



# We Are Church, We Are Called

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50•40•10

Proclaiming • Reforming • Celebrating

## WOMEN'S ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES ADULT FORUM



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

[ELCA.org/50yearsfordainedwomen](http://ELCA.org/50yearsfordainedwomen)

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## QUICK REFERENCE

ALC: American Lutheran Church

ALCW: American Lutheran Church Women

ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

LCA: Lutheran Church in America

LCW: Lutheran Church Women

The 50th Anniversary of Women’s Ordination Committee gives thanks to the Rev. Gladys Moore and the Rev. Janet Peterman for their hard work in putting together this study guide.

You are invited to customize it to fit your group, context, and the time you have available.

## SESSION 1: THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE ELCA

### PREPARATION

#### Needed for the Session:

- A meeting area with room to move around. Tables make the later exercise easier for writing but are not necessary
- A leader who can honor the experience of all participants, draw out relevant sharing where noted, and keep the session moving
- Time to explore. The session is designed for 90 minutes. Shorter sessions, perhaps for a Sunday-morning, 45-minute forum setting, can be planned by choosing a few of the segments.
- Copies of Women's Ordination Bingo (card stock is helpful, if possible, but not necessary, one per participant); pens
- An easel with the questions posted on it for the small groups to consider for that section of the session, or some other way to post the questions around the room
- Someone to lead the song and prayer to conclude the session. This can be someone other than the leader.

### SESSION OUTLINE

#### Opening Exercise: Women's Ordination Bingo (15 minutes)

*As people gather in the meeting space, provide them a copy of the Women's Ordination Bingo Game cards with a pen. People mill about the space to secure each other's signatures on blocks where what is written there fits their experience.*

*If walking is difficult for someone, that participant may sit at a table and others may stop there to get and give a signature. If the group has fewer than 24 people involved, set the number of times each participant may sign a game card to make the game work out. Leaders mill about the room to encourage creative solutions to game snags. The game ends when at least several people have filled their cards with signatures and there is a warm hum of activity in the room, or when your time has run out.*

*This is a warm-up game. Use it for gathering people with a light playful spirit but also draw people together after 12-15 minutes to move on to the substance of the lesson.*

## WOMEN'S ORDINATION BINGO

Have been baptized by a pastor who is a woman	Have been confirmed by a pastor who is a woman	Have been married by a pastor who is a woman	Someone in my family had a funeral conducted by a woman pastor	Raised in a Church that doesn't ordain women
I can recite Galatians 3:28	Have taken a course at a seminary (man or woman, ordained or not)	Know the name of one of the first 25 women ordained in the LCA or the ALC	I know the year of the vote to allow women to be ordained in Lutheran churches in the U.S.	Attended the ordination of a woman pastor
Have a pastor who is a woman	I can name three women at the grave of Jesus (who?)	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	I can name three women followers of Jesus in the time of the apostles (name)	Have been shaped by a Sunday-school teacher who was a woman (name)
I can name a Lutheran pastor nearby who is a woman	Name the first woman you ever saw wearing a clerical collar?	Have Lutheran pastors in your family (who?)	Write your name here if you have ever struggled with what to call a woman pastor	Find someone in the room who ever considered going to seminary (or perhaps did!)
I can name a Lutheran bishop who is a woman	Who among us has met a female Lutheran pastor more than 20 years ago? (~what year?)	Who among us has met a woman pastor from another denomination more than 20 years ago? (~what year?)	Have met a religious leader of another FAITH (Jewish, Hindi, etc.) who is a woman	I know what the term "rostered leader" means in the ELCA

**DIRECTIONS:**

Walk around the room or sit and have others come to you, to find people present who can sign a block on your sheet. A person may sign your sheet only once. The goal is to fill up your sheet before we move on to the next activity.

## Greeting and Song (10 minutes)

*Leader: We are gathered in the name of the eternal God*

**People: In whom we live and move and have our being.**

**Song:** “God of the Women” (“Slane”) by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette<sup>1</sup> (verses one and five)

1. God of the women who answered your call,  
Trusting your promises, giving their all,  
Women like Sarah and Hannah and Ruth—  
Give us their courage to live in your truth.
2. O God of Phoebe and ministers all,  
May we be joyful in answering your call.  
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near  
That we may share in your ministry here.

## Biblical Reflection (15 minutes)

*Have someone read Isaiah 42:5-7 aloud for the whole group. Give people a chance to read the brief scenario silently for themselves. Then allow them five or six minutes to discuss the two readings with another person. Afterward, share a few reflections from the dyads with the larger group before moving on.*

### Isaiah 42:5-7 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the LORD,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people upon it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:  
<sup>6</sup> I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,  
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  
I have given you as a covenant to the people,<sup>[a]</sup>  
a light to the nations,  
<sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

### Brief Scenario

In early 1981, the newly ordained female pastor stood at the door shaking hands of parishioners after worship with the (male) senior pastor, who greeted an older woman, a beloved member of the church, “Mrs. Jones, so good to see you after all that sickness! What do you think of our new assistant pastor, now?” “Personally,” she snapped back, “I don’t think much of it at all! But if God called her, what are you going to do about it?”

<sup>1</sup> Text: Copyright © 1998 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved. Copied from *Gifts of Love: New Hymns for Today’s Worship* by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (Geneva Press, 2000). [www.carolynshymns.com](http://www.carolynshymns.com).

## Women's Roles Reflective Exercise (15 minutes)

*Quickly break up the group of participants into small groups of four or five. If possible, have people count off to mix up the room from the clusters of friends with which people have initially entered the space. Have paper, pens, and colored markers at the tables in the seating area where the small groups will meet. Then have the leader explain the following brainstorming exercise:*

I'm going to ask you to brainstorm together as a group. Choose one person to record the responses that get called out to each question. Brainstorming means there is no censoring of responses. Let people's thoughts flow freely, even if some of the responses seem a little out of the scope of the question. Just note all responses on your paper. You'll have two minutes to answer each question. *[The leader will have to keep the exercise moving.]*

1. As you look around the world you inhabit outside this church, where do you see women functioning in society? In what kind of roles?
2. Consider now your congregation, apart from the role of pastor (or bishop). What roles do women carry?

*Leader to the whole group:*

Listen to these two passages from the New Testament, the first from the apostle Paul, the second from later writings called the Pastoral Epistles:

"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" (I Corinthians 14:33b-35).

*And again:*

"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" (I Timothy 2:11-14).

*Leader to the small groups:*

Take a marker of a different color than you've been using to write your list. As a group, review your list. Circle any item on either list, society or church, that involves a woman's speaking in public. Include also any roles that would involve a woman's having "authority over a man."

*Give them one or two minutes to complete the task.*

What do you notice?

*Have someone read aloud these paragraphs from church historian Maria Erling (United Lutheran Seminary):*

By the 1960s, “for many interpreters who supported women’s ordination in America, the fact of the emancipation of women was the key decision. Any of the biblical or traditional arguments against women’s ordination were actually arguments that at the root—Paul’s ‘I permit no woman to speak’ or ‘Wives obey their husbands’—would forbid women from voting, at all, and certainly not in the congregations. So once churches had decided that women could vote, or speak in public, they had already moved out of [the apostle] Paul’s framework for society. This was the situation that American Lutherans had already assumed in the late 1960s when they embarked on the official study on the role of the women in the churches, with the task of deciding whether Lutheran churches in the United States could ordain women to the ministry.<sup>2</sup>

“All the biblical passages concerning women were the same ones used to study whether women also should vote in congregations. Since the churches had already decided to give women the vote, in spite of biblical texts that spoke against women’s speaking or teaching in public, then they could not turn around and use the same texts to argue against ordaining women. Deciding that women should vote, that women should be emancipated from the private realm, was the fundamental question.”

*Ask the group to make observations about their experience together in this exercise before moving on.*

### **Preparing for the Next Section of the Session**

*In this next segment of the session, there are three blocks of information to consider. If you have more than 15 participants, let more than one group consider each section but make sure that each section is considered. If your group is smaller, even two people considering a section would be workable, though groups of four or five are ideal for including everyone in discussion.*

**Precursors to the Decision About Women’s Ordination in America** (25 minutes for the segment: 15 minutes working in small groups, 10 minutes for reporting out)

How did the question of women’s ordination arise among Lutherans?

*The groups’ task in this segment is to absorb information from the written text, each group reading one “block” of information; then, acting as reporters, to digest the information about work to prepare for women’s ordination; and then to present it—in simple and understandable fashion!—to the whole group.*

*Have participants start by reading their material silently as they begin.*

*When people have finished reading, ask people to work through the following discussion questions as a group to help them digest their material to be ready to present it to the larger group. Taking notes may be helpful.*

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Erling, “Democratization of Authority and the Ordination of Women, Part I,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, October 1, 2011, paragraphs 9, 28.

## Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Who is central in your group's material in relation to women's ordination?
2. What challenge is being considered?
3. In their conclusions, what did that person/group bring to the debate about women's ordination?
4. What else did you notice in the material you worked with that you'd like to bring to your larger group's attention?

## Group 1: Stendahl on Women and the Bible as the Church of Sweden Considered Women's Ordination

In a study of the biblical texts underlying arguments about women's ordination, Krister Stendahl, a well-known and loved New Testament scholar and teacher, wrote what became foundational reflections for the Lutheran church both in Europe and the United States. Stendahl wrote his reflections in 1958, before he emigrated to the U.S.; they were published in English in 1966.

Let's understand a little context: Norway was the first of a number of countries in Europe with (Lutheran) state churches that began to grapple with women's ordination. "While a few women had been ordained in Lutheran churches of Germany and the Netherlands in the 1920s, the churches as a body had not approved the action. ... In 1938 the church of Norway authorized the ordination of women but did not ordain one until well after WWII. ..." With these changes came counterarguments, especially from German theologian Peter Brunner, who argued on the basis of Scripture and the orders of creation that women were not created to be pastors, that being a pastor was a deep violation of a woman's created nature.<sup>3</sup> Krister Stendahl challenged Brunner.

Stendahl argues that:

- There is a difference between what the text says in its original context and how we interpret it for our time. It is not Scripture that is the issue, says Stendahl, but the view of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The academic word for Scripture interpretation is *hermeneutics*.
- Many questions we have in our time are not addressed directly in the pages of Scripture.<sup>5</sup>
- When we think through the role of women in the church, "In all the texts where the New Testament speaks about the role of women in the church ... when a reason is given, it is always by reference to the subordinate position of women in the order of creation. ... Nowhere do we find any reference to Jesus' choice of men as apostles or the exclusively male character of the first celebration of the Last Supper."<sup>6</sup>
- "What the New Testament has to say about the new equality between man and woman as well as between Jew and Greek, slave and free, it says concerning those who are in Christ and for those who belong to him. It is not speaking outside the church, it is not enunciating new principles for society. It would then be peculiar if the church, which wants to belong to Christ and to witness

<sup>3</sup> Gracia Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," *Lutheran Quarterly* 32 (2018), 282.

<sup>4</sup> Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Woman* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 38.



to him, saw it as his duty to turn this biblical picture upside down by saying to its faithful: 'In worldly affairs you may accept emancipation—and before God there is neither man nor woman—but in the church's life and its worship it is not so.' Then one would have to go on to say: 'In the world slaves are emancipated by now, but in the church that should not be so ... etc., etc.'"<sup>7</sup>

- Therefore Galatians 3:28 is crucial as it reveals the order of salvation that supersedes the order of creation: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

## **Group 2: Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA) and Seminary Faculties**

When Lutherans face something new or difficult, by tradition, we gather our best theologians and biblical faculty to study the issue. In the late 1960s, the newly formed LCUSA, with its Division of Theological Studies, provided a natural forum for studying a topic such as women's ordination. Four scholars were assigned the task and each of the four church bodies, including also the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, assigned representatives to an inter-Lutheran consultation of the study materials that took place in September 1969. Their study covered Scripture arguments that could be considered against women's ordination, those in favor, Scripture interpretation, the history of what Lutherans have said on the subject, and how workable women's ordination might be, and presented conclusions for a church consultation.<sup>8</sup>

### **Notes From the Study on the Ordination of Women by LCUSA:**

When the ten representatives of the churches gathered with the Lutheran scholars in Dubuque, Iowa, to compare views on the question of women's ordination, "Some were strongly opposed to [women's] ordination, but not one argued that woman was by nature incapable of receiving God's charismatic gifts.

"Neither did the representatives accept the God-is-male argument against female clergy. ... The apostles-were-male argument was also rejected by the study participants."<sup>9</sup>

The study notes that the word "ordination" does not appear in Scripture, that rites such as ordination shifted in use in Scripture and are therefore not helpful as mandates for our time. It spent considerable time on key terms such as "headship." Reflecting on Lutheran confessional writings of the 16th century, the study notes the differences among Lutherans in their understanding of ministry, on how much emphasis it places on rulership, or service, saying, "[The Lutheran view of ministry] does not make the pastor a special, sacred class of citizen; yet it calls for sufficient respect to make the office effective. The pastor stands with the people under God, yet also under God against the people as the voice of God's word."<sup>10</sup>

The study affirms a Reformation understanding of the word of God and the office of the ministry, summarized this way: "The person adds nothing to this Word and office commanded by Christ. No

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 54-55.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

matter who it is who preaches and teaches the Word, if there are hearts that hear and adhere to it, something will happen to them according as they hear and believe because Christ commanded such preaching.”<sup>11</sup> Readers will note this traditional understanding of the ministry Lutherans have, which means that they do not place emphasis on the gifts brought by the person occupying the pastoral office.

While the Division of Theological Studies of LCUSA undertook its study, some faculties of both ALC and the LCA seminaries prepared studies of their own. In a particularly succinct one, in 1966, the Board of Luther Seminary resolved: “God has left the details of the ministerial office to the discretion of the church, to be developed according to its needs and according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

1. The New Testament does not confront the question of ordination of women and therefore does not speak directly to it. On the other hand, nothing in the New Testament speaks decisively against it.
2. Although the ordination of women raises new and difficult questions, there is no decisive theological argument against the ordination of women.
3. The practical objections, however serious, do not by themselves settle the question for Lutherans. As long as no decisive biblical or theological objections are raised, the ordination of women remains a possibility.
4. The most serious objection is the ecumenical, that Lutherans ought not unilaterally in the present divided state of Christendom make decisions that affect all Christian churches. But inasmuch as other churches already have ordained women to the ministry, and some churches not presently ordaining women are open to discussion of its possibility, the exact weight of this objection is difficult to assess.

In view of the considerations above, we can see no valid reason why women candidates for ordination who meet the standards normally required for admission to the ministry should not be recommended for ordination.<sup>12</sup>

### **Group 3: Where Are the Women? ALCW and LCW Reflections on Hindsight’s Vision**

Historical perspective allows us to see things that weren’t always visible to those living in a moment of the past. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of women’s ordination, it seems strange to notice that after the LCA and the ALC decided to ordain women, their denominational magazines did not give report of these actions front-and-center coverage.

*The Lutheran Standard*, “Official Publication of the ALC,” has a boxed summary of “Major Convention Actions.” “Approved the ordination of women” appears as number 5 on the list of 12 items. The narrative description of the convention gives even less weight to the affirmative vote. There are three paragraphs about the decision on the second page of the convention report, but half of that space is dedicated to a failed motion to offer support to the women who would matriculate in seminaries, while another full paragraph discussed the traditional theological arguments against women’s

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 17. Quoting from Philip Melancthon, *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, 26; *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore Gerhardt Tappert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1959), 324.

<sup>12</sup> “Reports and Actions,” 1970, 326-327. Footnote with the Luther faculty statement, submitted to the ALC Church Council on October 30, 1968: Footnote 13, McArver, “Democratization of Authority and Ordination of Women, Part II,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, November 1, 2011, body of the resolution and footnote are in note 13.

ordination.<sup>13</sup> No matter how important these decisions were to some in the church, other issues of the day dominated both convention action and reports about the convention.

Likewise, where LCUSA was studying the issue of women's ordination on behalf of the Lutheran bodies in the United States, including the Lutheran church–Missouri Synod, concern there predominated about what effect a decision on the ordination of women would have on the relationship between the ALC and Missouri, who were in the process of affirming a historic relationship, should the ALC proceed with ordaining women.<sup>14</sup>

Hindsight also allows us to see that in the LCUSA's study about the ordination of women, all of its scholars were male, as were all of the churches' representatives for the September 1969 consultation about their findings, except for one of the LCA's three representatives, Margaret Sittler Ermarth. From our vantage point today, it is startling to think that they could imagine they could decide the question of women's ordination without women being part of the discussion. That was their assumption. Yet while their conversations and studies were going on, the women's organizations of the ALC and the LCA were supporting women's leadership in other ways and were studying women's ordination in other settings.

## LCW

Reflecting on the purpose of women's organizations in Lutheran churches, Dorothy Marple, an active laywoman in the LCA and LCW, who also worked for the church, comments that "Even though in the early years the dictates of men circumscribed their purpose and existence, these organizations were major vehicles for women's involvement and leadership in the church. ... Leadership training affirmed God-given gifts and prepared women to use these gifts in service to others. The recruitment of women for overseas missionary service accompanied by scholarship and salary support, cracked open the door for a role in the church beyond that of volunteer."<sup>15</sup>

Dorothy told the story of how, in the run-up to the 1970 LCA convention with its vote for the ordination of women, an anti-racism encounter was especially meaningful for the women of the LCW. An African American woman shared what it was like for her to be black. LCW leaders at the consultation heard anew, as though for the first time, how their own participation in racist structures and practices denied the equality of all people before God. "Dealing with negative and false images of black Americans frequently projected by white persons opened up the discussion of the image of women and their subordination in the church. It was a short step to a more profound understanding of the structures within the church that stunted the personal growth of women and limited the possibilities for creative expansion of talents and abilities for service."<sup>16</sup>

That experience among LCW leaders led them to formulate a resolution to send to the LCA convention as a follow-up resolution, presented by the Rev. Frederick K. Wentz, president of Hamma

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<sup>13</sup> "The Grace to Trust," *Lutheran Standard*, November 10, 1970, 5.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Gracia Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," *Lutheran Quarterly* 32 (2018), 290.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy J. Marple. "God at Work Among Us," in *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry, 1970-1995*, ed. Gloria E. Bengtson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995), 21-22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Theological School, after the passage of the main resolution, urging the LCA's "members, its congregations, commissions, its synods, its auxiliary, its relevant boards and commissions, and all its leaders" to "encourage qualified women to seek and to fulfill calls into the ordained ministry," and to "vigorously and creatively" provide a "facilitating climate and supportive structures" for these new prospective candidates.<sup>17</sup>

## ALCW

"In 1969, at its Minneapolis Triennial Convention, the American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW) had voted 'to call a study conference or some other effective method of studying the role of women in the church on legislative participation and on ordination.' That work bore fruit. When it came time for the President of The ALC to appoint a committee to study the ordination of women ... to make a recommendation to the Church Council, Frederick Schiotz (then President of The ALC), after a conversation with the ALCW Board," appointed two well-known women from different parts of the ALC tradition. "Their leadership proved crucial to the passing of the resolution approving women's ordination."

"In preparation for The ALC convention, *The Lutheran Standard* printed a feature article by [Marjorie] Wold on the ordination of women. ... Wold was one of the best-known women in the ALC and would soon become the ALCW Executive Secretary. Her article considered the place most women of the church were in: women against change, some for, some perplexed. She spoke for the typical ALC woman's 'mixed feelings' about women's rights and feminism and her own struggle to be accepted. A Bible student herself, she handled those materials by focusing on the Galatians texts about equality and left it at that. ... She concluded her article with a plea for conversation and discussion."<sup>18</sup>

## The Vote Itself (10 minutes)

*Have someone stand before the room to read, as though functioning as a herald:*

In the LCA, one word changed everything: the resolution before the convention simply amended the denomination's Bylaw "by striking the word 'man' and inserting the word 'person.' The revised Bylaw read: 'A minister of this church shall be a person whose soundness in the faith, aptness to teach, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the constitution, and who has been properly ordained.' The measure was adopted—somewhat anticlimactically—on a simple voice vote.<sup>19</sup>

A little more than two months later, "at the ALC General Convention in October, the Church Council submitted a motion that 'women be eligible for call and ordination in The American Lutheran Church.' The vote was more contentious than it had been in the LCA, but the measure passed: 560 to 414, with one abstention."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Gracia Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," *Lutheran Quarterly* 32 (2018), 292, 295.

<sup>19</sup> Maria Erling, "Democratization of Authority and Ordination of Women, Part I," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, October 1, 2011, paragraph 37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*Leader:* Will you please stand, as you are able, and join me in celebrating with your applause: For everyone who worked to bring the church to that day and who continues to open the doors of the church for people to serve in leadership, even as we come to the 50th anniversary of those decisions in the ELCA.

**Closing Hymn** (10 minutes)

“The Church of Christ, in Every Age” (ELW 729)

*Alternate choices are available in the appendix or may arise from common usage in your setting.*

**Prayer**

Gracious God, we come before you this day with hearts full of gratitude. When we stand on this mountaintop, looking back on our journey as women and men in Christ’s church, we see your hand, faithful and steady, leading and guiding us, through joys and sorrows, through perils and difficulties we could never have endured without you. We praise you, and we thank you. May our lives honor you! In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen.**

## SESSION 2: THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT: NOTICING THE SHIFT FROM “WHAT WOULD PREVENT US?” TO “WHY WE MUST!”

### PREPARATION

#### Needed for the Session:

- A meeting area with room to move around. Tables make the later exercise easier for writing but are not necessary.
- A leader who can honor the experience of all participants, draw out relevant sharing where noted, and keep the session moving
- Time to explore. The session is designed for 90 minutes. Shorter sessions, perhaps for a Sunday-morning, 45-minute forum setting, can be planned by choosing a few of the segments.
- Supplies needed: 3x5” cards with Bible passages written on them, one per card: eight of them, as noted below; Bibles spread about the room; copies of the FACT SHEET, one per person
- Someone to lead the song and prayer to conclude the session. This can be someone other than the leader.

### SESSION OUTLINE

#### Greeting and Song (10 minutes)

*Leader: We are gathered in the name of the eternal God*

**People: In whom we live and move and have our being.**

**Song:** “God of the Women” (“Slane”) by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (verses two and five)

2. God of the women who walked Jesus’ Way,  
Giving their resources, learning to pray,  
Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and more—  
May we give freely as they did before.
5. O God of Phoebe and ministers all,  
May we be joyful in answering your call.  
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near  
That we may share in your ministry here.

#### Biblical Reflection (10 minutes)

*Have the leader or another reader read the passage aloud, or take turns reading the story by verses. Let participants know that you will be holding a minute of silence together after the reading to feel the weight of the women’s roles, then let the silence stand for a whole minute. Then ask participants to gather with two others seated near them to talk about the discussion questions listed below the text. It can help to have the questions printed out on a board, on a flip chart, or on paper set out on the tables for people to refer back to.*

## **Luke 23:55-24:11 (NRSV)**

<sup>55</sup>The women who had come with [Jesus] from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup>Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. <sup>1</sup>But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

*Discussion questions: Gather with two others seated near you. Let each one in the small group tell the others about a time when he or she had something important to tell others but the others were not listening, hearing, or believing them. What did that feel like? Was there mockery involved, as there might have been in the text, with the phrase “seemed to have been an idle tale”?*

**Additional Arguments in Favor of Women’s Ordination** (20 minutes–10 minutes for the small groups to consider one of the writers, Stumme or Bloomquist, and 10 minutes for the groups to share what they learned with each other afterward)

**Others Who Take Up the Argument in Favor of Women’s Ordination in an International Context**, through whom we can more deeply understand the lines of argument

*Have participants gather in twos and threes. Half of the groups will read through Pastor Stumme’s points from his study of the Lutheran Confessions. Have each small group choose one point to share with the whole group. The other half of the groups will skip below to Pastor Karen Bloomquist’s presentation to the Lutheran Church in Cameroon.*

*This work in small groups prepares for the vignette that follows. That story is the heart of Session 2. Keep to the allotted time now so there will be sufficient time later to consider the vignette.*

## **The Role of the Lutheran Confessions**

Pastor John R. Stumme’s work with the Argentinian church on the Confessions in 1980-’81: John R. Stumme (Missionary in Argentina: the Confessions do not stand in the way)

“The Confessions” are the Lutheran confessional writings of the 16th century that Lutherans hold dear in helping to interpret scripture. They include Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms, the Augsburg Confession, and other writings in the Book of Concord.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), \*2.05, \*2.06.

In 1980, Pastor Stumme studied the Confessions to understand how they might or might not be relevant to the question of whether women could be ordained, as the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida, IELU) faced that question. IELU took up the issue in October 1981 because women were in the seminary for the first time preparing to be pastors. While there was opposition to allowing women into the church's ordained ministry, the assembly's vote in favor was overwhelming.

Here are quotes of some of his points from his discussion:

- The Confessions do not face the question of women's ordination. They do not say anything explicitly about the issue. It was not their concern. Therefore, help from the Confessions is going to be indirect.
- The Confessions were written in a man's world. They presupposed that ordination was only for the masculine sex. They do not defend this position.
- We should not count on the Confessions giving us concrete directions for every situation. To read them in that manner would paralyze our responsibility to confess the gospel now. It is crucial to appeal to the center of the Confessions, the gospel.
- The place to discuss the ordination of women according to the Confessions
- The forms, structures, and qualifications of the special ministry do not belong to the heart of the gospel, to the essence of the church. They are not divine but human. They can be different, they can change. They are *adiaphora*, that is, objects of human responsibility, formed in relation to the mission of the church.
- The minister as representative of Christ
- The focus here is on the minister's function, not on his or her personal quality. According to Luther, "Even though a scoundrel receives or administers the sacrament, it is the true sacrament (that is, Christ's body and blood), just as truly as when one uses it most worthily. For it is not founded on human holiness but on the Word of God." (Large Catechism, V, 16)<sup>22</sup>

### Discussion Questions for the Small Groups Discussing the Stumme Material:

1. Name something you heard in Pastor Stumme's teaching that seems crucial to your understanding of Lutheran faith.
2. How would you summarize Pastor Stumme's consideration of the confessional writings of the Lutheran church as they relate to the question of whether Lutherans ought to allow the ordination of women?

### The Place of the Gospel

In 2009, the Rev. Dr. Karen L. Bloomquist, then director of the Department for Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Geneva, was invited to give a theological presentation to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon as they were considering the ordination of women and preparing to vote on that question.<sup>23</sup> They did vote to allow women's ordination that year.

<sup>22</sup> John R. Stumme, "Some Thoughts on the Ordination of Women and the Lutheran Confessions," December 1, 2009, [www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/339](http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/339).

<sup>23</sup> Karen L. Bloomquist, "Ordaining Women Goes to the Heart of the Gospel," December 1, 2009, [www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/340](http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/340).



When you see the theological and Biblical arguments about women's ordination laid out in chronological order, as we have been considering them in this study, what is striking when you consider Dr. Bloomquist's presentation is that she picks up the thread of the argument from the other side.

Everything prior to her work considers what might *prevent* the church from ordaining women: Is there anything in the Scriptures that tells us definitively that women cannot bear this role? Is there anything in church history, in our ecumenical relationships, or in the Lutheran churches' 16th-century confessional writings of the Reformation era that hinders us from taking this momentous step in this time and place, of ordaining women to Word and Sacrament ministry?

Dr. Bloomquist lists factors typically involved where there is resistance to women's ordination, even as she notes the widespread current practice of ordaining women within the 145 worldwide member churches belonging to LWF—in 2009, 63 million out of 68 million members of LWF churches belonged to an LWF church that *did* allow for the possibility of ordaining women, with some Lutheran churches having done so as far back as 80, 50, or 40 years, though many having only begun doing so more recently and having only a few women ordained.

But then Dr. Bloomquist opens her Bible.

She proposes that the main focus of the Cameroonian Church's attention not be on how people have resisted women's ordination but that, especially as Lutherans, they consider what is central in our faith: the gospel. Listen to her words:

"My main contention is that the church betrays the heart of the gospel if it prohibits women from being ordained to the public ministry.

"The main basis for this claim is that according to all four of the Gospels, the first to witness and proclaim the good news of Christ's resurrection were women. According to a Lutheran understanding, proclaiming the gospel and presiding over the Lord's Supper are the central tasks for which some are ordained for the church's public ministry."

She then explores why women have not been ordained for so much of the church's history, reflects on the meaning of the gospel, and encourages her hearers to encounter the presence of God in Jesus Christ through the ministry of women, even if it breaks taboos and challenges current practices.

### **Discussion Questions for the Small Groups Discussing the Bloomquist Material:**

1. Name something you heard in Dr. Bloomquist's presentation that seems crucial to your understanding of Lutheran faith.
2. How would you summarize her consideration of the gospel as it relates to the question of whether Lutherans must allow for the ordination of women?

*The group leader calls everyone in the room to order, asking the small groups each to share a highlight of their discussion.*

**Vignette: The Story of the Rev. Dr. Jeannette Ada Maïna, first pastor ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun, EELC)<sup>24</sup>**

(25 minutes total: 7 minutes to read aloud in small groups, 10 minutes to discuss there, 8 minutes to bring discussion into the whole group)

*Count off to create groups of four or five for this next exercise. Take turns reading aloud for those who enjoy doing so, a paragraph or two at a time, to present the story to your small group. Using the questions provided following the vignette, discuss the story. Have one person take notes to share with the larger group.*

Jeannette Ada followed her bishop's suggestion, though at the time she felt unsure about it, and went to seminary to study theology in 2006. She was there with four pastors who were ordained. She was the only woman and was not ordained. They said, "What are you doing here? The church doesn't ordain women! What church would do that?" She told them that she was ordained from her mother's womb and didn't need their affirmation, that they weren't going to discourage her, and that the day that the Lord wants women to be ordained, it will happen.

From the time Jeannette was a young girl, she knew she was destined to be a "great woman," though some in her family scoffed at her. She had dreams where she sensed the presence of God coming to her, calling her forward. She understood the dreams more fully when she was in seminary. Initially, she didn't imagine the dreams as a call into the ministry. She had seen her father, who raised her, suffer as a pastor. But steps in her education—the support of her bishop, Bishop Nyiwe, to study theology, for instance, instead of another course of study—led her path to ministry.

While her family, her husband, Bishop Nyiwe, and women church leaders in nearby countries rejoiced at her calling and eventual ordination, few in Cameroon rejoiced at the outset. The majority of pastors in both Lutheran church bodies in Cameroon didn't think ordaining women was a good idea. Church members against women's ordination were in the majority. Listen to Pastor Ada's description of the assembly of the EELC in Bankim in May 2009 as they considered the question of women's ordination [where Dr. Karen Bloomquist presented her teaching, above]:

"The first vote was all red cards. The president of the assembly said there were more cards than voters; [it had to] be redone. So Dr. Ngah got up and talked and started teaching again and he talked and talked and when they voted this time it was green.

"So it is that God really made this happen."

Ministry in Cameroon is structured differently than in the United States. A call to a particular congregation or social ministry organization is not required for ordination. Pastor Ada was ordained on May 6, 2012. Two other women were also ordained that day—Halema Rita Dewa and Eliane Nock Djjobdi—the first women ordained in the EELC since the 2009 vote to allow women's ordination.<sup>25</sup> She

<sup>24</sup> From an interview with the Rev. Dr. Jeannette Ada épouse Maïna, pastor of the Église Évangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon), February 8, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Office for Women in Church and Society, Department for Theology and Public Witness of LWF, "The Participation of Women in the Ordained Ministry and Leadership in LWF Member Churches" (Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, 2016), 9.

was the first ordained that day, though all three were ordained at the same worship service. Pastor Ada worked for Women for Christ before being ordained. Her internship was at the cathedral in Ngaoundéré, site of the headquarters of the national church (EELC). She now works with the Council of Protestant Council of Cameroon in Yaoundé (CEPCA, Conseil des Eglises Protestantes du Cameroun). Her church body, the EELC, includes her in rotations (leading worship, preaching periodically) in the area where she lives and works. She completed her doctorate in theology at Protestant University of Central Africa in Yaoundé a few years ago, the first EELC woman to have a doctorate in theology. In 2018, she was elected to the Council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and became the vice president of the LWF for Africa, so she is the highest-ranking LWF official on the continent of Africa. Like the experience of many other women in countries that have recently begun ordaining women, she has not ever been called as the pastor of a congregation.

#### *Her struggles in ministry?*

Pastor Ada says that her challenges are to do whatever she does well so that others will say yes, women are capable. She also finds that men around her can be uncomfortable when she does well and shows herself to be capable.

Normally there are certain patterns for ministry. In her case, as the “first,” these did not happen for her: during her pastoral internship, it became necessary for her to change supervisors for reasons unrelated to her work, then neither man would write her final evaluation. It is customary for a pastoral candidate’s internship congregation to pay for and plan the ordination celebration; hers did not. She notes these differences yet also the ways others came forward to make a way out of no way: “God prepared everything as the congregation was watching. ... And this gives me the conviction that I was called for this ministry.”

#### *Her joys in ministry?*

Pastor Ada finds joy in her calling! She delights in wider Lutheran settings within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) where she has been invited to preach and has been given opportunity to lead, often among other African Lutheran Church bodies that do not yet ordain women. She noted that after the 500th anniversary celebration of the Reformation, she was given the opportunity to preach in Madagascar, where a regional president made note with a questioning tone that African women could preach. Many of the male pastors wanted to be photographed with her afterward, but, she noted, they aren’t yet ready for their churches to ordain women.

She is joyful as a counselor and pastor to women. In that role, she realizes that women haven’t all heard the gospel yet, and it is a privilege to bring it to them. In her pastoral role, she also helps them to voice their concerns within their churches and to lift up their own leaders. In the past, their pastors had chosen their leaders for them.

#### *Her message, especially for women?*

“It is not for nothing that Jesus said to women to go and tell my brothers. So don’t internalize the message that you are a poor, useless woman.”

*Her reflection on her ministry:*

“I can accompany all women so they can live out that they are God’s creation, can live that out in society and family and church. She is not inferior, second-class, but she is excellent. Mary was the mother of Christ. She carries the good news. You can’t carry the good news and be second-class. Men cannot make her believe she is inferior. Each should take her place.”

### **Discussion Questions for Small Groups**

1. After the group reading aloud, have each person in the small group name one thing he or she found remarkable in Pastor Ada’s ministry journey.
2. It is sometimes easier to see cultural forces at work from a distance than it is to see them closer at hand. How would you name the cultural forces at work in the EELC in relation to women’s ordination? How do they relate to issues you know in your own experience of life in church and society here in your own community and in the United States?
3. In Cameroon and other places that are newer to ordaining women, Lutheran churches have been reluctant to call women to lead congregations, placing them, instead, as leaders in organizations or as teachers. What cultural elements might impact that? Have you had any experiences with limits to what women are called to do in your area?
4. How does Pastor Ada’s faith in God’s purpose for her life and ministry and God’s power sustain her, and what power does the gospel have for you?

### **Dates to Remember** (15 minutes)

*Have participants scan the dates listed on the FACT SHEET for a few moments in silence. Ask the group to observe what they notice. Share together as a group.*

### **Closing Hymn** (10 minutes)

“Canticle of the Turning” (Mary’s Song) (ELW 723)

*Alternate choices are available in the appendix or may arise from common usage in your setting.*

### **Prayer**

O God, full of compassion, we commit and commend ourselves to you, in whom we live and move and have our being. Be the goal of our pilgrimage, and our rest by the way. Give us refuge from the turmoil of worldly distractions beneath the shadow of your wings. Let our hearts, so often a sea of restless waves, find peace in you, O God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(“Protection Through Life,” ELW, page 86)

## SESSION 3: WHAT WAS MISSING WITHOUT WOMEN IN ORDAINED PUBLIC MINISTRY?

### PREPARATION

#### Needed for the Session:

- A comfortable meeting area with an open space for the group exercise that takes place after the biblical reflection. Chairs that can move around to accommodate small groups of four or five make moving into the later exercise simpler. Small tables could make the later exercise easier for writing but are not necessary.
- A leader who can honor the experience of all participants, draw out relevant sharing where noted, but also keep the session moving
- Three-by-five-inch note cards for use in the biblical reflection, paper for the later group exercise, pens; Bibles for small groups working on story number two will be helpful as a reference.
- Someone to lead the song and prayer to conclude the session. This can be someone other than the leader.

### SESSION OUTLINE

#### Greeting and Song (10 minutes)

*Leader: We are gathered in the name of the eternal God*

**People: In whom we live and move and have our being.**

Song: “God of the Women” (“Slane”) by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (verses three and five)

3. God of the women long put to the test,  
Left out of stories, forgotten, oppressed,  
Quietly asking: “Who smiled at my birth?”—  
In Jesus’ dying you show us our worth.
5. O God of Phoebe and ministers all,  
May we be joyful in answering your call.  
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near  
That we may share in your ministry here.

#### Biblical Reflection (15 minutes)

##### Matthew 14:15-21 (Jerusalem Bible)

<sup>15</sup>When evening came, the disciples went to [Jesus] and said, ‘This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.’

<sup>16</sup>Jesus replied, ‘There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.’ <sup>17</sup>But they answered, ‘All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.’ <sup>18</sup>So he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ <sup>19</sup>He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his

disciples, who gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup>They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children.

### **Reflection Question**

Take a moment in silence, then jot down your thoughts on a note card that come to mind from your community and the world around you: Where do you see examples of women and children being a kind of afterthought?

### **Invisibility Game (10 minutes)**

*Have everyone gather in one large circle. If you have a group of more than 20 people, let there be multiple circles of 10-20 people each. Choose a distinguishing characteristic of someone in the group that is not associated with any other group norm associated with social norms or status such as height, weight, or skin color—a particular color, for instance, that s/he is wearing that is more uncommon that day. Have that person chosen to stand outside the circle to start the game. It is important to choose someone for a reason, however strange.*

*Everyone else in the circle faces in toward the center of the circle, locks arms, and does everything in his/her power to keep the chosen person out—without, of course, physically hurting the person. When that person breaks into the circle, s/he chooses another characteristic for a single person represented among those present to be “on the outside.”*

*Try the exercise two or three times, then sit as a large group, with the leader asking: As with other warm-up games in this series, keep the discussion moving so there is time for the heart of the session that follows.*

- Who experienced something uncomfortable with this exercise? What was it?
- Has anyone experienced something similar in your life?
- How might your awareness of being excluded from something in your life, or of finding that your access to something you want or need to do is more difficult than it is for others, relate to the study material we are discussing about women’s ordination?
- Last session we ended with the convention votes taken—with the authorization given for ordination to happen—but at that point there were very few women ready to serve or approved for ordination, and in the early days it was difficult for them to receive calls. Can you remember the first time you met a pastor who was a woman? Did you ever talk with her about barriers she experienced in serving?

### **From the Vote to Allow Women’s Ordination to Women Serving as Pastors (10 minutes)**

*Leader and someone else read these paragraphs aloud, alternating, to lead into the main teaching section of this session.*

At the ALC Convention in October 1970, as a follow-up to the successful vote to allow the ordination of women, the ALC Church Council “acknowledged that women clergy would face ‘especially during

the transitional period ... many practical issues.’ They recommended ‘that the seminaries give special counseling to women who may seek to matriculate at the seminaries.’ [F]ollowing on the heels of the original affirmative vote, this motion failed.”<sup>26</sup>

The vote had been more contentious at the ALC convention than it was in the LCA. Just leave it alone now? They’ll do fine. We don’t need to pander to them! Was it a failure to grasp the significance of what they had just done? Or fear of the vote’s consequences? If there was a “sense of the house” about why the second motion failed, which so clearly supported the convention’s action just taken, it is now lost.

While it’s not clear what the vote of the ALC Church Council meant to those who participated in it, what was not lost on the women who were ordained in those early years following the votes is how challenging the transition was, both for those early women who served and for the church.

*Read the following bullet points in different voices, among participants.*

- In the early to mid-1970s a young woman was talking with a well-known Lutheran church leader. She shared with him that she was thinking of entering seminary to study for the ministry. He answered quickly: “Oh, honey! You don’t want to do that!”
- In 1978, a woman pastor visited a Fortress Church Supply store to find clergy shirts for her new call. She tried one on. It fit across the shoulders, but the darts were in the wrong place.
- The younger woman’s (male) internship supervisor shared with her that what was hard for him about women’s ordination was that female clergy brought sex into the ministry. She wondered to herself, “What did he think of himself? Was he not a sexual being?” It was not a safe topic for a supervisory session.
- Following a large Lutheran worship service in the early 80s, a woman reached out to grab the vestment of the young woman pastor: “I’ve never seen one before!” It turns out she wasn’t talking about the vestment.
- Statistics in Session 4 reveal deeper adjustments than these lighter-hearted examples: comparisons about time spent waiting for a first call, time spent on leave from call, percentage of women versus men who have ever served in a senior pastor position, and salary discrepancies between men and women.
- It took another nine years for a woman of color to be ordained among Lutherans in the United States.

And yet ... women began to arrive at Lutheran seminaries, following their own sense of call *from God* that they should serve in the public ministries of the church.

And just as it was hard to imagine what the transition would look like, standing at the moment of the vote, so also it was hard to imagine the rich gifts of grace that women would begin to open up with and for the church, by their presence.

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<sup>26</sup> “Reports and Actions of the American Lutheran Church” 1970. Cited as endnote 64 in Susan Wilds McArver, “Democratization of Authority and Ordination of Women, Part II,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, November 1, 2011, 328.

None of the arguments in favor of the ordination of women before the votes had posited that women would bring unique perspectives with them. Yet without the possibility of women's ordination, at least half of the adult membership of the church was missing from its leadership! In the LCA convention's vote, the language of the church's bylaws was changed from "man" to "person." It was an ingenious constitutional amendment: simple, efficient, and momentous. But did it also express a deeper unconscious meaning—did some people imagine that the new pastors would be interchangeable with the old?

The early years with women theologically and biblically trained brought new gifts to the church's public ministry. As women began to serve in the church's leadership, their communities began to discover a wholeness of the body of Christ in the gifts they brought with them. Let's explore two examples.

**Discovering Unique Gifts for Ministry** (35 minutes: 25 minutes in the small groups and 10 minutes for sharing back in the whole group)

*Quickly break up the group of participants into small groups of four or five. If possible, have people count off to mix up the room from the clusters of friends with which people have initially entered the space. If there are more than 10 people present, still keep the groups small to enhance discussion, letting multiple groups work on the two stories.*

*Have paper, pens, and five copies of the story that the group will consider at each table or seating area. Have someone in each group take notes on their discussion questions for sharing with the whole group.*

### **1. Hearing a Word From God for Her**

*Have the group read the story aloud by taking turns, reading a few paragraphs at a time. Work through the discussion questions at the end of the stories with one participant taking notes to share with the larger group later.*

Young and just a few years into her ministry, Pastor Janet Peterman was called out one night to respond to an emergency at a large teaching hospital. A woman was traveling far from home and had gone into labor too soon. Her daughter was stillborn.

It was late on a Sunday night, Pentecost night, and the pastor was tired after a long day. One of her neighbors, who knew a nurse on the woman's floor, called to say they hadn't been able to find a pastor to come. The woman had been waiting in her room by herself for hours with the body of her child, waiting for a pastor to come to baptize her baby. "Would you go, please?" the neighbor asked her pastor friend. Without further thought, the pastor dressed again and headed for the hospital.

The woman didn't want to talk very much. The nurses were attentive, but she wasn't interested in what they had to offer, either, so they left her alone. Her daughter was perfectly formed but oh, so tiny, wrapped in a blanket, snuggled in her mother's arms. Her father took her big brother home to keep him out of the bustle of the hospital and all the difficulty it meant for them. With sterile water and a metal bowl from hospital supplies, the pastor baptized Diana Lynn and handed her back to God.



On the way back out of the hospital's mazelike corridors, the woman's nurse thanked the pastor profusely. Caught up in the experience in that room, the nurse's words had only part of the pastor's attention. "I know it's Sunday night," she said, "but why was it so hard to get a pastor to come?" "Oh, there were pastors who *could* come, but they wouldn't. They all said, 'We don't baptize dead babies.'"

The pastor's attention suddenly snapped into focus, and she longed to disappear under the cover of the night's darkness. What had she done? Lutherans don't baptize dead babies, either!

As she reflected on that night and began to speak with colleagues, she knew that, short of refusing to go to be with the woman, there was no way she could have said no to her request for Baptism for her child. The woman believed that it was her Christian duty to have her child baptized to hand her back to God; whether she rightly understood that teaching was not negotiable inside that hospital room.

The pastor came to ask different questions over the next months: Not what had she done, but what if ... ?

What if the church had a well-recognized rite or set of prayers to use for families who have experienced stillbirth and/or the more common experience of miscarriage?

What if Christian tradition provided real alternatives to Baptism for pregnancy losses? What if this mother knew from the worship practices of her own church that when pregnancies end in loss—whether through miscarriage or stillbirth—the church has a word from God for the one bearing it and for her loved ones, a word that honors the uniqueness of this child or pregnancy; that acknowledges the parents' grief; that reassures them of God's love in Jesus, whose arms stretch wide open on the cross, wide enough to receive their child, though s/he died before baptism?

Perhaps the church did have such materials, and she did not know how to find them! The pastor began looking at the seminary library near her home, but when she searched, there were just bits and pieces—a few prayers, a reading or two, but not enough to stand with Diana Lynn's mother in that hospital room or with others like her, and nothing at all for the even more common experience of miscarriage.

Then unbidden, biblical lessons and hymns began to float into her awareness as she went about her life: But we have *this* to say to her, and *this!* By the working of the Holy Spirit, she was drawn into creating a new ritual for those experiencing stillbirths and other losses in pregnancy. Its ritual portions are flexible, allowing for use in various settings, including a hospital room, and provide a possible naming rite. In 1987, the rite was the first published ritual of its kind in any denomination in the United States.<sup>27</sup>

The church's ministry with women in childbirth, with couples and families, did not seem lacking before women were biblically and liturgically trained and began serving as pastors of congregations. But as they began assuming these roles, new dimensions of ministry arose that enriched both women and men.

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<sup>27</sup> Janet S. Peterman, first published as "Remembrance and Commendation: A Rite to Speak to Losses in Pregnancy," *Lutheran Partners*, July-August 1988, 21-24.

## 2. Seeing Wholeness in New Ways

*Have the group read the story aloud by taking turns, reading a few paragraphs at a time. Work through the discussion questions at the end of the stories with one participant taking notes to share with the larger group later.*

Wilda C.M. Gafney is an Episcopal priest and a scholar of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>28</sup> Let's explore an example from her work.

In her study of Genesis,<sup>29</sup> Gafney begins by noting that Genesis 16, the heart of the story of Hagar, does not appear in the Revised Common Lectionary, though it is a significant text in the "cultural lectionary of many African American Christians, particularly women."<sup>30</sup> She herself is African American.

Many Bible studies point out words in the text of particular significance or mention issues of translation in a passage. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. When introducing Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian slave-girl, in Genesis 16:1, Gafney makes a point to note that "she is 'called Hagar' and not 'named Hagar' (reading against the biblical text) because Hagar is a masculine Hebrew name meaning 'foreign thing' from the root gur that means 'to sojourn.' I very much doubt," Gafney continues, "that her Egyptian parents gave her such a name. It is more likely that Hagar is what she was called after she entered a Hebrew-speaking household. I find it noteworthy that her name is not even 'foreign woman.'"<sup>31</sup>

Just like that, with her keen, scholarly mind, with linguistic skills turned where others had not earlier thought to dwell, Gafney shows us Hagar, an Egyptian slave-girl. Clearly, we see: though Hagar is a slave now in a foreign land and her body is not her own, she was once a beloved child of parents who gave her a name that no one knew any longer. We are invited into the story in a new way, to know it more deeply from Hagar's perspective.

Later in the story, after Hagar runs away and God finds her in the wilderness (Genesis 16:6-7), God sends her back to Sarai, but God promises her that she will not be destroyed but "will become the Mother of Many Peoples. ... In verse 13, Hagar names God: El Ro'i—God of seeing—'Have I seen the One who sees me and lived to tell of it?' She is the only person in the canon [of the Old and New Testaments] to give God a name."<sup>32</sup>

Gafney helps those studying the Bible in our time to see what belongs to an earlier era: She does not shy away from identifying what can be difficult in the text—like the truth that, both in this story as also in the New Testament book of Philemon, the biblical text affirms the person's enslavement and

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28 The Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney is professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. Previously, she taught Old Testament and homiletics (preaching) at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which is now part of United Lutheran Seminary (ULS).

29 Wil Gafney, "The Book of Genesis," *The Pastor's Bible Study, Volume Three* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2006), 87-133.

30 *Ibid.*, 105.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*, 106-07.

the harsh treatment that comes with it. She is more forthcoming about this than many scholars. At the same time, with a poignancy that nearly leaps from the page, she grasps both the burden and the sorrow of the one under enslavement, and the joy and liberation of being seen by God, and of knowing her dignity there, nevertheless.

There were many fine Bible studies and expositions on the book of Genesis before Gafney's study. Yet she attends to parts of the text that have often been passed over. Her biblical and theological training and her life as an African American woman, combined, give her new gifts for the church, to elucidate the word of God for us in the text.

### **Discussion Questions for Small Groups Working on Stories One and Two:**

1. When you hear the story for the first time, what part of it jumps out at you?
2. As you reflect on the story together, what unique gifts did the pastor or scholar bring to her ministry?
3. Have you had the experience of being served by a pastor, seminary professor or bishop who was a woman? Can you name unique gifts she brought related to her life experience or particular spiritual gifts? How does that show you a picture of the wholeness of the body of Christ?
4. None of the arguments leading up to the votes for women's ordination in the Lutheran church referred to the unique gifts of women that would be unlocked or included by doing so. Comment; make reference to the story you have read, as you see connections.

### **Sharing With the Whole Group (10 minutes)**

*Members of each group share some of the most important discoveries from their discussion. The leader helps the groups compare and contrast their learnings.*

Your gathering may be able to reflect on this reality in a variety of ways beyond these two examples: These 50 years of our common experience of Lutheran women's ordination have revealed what those who worked for the possibility of it simply did not imagine beforehand: that pulling women out from under the cloak of invisibility into the sphere of public ministry would open up a richness of gifts offered for the church and the world. To God be the glory!

### **Closing Hymn and Prayer (10 minutes)**

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" (ELW 841),

*Alternate choices are available in the appendix or may arise from common usage in your setting.*

### **Prayer**

God of our weary years,	by thy might
God of our silent tears,	led us into the light,
thou who hast brought us	keep us forever
thus far on the way;	in the path, we pray. <sup>33</sup>
thou who hast	In Jesus' name. <b>Amen.</b>

<sup>33</sup> James Weldon Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (ELW 841), in the public domain.

## SESSION 4: STRUGGLES OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

### PREPARATION

#### Needed for the Session

- A meeting area with chairs and room to move around in. Tables make it easier for writing but are not necessary.
- A leader who can honor the experience of all participants, draw out relevant sharing where noted, and keep the session moving so it doesn't get bogged down
- Time to explore. The session is designed for 90 minutes. It can be stretched to two hours in a more extended session by giving more time for conversation and reflection for each of the exercises. Shorter sessions, perhaps for a Sunday-morning, 45-minute forum setting, can be planned by choosing a few of the segments.
- A laptop computer with access to Wifi and either a smart TV or a screen for showing the video "Seriously?" by the North Carolina Synod, ELCA
- A copy of the "Seriously?" group discussion guide
- An easel, newsprint and markers, or a Post-It notepad for brainstorming exercise
- Someone to lead the song and litany to conclude the session. This can be someone other than the leader.

### SESSION OUTLINE

#### Greeting and Song (8 minutes)

*Leader: We are gathered in the name of the Eternal God*

**People: In whom we live and move and have our being.**

#### Song: "God of the Women" (verses four and five)

4. God of the women who ran from the tomb,  
Prayed with the others in that upper room,  
Then felt your Spirit on Pentecost Day—  
May we so gladly proclaim you today.
5. O God of Phoebe and ministers all,  
May we be joyful in answering your call.  
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near  
That we may share in your ministry here.

#### Biblical Reflection (12 minutes)

*Ask someone to read the text aloud, then allow time for a brief silence. Afterward have participants read the text silently and underline any words or phrases that affected them (made them feel angry, confused, encouraged, etc.). Next, break the group into triads and ask them to share what they*

*underlined with the others for a few minutes. Remind them that everyone needs an opportunity to speak. After five minutes, bring the whole group together and discuss the following questions: “The angels reminded the women about what Jesus had told them concerning his resurrection (verses 6-7). What do you think we in the ELCA need to remember as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women? What is important for us to tell one another and the world?”*

### **Luke 24:1-2**

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup>But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

**“Seriously?”** (20 minutes: 7 to show the video and 13 for discussion.)<sup>34</sup>

*Set up the video of the North Carolina Synod by sharing the following:*

On a staff retreat of the North Carolina Synod of the ELCA, a discussion about the call process and women leaders was held. Instead of operating from assumptions alone, the synod staff committed to gather women and listen to their stories. In 2018, three gatherings were held with just over 60 of their 100 women on the Word and Sacrament roster.

Each gathering was facilitated by Dr. Mindy Makant, deacon. A majority of the time was spent in conversation without the bishop’s staff present, including time to respond to how the synod might better help shape the landscape of ministry more faithfully for them.

Following several hours of conversation, Bishop Tim Smith joined the pastors and listened to a recap of what had been shared, preserving the women’s confidentiality. All of the statements in the video are real and were actually spoken to women serving in the North Carolina Synod. These pastors desired that congregations could hear some of their stories and receive them with empathy.

This video was created in the hope that it would challenge, heal, and affirm that we are at our best as God’s church when gifts of both women and men are recognized and appreciated.

**View video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTcaAkG86QQ>

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<sup>34</sup> “Seriously?” North Carolina Synod, ELCA, October 2018, <https://nclutheran.org/womeninministry/>. This video, created by the North Carolina Synod, reinforces the need to have hard and healthy conversations around the reality for many of our women in ministry.

## Reactions to the Video

1. After nearly 50 years of ordaining women, we still have a long way to go. What surprised you or struck you in the video?
2. Have you witnessed these comments being said to female leaders? Have you experienced them yourself?
3. How do contemporary attitudes and behaviors continue to try and silence women or render them invisible?

## The Struggle Continues (20 minutes)

Progress has certainly been made over the nearly 50 years that our church has been ordaining women, but there is still much more work to be done. For instance, consider the following statistics found on the website of the ELCA:

“As of December 31, 2018, there were 16,001 on the ELCA Roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of whom 11,545 are men and 4,456 are women. Thus, the number of women pastors in the ELCA is approximately 28%. In the ELCA’s seven seminaries however, the numbers of women and men preparing for ministry are about equal, roughly 50% each. Even though the number of men and women seminarians is almost equal, male pastors outnumber female pastors roughly 3 to 1. What might account for these differences?”

*Read aloud the two paragraphs above and ask the group to brainstorm possible obstacles that have kept the ratio of female to male pastors so low. Write their responses on the newsprint. Remember that when brainstorming, comments are simply written down without discussion. When all the statements have been exhausted, discuss the responses. (six to seven minutes)*

*Next, invite participants to read the following portion to themselves and then discuss the questions that follow the passage as a large group.*

The percentage for women-of-color pastors is even more distressing, as are the barriers they frequently confront. Consider for example this striking description from the ELCA’s celebration of the 45th anniversary of the ordination of women: “While they sometimes are supported, ELCA women of color often matriculate through seminary and candidacy and enter pastoral leadership by dint of their own determination in quilting together the affirmation, assistance and opportunities they need. On average, women of color wait three to five years to enter their first (and sometimes subsequent) pastoral calls. Forty-five percent report receiving compensation below synod compensation guidelines.”<sup>35</sup>

The injustice created by our church’s response to the intersections of gender, race, and perhaps class as well, among our sisters of color calls for repentance and structural change throughout our denomination. If the ELCA is to become an increasingly multicultural church, the church must address these intersections and this injustice.

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<sup>35</sup> “Forty-fifth Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report and Multicultural Ministries Staff Report,” Research and Evaluation Unit, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In addition to the disparities between the numbers of ordained women and men in the ELCA, as well as those among women of color and their white colleagues, is the reality that it took 10 years longer to ordain women of color than white women. The year 2020 marks the 40th anniversary of the ordination of women of color, not the 50th!

A similar experience holds true within our episcopal ranks too. While the election of our first female bishop, the Rev. April Larsen, occurred in June 1992 (La Crosse Area Synod), it was nine years later before a woman of color was elected bishop. The Rev. Margarita Martinez became bishop of the ELCA Caribbean Synod in June 2001. Seventeen years later, on June 16, 2018, the ELCA Caribbean Synod elected its second female bishop, the Rev. Idalia C. Negrón Caamaño.

It took 26 years after the election of Bishop Larsen for our church to elect its first African American female bishops. On May 5, 2018, the Rev. Patricia A. Davenport was elected bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, and the next day, May 6, the Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld was elected bishop of South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. The Holy Spirit was blowing mightily through our church that summer as the first two African American women joined the ELCA's roster of bishops.

Clearly, we are making progress in recognizing the gifts of our women of color. In addition to electing Latinx and African American female bishops, a small number of women of color pastors in the ELCA have been called to serve predominantly white, suburban congregations (including the co-writer of this congregational study). These partnerships, encouraged through the advocacy of synodical bishops and their staffs, report being mutually blessed, though not without the struggles associated with any pastoral and congregational relationships. Still, the more we are able to overcome barriers of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, the richer our church will be!

*Discuss for the next five minutes their congregation's experience (or lack thereof) with women pastors. What are their reactions to the statistics mentioned above? What might assist them and their congregations in calling either a white woman or a woman of color as their pastor? Write down the responses.*

### **Ordained Women in Other Lutheran Church Bodies**

There are certainly obstacles to women's ordination within the ELCA that we must continue to address. However, among our partner church bodies in the Lutheran World Federation, even more progress needs to be made. A number of Lutheran denominations around the world do not ordain women. In fact, some of these churches were ordaining women long before the ELCA began doing so. The United Protestant Church of France ordained their first woman pastor in 1937, albeit with some restrictions. Similarly, churches in Romania, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, and Germany were ordaining women in the early 1950s.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, it is still the case that in some Lutheran church bodies, there are great differences between making *decisions* to ordain women and actually doing so. Consider these sobering facts: In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baden the decision to ordain women was taken in 1993,

<sup>36</sup> *The Participation of Women in the Ordained Ministry and Leadership in LWF Member Churches*, ed. Office for Women in Church and Society, Department for Theology and Public Witness of the Lutheran World Federation (Geneva, Switzerland: Lutheran World Federation, 2016), 11-14.

but it wasn't until 2012 that the first woman was ordained—almost 19 years later! Similarly, in the Indonesian Christian Church (HKI) the decision to ordain women was made in 1974, yet the first ordination of a woman didn't take place until 13 years later, in 1987.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes, as is the case with the Nepal Evangelical Lutheran Church, even though there is no constitutional restriction to women's ordination, there are still no women pastors. The reason stated is sadly all too familiar: "So far there are no properly educated and prepared candidates."<sup>38</sup>

In addition to these difficulties of *including* women in the church's ordained leadership, a number of Lutheran church bodies intentionally *exclude* women as ordained leaders. In the United States, two such examples continue to be the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WES).

Globally, decisions have been made that have had an adverse effect on the possibilities of creating a more inclusive church, particularly with regard to women's ordination. For instance, in June 2016, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) decided to rescind its 40-year-old decision to ordain women by officially ruling that women cannot be pastors.<sup>39</sup>

Two-thirds of their 337 synod members voted in favor of changing the church constitution and allowing only men to be ordained from 2016 on, according to the Latvian daily *Diena*. The Latvian church began ordaining women in 1975, when Latvia was still a part of the Soviet Union. From 1975 until 1993, women were ordained and served as priests, but in 1993, the conservative Janis Vanags, the present archbishop of Riga, was appointed. Since his appointment, no women have been ordained.<sup>40</sup>

Most recently, in June 2018, the Lutheran Church of Australia voted on the ordination of women once again, returning a vote of 240 in favor to 161 against. Because the vote failed to reach the required two-thirds majority, once again Lutheran women in Australia were denied the possibility of using their gifts as ordained leaders in the church.<sup>41</sup>

In the early decades of the 20th century in the United States, it was not uncommon to see signs that relegated different ethnic groups to second- or third-class status among the working masses. Signs that read "Irish Need Not Apply" or other such nativist rejections were hurtful to those discriminated against. Imagine what it must feel like then to be a woman who is rejected for ordained leadership simply because she is a woman. In effect some church bodies may as well have signs on their websites reading, "Women Need Not Apply."

*Ask group members to turn to their nearest neighbor and discuss what it must feel like to be rejected by their church simply because of their gender. Have you ever been rejected because of your gender,*

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37 Ibid.

38 Lutheran World Federation, Office for Women in Church and Society, <https://wicas.lutheranworld.org/>.

39 Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, "Latvian Lutheran Church Rules That Women Cannot Be Ordained Priests," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 10, 2016.

40 Ibid.

41 Gene Veith, "Lutheran Church of Australia Votes Down Women's Ordination," *Patheos.com*, October 5, 2018.



*weight, skin color, or class? If so, how did it make you feel and what was your reaction to being excluded? (8 minutes)*

### **Stories of Pain and Possibility (10 minutes)**

*Ask participants to read the following section to themselves. When finished, ask, “What in this section stood out for you? What enabled these pastors to persevere beyond the pain to the joy of serving as ordained women? How might we in the ELCA do a better job of supporting our women seminarians and pastors?”*

Whether in the ELCA or in other Lutheran church bodies, it is quite clear that the ordination of women is still a major stumbling block. Unfortunately, too many women pastors can still recount painful or unpleasant stories of their journeys to and beyond their ordinations.

Once, when interviewing a potential candidate for ministry, an assistant to a synodical bishop was shocked to hear these words from an African American woman who had already waited more than two years to receive her first call. “After waiting so long and becoming more and more discouraged, I had to ask myself, ‘Did I really hear God calling me or was I overhearing someone else’s call?’”

In some instances, when married women have felt called to become pastors, they receive an incredulous response; namely, “Your husband would make a wonderful pastor.” This was the case with the Rev. Margrethe Kleiber when she told a few people that she was thinking about going to seminary.

“‘Your husband would make a great pastor.’ The words hit me like a physical blow. I had come to Claire, an accomplished woman with a Ph.D. and a respected elder in our church, and had told her I was thinking about seminary. So, I went to Joel. He and I worked together in youth ministry at the Lutheran Church of Honolulu. He knew my gifts. ‘Joel, I’m thinking of going to seminary.’ ‘Really?’ he said, ‘Your husband would make a good pastor.’

“‘Stunned, I talked to our friend Eric, also a member of the congregation. ‘Eric,’ I said, ‘You know, for a while now, I’ve been thinking about going to seminary.’ ‘Tony would make a great pastor.’ He paused. ‘You’d be pretty good, too.’ Three strikes, and you’re out. I gave up the idea of seminary.”

It took another four or five years of discerning before Pastor Kleiber eventually went to seminary, and she credits the “great cloud of witnesses” with encouraging her to do so. “Yet, thanks be to God! There are other voices in the church! For every voice that questioned my competence and my call, there were other voices that encouraged and inspired me. Thank God for this great cloud of witnesses!”<sup>42</sup>

Pastor Louisa Groce, who, at age 80, was the oldest person ever ordained in the ELCA, recounts the story of her call, indicating the joy that she experienced when she realized that God wasn’t finished with her yet, vocationally speaking:

“One Saturday morning, I opened a letter from the New Jersey Synod. E. Roy Riley, then synod bishop, had extended a call, an invitation to do the impossible. I called and reminded him that I was

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<sup>42</sup> “God’s Faithfulness on the Journey: Reflections by Rostered Women of Color,” ed. Rosetta E. Ross (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2018), 45-46. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gods\\_Faithfulness\\_on\\_the\\_Journey.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gods_Faithfulness_on_the_Journey.pdf)

in my 70s. Would anyone my age be accepted as a student, especially by the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia? (Now ULS). God's answer was, 'Yes.' I completed my studies at age 80 and accepted a call to Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jersey City, N.J. It was an unimaginable privilege to serve this community as an ordained minister for 10 years—one of God's miracles. During my 99 years of life, I have seen God sweep aside barriers of ethnicity, gender and age to help people like me become a pastor of Christ's beloved people."<sup>43</sup>

This joy in serving is captured by our presiding bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, too. She writes, "We didn't say yes to God's call because we wanted to be pioneers, or trailblazers or to make some kind of statement. We said yes because God's call is irresistible, because of the joy of serving the gospel, because of the great privilege of walking with people as the deep love of Jesus becomes real for them."<sup>44</sup>

For this and for all of our sisters in the ministry who have experienced great struggles and great joy in serving, we give thanks to God!

### **Table Manners** (10 minutes)

There have been many positive experiences of women in ordained ministry. Nevertheless, much work still needs to be done. One description of this work was imagined by Chuck Lathrop some years ago in his poem "In Search of a Roundtable":<sup>45</sup>

"Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry, one image keeps surfacing: A table that is round. It will take some sawing to be roundtabled, some refining and designing. Some redoing and rebirthing of narrowlong Churching can painful be for people and tables. It would mean no daising and throning, for but one king is there, and he was a footwasher, at table no less."

Building on Lathrop's image, the roundtable has come to be a powerful way to describe a different model of the church's ministry. What if, rather than being a hierarchical institution at whose tables of power are heads and feet and sides, the church instead viewed itself as a worldwide community of Jesus' people gathered around its only head, Jesus Christ, serving and working at a roundtable?

*Ask participants the following questions and discuss as a whole group: How does the image of a roundtable strike you? Are there other table images that come to mind as you think about a renewing, reforming, women-ordaining church?*

The Bible records instances of women who supported Jesus (Luke 8:1-3) as well as those who served him at table (Luke 10:38-42). In addition, there are those whose ministry within the early church helped to advance the Christian mission throughout the world. Notable among these is Phoebe, a deacon, or one who served at table (Romans 16:1-2).

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43 M. Wyvetta Bullock and Cheryl Stewart Pero, "Called and Chosen," *Living Lutheran*, March 2018.

44 Elizabeth A. Eaton, "God's Irresistible Call," *Living Lutheran*, March 2018.

45 Musimbi Kanyoro, *In Search of a Round Table: Gender, Theology & Church Leadership* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1997), 28-29.

For centuries, women have joyfully served Christ at kitchen tables, school tables, boardroom tables, and the Lord's table. Let us pray for and work toward the day when the Lord's table will be well-served by all whom the Lord has called. For, as St. Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

### **Litany of Confession and Commitment (10 minutes)**

**People: We confess that we are captive to our brokenness. Forgive us for the times we were silent. Forgive us for the times we were careless with our words. Forgive us for not paying attention. Forgive us for our surprise that hurtful words were being flung at our sisters in ministry. Guide us and make us new. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

*Leader:* Listen, children, to the truth. God has chosen to be merciful to all creation. You are no exception. Your sins are forgiven; your heart is made clean in the name of the triune God. Amen.

### **Read Acts 2:17-18**

L: We remember Esther, who spoke truth to power to free her people.

P: Inspire us to lead as she did.

L: We remember Ruth, who made Naomi's people her people.

P: Teach us to value family as she did.

L: We remember Deborah, who was both prophetess and judge.

P: Help us be bold in our proclamation of truth.

L: We remember Mary, mother of our Lord, who bore Christ into the world.

P: Incite a movement to give voice to those who share Christ in the world.

L: We remember Mary Magdalene, who wept at the tomb and yet still proclaimed.

P: Surround us with the witnesses who, through tears, proclaim Christ to us.

L: We remember Elizabeth Platz, the first woman ordained by any Lutheran denomination.

P: Direct us to shape a different church for the next generation of women pastors.

L: We remember Earlean Miller, the first African American woman ordained by any Lutheran denomination in North America.

P: Make us a welcoming people, open to all.

L: We remember that you created women in your image.

P: Encourage us to speak well of each other.

L: We remember.

P: Help us remember well and commit to do better.

L: God of Surprises, you call us  
from the narrowness of our traditions to new ways of being church  
from the captivities of our culture to create witness for justice  
from the smallness of our horizons to the bigness of your vision.

Clear the way in us, your people, that we might call others to freedom and renewed faith and that all might know the beauty and power and danger of the gospel, especially through the ministerial witness of women, who, with their many gifts, can bring healing to a suffering church and people.

**P:** Amen.

**L:** Go in peace.

**P:** Serve the Lord.<sup>46</sup>

**Song:** “I’m So Glad Jesus Lifted Me” (ELW 860)

*In preparation for Session 5, ask participants to consider inviting friends and ecumenical colleagues from neighboring congregations for the closing celebration.*

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<sup>46</sup> From “Seriously” group discussion guide. <https://nclutheran.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Seriously-Discussion-Guide.pdf>

## SESSION 5: CELEBRATIONS: ENVISIONING THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD THROUGH WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

### PREPARATION

#### Needed for the Session:

- A meeting area with room to move around in. Tables make the later exercise easier for writing but are not necessary.
- A leader who can honor the experience of all participants, draw out relevant sharing where noted, but also keep the session moving so it doesn't get bogged down early and lose the opportunity to explore later segments
- Time to explore. The session is designed for 90 minutes. Shorter sessions, perhaps for a Sunday-morning, 45-minute forum setting, can be planned by choosing a few of the segments.
- Copies of "Women's Ordination History: True or False" (one per participant), pens
- Five sheets prepared in advance with one value/vision stated on each page
- Three-by-five-inch cards prepared in advance with each of the "first" experiences numbered in the order in which they will be spoken at a later point in the session
- Someone to lead the song and prayer to conclude the session. This can be someone other than the leader.

### SESSION OUTLINE

#### Greeting and Song (10 minutes)

*Leader: We are gathered in the name of the eternal God.*

**People: In whom we live and move and have our being.**

All verses of "God of the Women," Carolyn Winfrey Gillette's hymn

1. God of the women who answered your call,  
Trusting your promises, giving their all,  
Women like Sarah and Hannah and Ruth—  
Give us their courage to live in your truth.
2. God of the women who walked Jesus' way,  
Giving their resources, learning to pray,  
Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and more—  
May we give freely as they did before.
3. God of the women long put to the test,  
Left out of stories, forgotten, oppressed,  
Quietly asking: "Who smiled at my birth?"—  
In Jesus' dying you show us our worth.

4. God of the women who ran from the tomb,  
Prayed with the others in that upper room,  
Then felt your Spirit on Pentecost Day—  
May we so gladly proclaim you today.
  
5. O God of Phoebe and ministers all,  
May we be joyful in answering your call.  
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near  
That we may share in your ministry here.

### **Biblical Reflection** (15 minutes)

*Have someone read Romans 16:1-4 aloud, then get into groups of three and discuss as many of the following questions as time permits.*

Paul recommends Phoebe to the Roman congregation on the basis of her ministry. She was a “deacon”<sup>47</sup> or servant in the early church who likely participated in the visitation of the sick, in the distribution of food to the poor, and in liturgical and administrative roles.<sup>48</sup> She was also a “benefactor” or patron to Paul and other missionaries in the early church, supporting them financially.

In what ways have women pastors been recommended to your congregation, and by whom? How was the recommendation received?

Paul also encourages the Romans to welcome and help her in whatever she needs. How has the ELCA or your own congregation welcomed and stood beside women pastors or other female leaders?

Similar to some of the ELCA's global missionaries, Prisca, also known as Priscilla (1 Corinthians 16:19; Acts 18:2, 18, 26), and her husband, Aquila, were a missionary team. Like Paul, they were tent-makers. They also presided over a church in their home. While we do not know how they may have risked their necks for Paul's sake, they clearly stood by him in numerous circumstances throughout their missionary travels. How have women and men risked their status or reputations in support of women pastors and other church leaders?

### **Romans 16:1-4**

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup>so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. <sup>3</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in

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<sup>47</sup> Bill Gafkjen, “Here a Deacon, There a Deacon, Everywhere a Deacon, Deacon: A Brief Sampling of Current Uses of the Role/Title ‘Deacon’ in the ELCA and Beyond,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, July 2014. Phoebe was called a “deacon” by Paul, not a “deaconess.” Deaconesses in the ELCA are “a consecrated roster of theologically trained, professionally prepared women, called to ministry and service by congregations and synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.” The non-gender-specific use of the term appears to be the most common norm over time and geography. This practice appears to follow that of the apostle Paul, who, for example, does not use a feminine form in referring to “our sister Phoebe, a deacon [diakonon] of the church” in Romans 16:1.

<sup>48</sup> Norma Cook Everist, “Minister of Word and Service: Deacon, Deeper Understandings,” *Living Lutheran*, November 2017. From the first century to the fourth, deacons had significant liturgical and administrative roles and served the poor. They were the eyes and ears of the early church, reporting needs to the bishop.

Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup>and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

**Exercise: Women’s Ordination History: True or False (15 minutes)**

*Divide the group into two teams. Give each person a copy of the “Women’s Ordination History: True or False” and ask him or her to complete it, discussing it with his or her group. Then call the teams together and review the sheet, alternating between the two. When group members share their answers, be sure they give their rationale for why something is either true or false.*

1. All Lutheran church bodies in the U.S. ordain women.
2. There are 14 women bishops in the ELCA (counting Bishop Eaton).
3. Twenty-five percent of the ELCA’s Conference of Bishops are women.
4. The first woman ordained in the Lutheran church in the U.S. was Elizabeth Eaton.
5. At least one person in this group has had a woman pastor.
6. In 2018, three African American women bishops were elected in the ELCA.
7. More men than women are likely to be on leave from call at any given time.

**A Change Has Come (15 minutes)**

*Begin this section by reading the following: “Fifty years is a long time. If you were born back then, just think about how different things were.” Then, for the next seven or eight minutes, ask those who are older than 50 to share some of their reflections on what life was like back then. If no one shares, here are some responses you might consider.*

“Fifty years ago, a home phone was a necessity and they were pretty clunky, rotary-dial contraptions. Today fewer and fewer people have landlines and nearly everyone has a cell phone, the majority of which are mini-computers, stereos, telephones, and cameras all rolled into one. Hence, they’re called ‘smart phones.’”

“Fifty years ago, what is now called ‘snail mail’ was the major way that people communicated with one another in writing. Today people can be connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Between email, texting, and various kinds of social media, people can always know what someone in their circle of life is doing.”

“Fifty years ago, big retail stores were the main places that people could shop. With the invention of the Internet, more and more shopping takes place online, and you don’t have to leave your home at all.”

*Continue the discussion with these questions.*

Now think about what the church was like 50 years ago. How many times did people receive communion? Was it weekly? Who were the pastors, Sunday-school teachers, and Church Council members? How often were you, your parents, or your grandparents in worship then, in a typical month? How many people attended worship in those days? How did “church news” get

communicated, i.e. through a weekly bulletin, mailed monthly newsletter, etc.? How does that contrast with how your church communicates information today?

The ELCA didn't even exist back then, and those whom we refer to as "bishops" today were called "presidents." Times have indeed changed!

*Once again, for seven or eight minutes, ask the group to think of some ways in which the church is different now than it was 50 years ago. If there are no participants who can remember back that far, ask them about 15 or 20 years ago. What is different today? Invite a reader to conclude the discussion with the following anecdote:*

Some years ago, a church in the New Jersey Synod had been served by four consecutive women pastors. At a celebratory event at which a member of the bishop's staff was present, a little boy went up to the assistant to the bishop and asked, "Can boys be pastors?" This little boy's only image of pastors was that they were female because he'd grown up in a church where all the pastors in his young life were women. While this child's experience was likely an anomaly throughout the ELCA, it does speak of the radical changes that have taken place in the Lutheran church over the past 50 years. A significant and blessed part of that change has been the ordination of women!

### **The Gifts We Bring** (25 minutes)

Both men and women bring tremendous gifts to the church: theological acumen, pastoral care, preaching, teaching, and many more. How wonderful it is, however, to receive the particular gifts that women bring to ordained ministry.

Some of these perspectives and gifts are poignantly lifted up by the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), the oldest and largest national organization that works to ordain women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic church.<sup>49</sup> Much of what they value and work toward are the very things that we believe our women pastors bring to the church's ordained roster.

According to the ELCA's "Model Constitution for Congregations," every pastor is expected to "speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world."<sup>50</sup> For the WOC, however, this expectation becomes both personal and public, and, indeed, even political. A frequent rallying cry during the feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s was, "The personal is political." For many women (and men), this sentiment stressed the connections between personal experience and larger social and political structures.

The values of the Women's Ordination Conference are consonant with some of the gifts that women bring to ordained ministry. Of particular importance is making the necessary connections between one's personal life and what one does within the public sphere, including living out one's faith as a citizen, i.e. through political participation. In other words, while "speaking publicly to the world and *calling* for justice" are important expectations for ministry, embodying them, personally and

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49 Founded in 1975, Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) is the oldest and largest national organization that works to ordain women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Catholic church.

50 "Model Constitution for Congregations" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), \*C9.03.8.



collectively, are more important. Below are the stated values of the WOC. They profoundly address their understanding of those called to be the church's public leaders, including its ordained servants.

† **Diversity, Inclusion & Racial Justice:** We believe we have a responsibility to dismantle oppression within ourselves, our church, and our society. As the body of Christ, we value diverse identities and inclusion on individual and organizational levels.

† **Collective Decision Making:** Decisions affecting the life of the church must reflect the experience and opinions of women as well as men in a democratic spirit. We believe building consensus is a way to value each person's insights and wisdom.

† **Empowerment & Participatory Leadership:** We believe all people should participate in making the decisions that affect them. We are certain the future of the church rests squarely on the knowledge, creativity, skills, leadership, and integrity of the whole church. Therefore, we advocate for church leadership to include the voices of all Catholics in decision-making processes.

† **Feminist, Mujerista, and Womanist Thought and Action:**<sup>51</sup> The hierarchy must not define male and female "roles" or perpetuate any system that defines or limits one's gifts or calling on the basis of gender.

† **Social Justice:** A renewed priesthood will transform the church and unjust structures in the world community. We will model nonviolent behavior and act for a peaceful world that cherishes each human being, our earth, and its resources.

*Break up into triads. Give each triad one section of the values listed above as stated by the Women's Ordination Conference. Ask them to discuss where they have seen or experienced this dynamic in the life of the church. (If you have fewer than 15 participants, give each group more than one; if you have more than 15, assign multiple groups the same section.) After 10 minutes, call time and bring the whole group back together for sharing. Ask: In what ways does your own congregation or the ELCA reflect the values discussed in your small group? Have you observed any women pastors living out these values more or differently than their male clergy counterparts? If so, how?*

We long and pray for the day when our Roman Catholic sisters will be granted the privilege of being ordained as deacons and priests. At the same time, we give thanks to God, who has brought us in the ELCA a mighty long way!

### **Celebration** (15 minutes)

*Give participants cards with the names of "firsts" on them. Have someone ready with a church offering plate or a basket for when these names will be read.*

*The leader begins with the litany "In Search of a Roundtable." Participants stand as they are able and respond with the words in boldface.*

<sup>51</sup> The terms "feminist," generally referring to white women; "womanist," African American women; and mujerista, Latinas, are designations for liberatory theologies. These women all understand theology as being a "lived" and "living" experience and dialogue that significantly shapes who we are as human beings and within our communities of faith.

## Litany, “In Search of a Roundtable” by Chuck Lathrop

Adapted by the Rev. Janet Peterman<sup>52</sup>

*Leader:* Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry,  
One image keeps surfacing:

**People: A table that is round.**

*Leader:* It will take some sawing to be roundtabled,  
some redefining, some redesigning.  
Some redoing and rebirthing of narrowlong churching  
can be painful for people and tables.  
It would mean no daising and throning.

**People: For but one king is there, and he was a footwisher, at table, no less.**

*Leader:* And what of narrowlong ministers  
when they confront a roundtable people,  
after years of working up the table  
to finally sit at its head, only to discover  
that the table has been turned round?  
They must be loved into roundness,  
for God has called a people,  
not “them and us.”

“Them and us” are unable to gather round  
for at a roundtable, there are no sides.

**People: And all are invited to wholeness and to food.**

*Leader:* At one time  
our narrowlong churches  
were built to resemble the cross  
but it does no good  
for buildings to do so.

**People: If lives do not.**

*Leader:* Roundtabling means no preferred seating,  
no first and last, no better and no corners for the “least of these.”  
Roundtabling means  
being with, a part of together,

**People: And one. It means room for the spirit.**

*Leader:* And gifts.

**People: And disturbing profound peace for all.**

*Be seated.*

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<sup>52</sup> Chuck Lathrop, “In Search of a Roundtable” adapted by the Rev. Janet Peterman, in *In Search of a Roundtable: Gender, Theology & Church Leadership* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1997), 28-29.

*Leader:* Let us lift our hearts in gratitude to God, maker of heaven and earth, who has carried us and the church for these past 50 years.

*There are blank 3x5" cards near you. If you would like to, write the name of a woman pastor or church leader who was a "first" for you that you can acknowledge in our prayers. Then, as we begin, each person with a 3x5 card, either those passed out in advance or those written now, will offer what is written on them as part of our closing prayer. We will respond to each petition with "Thanks be to God." Please rise as you're able when our prayers begin, and after you have spoken, place your card in the offering basket for our communal thanks.*

*Leader:* With joy and praise we give thanks to God ...

For all who worked to break down barriers that prevented women from exercising their leadership in the church, especially for the women of Lutheran Church Women (LCW) and American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW):

**Thanks be to God!**

For Lutheran women around the globe whose ministries have cleared the path, who became firsts in their churches and countries:

**Thanks be to God!**

For men and women in seminaries and throughout the church who have envisioned a world where women's leadership was natural and necessary, who took steps to make it so before others imagined it possible:

**Thanks be to God!**

*Leader:* With joy and praise we give thanks to God for all women pastors and, among them, these Lutheran "firsts" who paved the way for those who came after them:

Elizabeth Platz, first woman ordained in the U.S., on November 22, 1970, and a member of the Lutheran Church in America.

**Thanks be to God!**

Barbara L. Andrew, first woman ordained in the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the first differently abled woman pastor ordained in the United States, on December 20, 1970.

**Thanks be to God!**

Earlean Miller, first African American woman, ordained on August 26, 1979.

**Thanks be to God!**

Lydia Rivera-Kalb, first Latina, ordained on March 4, 1979.

**Thanks be to God!**

Asha George-Guiser, first Asian woman, ordained on May 15, 1982.

**Thanks be to God!**

Marlene Helgemo, first American Indian/Alaska Native woman, ordained on July 19, 1987.

**Thanks be to God!**

Dolores McKay, first Arab/Middle Eastern woman, ordained on December 12, 2009.

**Thanks be to God!**

Ruth Frost, Phyllis Zillhart, and Anita Hill, first openly lesbian/queer women ordained in the U.S. (extra ordinem), on January 20, 1990.

**Thanks be to God!**

Louisa Groce, first octogenarian, ordained on September 12, 1999.

**Thanks be to God!**

Megan Rohrer, first openly transgender person, ordained in 2006.

**Thanks be to God!**

April Uring Larson, first woman elected a bishop in the ELCA, June 12, 1992.

**Thanks be to God!**

Margarita Martinez, first Latina elected a bishop in the ELCA, June 2001.

**Thanks be to God!**

Patricia A. Davenport and Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld, first African American women elected bishops in the ELCA, May 2018.

**Thanks be to God!**

Elizabeth Eaton, first woman elected presiding bishop of the ELCA, 2013.

**Thanks be to God!**

*Leader:* With joy and praise we give thanks to God for all women deacons, seminarians, and pastors who have nurtured us in faith and life. ... O God, for saints and servants, those named and those unknown, in whom through all the ages your light of glory shone; we offer glad thanksgiving and fervent prayer we raise that, faithful in your service, our lives may sing your praise. **Amen.**<sup>53</sup>

**Song:** “All Are Welcome” (ELW 641)<sup>54</sup>

*Conclude your celebration with some sort of reception (cake and ice cream, etc.).*

### **Answer Key: Women’s Ordination History**

1. False. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and some other smaller Lutheran bodies in the U.S. do not ordain women.
2. False. In 2018 there were 17 women bishops in the ELCA, including Presiding Bishop Eaton.
3. True.
4. False. The first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church in America was Elizabeth Platz, on November 22, 1970.
5. True/False. Discuss among yourselves.
6. False. In 2018 two African American women were elected bishops in the ELCA for the first time: The Rev. Patricia Davenport in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod and the Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin.
7. False. According to “The Rosters of the ELCA: Executive Summary by Kenneth W. Inskeep of Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop,” “Finally, women are significantly more likely than men to be on leave from call.”

<sup>53</sup> “For All the Faithful Women” (ELW 419). Text: Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., ©1993 GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

<sup>54</sup> “All Are Welcome” (ELW 641). Text: Marty Haugen, ©1994 GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

## APPENDIX

### Additional Songs/Hymns and Scripture Passages

*Alternates to suggestions within each session*

*Possibilities for worship created to accompany sessions*

### Hymns and Songs

There are at least eight versions of Mary's Magnificat in ELW:

Vespers, pages 314 and 315

ELW 234 plainsong melody

ELW 235 Moore setting

ELW 236 Canon/Taizé, four parts

ELW 251 Ralph Vaughan Williams

ELW 573 Heinrich Schütz and text adapted by Stephanie Frey

ELW 723 "Canticle of the Turning"

ELW 882 by G.W. Brown

Additional Magnificat in *Renewing Worship*:

R196 by Lovsang and Duck

### Additional Hymns and Songs:

ELW 237 "Litany of the Saints"

ELW 258 "Unexpected and Mysterious"

ELW 419 "For All the Faithful Women"

ELW 613 "Thy Holy Wings"

ELW 633 "We've Come This Far by Faith"

ELW 720 "We Are Called"

ELW 723 "Canticle of the Turning"

ELW 735 "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth"

### From *Renewing Worship*:

R102 "Bring Many Names"

R102 "Keep Your Lamps"

R283 "Holy Woman, Graceful Giver"

### From *With One Voice*:

WOV 639 "Oh, Sleep Now, Holy Babe"

Hispanic song arranged by Robb

WOV 640 "Gloria" (easy to teach anywhere in the world, Africa, Central America) Lovely canon, the angels' song

## Additional Scripture Passages

### Matthew 9:20-22

<sup>[20]</sup>Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, <sup>[21]</sup>for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”

### Luke 8:1c-3

The twelve were with [Jesus], as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

### Romans 11:33

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

### Romans 10:14-17

<sup>[14]</sup>But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? <sup>[15]</sup>And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” <sup>[16]</sup>But not all have obeyed the good news;<sup>[a]</sup> for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” <sup>[17]</sup>So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

### I Corinthians 10:13

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing [God] will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

### 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

<sup>[16]</sup>but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>[17]</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>[18]</sup>And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

### Galatians 5:1

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

## Additional Bible Activity

**Bible Trivia:** Who were they? What were they *doing*? (10-15 minutes)

*Have people cluster in small groups of three to five people with a Bible and a 3x5" card prepared in advance with one of the following Bible passages. Each group looks up its passage, reads it, and prepares to share with the group: who are the women in the story? What are they doing? What was her role/function in the ministry of Jesus or of the apostles? (See the answer key below.) If you have more than 40 participants in your study, make duplicate copies of the cards.*

Matthew 9:20-22

Luke 10:38-42

Acts 18:24-26

Mark 16:1

John 4:7-26, 28-29

Romans 16:1

Luke 8:1-3

Acts 16:14-15

## Bible Trivia Answer Key:

1. **Matthew 9:20-22:** An unnamed hemorrhaging woman. She had faith that even touching the hem of Jesus' garment would be sufficient to be healed. Jesus saw her and acknowledged her faith.
2. **Mark 16:1:** Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; and Salome. They went to Jesus' grave to anoint his body.
3. **Luke 8:1-3:** Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus had healed of demon possession; Joanna, wife of Herod's steward, Chuza; and Suzanna. The three women provided for the Twelve out of their resources
4. **Luke 10:38-42:** Mary, doing household tasks, and Martha, sitting at the feet of Jesus, learning from him.
5. **John 4:7-26, 28-29:** An unnamed Samaritan woman. She has a conversation with Jesus, leaves her water jar at the well, and bears witness to Jesus.
6. **Acts 16:14-15:** Lydia, a businesswoman, a seller of purple (which would presumably have made her wealthy), and a worshiper of God. She responded to the preaching of Paul, had herself and her household baptized, and supported the early apostles financially.
7. **Acts 18:24-26:** Priscilla. With her husband, Aquila, she corrected the teaching of a teacher of the way, Apollos.
8. **Romans 16:1:** Phoebe, a deacon and benefactor of the church at Cenchreae. Note that, in Greek, there is only one noun form for deacon or deaconess. The years of translating verse 16:1 as "deaconess" arose from the assumption that a woman couldn't have been a deacon.

## FACT SHEET: FOR USE IN SESSIONS 2 AND 5

August 26, 1920 – The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed, which states, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” The successful action of passing the amendment followed efforts over more than 50 years, often at state and local levels.

### Women’s ordination in international Lutheran churches

*A sampling from the work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Women in Church and Society (WICAS) [1]*

In 1922, Laurence Caroline Dufour, a student of theology in Leiden, wrote to the Lutheran Synod in the Netherlands asking if women might be formally ordained as pastors. Dutch Lutheran theologian Prof. H. A. van Bakel at Leiden argued that “there was no principal argument against women ordination,” citing Galatians 3:28: “In Christ there is no man or woman.” Thus the synod decided unanimously that there was no argument to be found in the regulations that would contradict the ordination of women.

In 1929, Rev. Jantine Auguste Haumersen became the first ordained Lutheran woman in the Netherlands.

According to Gracia Grindal in “Getting Women Ordained,” “A few women had been ordained in the Lutheran churches of Germany and the Netherlands in the 1920’s, but the churches had not *as a body approved the action*. In 1938 the church of Norway authorized the ordination of women, but did not ordain one until well after WWII. ... Some [women] were known to have attended [Lutheran seminaries in the United States to become missionaries] in the late 1890’s, but the question of women’s ordination was not a matter for serious debate among Lutherans in America until the 1960’s.” [2]

Germany was then a series of regional political units, not the unified country we know today. Church bodies were *Landeskirche*; that is, they fell within the regional political units. The question of ordination varied greatly among them.

As one example, in 1927, a united Lutheran-Reformed church, the Pomeranian Evangelical Church, part of the Old Prussian Union, allowed female vicars (candidates for ministry) but required celibacy. The text doesn’t say if celibacy was also required of men. In 1963, the Pomeranian Church passed a law for female *pastors*, and in 1974 the celibacy clause was abolished in all churches in the former East Germany. A 1982 law regulates the service of pastors, ensuring men and women equal status in church law in all churches of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR (the German Democratic Republic, which governed East Germany before reunification).

### In other European countries:

1937: Decision taken and first ordination, with some restrictions in the United Protestant Church of **France**. 1965: A full decision with no restrictions, such as celibacy. First ordained, with restrictions: in 1937, Geneviève Jonte, and in 1949, Elisabeth Schmidt.

2011 Evangelical Lutheran Church in **Italy**: Though the church received women pastors earlier from Germany, the first woman ordained in the Italian church was Kirsten Thiele.



## **ELCA and predecessor bodies**

**June 29, 1970:** The LCA in convention voted to allow women's ordination.

**October 24, 1970:** The ALC in convention voted to allow women's ordination.

**November 22, 1970:** Elizabeth Platz was the first woman ordained in the Lutheran Church in the United States. She was a member of the LCA.

**December 20, 1970:** Barbara L. Andrew was the first ordained woman in the ALC, and the first differently abled Lutheran woman ordained as a pastor. She died in a house fire as a result of her lack of mobility.

**March 4, 1979:** Lydia Rivera Kalb, first Latina ordained

**August 26, 1979:** Earlean Miller, first African-American woman ordained

**May 15, 1982:** Asha George-Guiser, first Asian woman ordained

**July 19, 1987:** Marlene Helgemo, first American Indian/Alaska Native woman ordained

**January 1, 1988: The ALC, LCA, and the AELC united to become the ELCA**

**January 20, 1990:** Ruth Frost, Phyllis Zillhart, and Anita Hill, first openly lesbian/queer women ordained (extra ordinem)

**April 1992:** The Rev. Maria Jepsen of Germany was the first Lutheran woman bishop elected worldwide.

**June 12, 1992:** The Rev. April Ullring Larson was the first woman bishop elected in the ELCA.

**September 12, 1999:** Louisa Groce, first octogenarian ordained

**June 2001:** The Rev. Margarita Martinez was the first woman bishop of color elected in the ELCA.

**2006:** Megan Rohrer, first openly transgender person ordained

**December 12, 2009:** Dolores McKay, first Arab/Middle Eastern woman ordained

**August 14, 2013:** The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton was the first woman presiding bishop elected in the ELCA.

**May 5, 2018:** The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport was the first African American woman bishop elected in the ELCA.

**May 6, 2018:** The Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld was the second African American woman bishop elected in the ELCA.

## **2018 – Current Statistics**

- At the end of December 2018, ELCA Ministers of Word and Sacrament: 11,545 men and 4,456 women, of which 437 are on leave from call and 7,424 are retired. The statistics are not broken out for whether those on leave or retired are men or women, or people of color or white.
- At the end of December 2018, ELCA Ministers of Word and Service: there were 222 men, 991 women; on leave from call, 59 and 602 are retired. The statistics are not broken out for whether those on leave or retired are men or women, or people of color or white.
- There are 17 female bishops of the ELCA (the ELCA has 65 synods and one presiding bishop), which is 25%.

Notes:

1. The material in the section on Women in International Lutheran Churches, except for the paragraph with the citation from Gracia Grindal, all come from the LWF publication "Office for Women in Church and Society," ed. Department for Theology and Public Witness of LWF, *The Participation of Women in the Ordained Ministry and Leadership in LWF Member Churches* (Geneva, Switzerland: 2016). It is available for free download from [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org).
2. Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," *Lutheran Quarterly* 32 (2018), 282.

## God of the Women

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, 1998

Slane  
ancient Irish ballad



1. God of the wo - men who ans - wered your call,  
 2. God of the wo - men who walked Je - sus' Way,  
 3. God of the wo - men long put to the test,  
 4. God of the wo - men who ran from the tomb,  
 5. O God of Phoe - be and mi - ni - sters all,



Trust - ing your pro - mi - ses, giv - ing their all,  
 Giv - ing their re - sour - ces, learn - ing to pray,  
 Left out of sto - ries, for - got - ten, op - pressed,  
 Prayed with the oth - ers in that up - per room,  
 May we be joy - ful in an - swering your call.



Wo - men like Sa - rah and Han - nah and Ruth—  
 Ma - ry, Jo - an - na, Su - san - nah, and more—  
 Qui - et - ly ask - ing: "Who smiled at my birth?"—  
 Then felt your Spi - rit on Pen - te - cost Day—  
 Give us the strength of your Spi - rit so near



Give us their cour - age to live in your truth.  
 May we give free - ly as they did be - fore.  
 In Je - sus' dy - ing you show us our worth.  
 May we so glad - ly pro - claim you to - day.  
 That we may share in your mi - ni - stry here.

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 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (Geneva Press, 2000).  
 Email: [carolynshymns@gmail.com](mailto:carolynshymns@gmail.com) | New Hymns: [www.carolynshymns.com](http://www.carolynshymns.com)

"God of the Women" sheet music.  
 Used with permission.  
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Women's Ordination Conference. Founded in 1975, WOC is the oldest and largest national organization that works to ordain women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Catholic church. WOC represents an increasing percentage of Roman Catholics in the U.S. who are supportive of various forms of women's ordination. (Statistics vary depending upon cited sources but suggest a range between 40% and 70%.) WOC also promotes new perspectives on ordination that call for more accountability and less separation between the clergy and laity. <https://www.womensordination.org/>

After reading the passage in session 3 about the work of the Rev. Dr. Wilda Gafney, would you like to explore more works with biblical or theological material by women scholars? Below are some suggestions for further reading.

### **Selected Additional Works by Women Biblical Scholars and Theologians**

Gafney, Wilda C. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017.

With long experience in both Christian and Jewish methods of biblical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, and from her perspective as an African American scholar and pastor—that is, from within the church—Gafney writes as a womanist scholar “to introduce readers to biblical women and their stories, with which they may not be familiar, and to reintroduce them to familiar stories through new lenses.” Though she reads through a womanist lens, it is for the sake of women and men of all ethnicities. “Womanism,” she says, “is committed to the wholeness and flourishing of the entire community” (pages 9, 7). See the definition of “womanist” in Chapter 5 on page 8.

Gafney, Wilda C. *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

An exploration of named and unnamed female prophets in Israel, and in Rabbinic and Christian trajectories beyond the biblical canon.

Tinker, George E., Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Wilda C. Gafney, Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz, and Frank Yamada, eds. *The Peoples' Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

This Bible is unique in its aim to engage culture then and now and includes the following unique features: introductory essays highlighting issues of culture, ethnicity, and identity; feature boxes that reveal insights from African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American perspectives; and a gallery of culturally diverse four-color art.

*By others, ordered chronologically by publication date:*

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.

One of the first explorations of a woman in the Bible by a Roman Catholic lay theologian and teacher, intended to help Protestants better understand Mary. Published by Presbyterians.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

One of the first reopenings of the Scriptures by a woman scholar trained with the tools of biblical exegesis and in the original biblical languages. Tribble looked at the fate of four women of the Old Testament—Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed woman, and the daughter of Jephthah—noting the cultural and economic times of the Bible, where they had no power and suffered greatly, as their stories reveal.

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Cannon, Katie G., Beverly W. Harrison, Carter Heyward, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Bess B. Johnson, Mary D. Pellauer, and Nancy D. Richardson. *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985.

A series of thoughtful short reflections among a group of theologically and biblically trained women, known as the Mud Flower Collective, working in theological education on issues of gender, race, and class.

Weems, Renita J. *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*. San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988.

An early exploration of women in the Bible from an African American perspective, by an exemplary pastor and teacher.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*. New York: Continuum, 1998.

An exploration of the Christian symbol "communion of saints," referring not to exemplary Christians ("saints") but to the whole community of people graced by the Spirit of God, and referring primarily not to those who have died but to those who live.