community of faith that personal characteristics—such as one's ethnic background, gender, age, and physical abilities—can also be determining factors along with one's skills, abilities, and experiences. Members of the call committee will need to struggle with the question, "What is our vision of what our new pastor will look like?" This is a secret that each person on the call committee holds. Consultant Bunty Ketcham advises, "The sooner this secret is shared, the better. Every person has a fear of something the committee might do. That's a second secret that needs to be shared early on."¹ Discussing these concerns and "secrets" as

soon as possible will greatly assist you in making the entire call process an open and satisfying one.

For many congregations in the ELCA, considering a woman candidate for the pastoral office is a new experience. While it may be ideal for congregations to explore these issues before they enter the call process, the time of the congregational self-study is also a good opportunity. From the experience of these early decades of women's ordination, some knowledge has been gained about the more practical questions around women's ordination. It is not until the names of women candidates are presented to congregational call committees that the biblical, theological, and historical questions take on local significance. The call process provides a unique teaching moment for the congregation and for the candidates. Your participation in this process, your willingness to educate your congregation about women and ordained ministry, and your commitment to creative models of leadership, will all contribute to a growing appreciation of women in ordained ministry, of the office of pastor in your congregation, and of men and women in partnership.

Before You Interview . . .

❖ Provide opportunities for the congregation to explore the issue of women in ordained ministry. If your congregation has never been served by a woman, assume that some education and consciousness-raising will be needed. Do not assume that because of the sophistication, education, or general sensitivity of the



congregation, you can skip over this step. The chance to learn more about the history and biblical witness related to women and ordination and the chance to talk about feelings are important. Visibility is often a key element in this education process. Basic experiences with women in pastoral leadership can go a long way in your congregation. The church council may begin this process by specifically requesting a woman as your interim pastor, or by requesting several women as supply preachers during the vacancy. You may also want to ask a woman pastor in your area to lead a small group study or adult forum for your parish. It may be helpful to dialogue with a neighboring congregation served by a woman pastor about their experiences. The consideration of women as pastoral candidates and the calling of a woman pastor provide enriching teaching moments for your congregation. Take this opportunity to challenge yourself--and the congregation--to grow and learn.

- ❖ Some members of the congregation may express negative feelings about calling a woman pastor. If this happens:

- ❖ Encourage members of your congregation to say why they are opposed to a woman pastor. The reasons could range from theological concerns to the belief that a woman's voice isn't loud enough to be heard in the back of the church.

- ❖ Create a climate, with the assistance of the church council, interim pastor, and other congregational leaders, in which members feel safe expressing their concerns and questions. Acknowledge together that considering a woman as pastor is new for everyone. Let this be the common ground and start from there.

- ❖ If there are biblical concerns, address them directly. Invite a respected Bible study leader in your synod to conduct a review of biblical materials. Provide reading materials for the congregation.

- ❖ Realize that this is, among many other things, a pastoral care issue. This issue may be emotionally charged for some members, making them feel hurt and vulnerable.

- ❖ Assess the degree of opposition to a woman pastor and make some decisions based on this research. Is it potentially community-dividing? Is the opposition coming from only one or two people, who are assuming they speak for the majority of the congregation? Do you sense that these negative feelings could gradually fade once the pastor is on-site and is known in the community? Are you as a congregation willing to assist members with very negative feelings to move on to another congregation to or another denomination where they may be more comfortable?

- ❖ Perhaps your congregation has had a negative experience with a female pastor, intern, or seminary student. If so, develop a process of healing, recovery, and trust-building. Work within the climate of openness you have created in the congregation. Provide ways, with the assistance of your synod office, to deal with the negative feelings that may be remaining as a result of this experience. This is a process of

healing. Be aware, and remind each other, that poor experiences with male pastors do not prevent us from considering another man as our next pastor. We do this without conflict because we have learned through generations of experience that not all male pastors are the same; they come with a wide variety of personalities, gifts, and skills. This is also the case with women pastors.

- ❖ Know your limits. Every congregation wants and deserves the best pastor possible. Sometimes, often without realizing it, we narrow the field of pastoral candidates we are willing to consider because certain limits have been established, either consciously or unconsciously. Before the committee actually receives names from your synod office, attempt to ferret out any of these limitations. Some limitations may be gender, race, age, years of experience, or education. Be aware that when these kinds of limits are established, the committee may well be eliminating some candidates who, given a chance, would be wonderful pastors for your congregation. Age and years of experience are not always equal to skills and abilities. Obviously, few women candidates will be able to sport decades of parish experience. This does not mean they do not possess the skills they need or that they would need to be mentored by the congregation. Decide on the qualities that you believe are most needed now in your congregation. Then attempt to remove limits that could unnecessarily narrow your search process. Don't tie the wings of the Spirit! Be prepared to be surprised by the Spirit of God, who may lead you in a new and exciting direction!

- ❖ In preparing for the interviews of all candidates, advance planning is essential. The synodical staff person working with your congregation may have a suggested format for the interviews you are to conduct. In any case, you may want to develop an agreed-upon set of questions that will be used in each interview. This does not eliminate spontaneous questions and conversation; it assists in establishing a consistency in the questioning, which can then be used to compare the interviews. If you have certain concerns that are related to a candidate's gender, test them out with your call committee colleagues. Agree together about how, or if, these questions will be asked. Consider how these questions apply to the other candidates. Attempt to keep "surprise" questions to a minimum.

- ❖ Women candidates before a call committee are frequently asked questions related to their personal lives and families (see Part IV). If there are questions, which, if left as a mystery, could jeopardize an otherwise ideal candidate's opportunity to receive a call to your congregation, then ask your synod for guidance. For example, a call committee may wonder what would happen in their congregation if their pastor gave birth to or adopted a baby. Begin by consulting with your synodical liaison, who can share with you the experiences of other pastors who have provided models in this situation or others. Reflect together on what are your real concerns and judge whether or not you

have these same concerns about male candidates. If not, why not? Perhaps the unfamiliarity with the maternity-leave policy makes the committee anxious, or perhaps it is assumed that most women stop their professional careers once they have children. Don't worry that raising these kinds of questions will make the committee appear sexist. Seeking information is always appropriate when it is an honest request to know and understand the candidate better. What can sometimes cause conflict is the manner in which the information is sought. For example, you would not benefit from surprising a woman candidate during an interview with the question, "You're not pregnant, are you?"

❖ Advance planning and discussion can weed out inappropriate questions that can create a negative climate during the interview. Sometimes, because of the strong link in our society between women and the home (rather than women and work), a call committee may ask many questions about the pastor's family instead of focusing on questions about the congregation and ministry. It is not appropriate to ask questions about a candidate's personal life or questions requiring commitments from a candidate's family (for instance: "Will your husband join our Men's Club?"; "Will your teenagers participate in the youth organization?"; "If you have a meeting at night, what will you do with your children?"; "Are you dating anyone right now?"; "Will your boyfriend attend this church?"). These kinds of questions are not relevant to the purpose of the interview. They do reflect the church's corporate lack of experience with women as parish pastors. If these kinds of concerns appear to be overwhelming the call committee as you explore the possibility of calling a woman as pastor, you may want to provide an opportunity for a local clergywoman (one who is not a prospective candidate) to explore these questions out of her own experience and the experiences of others known to her. Many clergywomen would be happy to assist you in this way.

During the Interview

❖ Be aware of how you address women candidates. She is a pastor, as were all your previous pastors. There is a tendency among some people to refer to a woman as "Pastor Mary" or simply as "Mary," while referring to male pastors more formally as "Pastor Jacobs." There is no correct manner of address, although some pastors may prefer to be addressed in a certain way. The point is to be aware of the distinctions you may be making when you address women informally and men more formally.

❖ While you are interviewing candidates, the candidates are also interviewing you. A call works two ways. In order for you to get to know each other, you may want to style the interview in the form of a living-room conversation. Provide refreshments. Move away from conducting the interview around a long table with the candidate at the head. A circle of chairs around a punchbowl with fruit or cookies can help

ease the natural nervousness in the room.

❖ The interview may be more productive for the committee and the candidate if stories are shared, in addition to questions and answers. This style can also help avoid questions that appear to have a hidden or personal agenda (these are questions that a candidate can easily identify as having an unknown story behind them, and they can feel like trick questions). Avoid making the candidate feel as though she needs to watch for the trapdoor in her response. For example, you may have once experienced a woman pastor who always referred to God as "she" in her sermon and who changed all the male language in the liturgy to neuter or feminine pronouns. Perhaps you found this troubling, curious, or enriching, and you want to ask the candidate about her views on issues related to inclusive language in worship. Instead of asking, "Do you think God is male or female?", tell her your story--how it affected your worship experience and your understanding of God. Allow her to directly respond to your story. In so doing, you will gain a knowledge of her thoughts on this subject, additionally, you will witness how she responds pastorally to a person who is struggling with these kinds of concerns.

❖ In some congregations, new models of leadership are being explored by calling a clergy couple to share one position in a parish. When beginning this kind of interview, ask the couple how they would like to respond to the questions--taking turns on each new question, perhaps, or dividing the questions according to their interests. Most of the time, the couple will already have a plan in mind; but it's best if everyone involved knows the plan. The chair of the call committee may wish to monitor the conversation to insure that one person is not asked most of the questions. This person could also monitor the content of the questions, making sure that the interview does not become dominated with logistical topics--e.g., "Who will be in the office on Mondays?" These technical concerns are more appropriate further along in the process, when these details are discussed with the church council.

After the Interview

Frequently, after the initial interview the call committee will observe the candidates while they lead worship and preach in an off-site congregation arranged by the synod. If multiple candidates are being considered, the field may be narrowed at this point to only one or two candidates. Again, in this process of elimination, it is helpful to check for gender-specific concerns that may interfere with the call process. The next step may be to arrange a second interview for the candidate(s) with the call committee or with the council. This is a time for final clarification on any issues that remain unclear, and it is a more appropriate time to discuss any logistical concerns. Depending on synod guidelines, this may also be the time when a salary package and benefits are discussed.

Clergywomen have experienced some inequities in the past with respect to salary and benefits. Some discrimination can come about when a married woman's income is viewed as secondary family income, while a man is perceived as the primary breadwinner. No pastor's salary package should be based on the income of his or her spouse, the receipt of child support payments, whether one is married or single, and so on. These personal factors are irrelevant in considering a salary for your new pastor. Be forward thinking and make as many agreements as possible before the call is extended. A decision to "work this out later" may be planting a seed of frustration and conflict for the future. Make decisions about parenting leave, family leave, continuing education, and health and wholeness benefits.

Currently, a higher percentage of clergywomen than clergymen have part-time calls. If the call to be extended is a part-time call, make agreements about the number of hours to be worked each week. If there is additional work that needs to be done outside of this time frame, decide who will do it. When these kinds of agreements are not made in advance, the part-time pastor can easily slip into working a full-time job for part-time pay.

Often it is assumed that once these kinds of agreements are made, these issues will not be discussed again until the next pastor is called. A necessary part of any process, including the call process, are review and evaluation. One of the agreements that may be made during these negotiations is to set a date six to twelve months after the call to evaluate these agreements and to make modifications where needed.

After the Call Is Extended

Normally call committees end their work once the call has been accepted by the new pastor. You may want to consider extending the process over the pastor's first year of ministry in your congregation. This would be especially helpful if your congregation does not have a Mutual Ministry Committee serving as a liaison between the pastor and congregation. Some responsibilities after the call is extended might include:

- ❖ Assist in planning the Service of Installation.
- ❖ Plan a welcoming event for the new parsonage family.
- ❖ Assist in orienting the pastor to the congregation and community (for example, the history of the congregation, how organizations and committees function, services offered in the community, and so on).
- ❖ Become a support group for the pastor, as he or she adjusts to this new environment; meet with him or her on a regular basis.
- ❖ Work with the church council to review the pastor's ministry, salary and benefits, and any other agreements made at the time of call.

Serving on the call committee is one of great responsibility in a congregation. The process is most satisfactory to everyone when a circle of trust is established and maintained between the call committee, the church council, the synod office, members of the congregation, and potential candidates. This trust is as essential as the process itself. As you pray for the guidance of God's Spirit in your midst, establish ways to be open and receptive to the Spirit's direction in your work.

A Prayer for the Call Committee

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us! We thank you that throughout the generations you have raised up men and women to serve your church in all times and in all places. As we go about the task of calling a new pastor to serve with us, we pray for a spirit of mutual trust and for the ability to speak fully and listen faithfully to each other. We pray for the spirit of wisdom to be in our midst as we go about the task to which we have been called. We give thanks for all who have served this congregation as servants of your Word, especially do we remember *[at this time, names of former and present pastors, deaconesses, associates in ministry, and lay leaders in congregations may be spoken by those gathered]*. Fill us with the love, grace, and confidence that can only come from you. In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE . . .

This resource is offered to congregations who are committed to, or who desire to become more committed to, the partnership of women and men in the ordained ministry of the church. Since the 1970 and 1976 decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's predecessor bodies (the Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches) to ordain women to its ministries, increasing numbers of congregations are experiencing women in pastoral leadership roles in their communities. This is a time of discovery and transition with respect to the church's pastoral leadership and leadership models. Changes in custom and practice are almost always a slow venture, requiring patience, education, perseverance, and faith. We learn and grow as we go.

Even though the practice of ordaining women is more than two decades old in the ELCA, it will remain a "new" issue as many congregations experience women in pastoral leadership for the first time. This multifaceted resource has been designed to assist congregations in their learning and in their commitment to the role of women in ordained ministry. It offers suggestions on how congregations might do their own studies, while providing information and resources drawn from the experiences of many other congregations. Although individual congregations will continue to experience the calling of a woman as their pastor as something new, it is not a new experience within the ELCA. Much has been learned from the church's collective experience. Stories have been told, frustrations have been communicated, and ideas have been shared. This publication was designed to collect some of these experiences into an organized resource for use within the ELCA.

Part I, "*The Call to God's Vineyard: A Parable of Ministry*," uses the imagery and message of Matthew 20 to begin to look at the nature of ministry and the priesthood of all believers that we all share. Part II, "*A Woman's Work in the Vineyard: A Biblical Review of Women and Authority*," provides a Bible study on many of the scripture passages that have traditionally been cited as speaking against the leadership roles of

women in the church. Part III, "*The Call to Women Laborers: A History of the Decision to Ordain Women*," provides a historical summary of the deliberations, discussions, and decisions in 1970 and 1976 that brought the predecessor church bodies to their decisions to ordain women. Part IV, "*Laboring Side by Side in a Changing Vineyard: The Changing Roles of Men and Women*," discusses and reflects on the ever-transforming roles of men and women in church and society. Part V, "*Looking for the Laborers: Tips for the Call Committee*," is designed to assist congregations and their call committees through the whole process of considering women pastoral candidates--from the congregational study through the interviewing process to post-call support. Finally, Part VI, "*Statistics and Resources*," provides the latest statistics on clergywomen in the ELCA and lists additional resources for further study.

The six sections are designed so that they can be used separately, although a thematic thread runs throughout. They have also been designed for easy photocopying and distribution in the congregation. Here are some ways you might use **Call the Laborers** in your congregation:

- ❖ As an Adult Forum series
- ❖ In a retreat for the congregation or church council
- ❖ As part of the congregational study during a pastoral vacancy
- ❖ For use by the call committee before receiving names of candidates
- ❖ As a program resource for confirmation classes, youth groups, Women of the ELCA, Lutheran Men in Mission, Bible study groups, and so on.

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