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# CLERGY WOMEN OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DISPARITIES AMONG WOMEN OF THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Tammy Leigh Reedy-Strother

The Graduate School

University of Kentucky

2011

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PERCEPTIONS OF DISPARITIES AMONG WOMEN OF THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL  
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Tammy Leigh Reedy-Strother

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Directors: Dr. Dwight B. Billings, Professor of Sociology  
and Dr. James G. Hougland, Jr., Professor of Sociology

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### CLERGY WOMEN OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DISPARITIES AMONG WOMEN OF THE KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Women in the United Methodist Church (UMC) were officially granted full clerical rights over 50 years ago, and the church's official stance is that women and men are to enjoy fully equal rights throughout all aspects of life and society, religious and otherwise. Despite these policies, however, women's and men's opportunities and experiences in professional ministry in the church remain far from equal. Women continue to be underrepresented in the leadership of the UMC, especially in more prestigious appointments and positions, and face challenges to their work, leadership, and authority throughout their ministries. In fact, national statistics from the UMC show that as of 2010, only 24.6% of the clerical leaders are women. In the Kentucky Annual Conference (KAC), the focus of the present study, women are even more sparsely represented, constituting only 13.56% of the leadership as of 2010 appointments, with few serving at larger churches and only one currently serving as a district superintendent; only four have ever served in that role in the Conference's history.

Using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, I collected data from 36 of the 118 clergy women of the 2010 Conference, including women serving in all types of positions in the Conference as well as all current and former district superintendents and many of the earliest pioneers in the KAC.

The goal of this study is to understand from the perspectives of these clergy women their paths into and through ministry, the support and resistance that play such key roles in their lives and work, how their families affect and are affected by their work, and the symbols and symbolic actions that they use to claim and demonstrate the authority they have been given and to navigate some of the obstacles in their paths. In order to provide a theoretical framework for this study, I used primarily social constructionism and standpoint theory and related methods.

KEYWORDS: clergy women, social inequalities by gender, social constructionism, standpoint theory, United Methodist Church

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Tammy L. Reedy-Strother

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Student Signature

August 3, 2011

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Date

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To my husband, Eric, and our sons, Jacob and Andrew: I love you all more than I could ever express. You are the very best parts of my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the assistance and participation of so many people.

To my clergy women: I cannot fully express my gratitude for your help in this study. You shared more with me than I could have imagined, and I want you to know just how much that means to me. I hope you feel that I have honored you and your stories and your service through this work. I would also like to thank the many others who were willing to talk with me for this research, but for whatever reason, we were unable to make it happen.

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win. I also appreciate your letters of recommendation that helped me secure my new faculty position, as well as your offer of advice and help in the future.

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To my other committee members, Drs. Kathi Kern and Keiko Tanaka: thank you for your insights, advice, direction, and support. My work is better because of your participation in the process, and I look forward to the articles that come from this research in part because of your suggestions.

To the others who have served temporarily on my committee: thank you for your help as well. Each of you has contributed in some way, whether large or small, to this finished work and to the sociologist I have become.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research**

Women in Christian ministry are not a new phenomenon; the earliest records of women's role as church leaders within the Christian tradition date back to the New Testament. In the United States, the first woman known to be officially ordained as a Christian minister was Antoinette Brown Blackwell in 1853, who was ordained as pastor of the Congregational Church of South Butler, New York. Women even founded some Christian movements, including the Shakers; the Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Science); and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. Although the history is long, only recently have women entered the field in large numbers. In fact, in some seminaries women now constitute up to or even over fifty percent of the total enrollment in incoming classes. Despite their large numbers, however, their situations are far from equal to their male counterparts; many studies suggest that significant disparities remain in their opportunities in ministry and the paths their careers take.

While entry into seminaries is much more open to women than in the past, seminary training is only the beginning of ordained ministry. After they graduate, their placements, duties, salaries, and opportunities for advancement often differ from those of their male colleagues. They also face different expectations from parishioners, colleagues, and even themselves. Further, since religious institutions are largely outside of the control of other social institutions (and in fact often greatly influence other institutions, either directly or indirectly), those institutions generally have the authority to set their own policies, including who can be given full clerical rights and in what capacities they can serve.

At the forefront of the debate regarding whether women should be ordained as full ministers are basic differences in core-level beliefs. The New Testament gives what are

generally recognized as conflicting views of women's roles in the church as well as in the family and society at large, and each "side" of the debate regarding clergy women claims the power and authority of the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years we have seen many changes within mainline Protestant denominations regarding this issue, with some actually reversing previous, more-inclusive policies and others making tremendous advances toward gender equality among the clergy.

Perhaps the most notable denomination in the former group is the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, which on June 14, 2000, took the step of officially prohibiting women from becoming pastors of their churches. They did not revoke the ordinations of women who were already ordained ministers, but this action did prohibit others from the same legitimizing rite as well as preparatory education within Southern Baptist seminaries. While the Southern Baptist Convention does not directly place ministers in congregations and allows for local governance by congregations, stating this as the official policy justified the views of and protected individual churches that did not want to call a clergy woman, and denied any right of appeal to clergy women who believed they were being discriminated against. In a few isolated instances, some churches who called women to pulpit ministry after that time have been expelled by state and local associations, which ironically runs very much counter to the Baptist belief in autonomous rule among their member congregations.

In addition to prohibiting women from entering ordained pastoral ministry, the Southern Baptists also formally wrote into *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), the denomination's statement of beliefs and practices, that wives are to submit to their husbands, making clear that women were viewed in a significantly different, subservient role to men, not on an equal footing, but lower than both God and men. Prior to that, the Convention passed a resolution stating that women are responsible for the original sin

that entered the once-utopian world, and thus are unsuited for positions of authority in the church or home (Annual of the SBC 1984). Clearly, women are considered to have positions that are distinct from and inferior to men in this tradition.

Within this same time frame, however, other Protestant denominations moved in a very different direction and allowed women to reach higher levels within the power structures than ever before. In the summer of 2006, the Episcopal Church of the United States elected its first woman, Katherine Jefferts Schori, to the position of Presiding Bishop, the head of the denomination;<sup>2</sup> she was officially invested in the position in November 2006. This elicited both positive and negative reactions from members and administrators, both in the U.S. and around the world. The unfavorable reaction was so strong that some proclaimed that the choice of Jefferts Schori would cause a cataclysmic split within the church and indeed a number of churches officially left to form a separate denomination. Of course others heralded the election as a major step toward true equality within the church, as significant progress toward what they believe is the original role of women within the Christian church, citing Biblical examples of women's leadership roles from the very beginning of Christianity to support their stances. Two other large mainline denominations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the United Methodist Church (UMC), the focus of the present study, recently celebrated fifty years of full clergy rights for women.

In fact, the United Methodist Church, through its predecessors, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church, has a relatively long history of the full ordination of women into ministry, actually reaching back to its very beginnings (see Appendix A). John Wesley himself, the founder of Methodism, allowed women to preach if they exhibited an "extraordinary call" to do so, which was unheard of at that time in the 1700s.<sup>3</sup> On May 4, 1956, the General Conference of the Methodist Church approved the

addition of the simple statement “Women are included in all provisions of the *Discipline* referring to the ministry” to their *Book of Discipline* (the laws, plan, polity, and process by which United Methodists govern themselves); the effect of the inclusion of this statement was that women were permitted to be ordained as elders in the church, thereby granting them full clergy rights and making clear that all policies applied equally to women and men at all levels in the church, as well as in the family and larger society.<sup>4</sup> This was reaffirmed in 1968 when the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which ordained women beginning in 1894,<sup>5</sup> merged with the Methodist Church to form the United Methodist Church.<sup>6</sup>

The UMC has three classifications of ministers: elders, deacons, and local pastors. Elders hold the highest level of responsibility as well as the greatest authority. They are primarily responsible for teaching and preaching as well as administering the various rites the church sanctions and serving as the chief administrators. Deacons are also ordained clergy and can perform many of the duties of an elder (with the exceptions of administering communion or performing baptisms), but their primary responsibilities are to service and to connecting the church to the community.<sup>7</sup> Local pastors are licensed but not ordained. They serve as a reserve labor pool and typically serve in churches where placement officials cannot find a suitable elder who is able and willing to serve. They have the same authority and responsibility as elders, but those are limited only to the setting and tenure of their appointment. Ordaining women to the order of elder is particularly significant because it removes all official barriers to reaching the highest levels of organizational leadership.

As of 2010, 24.6% of active United Methodist clergy (elders, deacons, and local pastors) were women (Peck 2011). While this 24.6% overall does not even come close to the

percentage of total membership who are women and girls, it is significantly higher than in most other denominations.

The United Methodist Church assigns placements for its ministers, so women have traditionally been more likely to receive appointments to ministerial positions than within denominations without such placement structures; in fact the official policies of the UMC require that all ministers in good standing who are ordained as elders be assigned to a position, either ministerial or administrative (United Methodist Church 2004).<sup>8</sup> Some previous research has shown that this type of placement structure offers women a much better chance at more egalitarian placements than in most other denominations and systems without such policies (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, 1998). Even after receiving those placements, however, the data show that women still earn lower salaries, are more likely to be placed within what are generally considered the less-desirable churches, and typically hold positions that are lower in the overall leadership structure, as will be discussed in this research.

While we cannot easily determine why relatively few women are in ministry in the denomination, it is important to understand from the perspectives of the clergy women themselves why they hold the positions they do, what factors affect their placements (whether external factors or personal choices, or more likely, a combination of the two), and what obstacles they face throughout their ministries. The present study seeks to offer some of those clergy women from one Conference of the UMC, the Kentucky Annual Conference (KAC), the opportunity to provide some of those answers.

When compared with other local Conferences as well as national UMC statistics, the KAC has relatively fewer clergy women, significantly fewer in some instances (see Appendix B).<sup>9</sup> While a full explanation of the reasons why that is the case is well beyond

the scope of the present research, I propose that several factors are involved: a strong regional influence of more religiously conservative denominations and the Conference's location in the so-called Bible Belt; relatively less power of women in general in the region, religiously, politically, and otherwise; and an often-strong emphasis on traditional gender roles, especially in religion and the family. Particularly when their work affects (or has the potential to affect) their families, women are expected to subjugate their work to their families. All of these factors mean women are not as easily accepted as religious leaders as men, and when they are, that leadership is often limited and challenged, particularly if and when it is perceived to affect their families or in any other way presents challenges to the traditional and strongly patriarchal nature of the region. Thus the cultural character of the region presents additional obstacles and potential problems for clergy women that men do not face, and they must work within these constraints in ways that both challenge and at the same time recognize and to an extent accept these obstacles to their ministries.

Through qualitative semi-structured interviews, thirty-six of the one-hundred eighteen clergy women of the 2010 KAC shared their stories and experiences with me, their insights, triumphs, and challenges, and this work focuses on the details of those stories, particularly as they relate to the journey into and through ministry; the support and resistance they have encountered; the effects their families have on their ministries, as well as the effects their ministries have on their families; and the symbols and symbolic actions that are a part of the informants' lives and ministries.

This work contributes primarily to the subfield of sociology of gender inequality as it relates to women and work and women and religion. As one with an academic



specialization in research methods, I believe the work also contributes both to the methodological areas of exploratory, qualitative research and to feminist research, particularly as it focuses on the stories, experiences, and meanings my informants see in their lives.

### Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I have provided a brief overview of the research and the history of women in United Methodist ministry and offered my rationale for why the KAC in particular is an important group to study. In Chapter 2, I will provide an overview of the previous research into women in ministry as well as a theoretical framework for the present study. Chapter 3 will focus on the research methods employed in this work, including further explaining the rationale for the study and choices I made regarding decisions on whom to include and, as importantly, whom not to include. Chapters 4 through 7 are the heart of this study, the findings of the research: Chapter 4 considers the journey of the informants into and through their ministries, from their calls through the current points in their careers; Chapter 5 explores the support and resistance they experience and what the effects of those are on the women and their ministries; Chapter 6 examines the role of their families in their lives; and Chapter 7 addresses the symbols and symbolic actions that play important parts in their work, lives, and ministries and that enable them to perform the work they do as effectively as possible. Finally, Chapter 8 provides a summary of the most significant conclusions and implications of this work as well as suggestions for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> On one side of the debate are those who are opposed to women's religious leadership; they typically embrace statements that are attributed to the Apostle Paul that women should learn in silence and submission and that they should not be allowed to teach or have authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11-12). While many scholars question whether these statements were meant as overarching dictates or directed simply at a specific audience, the fact remains that many take them to be mandates for the acceptance and treatment of women.

On the other side of the debate are those who support women in ministry. They generally point to the basic ways Jesus treated women despite prevailing sentiments of the time, as well as to examples of several women Paul himself acknowledges as leaders in the early church (including several who supported his ministry), and to his words that there is "no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NIV).

<sup>2</sup> She is also the first woman to serve as the head of any branch of the Anglican Communion.

<sup>3</sup> "Extraordinary call" was God acting outside of the prescribed norms of the Bible. By allowing women to preach in the Methodist movement he was not questioning or challenging what was generally viewed as the Apostle Paul's prohibition against women speaking in church. Instead, Wesley was acknowledging that God sometimes moved in extra-ordinary ways (as evidenced by the number of female church leaders Paul acknowledged in his letters), and that he would not stand in the way of God's work—even if it seemed to contradict what was expected—if there was evidence of God's work, namely that people were converting to Christianity as a result.

<sup>4</sup> The *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church (2004) makes clear the official policy on gender equality in all parts of society, including the clergy:

We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. We therefore urge that every effort be made to eliminate sex-role stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society.

We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, promotion, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of

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Church life and urge such bodies to guarantee their presence through policies of employment and recruitment.

We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within our Church and society. We urge employers of persons in dual career families, both in the Church and society, to apply proper consideration of both parties when relocation is considered.

We affirm the right of women to live free from violence and abuse and urge governments to enact policies that protect women against all forms of violence and discrimination in any sector of society. (The *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* 2004: Paragraph 162)

<sup>5</sup> The Church of the United Brethren in Christ began ordaining women in 1894. That church merged with the Evangelical Church in 1946 to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Since the Evangelical Church did not ordain women, the bishops of the two constituent churches agreed not to ordain women, but the issue was never official policy as there was never a vote.

<sup>6</sup> While detailed analysis is beyond the scope of the present research, it is noteworthy that UMC churches have been declining in recent years, while others, particularly evangelical denominations, have simultaneously grown in size and power. In order to survive, it is speculated, UMC denominations, and particularly those in more rural regions, must compete with those other groups for members and resources, so they are sometimes willing to bow to the preferences of the membership (i.e., sending only "acceptable" ministers) to keep the churches open and the membership rolls as full as possible. This perspective will underlie some of the analysis of the data collected in this research.

<sup>7</sup> The contemporary order of deacon was established in 1996 to professionalize positions and roles that were typically filled by laity in the past, often by the former strictly-lay designation of diaconal ministers.

<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail later, the UMC requires a seminary degree for ordination into full clergy rights (at least a Master's degree, and most often a Master of Divinity degree), as well as other common education and training experiences, has

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minimum salary requirements for pastors in each position, and guarantees placements for all of its elders in good standing. Deacons share many of the same requirements. While “local pastors” are exempt from some of the ordination requirements, they have other mandatory training and are limited in their authority. (The *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* 1996: Paragraph 325)

<sup>9</sup> In a study of combined lay and clergy leadership in Conferences, the KAC ranked fourth-lowest in terms of percentage of women in Conference leadership positions. (This 2011)

## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

### Literature on Women in Ministry

No study of clergy women can be complete without acknowledging the contributions to the field by certain key works and researchers, so the present study will begin by providing a brief overview of the foundational works and prominent researchers whose contributions have largely shaped the research on women in ministry and provided much of the data we have on clergy women.

Of these works, arguably the most significant is *Women of the Cloth* (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983). This study was the first attempt to survey and compile data on and from a large number of clergy women who were in parish ministry in nine Protestant denominations in the U.S. at the time of the research. Its primary purpose was to appraise the landscape of the newly-emerging trend of women entering seminaries and professional ministries in record numbers. The researchers found some encouraging results, such as fewer obstacles to women entering seminary than before; overall satisfaction of clergy women with their ordination processes and first placements; and generally positive relationships with parishioners, other clergy, and judicatory officials. At the same time, however, they also found that clergy women still faced significant obstacles, including disparities in job placements, salaries, and career trajectories, as well as substantial resistance from some sides.

In 1998, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, 1998) was written largely as a follow-up to *Women of the Cloth*. *Clergy Women* examined what changes the field of women in ministry had undergone in the years since *Women of the Cloth* was published as well as what differences still existed between clergy women and

men. The authors also addressed issues that women faced that were different from those of their male counterparts. They found that in the years since *Women of the Cloth*, there was some progress in providing opportunities for women as ordained clergy. Unfortunately, however, many obstacles remained. Key among their findings was that disparities still existed in terms of salaries, securing a position, and the paths of their careers as time passed. Further, while their experiences were largely favorable, they still faced significant resistance and obstacles.

Another prominent researcher in the field is Edward Lehman. Lehman's work spans a variety of denominations and focuses largely on issues of receptivity of and resistance to clergy women by both laity and other clergy, including who is likely to support clergy women's hiring and ministries, who is likely to oppose, and the impact of those positions. Lehman also examines the effects calling a clergy woman has on the local congregations, both anticipated and realized, as well as the long-term impact on congregants and their attitudes toward not only their clergy woman, but other clergy women and women in other leadership positions as well (Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1994b, 2002).

Paula Nesbitt's work on clergy women also contributes to our understanding of clergy women's experiences. Nesbitt's most significant studies focus primarily on clergy women in the Episcopal and Unitarian Universalist churches. Much of her work begins with the premise that the clerical profession has undergone a "feminization" in recent years. This is manifested in two distinct ways. First, the clergy profession in general has experienced a decrease in prestige concurrent with more women serving, and Nesbitt examines how this process in the clergy is similar to what has occurred in other

fields, such as the legal profession. She cites prior research which shows that when women reach approximately 30% of the workers in a field, that field is more likely to undergo this process, both with losses of prestige and salary and a backlash against women in the field.

Second, Nesbitt contends that when women began entering seminaries in large numbers in the 1970s and 1980s, parallel career paths were created, and she argues that women are being funneled into those parallel career paths much more than men. Those paths, often created to professionalize previously women-dominated fields of work in ministry such as education and music ministries, yield overall lower pay, power, and prestige when compared to the paths dominated by male clergy, thus creating a bifurcated profession that is still very much gender-segregated. This allows women to serve as professional clergy but maintains the traditional gendered structure of the organizational leadership overall.

The work of Mark Chaves is also important to consider. Chaves' work largely focuses on trying to understand why some denominations ordain women and others do not, despite often strong pressures to do so. He examines how external political, cultural, and institutional factors affect women's ordination and finds that since churches do not operate in a vacuum, their policies can and do change over time, but their views on particular issues make it relatively more or less likely that they will do so. He conducted large-scale historical studies, examining the 100 largest Christian denominations in the U.S., and found that certain characteristics are related to whether or not denominations are likely to ordain women. Most notably, the decision is related to where they fall on the issues of sacramentalism and Biblical inerrancy (also called Biblical literalism).

Sacramentalism is the belief that the religious rites actually serve to bring the sacred realm into the earthly one; they are not mere exercises or remembrances, but rather holy acts that connect the two “worlds”. From this perspective, since the one performing the rites, the minister or priest, is the direct representative of God (a very clearly masculine deity in these traditions), he must be male or the entire rite is invalidated because God is not a feminine entity and thus cannot be represented by a woman. The second, Biblical inerrancy, is the idea that the Bible as the word of God is infallible, that it is to be read and interpreted literally, and that all of its teachings are to be taken as such. There is no room for matters such as cultural relativism in the interpretation; rather, what was said thousands of years ago, especially that which is found in the New Testament, is to be applied “as is” today. Churches that accept these perspectives to be true are much less likely to ordain women than those that do not. Chaves also considers factors such as whether the organizations have centralized power and authority and the extent to which their women’s mission society is autonomous, and what effects those factors have on their views and policies on the ordination of women (Chaves 1996).

While countless other researchers have made invaluable contributions to the field, these individuals and works arguably have had the most influence and are most relevant to the present work.

To understand the careers and lives of women in ministry, I will begin by looking at what the literature shows about their paths into and through ministry, starting with the call and progressing through placements. I will also address other issues prior research have found may differ by gender as they apply, including those of role strain, gendered



imagery and language that permeates traditional Christianity, and how personal choices affect clergy women's careers, perhaps differently than their male colleagues'.

## The Call

The idea of a call is central to serving in leadership positions in most Christian traditions. This notion stems from the beginning of the Judeo-Christian religions; it is the idea that God has a sacred mission or plan for the recipient's life and work. The call is a sort of litmus test for entering ministry for many faith groups and individuals, and in some cases, individuals cannot be admitted to ministries or even to seminaries unless they state that they have been called by God, sometimes offering very specific details of the nature and timing of the call. The idea of a call has been explored and expounded upon by a number of religious leaders, perhaps most notably by Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation, and John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, as well as by social theorists studying religion, most relevantly by Max Weber.

John Wesley used the notion of an "extraordinary call" to determine who could preach, and even allowed women to preach if they exhibited such a call, very much against the prevailing sentiments of the time. Martin Luther asserted that believers are to do everything that they do as a response to being called by God to do it, thus elevating profane work to a sacred level. In his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber used Luther's views about a call being on all lives, not just for those called to ministry, to explain how this worldview profoundly affected the entire culture (Weber 1996).

While the call takes on various forms, from a dramatic moment of revelation to a subtle or persistent feeling by the recipient, the idea that God has chosen the individual is a standard component; it is simply up to the individual to respond to that call. Since women overall have had a more challenging time becoming and then being accepted as ordained ministers, their sense of being called by God seems in many cases to provide them with the continued motivation to persevere toward their goals, often against overwhelming obstacles. In fact, some research has shown that women tend to have a higher level of commitment to ministry at the beginning of their careers, perhaps, researchers speculate, because of the additional obstacles they have had to overcome (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Lehman 2002).

Clergy women and men often receive their calls to ministry early in life, whether through personal insight, the encouragement of family or friends, or even through tradition and heritage (i.e., a “family business”). Women tend to be slower to answer that call, however (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Kent 2008). Women are also more likely to enter ministry as a second career and tend to have clearer ideas of where they want their careers to go than their male colleagues (Lehman 2002). Women may also experience other obstacles that their male counterparts may not, such as resistance within their families and/or communities of faith based on their gender and conflicting views of the appropriateness of ministry as a career for women. Women sometimes have to take the difficult step of leaving their denomination of origin to serve as ministers.

These women often experience cognitive dissonance when they sense their calls, and they may define everything they do in terms of what they view as gender-acceptable ways of ministering. Some handle internal conflicts by redefining what it means to be a minister and may not see themselves as ministers in the same way they see men as

ministers who are doing the same work. This is often related to their basic theologies regarding to what ministerial roles God calls women and the incongruence they feel between those views and how they believe they are being called to serve (Bennett 1993; Collier 2000; Kleingartner 1999; Mellow 1999; McDuff and Mueller 2002).

Clergy women face other obstacles as well. Clergy in general, and perhaps clergy women even more so, have a difficult time separating their professional and personal lives. Some research emphasizes the divided lives and conflicts between family and career that women in these fields face more than their male colleagues and what impacts these role conflicts have (Bleiberg and Skufca 2005; Gramley 1994; McDuff 2001; Nesbitt 1995; Perl 2002; Robinson 1988; Steward 1983; Walsh 1984). For instance, clergy men with wives are more likely to have someone else who takes care of “family life”; married clergy women, however, tend not to have someone in a traditional “preacher’s wife” type of role, one of a supportive, unpaid assistant who often helps with various church duties and cares for personal and family matters, freeing the clergy woman to perform her ministerial duties. Clergy women with children also have the added responsibilities of mothering within their own families. Further, congregants seem to believe that their clergy member’s time belongs to them, regardless of whether it is “after hours” and of whatever else may be going on in the clergy member’s own life, and some suggest this is even more the case for clergy women than men.

### Seminary and Ordination

After answering their calls, future ministers typically enter seminary. Here too, experiences often seem to differ by gender. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of

information about women's experiences in seminary and most of what we know comes from anecdotal accounts from individual clergy women. We do know about demographic characteristics of women entering seminary and how these vary by denomination, however, primarily through studies of seminary enrollments and graduation rates (Brasfield 1990; Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1993). We also know that seminary experiences of clergy women today have been shaped tremendously by those of their predecessors of the 1970s and 1980s, the "pioneering" generation, as they are often called.

Current clergy women have benefitted from those pioneers in several key ways. Seminary curricula today are more likely to reflect and include women's experiences and concerns than in the past; seminaries commonly offer courses focusing on women in the Bible and women's contributions throughout the Church's history, and even the cultural relativism of particular oppressive Scriptural passages is often openly discussed and accepted. While still relatively few overall, there are also many more seminary professors who are women; this means students have role models and perhaps mentors who may share gender-specific aspects of their challenges, and that all students, women and men, benefit from other perspectives and life experiences than previous generations of seminarians had. New seminary programs and "tracks" have also been developed, some of which are intended to meet the needs of students with families who also want to incorporate other important roles in their lives and ministries, although this trend has also been controversial and problematic, having far-reaching and often negative consequences for women in particular, as will be discussed below.<sup>1</sup>

## Ordination

Usually after graduating from seminary, those wishing to become full clergy members seek ordination.<sup>2</sup> Ordination is the procedure by which clergy are certified to serve as ministers. Ordination processes vary by denomination, but within most mainline denominations, ordination involves the completion of formal religious education (typically a Master's-level degree at a seminary or comparable institution, such as a divinity school or Bible college) including essentially what amounts to internships, interviews, practicums, and sometimes psychological profiles and counseling and even financial evaluations.

Much of the process of ordination is subjective, and some researchers have found that women may find that process more challenging and sometimes less successful than men, even within traditions that support women's ordination. While most women and men seem to believe that their ordination processes are fair and reasonable and are generally satisfied with the results, women are often evaluated on different criteria than their male peers. Since religious institutions are largely outside of the control of other social institutions, those institutions generally have the authority to set their own policies, including who can be given full clerical rights and in what capacities they can serve. Thus they are able to ordain (or refuse to ordain) whomever they choose based on whatever criteria they see fit (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Lehman 1980, 1985; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

Processes of ordination have also undergone significant changes in the past few decades. One key development is the creation of new tracks in seminaries that lead to ordination into different areas than existed in the past. While different specializations in seminary educations are nothing new, in the decades since women entered ministry in

large numbers, additional and significant new educational tracks have also developed. These new tracks were created for a number of reasons, including professionalizing previous lay work, particularly as it relates to education ministries (specifically those that focus on and work with children), music ministries, and other non-pastoral ministries. While this does serve the purpose of professionalizing what are traditionally women's areas of work within the church, it also serves another purpose, according to Paula Nesbitt (and others): it creates a sort of dual track, allowing ministerial careers to remain gender-segregated, and the tracks into which women are encouraged to go are more poorly compensated and allow men to remain in the more prestigious and supervisory positions while women are serving in more subordinate roles, with less prestige, authority, and financial compensation, thereby maintaining much of the same gender stratification as before (Nesbitt 1994; Nesbitt 1997a). According to Nesbitt, this all has the effect of maintaining a bifurcated profession, with clergy men remaining in the most powerful and prestigious positions and clergy women concentrated in the positions that are less so. This new group of professional ministers not only fills positions previously held primarily by women in a lay capacity, but also serves as a reserve labor force when needed, such as when a clergy man is unavailable – or unwilling – to serve in a given role (such as associate minister or minister in less-desirable churches) and frees clergy men to fill the higher-level roles in the organizational hierarchy. Thus clergy men are competing only among themselves for the highest positions, beyond a token representation of clergy women.

## Placements

Upon completing seminary and being ordained (or perhaps during the process, depending on the denominational practices), clergy members typically seek placements, whether traditional church-based placements, other religious appointments like chaplaincies, or secular jobs.<sup>3</sup> While women's and men's differences in seminary and ordination experiences seem to have lessened greatly in recent years, much more significant differences by gender arise once the clergy members seek and attain placements. Interestingly, while the "pioneers" recognized and blamed structural inequalities and oppressive patterns within the organization itself, newer clergy women are much more likely to internalize challenges and blame themselves and their perceived inadequacies for disparities and problems in their ministries, whether it is resistance, inability to obtain a satisfactory placement, or lack of advancement in the organization (Lehman 1979, 1980, 1993, 1994a, 1994b). This is just one of several cohort differences noted by researchers between newer clergy women and those from earlier groups.

Beginning with initial placements and then continuing throughout their careers, women's and men's careers begin to diverge markedly. While some research has suggested that clergy women who have been able to secure initial placements did not find the process itself unduly difficult (*cf* Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983), even those researchers note that this does not necessarily reflect the experiences of women who have been unable to get a job. Further, a number of studies indicate that it takes women longer to land their first placement (Chang 1997; Lehman 1979, 1980; Nason-Clark 1987) and that women are more likely to be placed as associate pastors and in "less-desirable" churches initially and then to remain there longer (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Houseal 1996; Lehman 1979, 1980; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).<sup>4</sup> Those

considered less desirable tend to be smaller, poorer, more rural, pay less, have fewer other paid employees, more likely to have declining membership, have more debt, and be in more imminent danger of closing. This disparity is important because early placements set the stage for subsequent placements.

In fact, studies have shown that what happens with initial placements has significant implications throughout clergy members' careers (Chang 1997; Nesbitt 1990, 1994, 1997a, 1997b; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998). Although first positions out of seminary are generally more similar between women and men, the real differences begin to appear at second and subsequent placements. Clergy men tend to have careers with more upward trajectories, progressing from associate pastor to senior pastor, from smaller churches in more rural areas to larger churches in more populous areas, for example, while clergy women's career paths tend to be more "flat" in nature (Bumgardner 2005; Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Finlay 1996; Lehman 1980; Nesbitt 1990, 1994, 1997a; Nason-Clark 1987; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998), and as their careers progress, the differentials become even more apparent. Men tend to gain more responsibilities and are more likely to move into higher leadership positions within the church organization (i.e., district superintendent, bishop, etc.), while clergy women's careers generally do not follow the same pattern. In her study of Episcopal and Unitarian Universalist clergy, Paula Nesbitt found that seventy-six percent of the clergy men in her sample were solo or senior pastors by their third appointment, compared to only fifty-two percent of the clergy women (Nesbitt 1990). While women in mainline Protestant denominations are typically not officially barred from these advances, in practice they are more likely to remain in lower positions, both in parish ministries and within the organizational hierarchy (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Chaves 1997; McDuff and Mueller 1999; Nesbitt 1990, 1994; Schmidt 1996; Zikmund,



Lummis, and Chang 1998). In fact a number of studies indicate that by their second and third placements, women are still more likely to serve in smaller, less financially-stable churches in small towns and often remain assistant or associate pastors instead of serving as senior or solo pastors (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Chaves 1997; Lehman 1979, 1980; McDuff and Mueller 1999; Nesbitt 1990, 1997a). So the effects of initial placements have a profound and long-term impact on the future careers of both clergy women and men with each facing different outcomes as a result.

It is not only the initial placement that is a significant factor in subsequent placements, however: gender is an independent variable in predicting placements, and in particular, upward mobility in ministers' future careers. For clergy men, assuming they were qualified for the positions, gender alone tended to be enough to secure placements. For women, however, multiple studies have found that what best predicts whether they will attain a desirable placement is the use of centralized employment information systems or the denomination's central placement system (Lehman 1980; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

Centralized employment information systems develop within denominations in which individual churches are responsible for hiring clergy. Since the tendency of the individual congregations' search committees is to hire clergy who are most like themselves in terms of gender, race, education, and other social location factors, the result is often "more of the same" instead of considering more diverse clergy members for their openings. The purpose of the information systems is to provide a more heterogeneous pool of applicants by collecting and maintaining information on all available clergy candidates in order to provide congregations with the best possible information to allow them to expand their search beyond their limited personal interactions. While these systems do not always work perfectly because of information

screening and the fact that individual biases are still in place, they do seem to aid women in securing positions.

Denominational appointment systems develop in denominations where there is a central body that makes placements. In these systems, control over clergy placements is placed in the hands of a few individuals who are charged with matching clergy with positions and controlling hiring patterns. This system does address some of the placement problems women have encountered, particularly as practiced by the United Methodist Church which actually places clergy members into each position in the organization (Bennett 1993; Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Chang 1997; Collier 2000; Hancock 1987; Perl and Chang 2000; Royle 1987; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998). A potential problem with the placement systems, however, is that it concentrates a great deal of power in the hands of a few individuals. If those individuals do not have a favorable opinion of women as clergy, their views will likely impact their placement decisions, even in denominations where placements are guaranteed. Several studies include accounts of clergy women who have faced this type of negative situation (Bennett 1993; Kleingartner 1999; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998). On the other hand, if those individuals act as advocates for clergy women, they will be more likely to secure favorable placements for them.

Placement officials have other issues to consider as well, however, even if they themselves fully support gender equity in the church. They have to balance their interest in obtaining satisfactory placements for their ministers with the desires of individual congregations and whether the congregations are willing to accept a “nontraditional” minister. Numerous studies examine others’ receptivity, resistance to, perceptions of, and responses to clergy women, including the anticipated economic impact on the local congregation (Aldridge 1989; Anderson 2002; Bennett 1993; Chambers and Chalfant

1978; Chang 1997; Dudley 1996; Handley 1985; Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1994b, 2002; Maybury and Chickering 2001; McDuff and Mueller 1999; Mueller 1989; Royle 1987; Simon and Nadell 1995). Often it is only a vocal minority who oppose women's appointments, but as in other areas, those individuals tend to make themselves heard. Since churches are voluntary organizations, supervisors have to weigh their interest in assigning good placements to their ministers against potential threats of withdrawal of membership and financial support in individual congregations. Interestingly, however, even when such threats are made, the dire predictions are seldom realized. In fact several studies have shown that even in more resistant congregations, after women are placed, the congregation tends not to fail and often thrives, and members overall tend to become more accepting of women in leadership positions not only in their individual church, but on a larger scale as well (see Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1994b, for example).

Another difference between clergy women's and men's careers is that at all points in their careers clergy women are more likely to serve outside of a "traditional" clerical position in a church congregation. Women are also much more likely to leave parish ministry than their male counterparts. Further, despite generally being at least as qualified to hold particular (high-ranking) positions as their male colleagues, women are much less likely to attain those positions and remain there.

Another issue raised in these studies is the fact that most evaluations of clergy are subjective and those evaluations often directly affect salary and placements. Clergy women tend to be measured against traditionally male characteristics and stereotypes, even when the desired traits are considered "feminine", such as nurturing and compassion (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Chaves 1996; Handley 1985; Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b; Mueller 1989; Nason-Clark 1987;

Nesbitt 1990, 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998). To paraphrase some of the findings, congregants commonly want stereotypically “feminine” traits in their ministers; they simply tend to prefer that they come from clergy men. All of these factors differentially affect women’s and men’s acceptance, opportunities, and rewards.

These placement disparities are often accompanied by salary disparities because more prestigious placements generally come with higher salaries, so placements have tremendous financial implications for the clergy members (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Lehman 1980; Nesbitt 1994, 1997a, 1997b; Perl and Chang 2000; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998). Such trends are especially concerning because, as some have noted, they reflect the relatively lower value placed on clergy women as compared with clergy men (Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1993; Nesbitt 1990, 1994, 1997a, 1997b). The authors of *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* summarized the issue of salary disparities particularly well:

Salary inequality is one of the most tangible and symbolic forms of discrimination. Earnings send an important message about how an organization or social group values the relative worth of its personnel. If women are earning less than similarly qualified men, the message is plain: the organization values them less. (1998:72)

Nesbitt and others have attributed at least part of this to some of the overall changes within the clerical field, particularly to the so-called “feminization of clergy” and claim that this profession, like others it follows, has become less-prestigious and more poorly compensated as greater numbers of women have entered the field (McDuff and Mueller 1999; Nesbitt 1990, 1997a; Royle 1987). While evidence does support the possibility

that the clerical profession overall is undergoing such changes, that does not account for the salary differentials between clergy women and men.

While there is little disagreement within the literature that disparities exist, some researchers attribute these disparities to choices made by clergy women to remain in certain positions, even if it means lower compensation. Those choices do not account for most of the disparities, however (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Chang 1997; Ice 1987; Nesbitt 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Robinson 1998). Family life is one area which both affects and is affected by the clergy member's choices. While some research suggests women's decisions to take positions and their likelihood to be offered positions are not greatly affected by their family status (i.e., whether they are married and whether they have school-aged children), other research disputes those findings. Anecdotally, some clergy women have expressed reticence to uproot their families for their careers but say they would be willing to move for their husbands' careers. Some other commonly-cited reasons clergy women give for choosing to remain in such lower-status positions are that they like the current congregants and location, and they believe they have greater opportunities to have more personal relationships with parish and community members than they believe they would have if they left for another more prestigious position (Bennett 1993; Hancock 1987; Nason-Clark 1987; Stevens 1989).

A number of studies dispute the idea that disparities result from choices, however, or at least argue that the choices are often made more as a result of those institutional and cultural factors rather than independent from them (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Nesbitt 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Robinson 1998; Royle 1987). These and other researchers suggest salary disparity in the clergy exists for the many of the same reasons as it does in other fields: women are less likely than men are to negotiate for higher salaries, they are perceived as requiring lower incomes (from the antiquated

notion of a “living wage”), and they are working in less-prestigious positions which are paid less, either as associate or part-time pastors or in less-prestigious parishes and/or poorer areas, despite having comparable experience and levels of education to those of their male counterparts (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983; Lehman 1979, 1980, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1994b, 2002; Nason-Clark 1987; Nesbitt 1990, 1994, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

Those factors alone do not account for all of the salary disparities by gender, however. The authors of *Clergy Women* found that, when controlling for age, experience, education, denomination, job type, and church size, clergy women earned only ninety-one percent of what clergy men earned (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).<sup>5</sup> This is similar to the findings of other studies, one of which found that in denominations that require a seminary degree for ordination (typically a Master of Divinity degree, or “M. Div.”), women with the degree earned only eighty-four percent of what men with the same degree earned (Perl and Chang 2000). Further, women with a higher degree earned even less, seventy-five percent, when compared with similarly-credentialed men (ibid). Perhaps the authors of *Women of the Cloth* sum up these findings best: “Regrettably, an institution committed to justice and love among humankind perpetuates injustice among a significant number of its professional leaders” (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1983:207).

While the preceding overview covers the literature that is most relevant to the present work, literature on women in ministry is more extensive than that. Another category of studies examines ministerial work by women as it parallels women working in other traditionally male fields, especially medicine, law, and the military, and often, the

changes each field has undergone in recent years (McDuff and Mueller 1999, 2002; Royle 1987; Steward 1983). In particular, these studies focus on the structural obstacles women face, especially in terms of hiring, promotion, and salaries, and how the clerical field mirrors the other fields in important ways. Other studies emphasize how women in these fields face divided lives and conflicts between family and career more than their male colleagues and what impacts these role conflicts have (Bleiberg and Skufca 2005; Gramley 1994; McDuff 2001; Nesbitt 1995; Robinson 1988; Steward 1983; Walsh 1984).

Many other studies have a more historical nature, exploring women's participation in ministry from the beginnings of Christianity (and even within its predecessor, Judaism) through the present (Carroll 1975; Chaves 1996, 1997; Felder 1984; Hunermann 1975; Kienzle and Walker 1998; Kleingartner 1999; Larson 1999; Rhodes-Wickett 1981; Ruether 1974, 2005; Schneider and Schneider 1997; Torjesen 1993; Tregallas 1997). While some of these studies are straightforward historical surveys, most are framed in terms of what has and what has not changed over the years. Other works focus on establishing a Biblical precedent for the prominent role of women in the church, including ordination (Carroll 1975; Hunermann 1975; Torjesen 1993). They examine the roles and positions in which women served in the early church and provide a reading of the New Testament writings attributed to the Apostle Paul in a cultural context. Some also move beyond the Bible to accounts and records from the pre-medieval church to support the contention that women served in positions of leadership during this time as well.

Finally, researchers have also examined leadership, teaching, and preaching styles of clergy women, often comparing and contrasting them with those of clergy men (Alexander 2003; Lehman 1993, 1994a; Mosley 1990; Pidwell 2001; Plant 2006; Sherrill 1991; Stevens 1989; Storms 2001; Thomas 1998; Zikmund and Lummis 1998). Some of these studies focus on or include analyses of sermon notes and texts as well as

evaluations and analyses of and by the clergy women themselves, by their supervisors, and/or by their parishioners (Albee 2000; Hendricks 1994; Ice 1985; Olson, Crawford, and Guth 2000; Robbins 1998; Stevens 1989; Watson 2001). Although the purpose of these studies is commonly to discover whether there are gender-based differences, most of the research finds that those differences are more attributable to age, education, personality, and other factors rather than gender.

### Theoretical Perspectives

While it is important to recognize that a fuller understanding of this research necessarily incorporates perspectives from both political economy and social constructionism, this work will only briefly touch on political economic ideas and focus much more attention on social constructionist perspectives. In part, this is because of the focus on standpoint theory that I will describe in greater detail below; this focus affected both the primary theoretical understanding of the research as well as methodological decisions I made on how to approach the research, whom to include (and whom not to include), and how to interpret the findings.

I am beginning with the premise that Judith Lorber (1994:1) stated so well: gender is an all-pervasive social institution that "establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself." Gender is the master status that outweighs all other factors in this region, and often in the institution of religion itself, and it is within this context that clergy women must necessarily operate.



Since I believe that political economic ideas are affecting my informants' experiences, I will briefly provide an overview of the perspective and also a short analysis of these ideas in this work, but then I will turn much more attention to the micro-level analysis that is the primary focus of the study.

Political economy is related to the work of Karl Marx and is a macro-level theoretical perspective that takes the stance that various institutions in society are intimately and inseparably connected. In particular, the political institution and the economic institution are interrelated and the same dominant groups control and benefit from both. Since their interests are the same, the power-elite use their resources to maintain the institutions as they are, thus working to perpetuate the status quo. Those who are members of non-dominant groups have little power and, whether they realize it or not, are affected by and to an extent controlled and used by those dominant groups to maintain that current order.

In the case of this present research, this perspective, particularly as utilized by Paula Nesbitt, takes the position that a dominant group is largely in control of this particular organization; they have a vested interest in maintaining the present system largely as is, and a significant part of that system has to do with who represents the organization and in what capacity. In this instance, that includes both elements of gender and traditional ideologies.

In the particular geographic region where this Conference is located, as previously noted, often rigid gender roles and traditional, patriarchal religious and family ideologies are firmly entrenched. When women choose to enter ministry, they face a number of obstacles, both structural, as will be discussed here, and ideological, as will be discussed briefly here but in more detail below. Structural obstacles include especially

the dual paths that Nesbitt addresses, both as in the creation of new professional designations and in the reserve labor force that results.

In the UMC, when diaconal ministry was formalized and became a professional designation, primarily women entered that order, and that trend continues today (see Table 2.1). This dual track allows those who perform those traditionally women’s areas

	Elder		Deacon		Local Pastor		Total	
	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %
<u>Southeast Jurisdiction<sup>1</sup></u>								
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>9.51</b>	<b>90.49</b>	<b>72.73</b>	<b>27.27</b>	<b>12.45</b>	<b>87.55</b>	<b>13.56</b>	<b>86.44</b>
Alabama/W. Florida	10.10	89.90	62.00	38.00	18.60	81.40	15.08	84.92
Florida	15.55	84.45	73.44	26.56	29.09	70.91	20.39	79.61
Holston	14.93	85.07	63.33	36.67	22.84	77.16	17.53	82.47
Memphis	14.41	85.59	56.52	43.48	11.43	88.57	16.23	83.77
Mississippi	13.21	86.79	60.98	39.02	14.63	85.37	15.33	84.67
North Alabama	12.67	87.33	70.00	30.00	17.80	82.20	15.49	84.51
North Carolina	18.10	81.90	71.11	28.89	30.23	69.77	22.76	77.24
South Carolina *	19.21	80.79	72.73	27.27	26.07	73.93	22.82	78.08
Virginia *	20.19	79.81	75.51	24.49	29.89	70.11	22.99	77.01
W. North Carolina	20.73	79.27	81.71	18.29	27.03	72.97	24.38	75.62
<u>Neighboring Conferences</u>								
West Virginia	17.27	82.73	81.25	18.75	23.67	76.33	21.39	78.61
East Ohio	19.38	80.63	42.86	57.14	27.27	72.73	21.98	78.02
Indiana	17.01	82.99	87.50	12.50	32.32	67.68	21.79	78.21
Missouri	22.43	77.57	72.22	27.78	40.67	59.33	28.10	71.90
UMC Nationally							23.60	76.40

\* Indicates female bishop

<sup>1</sup> Data for three Conferences (Tennessee, North Georgia, South Georgia) were not available for inclusion in this table.

**Table 2.1 Comparative Statistics Among Jurisdictional and Neighboring Conferences**

of ministry to receive the official designation of professional ministers and provides more options for paid careers in ministry, often performing the same types of work that some of these same women performed as lay ministers. Although now professional ministers, however, the work performed and the order into which the deacons are ordained do not provide the same level of respect and power as those who are ordained into the order of elder, the designation with full power and authority in the organization.

This bifurcated profession has real consequences, often negative for those serving as deacons, who are most often women. Two deacons interviewed in this work shared empirical examples of differences by designation. One has been serving the same church for a number of years as an associate pastor focusing on family ministries and she works many more than forty hours per week. However, she is only paid as a three-quarter time employee, which affects not only her income, but her retirement and some benefits as well. She has no real recourse for this, and the senior pastor is not supportive of making changes to her status to recognize and compensate her actual work. She commented that if she were an elder, that not only would not happen, but actually could not happen within the organization. Another deacon in a similar type of ministry noted that when the administrative assistant at her church left her position that she, the deacon, was basically expected to step in to fill the role, without any additional compensation or recognition; she believed this was likely because she was both a deacon and a woman (notably, perhaps, the only woman on the professional staff).

Even when they are serving as elders, however, women are disproportionately placed in smaller and more rural churches, as previous research has shown. Thus, their gender supersedes their credentials and ordination orders, as noted above, but this is particularly true for those who are deacons.

Although there are powerful structural factors at work, however, I have chosen to focus primarily on the interactional ones, specifically on how the women interviewed see themselves and their work, how they navigate the obstacles they encounter, and how they believe others see and respond to them and that work. While another researcher might choose to provide a more macro-level analysis, I have chosen to focus primarily on the women themselves and their stories, experiences, and perceptions. There are commonalities, likely due to the very real structural constraints they are facing, but their perceptions and their power to navigate and overcome the obstacles that they face come largely from the meanings they attach to those interactions. For this, I rely on social constructionism.

Social constructionism examines the social world from a micro-level perspective and focuses on the symbols and interactions used by actors to create and interpret the world. Symbols are very powerful elements in all of our lives, and their importance lies in the meanings we attach to them, generally through interactions. This perspective often analogizes these interactions to actors on a stage creating a reality, and these actors, the clergy women, as well as those with whom they work, know the scripts they must follow in order to play their roles appropriately. They also understand not only the gender-specific actions and symbols, but also the larger religious actions and symbols that are such important parts of their lives and work. Gender, as a social construction that is at the heart of so much of interactions, is both created by and constraining to the actors, and affects all parts of their lives and work.

Since these women are non-traditional leaders and often face tremendous resistance because of their gender, they know how to operate both within that patriarchal tradition as traditional (i.e., male) leaders have and do, but they also experience their lives

somewhat as outsiders in this work who must also know how to operate in other ways. Because of that, I am also using standpoint theory.

Standpoint theory is the perspective and related processes that primarily developed among such noted feminist theorists as Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, and Dorothy Smith. This perspective recognizes that one's view of the world is largely influenced by where one "stands" in the social world; whether one is a member of a dominant group or a less-privileged group, that group membership affects how she sees the world. While dominant groups' views and versions of reality are given preeminence overall, standpoint perspective recognizes that all groups have knowledge and experiences that are equally valid; in fact, members of marginalized or oppressed groups possess both the knowledge needed to operate in the dominant world as well as that which is relevant for their reality. Including their knowledge and perspectives, this view argues, allows us to have a fuller understanding of the world.

This is significant because it gives preeminence to the experiences of the informants, without requiring external "verification" from those in more powerful and dominant positions. This both gives voice to the informants themselves and also provides heretofore unheard stories and understandings of experiences. Their positions, while technically the same as their male counterparts, are in fact quite different in practice; they are treated differently and they experience those positions and the work they are doing differently. They are aware of those differences and they have shared some of them here.

Because I am focusing on these clergy women's perceptions and actions, I chose not to include clergy men because I believe if I had done so, my women's voices would have suffered some of the same fate that they have elsewhere: if not silenced, they would

have at least been softened; instead, by including only the women themselves, their voices are allowed to stand alone and be heard. While men in the organization could add perhaps interesting layers, at the same time, I believe that would give the impression, as so often happens, that the women's views and experiences are only "real" and "true" and valuable if recognized and validated by men, and I reject both the notion that men's voices are needed and that such external confirmation is required.

Notably, this research does include several informants who are or have been members of the leadership within the hierarchy, so it is not only the relatively less-powerful women in the organization who are included, but women from all levels of the hierarchy.

Interestingly, though, those women shared many of the same experiences as their female colleagues, while also speaking from the vantage points of those more powerful positions.

Thus, by using primarily social constructionist perspectives coupled with standpoint theory and related methods, I will be focusing on my participants' experiences, but even more significantly, on the meanings they attach to those experiences and how they work within the constraints they face to do the work they believe they are called to do. I will also apply the work of Laura Geller, particularly in Chapter 7, to demonstrate more clearly how these theoretical ideas are often evident in the empirical world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers have found that clergy women tend to be more motivated, more focused on what they want, more qualified, more likely to be in their second (or subsequent) career, more mature (both intellectually and spiritually), and have life goals that are clearer to them (*cf* Lehman 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> The process, timing, and requirements for ordination differ by denomination.

<sup>3</sup> Placements may or may not be the result of some overseeing body who “places” the individual; they may simply be the result of the minister getting called by the church, usually going through a screening, interviewing, and “practice” preaching process, and then being hired; the organization with which the present study is concerned does practice policies of a governing body placing individual ministers, although either the minister herself or himself or the individual congregation may protest the placement. The standard practice is that the district superintendent discusses what the individual congregation believes they need in a pastor and then strives to place the pastor who is the best fit for the congregation. The formal placements are made by the Appointive Cabinet, which is composed of the district superintendents and the Bishop of the Conference.

<sup>4</sup> Since the researchers are including only clergy women who have secured appointments as clergy, many clergy women are omitted from the studies, particularly those who end up serving either in lay positions or outside of the church in non-clerical positions. Thus we know very little about those who serve in those capacities.

<sup>5</sup> Notably, the centralized information systems do seem to have an effect on salary, with the gender wage gap narrowing from twelve percent in denominations without information systems to six percent in those with them (Lehman 1979, 1980; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Geller describes how major religions are androcentric from their images of God to their languages, liturgies, and symbols. Clergy members, traditionally men, have a decided advantage over clergy women. They are the expected and readily-accepted leaders because of their gender and because there are significant elements in the traditions and sacred texts that justify and even require that men serve as the leaders, and most adherents accept men’s authority unquestioningly. Everything in the religion is set up to support male leadership; when those assumptions of (exclusively) male leadership are questioned or violated, problems arise for both leaders and members.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methods**

#### Rationale for Choosing the KAC

As described in Chapter 1, this research focuses specifically on the clergy women of the Kentucky Annual Conference (KAC) of the United Methodist Church (UMC). The purpose of this research is to understand from the perspectives of the clergy women themselves why they hold the positions they do, what factors affect their placements, and what obstacles they face throughout their ministries.

I chose to focus on this particular group of clergy women for several reasons. First, the UMC is an especially good choice because of the relatively long history of official full inclusion of women at all positions of leadership in the denomination as well as the quality of records available (i.e., placement history, individual church statistics, information about individual ministers). Additionally, all ministers in the UMC must meet certain criteria in order to be full clergy members (with the exception of those who are classified as “local pastors”,<sup>1</sup> who must meet other certification criteria): each holds at least a Master’s degree (most commonly a Master of Divinity, or M.Div., although some hold other types); each has completed or is in the process of ordination; and provided she is designated as a “member in good standing,” each elder is guaranteed a placement in the Conference in which she is a member, although not necessarily a pastorate.<sup>2</sup> Finally, salaries in the UMC are determined primarily by placement type, and while individual churches have the option to choose to pay their clergy members more than the minimum required salary, most analyses have shown that salaries by gender are very comparable overall in the denomination when controlling for placement types.<sup>3</sup>



I am focusing on clergy women who are members of the Kentucky Annual Conference for several reasons. In addition to the above criteria that all UMC clergy members share, this group also has other qualities that make it a good choice for exploration, and neither I nor archivists of KAC records have been able to find any research of this type looking at this particular group of clergy. Since individual Conferences are responsible for keeping their own records, the KAC in particular is a good choice because of the quality and quantity of records available, many of which are on file at Asbury Theological Seminary, located in Wilmore, KY, which serves as one of the main repositories for both UMC and KAC records and archives. The KAC also has relatively few clergy women as members: while the percentage of women in leadership positions in the UMC overall was around 24.6% as of 2010, those in the KAC actually make up only around 13.56% (118 of 870) as of the 2010 Conference, so I hypothesized (and found) that regional differences and particularly the strong religious influences of other groups in some areas may affect this particular population. Finally, despite the relatively few clergy women overall as well as the fact that only one of the twelve current district superintendents is a clergy woman (and only four clergy women have ever served as district superintendents in the KAC; no woman has ever served as Bishop in the KAC), a few women are currently serving or have served as senior pastors at some of the largest churches in the Conference, even though national statistics show that women are relatively unlikely to be appointed to those positions.<sup>4</sup> While this research cannot explain with certainty why that is the case, several women speculated that it was because of particular bishops and district superintendents who advocated for very competent clergy women to serve in those more prominent positions. Finally, as noted in Chapter 1 and by a number of informants, many areas of the region where this Conference is located are largely Baptist, typically Southern Baptist or other conservative Baptist denominations, and parts of the region often have strong views opposing women's leadership and even more

so, women’s religious leadership. Placements of women in the Conference tend to fall along those lines (see Table 3.1). Although I cannot speak to all of the reasons behind the regional disparity in placements, my informants’ views were that those geographic disparities were largely related to the regional cultural differences in acceptance of clergy women. Although the more urban areas simply have more positions to fill, the percentages of clergy who are women are also significantly different by region.

District	Clergy Women N=117	Percentage of all Clergy Women	Percentage of Total Clergy in District Who Are Women
Ashland	7	5.93%	11.67%
Bowling Green	5	4.24%	7.94%
Columbia	12	10.17%	14.46%
Corbin	1	0.85%	2.08%
Covington	9	7.63%	13.04%
Elizabethtown	15	12.71%	22.39%
Frankfort	7	5.93%	10.94%
Lexington	19	16.10%	18.81%
Louisville	28	23.73%	43.08%
Madisonville	5	4.24%	8.93%
Owensboro	6	5.08%	10.34%
Prestonsburg	4	3.39%	8.16%

**Table 3.1 Clergy Women Placements by District**

#### Description of Population and Significance of Sample

The KAC was relatively late in ordaining women into the order of Elder in Full Connection (also referred to as Full Elders), the type of ordination required to perform full clergy rites and to serve as senior or solo pastor of a church. The very first woman to be ordained as an elder in the then-Louisville Conference, Marietta Mansfield, was actually ordained in 1959, but no other women were ordained as elders until 1977; after

that point, women began being ordained more routinely. This present research includes interviews with several of the earliest women to be ordained in each of two constituent Conferences of the current KAC<sup>5</sup> (the first elder ordained in the Conference, Rev. Mansfield, died in 2003). The first woman believed to serve as chaplain in Kentucky (in any denomination) and the first (interim) campus minister are also included. This research includes all four of those current and former district superintendents as well as at least most clergy women who are currently or who have previously served as senior pastors of some of the largest churches in the Conference.<sup>6</sup> I have also included women from each of the 12 districts composing the KAC, although informants included do not represent all districts as of the 2010 Conference.<sup>7</sup>

#### How I Became Interested in This Research

When discussing my research with others, whether clergy, friends, or colleagues, one of the first questions I am asked is how I came to be interested in this topic. While not a simple question to answer, I can identify several compelling reasons. First, and most personally, I grew up in a more conservative Protestant tradition, one that prohibited women from formal leadership in higher-level positions, and even as a child, I was very uncomfortable with this. I remember my “first sighting”, as one of my informants called it, the first time I saw a woman preach, and I knew at that time that all I had been told about women preaching had to be wrong. She was clearly in the right line of work.

I also worked as a children’s minister at two churches during and after college and I considered entering seminary myself. Unfortunately, those experiences also exposed me to the darker sides of this important work: I was chastised and condemned by some

and viewed as a curiosity by others, and all of this was within the context of the generally-acceptable role (even within more conservative denominations) of a woman working with children. I once made a telephone call regarding an advertised position at an independent (i.e., non-denominationally affiliated) church seeking a youth minister, and I was told very abruptly that women were not eligible to apply for that job and the person answering the telephone hung up on me. I also have several friends, women and men, who have served as ministers and I have witnessed both the positive and negative experiences they have had.

Despite those experiences, however, I do not believe that the religion of Christianity is the problem; I, like many of my informants, believe that at the heart of the problem lie different interpretations of sometimes unclear directives in the Bible, as described previously. I personally (and my clergy women) find my faith to be liberatory, not oppressive. Because of that, I chose as an adult not only to continue participation in Protestantism, but to raise my children to share my faith as well. I joined a UMC congregation after moving to Lexington, Kentucky, to complete my doctoral work. I chose the particular church I did because a woman was serving there as an associate pastor, and after my experiences in ministry and because of my personal views, I knew I preferred a church that demonstrated the church's acceptance of women and women's service in concrete ways. After attending that church for a while, my husband and I decided to officially join the congregation and therefore the denomination.

Thus I am an "insider" both in the faith and in this particular denomination; because of that insider status and knowledge, I experienced both benefits and challenges in this research and this work reflects those. Most beneficial were the connections I had with others in the Conference, especially with my current pastor, a clergy woman who is very highly respected and well-known throughout the Conference and who served as my first

informant. She also acted as a reference for other clergy women considering talking with me. Because a few of my informants had previous negative experiences sharing their stories with others, some were initially cautious about talking with me, but after they were confident I was an insider (and especially knowing my connection with my pastor), they spoke more freely. Also since I had those personal connections to the KAC, my informants did not feel the need to justify or defend themselves or their ministries or their right to serve as ministers.

This work was also made easier because I knew the language and references they used and the history to which they referred. Often one of the first questions I was asked when they were preparing to discuss or describe particular experiences was whether I was a United Methodist or familiar with the UMC; after I told them about my affiliation, they gave what I perceived to be both deeper and more jargon-filled responses. While this fact helped in that I did not have to learn the language and basic premises of the religion, it may also limit this analysis somewhat because of assumptions I unconsciously make. At the same time, however, I have consciously tried to step away from that insider knowledge so I could effectively ask questions and write for those who are not familiar with the organization and its beliefs and rituals. I think my insider status also allowed me a privileged vantage point where I knew many of the questions I wanted to ask even before I completed my preliminary research, in part because of my experiences in ministry and in part because of my connections to this particular organization; as much as possible, I have been very cautious throughout the research, though, not to allow my beliefs and expectations to obscure or overshadow (or even influence) my clergy women's stories or my interpretations of those.

I also believe I faced somewhat of an advantage because I am a woman. Although most of my informants work in traditionally-male roles and are generally very comfortable

living and working in that world, several remarked that they would not say some comment to a man but could tell me or that I would understand because I am a woman as well. There often seemed to be an unstated connection because of our gender. While I recognize that any two interviewers will likely receive somewhat different responses, I believe that if I had been a man, some of the responses I received would have been qualitatively different and perhaps some thoughts would have been censored or phrased differently, if stated at all.

Finally, I believe the fact that I am a wife and (perhaps even more importantly) a mother further forged bonds with some informants and may have elicited deeper and more detailed responses than if I were not. I conducted most of these interviews beginning six days before and ending four months after my younger son was born; my older son was 23-27 months old at the time. I believe at least in part because of that shared experience, several of my clergy women described particular challenges they faced as mothers, both when their children were very young as well as when they were older, and many also referred to the commonalities they saw between mothering children and mothering a church, often ending with a comment such as "I'm sure you understand that," or "You're a mom, too, so you know how it feels." Some also asked specifically about my family structure before providing more detailed answers about their family beyond family structure and basic questions about their families' responses to the clergy women's careers. After learning more about my family, some seemed to become visibly less guarded in providing details and more freely described the challenges of balancing many complex and vital roles in their lives, although I was surprised to feel that a few seemed uncomfortable to learn that my husband was at home with our children while I was working with them.

## How My Theoretical Framework Shaped the Research

Because I am allowing my women to speak for themselves, I am focusing on their experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences; I am not attempting either to generalize to all clergy women in the KAC or to women in other Conferences or fields outside of the clergy.

Social constructionism is evident in the questions I asked as well as in the stories the informants shared, and also in the interpretations I made. My informants undoubtedly shared differently with me because of many factors: they knew why they were being interviewed and how I had access to them, many knew my history with and connections to Protestantism, and they knew what I hoped to accomplish. This shaping and selective sharing is one way that they make sense of and communicate what they believe is important. In fact, in the two cases where informants requested (and received) the Interview Schedule in advance of our meeting, they had the opportunity to determine beforehand what they wished to share and how.

Throughout this process, informants were constructing meaning and interpreting experiences, sometimes in different ways than in the past. In fact a few informants stated that they had not made certain connections in experiences before our conversation or had not thought of something in many years and now saw things differently. This is clearly an example of the constructive, ever-changing, and interactive nature of knowledge and meanings created and recreated through interactions.

Throughout this work, I will be relying on the meanings that informants attach to events and interactions, instead of trying to superimpose mine. This is also an example of my use of standpoint theory, the fact that I am allowing my informants to speak for

themselves instead of applying my meanings and interpretations regardless of their understandings (i.e., they said this, but they really meant something else, or they only said that because they did not understand what was really going on). While not a disempowered group, these women are nevertheless in less-powerful positions, both in the hierarchy because of placements and opportunities and in the communities of which they are parts.

As discussed previously, standpoint theory recognizes the knowledge of marginalized or subordinated people as equally valid as that of the dominant group(s) in society. This perspective is especially salient here because the particular group with which the present study is concerned, despite their relative power and their membership in dominant groups on many factors (for example, most are highly educated, most are White, most have stereotypical family structures), they have little power in others. Their gender is their master status, regardless of all of their other statuses and even official, legitimized roles of power within the organization.

This gender-as-master-status is partly related to the nature of the organization and its historic tradition of male leadership and partly due to the geographic location where they live and work, as described in Chapter 1. This Conference is located in the southern Bible Belt and includes many very traditional (i.e., religiously conservative and staunchly patriarchal) communities. Education and credentials have less meaning and value than connections to the communities and whether one “looks and sounds” like a (traditional and stereotypical) preacher, and that typically means the preacher neither looks nor sounds like a woman.

A handful of my informants specifically noted this point: “They aren’t used to hearing God’s word come from a woman’s voice,” “I don’t look like the preachers they are used



to,” “They are used to being led by a man, not a woman,” “It takes a while for them to get used to a woman being their pastor.” Gender, and all of the presumed traits that go along with it, matter as much as the religious ideology for many of the church members. Because those gender images are so intrinsically, and often unconsciously, connected to ideas of God and the authority of God (and authority more generally), many congregants have a difficult time accepting and following clergy women. Clergy women are unfamiliar and uncomfortable, and they present challenges to the traditional ideas. Examples and analysis of this will be presented throughout this work.

#### Data Collection Methods

Because no previous research has been conducted with this particular population, the research is largely exploratory in nature, so I determined that qualitative interviewing using a semi-structured questionnaire would produce the best data. I developed my initial interview schedule based on what I found in the literature. My research questions (see Appendix B) were designed to elicit clergy women’s views on their lives in ministry, from their calls to ministry through their current placements, and to include what were likely the most important parts of their lives, focusing on the following general topics: basic demographic data; the story of their call to ministry, early preparation, seminary education and experiences, ordination, and placements; support and resistance; their family; and symbols and symbolic actions. While there was a great deal of overlap within these categories, I found that grouping questions together loosely on the basis of these ideas made the interviews (as discussed below) flow more easily and smoothly, and provided continuity in the analyses as well. Although these general themes were originally devised through what I discovered while conducting the literature review, the

importance of the themes was confirmed and the ideas were clarified through the interviews themselves.

### Recruitment of Informants

In order to recruit informants I used two methods, as described below. Recruitment occurred between May and July of 2010 and interviews occurred primarily from June-August 2010, although one interview took place in May and two in December due to scheduling obstacles.

As of the 2010 Conference, 118 of the 870, or 13.56%, of the clergy are women; this includes all who are active members, retirees, on family or maternity leave, serving abroad, and in extension ministries. All members of the population are known and contact information is available, so I was able to contact all of the clergy women of the Conference by an email sent on my behalf from the Conference Office (see Appendix C). I provided all of them with the chance to participate in this research as long as they were members of the KAC. I also relied on referrals from other clergy women, beginning with contacts from my pastor; some informants noted that they had received as many as four emails or telephone calls from other informants urging them to participate. In all, I was contacted by 59 women who expressed interest and willingness to participate, or 50.00% of all clergy women in the KAC, although I was only able to complete 36 interviews due to logistics and time constraints. Because six of those interviews had incomplete information or I was unable to follow up with additional questions (due to logistics, not unwillingness on the parts of my informants), I am only using 30 interviews

in their entirety, although I am using anecdotes and information from the other informants as well.

While the problems of referrals or snowball sampling are well-known, the fact that this method was used to supplement direct contact of the entire population, as well as the fact that this research includes interviews with nearly one-third of the population (30.51%) both reduce the potential bias of the data. In fact in this data set, snowball sampling actually allowed me to include informants from one category of clergy, local pastors, that was unrepresented by responses to the direct email through the Conference Office. This is very important because local pastors represent 28.62% of all clergy in the KAC (249 of 870) and 26.27% of clergy women (31 of 118). The combination of methods, then, ensured that I had adequate informants in all categories (senior or solo pastors; associate pastors; those in extension ministries and others included in the category "Beyond the Local Church"; and local pastors).

### Interviews and Analysis

After initial contact via email, I scheduled individual interviews with informants at locations of their choice. Informants were told ahead of time what the nature of the research and questions were, and the two informants who asked for the questionnaires in advance were provided with those and informed that those questions may be supplemented based on what emerged during the actual interviews. In all cases, I answered any questions I could before, during, and after the interviews, and I offered full availability of the final project by request. I also requested permission to contact them again if I had follow-up questions and whether it was acceptable to them for others to

know that they had been interviewed (although I assured them that the content of their interview responses would remain confidential); all informants consented. I also requested that if they thought of anything else they wanted me to know after our interview was over that they contact me. In all cases, informants were provided with Informed Consent Forms before the interviews began; some were signed in person, some were returned by fax, and some were returned by email. In addition, I verbally confirmed that each had received and understood the Consent Form before beginning the interviews.

Of the thirty-six interviews, nineteen were conducted by telephone, nine took place at a church (hers or another), four were at the informants' homes, and four were at restaurants. In addition to data collected in the initial interviews, six informants contacted me with additional responses or thoughts later via email, some multiple times.

The interviews were audio-recorded (with prior permission) and each recording began with the clergy woman's name, position, and current placement, all of which I later separated from the interview itself. I also confirmed that they realized I was recording their comments and assured them that if they wanted me to stop recording at any time, I would do so, whether for particular comments or to end the interview. While no one requested that I stop the interview, three requested that I stop recording for particular segments (none for the specific questions I asked, but rather to relate an anecdote or additional thoughts they had). None of those objected to my taking notes during the unrecorded segments, however. I also placed the recorder in a visible location during in-person interviews so that informants remained conscious that I was recording their responses and comments. No one contacted me after the interview with any concerns, although I told each of them before their interviews that if they later had concerns, they were welcome to contact me and I would move portions of their interviews to a

permanently aggregated file if they wished. Despite asking what I believe to be some challenging and perhaps difficult questions, no one refused to answer any questions that I asked, although some said they were unable to answer a few questions simply because they did not recall or did not have the information I requested.

After the conclusion of the interviews, I moved the recordings from the recorder to my personal computer and also onto a cloud server and an external hard drive for safety; each was password-protected to further ensure the security of the interviews. Names were disassociated from specific interviews after they were processed (i.e., after interviews were transcribed and relevant demographic data was recorded and any necessary follow-ups were conducted). I maintained a numbered list of informants and their interviews in case I needed to contact them later, but those lists were stored separately from the actual audio recordings.

I transcribed the recordings into NVivo 8 and coded based on themes anticipated from the literature review, as noted above, and also which emerged from the interviews themselves, as I will discuss in the following chapters.

#### Rationale for Decisions and Exclusions

While I would like to have included an analysis of race and ethnicity in my research, I could not because the KAC is overwhelmingly composed of members who identify themselves as White (110 of 118, or 93.22%); only 8 members identify themselves as another race or ethnicity (see Table 3.2). I also chose not to include any questions regarding informants' sexuality because the UMC does not ordain openly homosexual

members and I did not want to put my informants in any uncomfortable or difficult positions, so I chose to assume heterosexuality, as the UMC does.

Female Clergy Members				
Categories	Deacons	Elders in Full Connection	Associate Members & Affiliate Members with Vote	Part-time Local Pastors
Asian	0	1	0	0
African American/Black	4	1	0	1
Hispanic Native American	0	0	0	1
American Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
White	28	49	4	29
Multi-Racial	0	0	0	0
Total Number, Female Clergy Members	32	51	4	31
Grand Total, All Conference Female Clergy Members	118			

**Table 3.2 Clergy Women by Race/Ethnicity [from the 2010 Journal of the Kentucky Annual Conference, Table 59b: Conference Appointments by Racial/Ethnic Identification (Women Only)]**

Many informants also shared stories and experiences that I believe would provide tremendous richness to this research, but since clergy women of the KAC are a small, well-known, and somewhat vulnerable population, I have consciously chosen not to do so where I believe that sharing those would violate confidentiality and possibly cause harm or embarrassment to informants. While some informants will necessarily be identified, such as those four women who have served or are serving as district superintendents, I confirmed with all informants that they were not uncomfortable with

others knowing they participated in this research. Because of those concerns, however, I am also only able to provide aggregated statistics about those who spoke with me (see Table 3.3).

Age	N=36	Years of service	N=36	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> + career	N=36	Marital Status	N=36	Classification	N=36
30-39	2	1st appt.	2	1 <sup>st</sup>	11	Married	29	Elder	21
40-49	6	1-5	9	2 <sup>nd</sup> +	25	Divorced/ Widowed	4	Deacon	10
50-59	19	6-10	5			Never married	3	Local Pastor	5
60-69	4	11-15	6						
70-79	3	16-20	4						
80-89	2	21-25	6						
		26-30	2						
		31+	2						

**Table 3.3 Aggregated Characteristics of Clergy Women Interviewed**

Since I employ a standpoint perspective, I privilege my informants' perceptions and perspectives. Because of this approach, I have chosen not to include clergy men in this research; while they would perhaps offer a different interpretation of the clergy women's experiences, I do not believe it would add anything to this particular research and may even serve to dilute the power of my informants' views and voices, as discussed previously. In fact I believe that allowing my clergy women to speak for themselves without those male voices not only enriches the work, but is also a way to provide some level of empowerment. Since they live and work in traditionally patriarchal roles, several stated that it was nice to be able to "be themselves" without censure or judgment or even being compared to clergy men, although some comparison—even here—is inevitable.

Because this work focuses on the clergy women and their viewpoints, I cannot say whether those differ from their male counterparts', nor do I try. If they believe their experiences are different, I report that, but I have no statistical evidence to support or refute it, but again, my approach does not attempt to externally "verify" or validate their thoughts and feelings. I do want to note, however, that I found a great deal of consistency and commonality among their experiences, so I believe that does provide further validation of what they perceive, whether that validation is necessary or not.

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike elders, local pastors are licensed but not ordained. This license allows the local pastor to perform all the duties and rites of a pastor, but only in the context of a specific appointment. Local pastors are required to hold a high school diploma or certificate of equivalence and pursue theological education from an approved seminary or the Course of Study administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) of the United Methodist Church.

<sup>2</sup> Elders are ordained to minister through service, word, sacrament, and order. This means elders serve their congregations and the community at large, preach, perform the rites of the church (i.e., communion, baptism, weddings, and funerals), and provide pastoral supervision in the life of the congregation. Elders can serve in any capacity within the church and receive their appointments from the bishop. Unlike local pastors, the authority of elders is not limited to a particular charge or timespan. The order of deacon is also an ordained position with more limited authority than elders. Deacons are ordained to ministry through service and word only, thus prohibiting them from administering sacraments and providing pastoral oversight. As a result, deacons cannot generally serve as senior or solo pastors. While deacons are also appointed by the bishop, they are most often responsible for locating their placement opportunities themselves which must then be approved.

<sup>3</sup> Placement types refer to whether the clergy member is a senior pastor or an associate, for example.



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<sup>4</sup> As of December 2006, 27% of active United Methodist clergy were women but were less likely to be senior pastors (only 23% of senior pastors were women); women were also less likely to serve as senior pastors in the largest churches: while nearly 6% of men held those positions, only 1% of women did so (UMC Report - General Council 2006).

<sup>5</sup> The current KAC is composed of the former Louisville Annual Conference and the “old” Kentucky Annual Conference and was combined to form the current Kentucky Annual Conference in 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Since there are no records documenting by gender specifically who served in large churches, these statements are based on the recollections of clergy women in the Conference and my examination of Conference journals looking for names of the pastors of large churches. However, since the history of women serving in this particular Conference is quite brief, and the number of clergy women in the Conference is so small and those women are generally well-known, I believe these recollections can be trusted to be accurate.

<sup>7</sup> As of the 2010 Conference, all districts noted in Table 3.1 were represented by informants in this study except for Corbin, where only one clergy woman was serving; when including all appointments over the course of the informants’ careers, however, each district is represented.

## Chapter 4: The Journey

The path to ministry is often a long and arduous one, and my clergy women's stories reflect that. From their early activities in church to hearing their calls, from seminary to ordination, and from their first placements to the current point in their careers, the informants of this research shared their stories into and through their ministries. This chapter will examine those key moments and significant events in their lives.

### Hearing the Call

As discussed in Chapter 2, the idea of a call is central to Christian ministry. Most clergy believe their call is beyond their control: they do not choose to enter ordained ministry, but rather God chooses them. In fact the authors of *Women of the Cloth* found that the call is the most important factor in a decision to enter ordained ministry (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis 1981).

The nature of the call is different for everyone. For some clergy, it is a one-time dramatic experience, a powerful moment where they clearly see the direction they believe their lives are to take:

At the time I received my call I was living with my husband and teaching and we were travelling to Sunday school at a little country church. We were driving down the road and I was studying my Sunday school lesson and suddenly I had an awareness that God was calling me into ministry. That was the term that hit my head, whatever that means. It was sort of like a connection, like when you cross electrical connections and the spark jumps from one place to another, it was more like that than anything else I can think of. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)<sup>1</sup>

There was a particular time I was in Florida working and we took the youth group to a camp in North Carolina. While we were there they had an altar call where they asked people to come forward for salvation, rededication, and all these different things, including if they felt called to ministry. In that moment right there, I felt like God was speaking to me and I began thinking seriously about going into ministry. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

[When she was in her mid-teens,] the minister gave the sermon one Sunday on full time Christian vocation and gave an invitation to anybody that felt like God was calling them into full time Christian vocation, and his son and I went to the altar that morning. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

For others, the call is a gradual realization, or even an evolution, where the true nature of their calls grows and develops over time. As several informants described it, “I’m not sure when it happened...”

“Evolution is really the word as far as how my call evolved. Originally, I thought I would be a teacher and work in Christian Ed, so I did the Christian Ed thing and then the pathway to be ordained became very clear to me.” (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

In terms of being called into ministry vocationally, that evolved over a period of time...I finished my Master’s and began working in a church setting. About 5 or 6 years into that, I began to realize that I was called specifically to preach. Some of that had to do with the inspiration I experienced from the senior pastor of the church where I was serving, just as I would sit and listen to him, my heart would be moved. I realized that was what I was supposed to do. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I am the daughter of a UM minister. I removed myself from the church, the UMC in particular, for a while. I found myself moving back in that direction and my call came as a result of seeing the need for reform and change. I felt more drawn and felt the question came down to am I going to be a voice inside or outside the camp? I felt like God was saying, “Your most effective place would be inside the camp.” That led me down the path. I did not intend to go into pastoral ministry at all. I was more

headed toward administrative duties...Basically, if I can quote one of my professors, "I watched the vine of ministry entwine itself around you." So it was drawing me into that process. I felt my voice was stronger in the pulpit and in this position than it would have been in another position. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

As I got older, after the children, after I knew that I could go back to work and got the children up several years old...I just felt a strong leaning to be involved in some kind of full-time work with the church. That's what led me to apply for the first lay position, and it was sort of an evolution from there on. After I started that work, then the general conference passed the legislation for diaconal ministry<sup>2</sup> and I thought, "That describes what I am already doing," and that was lay ministry. And then a few years later they passed the legislation for the deacon, and that was just a natural progression from diaconal ministry...So, it was kind of a growing process in my life. When I was younger, my father, who influenced my life greatly, said "When God opens a door, walk through it." And that's sort of what I've done in my life and kind of the way I view my call: God opened doors and I've tried to walk through them as he opened them." (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

I kind of heard a nudging, if you want to put it that way, off and on. In 1999 or 2000, my pastor came to me and asked to if I would go to Camp Loucon with him as a counselor, and I told him no I teach adults, I don't do children. But I ended up going and it was while I was there [that] I felt this overwhelming desire to do more and that I was to go into some form of pastoral ministry or some kind of ministry. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

It kind of evolved that God's hand was guiding me. So it was just that gnawing to follow whatever door, whatever path that naturally became open. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Some even described their experiences of being called to different types of ministry at different times:

I taught Sunday school from the time I was married until I went into the campus ministry. I think that was a calling, you could say it was a calling. And then I was led into the campus ministry when the opportunity opened. God opens windows and doors. And then from that I decided to go into the CPE [Clinical Pastoral Education] and see where that led and

that led to the chaplaincy. (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

### Early Experiences and Preparation

Previous research has found that both women and men often hear their calls fairly early in life, although women tend to wait until later in their lives to answer (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998). Overall, my informants fit these patterns. I generally began interviews with the simple question, “Can you tell me about your call?” and was prepared to prompt as necessary with questions about when and how they first heard their calls and how they responded, although those were rarely necessary. Since the call stories are these women’s narratives, they know them well and have told them before, perhaps many times. While a detailed discussion of these topics is beyond the scope of this research, I believe it is important to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of the stories shared. Both the settings and the context of the interchange (i.e., an interview about their experiences as clergy women) likely affected both the way their stories were told and the content included. It is also likely that their stories evolved as their understandings of themselves and those calls changed. Finally, since the clergy women knew my purpose in asking for their stories and they also knew I am an insider in the religion, they almost certainly gave an account that varied slightly from what they would have shared in another context, both in terms of the content and the delivery of their stories. They were also conscious of the fact that they were being audio-recorded, so that may have had some effect as well.

When describing the details of their calls, many informants began with stories from their childhoods and experiences they later came to view as defining their futures. Most often, they did not recognize them at the time as signs of their callings, but in retrospect,

they saw them as at least glimpses of things to come. When sharing those stories, several related instances of playing with friends when they were very young and said that while other kids were playing house or school, they were playing church, and they either took turns or they themselves always took on the role of the pastor, sometimes in very elaborate play.

When I was little and people came to my house to play, we didn't play house or school or doctor, we played church and I would preach. And I would make mud pies and we would put them in those little tins and they'd bake out in the sun and when they dried, I'd make everybody kneel down and take communion and make them sing "Holy, Holy, Holy". So I've always known, there's always been some level of knowing, some connection there that I wouldn't have had the vocabulary for it, and really didn't get it for quite some time until I was in my 20s. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

We lived in a very small community, the church didn't even have a lock on the door, so the children in the community, we played in and around the church, and as kids, we played church. We'd take turns, one of us would be the preacher and one would be the song leader and one would be the piano player and the rest would be the congregation, and we took turns and we played church. I remember the times when I played preacher, and I think even then, God was preparing me, and at 12, I knew that God had a special place for me, a special plan for my life. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Others described early events that turned out to be significant later in their lives.

My family went to church in and out when I was a kid. My parents had no real commitment to it, no real strong sense of understanding, I didn't understand yet. I knew there was something special about church, but it was kind of a private thing. I would go off on Sundays when we were at church and think...I felt a call then, didn't know it was God, just thought it was something outside of me that was important. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I just knew God had a call on my life and I had known him in very special ways since I was a young kid. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

As a 14-yr old I walked down the Baptist aisle with "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow" and that's just, I just wanted to go where the Lord wanted me to go. And it has led me many different ways, I believe in big and small ways." (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

When I was a teenager I heard a missionary that came to our church and I was very, very touched by that and felt something then. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

When I was 10 I was out on a hillside one day. It was one of those beautiful spring days and it was so uplifting, you think well, I'm just inspired by springtime. But there was something about it all that was so great that I just thought I need to share with everybody—I need to tell everybody about God's wonderful world and this kind of thing and then I thought, "Well that's what preachers do," so I went to the house and announced that I was going to grow up and be a preacher. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

It was not a bolt of lightning, a moment where I knew without a doubt that I was called. I gave my heart to Christ when I was 12 years old at a camp meeting. I sensed then that my life would be different, that I wouldn't have the typical life, and I don't know what typical is, but that my life would be different. I look back now and I realize that from an early, early age God was preparing me. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

From the time I was a very, very small child, I LOVED church, you know how you have to drag kids to church? That was not I, I loved to go to church, Sunday school, I loved everything about church. And I think ministers, unbeknownst to me, I was watching them all the time, but I didn't really know that was happening. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Since most informants in this study are in their 50s or older, it is especially noteworthy that they pretended to preach or to be pastors when they were young children because in many cases they would not have been permitted to do so, and they almost certainly had never had a clergy woman as a pastor themselves, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

I told my mother that I was going to grow up and be a preacher. And Mother said, and she said it very lovingly, "You can't be a preacher because girls don't do that. But you could be a teacher," and so I thought, "Alright, maybe that's what I'll do." (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

I was brought up Southern Baptist and my family, my parents always took us to church. I was a church brat from the get-go. I received my call, I felt my calling when I was a junior in high school, that God was calling me into some form of ministry. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

In fact, most of the informants were at least teenagers or young adults (or even older) before ever seeing women in the pulpit "except to clean it", as a couple of women noted. Several of the informants described what one said was often called a "first sighting", one's first encounter with a clergy woman.

I didn't know women could be ordained in the UMC when I first started feeling this call to preach, I didn't know I could do it. And a lot of us call it the First Sighting, when you first see a woman pastor, and you go "Oh, wait, you can do that?" (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Even though my dad was a pastor, I had not seen female clergy, to my knowledge, ever in my childhood and teenage years. I did know some women who were in leadership roles in the church and I had a respect for them. But it did not cross my mind that ministry was a role that might be a possibility for me or that would even be something to entertain. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)



Despite not seeing other women in formal roles as ministers, however, many of these clergy women became involved in some form of ministry very early in life, even before sensing what they defined as a call. Because most of my informants grew up in Protestantism, they were often involved in church life from a very early age, and many took on leadership roles. Many also actively participated in youth groups, served on committees or boards as members of youth or other groups, and did some form of volunteer or missions work, whether occasional trips over school breaks or volunteering in various social service venues, usually connected to their church.

In high school I began to take leadership in the church with both youth programs and district and sub-district programs. I think they asked me to preach when I was probably in 9th or 10th grade. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I became involved in the Methodist student center on campus and had opportunities there to do some witnessing, some public speaking. We went out on the weekends as teams, sang and gave testimony, so I had some opportunities to share before the congregations in different churches and really enjoyed that and was affirmed by that. (Elder in Full-Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

## Responding to the Call

As hearing the call varies, so do responses to that call. For some, their calls were life-altering experiences to which they responded in an immediate and dramatic way.

I was having supper with another friend and she was kind of feeling some unrest in her professional life too, and I said "I know God has a plan for me and I don't need to know what that is 20 years out, I'd just like to know a general direction." There was like this voice in my head...and all the other stuff just clicked into place, so later that evening I said to my friend that I was going the next day to seminary to talk to someone about how to start...and I went through the regular admission process, and I got one of those personalized form letters telling me what I could expect if I chose to

attend: 100% tuition grant, which was like God saying "Not only do I want you to do this, I want you to do this badly enough that I will pay your way." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

For others, when they thought they heard their calls, they responded more skeptically.

"God, you have GOT to be kidding! There is NO WAY I can do that!" "Sorry, God, but you've got the wrong person!" "I'm not even sure what it means to be a preacher, and you expect me to become one?"

I sensed this call to more, to ordained ministry. And truthfully, I thought the Lord had lost his mind. I said, "Are you kidding me? I'm in my 40s, why would I want to go back to seminary?" (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

Some only responded after having their call affirmed by others.

I was about 30. I remember saying to my mother, "Mom, I think I'm going to go back to seminary." And I said, "But you know there's a part of me that thinks that's crazy, because I'll be 35 before I graduate." And her response to me was classic, she said, "You know what, in five years you'll be 35 whether you've gone to seminary or not." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I had all these excuses—I know now they are excuses, then I thought they were reasons—why I couldn't do this. Then I had throat surgery and I couldn't talk for 6 weeks. It makes a difference when you can't talk because then all you can do is listen. And God showed me that every one of the things that I thought were reasons were just excuses I was using. So I contacted a friend of mine and I contacted the DS and I told them I felt like God was calling me into ministry and the DS said "Well, we have known this quite a while and we've been waiting on you to figure it out." (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

Several even described what they felt was being "tricked" into a particular type of ministry:

My call worked on me, but God tricked me to get me to where he wanted me to be. “Yeah, yeah, yeah, you think you're going to work [in a particular type of ministry],” but I'm working now with everyone. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

During the seminary process I found out I liked parish ministry, I might still go into chaplaincy at some point, but I liked parish ministry, so I kind of accused God of using a bait-and-switch technique. Probably the Lord knew if he had said parish ministry to begin with, I would have said “No, no, no.” Chaplaincy is one thing, but parish ministry is another thing altogether. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Each of the women involved in this study eventually answered her call, however, whether immediately or nearly fifty years after her first sense of being called to ministry or somewhere in between. Interestingly, I did not find a connection between the age of first sensing a call and the age of responding, nor a relationship between the current age of the informants and the ages of their calls. Some of those who recognized some indication of their calls did so at very young ages (pre-adolescence), but in some cases, generally because of social mores at the time, lack of opportunities, or because “life just got in the way,” as a couple of women stated, many of those women waited decades to answer. In fact many second- or subsequent-career clergy women first heard those calls very early but did not enter ministry for many years. At the same time, some who did not sense any calls until later in life responded very quickly, including a couple of women who sensed calls to ministry either very soon after or concurrent with first starting to practice Christianity.

I found a church and started attending and kind of fell back in love with God and my faith. I felt a real strong calling to go to seminary, and it was a peaceful, wonderful feeling. (Elder in Full Connection, under age 50, second-career clergy)

## The Call as an Anchor and a Compass

As noted above, the call is not merely important at the beginning of ministry, however. The vast majority of informants described their calls as the precipitating factor in entering ministry, but most also came back to those calls as influencing other aspects of their ministries as well. The journey through ministry is not an easy one, regardless of one's gender, but for women, and perhaps even more so for women in this region, ministry is an especially difficult vocation. As will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 5, most clergy women faced tremendous resistance at points in their careers, and all faced some degree of resistance.

In fact, this research led me to conclude that the importance of their call is second only to their faith as the most important factor in my informants' lives and ministries, and indeed, it is typically connected very intimately to their faith. It becomes their anchor and their compass and permeates not only their careers but their entire lives: "I think God doesn't just call and stop. It's sort of like a tune that plays over and over for you. It's always there, and you hear it sometimes more than others, but it is there," (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy). When they struggle or have doubts, they remember their calls; when others question their choices, they cling to their goals because they believe those goals come directly from God. When they have to make difficult decisions for themselves or their families, they go back to their calls and feel more confident in their choices. In some cases, the call is all that keeps them in ministry. As one woman said, "I've thought about leaving all kinds of times. God keeps calling me back and reaffirming that I am right where I am supposed to be," (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy). The importance of the call throughout all stages of ministry and all aspects of these women's lives cannot be overstated.

Their calls may be the impetus for entering ministry, but even after acknowledging and responding to those calls, they still have a long road ahead.

### Seminary Experiences

At some point after accepting their calls, most informants entered seminary.<sup>3</sup> Seminary provides practical knowledge and experiences as well as some of the credentials needed for full ordination in the UMC. It also serves as a time where the minister's call and path are clarified.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the research literature does not include much information about the seminary experiences of clergy women, and I hoped to gather empirical data from my informants about their time in seminary. We know from previous research that women tend to enter seminary later than men and more likely as preparation for second (or subsequent) careers, generally have clearer goals for their ministries, have higher intellectual and spiritual maturity, and be more experienced in church life (see, for example, Lehman 2002). We also know that women now compose large percentages of many seminary classes, well over 50% in some cases, and that seminaries as a rule are more welcoming to women now than in the past, with some notable exceptions.

My informants graduated from seminary at a mean age of 39 years.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, unlike more recent research suggests, most of these women did not have clear goals when entering ministry, and among those who did, those goals often changed over time, as described above. Because the present research includes a number of women who were among the pioneering generation, I anticipated that at least those women would have faced significant struggles in seminary because of their gender. What I found,

however, is that very few encountered issues related to their gender, and when they did, as often as not, they felt that their gender was actually an asset and afforded them opportunities that they may not otherwise have had. Particularly among those who attended seminary in the 1980s and early 1990s, several found their seminaries were anxious to be more open and welcoming to women, so they felt that the leadership went out of their way not only to include them, but to help them have opportunities and experiences and to be more out-front in seminary life. Several, for example, were asked to give senior sermons, and they believed that was due at least in part to the fact that they were women and administrators were anxious to provide those positive and visible role models for others. While all were amply qualified for the opportunities they received, they noted that they were likely no more so than many male colleagues, but they believed that their gender gave them an edge.

Related to this somewhat preferential—and certainly positive—treatment, I asked informants about the notion of tokenism, whether they felt they were placed out front as symbolic gestures, or whether they believed it was truly to provide positive images and role models for others. Most said they believed it was a combination of the two, that perhaps for some members of the administration, it was merely a symbolic and highly visible gesture, “See, we have women here and they have equal opportunities,” but more often than not, they saw these as legitimate acts of good faith and affirmation of themselves and other clergy women, both of the legitimacy of their calls and the strength of their abilities.

There were exceptions to this, and several did discuss what they were more likely to describe as differential treatment from their male colleagues’, but none expressed outrage or even much concern, nor the view that their experiences were negative or inferior to men’s. Nearly all encountered individuals who challenged their rights to be

there and the legitimacy of their calls, but in each case, the clergy women saw those as just that: isolated experiences with particularly closed-minded individuals, usually from more conservative religious backgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

Besides a few individuals' comments or treatment or even alienation, a few did describe different treatment that they attributed to their gender. To the question: "Do you feel that your male professors treated you any differently than the men in your classes?", one clergy woman replied, "You mean like the professors trying to pick you up? Yeah, I had that! Trying to date me, and I was going, I don't really think that's appropriate, is it?" When she refused, however, she faced no negative reprisal or maltreatment of any kind. A few women felt they were asked to provide "The Female View" on topics, as if there were such a universal thing, but even then, they believed it was not done with any malice and none expressed concern or disappointment.

In one instance, a clergy woman not interviewed for this study related an experience that I identify as gender-discriminatory treatment, although she did not. While taking a class on preaching in the mid-1990s, she and the other women in the class were told by the professor that they were not permitted to preach from behind the pulpit but rather had to stand beside it because he did not believe women should preach and would not allow them to do so from behind the pulpit in his classroom. The clergy woman related this story after saying that she did not feel that she was treated differently or unfairly in seminary because of her gender; instead, she saw this not as indicative of a culture of gender discrimination at the seminary, but as one person who acted on his own beliefs. This was by far the most extreme example related to me, however.

In addition to the classroom and other aspects of seminary life, I also asked about whether there was adequate support for the clergy women and their families while in

seminary, but as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, this also was not a cause for concern for my informants.

Overall, then, my informants found their seminary experiences to be positive and believed they provided some measure of useful preparation for what was to come, although others said, “I wish they had talked about ‘x’ in seminary,” particularly as it related to the later discrimination and challenges that nearly all faced in their future careers, supporting what the authors of *Clergy Women* found as well (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

The only significant cohort differences I found were that the earlier women were often “the only” or one of only a few women in particular classes, and that the more recent cohorts were less aware of what struggles previous women faced upon entering ministry, and were thus perhaps less prepared for it themselves, as a few more veteran clergy women speculated. While the older cohorts were more likely to anticipate the challenges, they too found some daunting and disheartening experiences ahead, as will be described below and in Chapter 5.

### The Ordination Process

In the UMC and many other denominations, a critical part of the process of entering professional ministry is ordination. Ordination processes are somewhat long and complex, but one decision that contemporary candidates must make is whether to seek ordination as an elder or a deacon.<sup>6</sup>



According to Paula Nesbitt (1994), most churches with an episcopal hierarchy have traditionally had a two-step ordination process. Clergy are first ordained into a probationary order (i.e., deacon) and then after a period of time can apply to be ordained into the full order (i.e., elder or priest). In more recent years, however, many of these churches, including the United Methodist Church, have moved away from this sequential process toward a discrete one with two distinct orders. Nesbitt notes that this move serves an important function for the church in that it allows the clergy to focus on their particular roles and maximize their gifts without being sidetracked into other roles and responsibilities for which they are less well-suited. It also professionalizes what was previously considered lay work, thus adding a layer of prestige to that work.

Her research with Episcopalian and Unitarian Universalist clergy women (1994), however, shows that the two orders are not granted the same level of prestige and that what is often perceived to be the less-prestigious of the orders, deacon, has seen an increase in women's ordinations, whereas the more prestigious order, elder, has seen a decrease. She concludes that while this dual-tracking does serve purposes in the church, it also marginalizes and segregates women into the lower-prestige order. Related to this, I found that those who chose to be ordained as deacons tended to work in more traditionally women-dominated fields, such as education, family ministries, counseling, and music, and also faced less resistance to their work, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

## Differences in Ordination Designations

Although elders and deacons in the UMC are officially considered to be equal in terms of legitimacy and value of their roles in the church, they do have different types of authority.

As described by one clergy woman,

The biggest difference between a deacon and an elder has to do with the sacraments. An elder can administer the sacraments, a deacon can assist with that, but there has to be an elder present. And the same with baptism. Those two are major distinctions. A deacon is called to word and service, and love, and elders are called to word, sacraments, and order, which means leading the church and ordering the life of the church. In many ways a deacon can find themselves in a role where they are doing the same things as a pastor, but they would not be appointed as the pastor of a church. They might be an associate or in what's called beyond the local church kind of position, or they could be at an Annual Conference level, but they would be at a Christian Ed or administrative position. They would not be a pastor, district superintendent, a bishop. The functions of those are such that they would not be doing those kinds of things. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The elder order is the one most often thought of when one talks of professional ministers; it is the order from which senior pastors, solo pastors, district superintendents, bishops, and most associate pastors come. The order of deacon has professionalized much of the work previously performed by lay ministers, especially work typically performed by women in the church, as described by Nesbitt (1990, 1994). Perhaps because of that as well as the transition from diaconal minister, a lay designation, to deacon, a professional designation, most deacons are women, although men do serve in that role as well. Fewer women have been ordained as elders, and when they are, they are then in direct competition with men for the top positions in the hierarchy of the organization, as will be addressed below.

As deacons' roles have changed and the lines between some work performed by elders and deacons have become less clear, some informants described a sort of tension that arose between elders and deacons. Deacons generally must locate their own placements (with the approval of the bishop) and are not assured placements as elders are, so they have additional issues with which they must contend.

Several ordained deacons described feeling as if their roles, though officially defined as being as important in the life of the church and society as those of elders, are not valued in the same way that the roles of elders are. Further, they believe that some others (both laity and elders) view a hierarchy within the orders, with the order of deacon being perceived as less valuable.

People, especially some pastors, don't think I'm doing "real" ministry because I am a deacon instead of an elder. I could have been ordained as an elder, but I was called to this. I work as hard and my work is every bit as important to the church, but sometimes others don't see it that way. (Deacon in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

No elders described a hierarchy in terms of believing their roles are superior, but several deacons did.

Some also described what they viewed as a type of "turf war" between elders and deacons: as the roles have become more ambiguous and the expectations have blurred, deacons have been called on to perform many of the same roles, yet believe they are not held in the same esteem, as discussed above. Further, because the role of deacon is not as clear and they often serve in different types of placements, including as associate pastors, campus ministers, chaplains, directors of camps or social service venues, or others, expectations for and by deacons often have much greater variability than those for elders.

There is always the tension of why do we have deacons? What is purpose in deacons? They're not sacramental, so why are they there? There is always a tension of why do you have the same equality as we do, so there is an inequality between the two orders. I'm not sure how it plays out, and I'm not sure it has yet. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

In a couple of other cases, clergy women began ministry with the goal of becoming elders but later realized their calls were to become deacons instead.

The reason I am a deacon is that I was going through the ordination process for elder and went through a grueling all-day process for my exit interview. Everyone told me you are not supposed to get there if they didn't think you will pass it. So I got to the end and instead of hearing from Executive Council, "Congratulations," I heard "not at this time". I was crushed, but I came out of that thinking if I am going to have to fight for this, the life I'm living now is not something I want to fight for. At that time I began to discern that God had a different plan for me and I began to seek out the deacon track. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

Deacons did face some advantages over elders, however. Most deacons noted, and most elders agreed, that deacons tended to face fewer gender-related obstacles, even when working in traditionally-male roles. Some hypothesized it was because they were not in direct competition for generally more desired positions, i.e. pastorships of large, urban churches or Cabinet positions. Deacons also did not face as much resistance from churches or the community, likely because of the roles they typically perform, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

### Ordination Experiences

Regardless of the type of ordination sought, as discussed in Chapter 2, ordination is a formalization and bestowing of official credentials and authority within the church. It is

largely viewed as a symbolic rite that marks the church's official sanction on the minister's call, and even among the most charismatic denominations, very few see ordination as a ritual that grants any supernatural gifts or powers. Ordination rituals vary from denomination to denomination. For some groups, it is simply a matter of having the church leadership place their hands on the minister and say a prayer dedicating the person to the service of the church, whereas for others it is a much more complex process that some clergy see as much of an administrative hoop as a God-given privilege (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang 1998).

I thought about a lot of different denominations when I was in seminary because certainly this [the UMC's process] is NOT an easy path to ordination. I have clergy-envy for all of my Baptist friends who just say a few things and lay hands on you and Bang! they're ordained and I think, "I wanna [sic] do that!" (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

While ordination in the UMC does tend to be a fairly long and somewhat complicated process, the vast majority of my informants, especially those ordained more recently, did not find it to be particularly challenging or unfair.

Some earlier women did believe they were asked questions that their male colleagues would not have been asked, such as being asked about their marital status and whether they intended to remain in ministry "after" they did marry and have children, which seemed to have been assumed as a certainty.

Back then, you submitted all of your paperwork to the Board of Ordained Ministry and then you went before the entire Board for your questioning. I remember going before the Board for my deacon's orders [as the necessary step before elder's ordination at the time] and it was probably thirty-some men in suits sitting around a room in a U-shape who questioned you about your paperwork, your theology, and your call...One other clergy asked me if I was "encumbered." And I sat there and looked

at them and said, "Am I encumbered? Well sir, since I don't really know what you are asking me, I must not be." And then he paused a moment, I guess that was kind of flippant, but I didn't know what he was asking me, and he said, "Are you engaged or married?" And I said, "No, I don't see that on the horizon any time soon,"... I don't think they would have asked the "encumbered" question if I was a man. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

For some of the women, they believed that being married and having children was perhaps somewhat of an obstacle in the minds of others, though generally not in their own views. In a few cases, candidates were asked how their husbands felt about their ordination and whether they had any problems with their wives' career choices, and in a couple of cases, the husbands themselves were asked those questions either before or after their wives went before the Board. Other informants were asked how they intended to care for their young children while ministering and whether they would be able to mother their children and care for a church. These concerns of ordination officials were particularly true for those being ordained in the elder path.

Overall, though, my informants described ordination as a challenging process but felt it would have been no different for them if they had been men. Even those who were asked what they believed to be different questions than their male colleagues were satisfied with the overall process and the outcome. The next step along the path, however, placements, presented special challenges. As Lehman points out (1985), the development of official policies that sanction women's ordination is not enough to get church members to treat clergy women with the same respect or grant them the same authority that they do clergy men.

## Placements

During the interviews, I asked informants a number of questions about placements (see Appendix B) and found that this is where the greatest challenges and differential treatment arose and remained, particularly for elders and local pastors, who are the up-front leaders of the local churches. As in other careers, some informants had a clear goal for their careers, including climbing the organizational ladder as far and as quickly as possible, while some chose to seek other types of positions. While it is easy to assume that everyone is seeking a "most desirable" placement, a number of my clergy women defined that not as a senior pastorate or Cabinet position, but rather serving in a more traditional (i.e., stereotypically women's) role, whether working with children and families or in music, or in an extension ministry (a "beyond the local church" appointment). Several stated that they were called specifically to family and children's ministry, for example, or to serve in social service roles beyond the local church. A few were called to chaplaincy. This is where the distinction between elder and deacon roles and callings and placements became most significant.

In the UMC, placements are made with the goal of matching candidates' "gifts and graces" with churches' needs. The responsibility falls with the Cabinet, which is composed of the bishop and the district superintendents of the Conference. In the KAC, that means there are currently thirteen people who determine placements.<sup>7</sup> While candidates have to be qualified to serve, beyond that, it is up to the placement officials to determine where. Candidates may request particular areas or request not to be moved, but as a condition of their ordination, elders take an oath to itinerate as they are sent. While some do request limits on their geographic regions of placement, most do not, and the Cabinet is not required to take their preferences into account, although the goal is

generally to provide everyone, both ministers and congregations, with the best possible situations where all are happy and effective.

Most elders, both women and men, begin ministry as either solo or associate pastors and most serve smaller churches and in more rural regions in the KAC, in part simply because of the sheer greater numbers of congregations in those areas. While some later move to larger churches and into the generally more desirable “golden triangle” of Lexington, Louisville, and northern Kentucky, as two informants described it, most clergy women do not. In fact, most of the informants for this research have spent the majority of their careers in solo pastorates. While many were not necessarily displeased with that (although most did want other experiences), a number of informants expressed disappointment and regret that they felt they would never have the opportunity to serve in different settings and in churches with more resources and opportunities for ministry, both within their congregations and beyond into the larger communities. They believed their opportunities for what they viewed as advancement were limited, and while all believed their ministries were successful, they longed for more.

In the Methodist church, being female still has its drawbacks. I have probably missed out on being on in a bigger church because of being female. They just don't offer them, they don't appoint you very often. I have not been placed in even smaller churches or a smaller...one particular church because I was female. It only takes one person in the church, particularly a small church, that says I'll not have a female for them not to put a female there. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Worse, however, was that several informants described what they believed to be “being set up to fail” by being placed in situations where they felt that no one, and perhaps even more so, no clergy women, could succeed. Then, when their ministries were not very effective in those locations, they believed that was used as justification not to “promote”



them into a larger church or into a more desirable region, and in some cases, they believed they were actually “demoted” to less-desirable situations than before in their next placement.

I'm in a really tenuous situation here. The challenges of this church, the dysfunction of this church, I can do the hard work here—that's what I did in [city of previous appointment] is the hard work—and then it was really presented as a punitive move to here from what I could see...there are some issues of justice, but what I learned from the system the way it is, if you try to raise that voice, you will be cut down. And that's not unusual, in a closed system that's how it works. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

District superintendents also discussed placements, both as placement officials and as clergy members themselves; they saw both sides of the situations and often discussed dealing with “the underbelly” of the church and the challenges that went along with that. District superintendents are the direct supervisors of clergy and answer to the bishop, to the churches in the districts they serve, and also to an extent to the clergy in their districts. They also described the positive aspects and likened part of their responsibilities to being a sort of pastor’s pastor. Generally, it was by far the relationship aspects of the role that they relished, while it was the administrative tasks that they merely accepted, although they were fully committed to each part of the role and never took lightly the authority and responsibilities entrusted to them. By the nature of the job, district superintendents have to balance the needs and desires of both clergy and congregations, and making everyone happy is often challenging at best.

“Whatever You Do, Don’t Send Us a Woman!”

One consistent concern voiced by the clergy women themselves as well as by all district superintendents was the difficulty in placing women in the KAC. Some churches simply

refuse to accept women in the role of pastor, regardless of the official stance of the denomination.

I asked all informants if they believed it was more challenging to place women, and especially to place women in particular areas, and the unanimous response was, "Yes". It was widely perceived that certain geographic areas of the Conference are relatively more or less accepting of women's religious leadership, although it is also important to note that even in areas perceived to be less-welcoming, there has often been strong women's leadership for many decades, both religious and otherwise. The biggest factor seemed to be what was viewed as strong influences by other religious groups that are very opposed to women's religious—and other—leadership:

I don't know the reason for it exactly and it's not as cut and dried as one might think. Because for instance in eastern Kentucky, some of the churches have had strong female leadership for centuries. There was a woman who was quite elderly when I was there who had pastored a church back in the 50s and was beloved. So it depends individual to individual church, but I still think that regionally one of the reasons would be there is a very strong Baptist influence. And by Baptist I mean Primitive Baptist, Old Regular Baptist, very conservative. So that influence would be part of it. What other denominations are doing can impact the theology even of certain regions. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I saw some fairly horrendous things happen to women in that time when I was superintendent, and very disappointing. I would go and sit with a pastor parish relations committee and start talking to them about what they would need in a pastor, when they were experiencing a move, only to have them say, "Now we don't want no woman! Don't you dare send us a woman!" And I had one congregation kind of act like I would send them a woman to spite them. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I think that we're, Kentucky as a state, we're way behind in placement of women, way behind, we're just way, way behind the other Annual Conferences in placement and how quickly somebody can move up with

gifts and graces and results, that kind of thing. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

When we go down and we have consultations with the pastor-parish committee and they'll say, "Now don't send us a woman." The pastor-parish committee, where the DS consults and asks what kind of minister do you need, etc., and they ask us questions and then they'll come right back and say, "Well, just don't send us a woman." And there are just pockets of that. I think some is geographic, and I think part of it is that geographically there have not been good strong women there. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Since most perceive the so-called pockets of resistance, I asked whether informants were hopeful that women would eventually be welcomed and able to serve effectively throughout the Conference, and I received conflicting views. Some believe that more opportunities are very close, while others were much more skeptical.

Often the opposition by churches is not due to the interpretations of Scriptures prohibiting women's leadership, however, but primarily to the general culture, history, and previous (lack of) experiences with clergy women (Lehman 1981, 1985):

When some churches would specify they weren't ready for a female, I would sometimes say, "How come? Help me understand why that is." And I was expecting it would be Biblical and theological reasons, but that was not the main reason. The main reason was, "We've never had one before." That was an "aha" to me because I had assumed it was always about theology and Biblical interpretation. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Most of the women interviewed for this research were the first women in most or all of their placements, which means that most congregants and most congregations still have never experienced having a clergy woman leading them.

“We Already Had a Woman, So Don’t Send Us Another One of Those”

Even among congregations that have had that exposure to effective women’s leadership and hold generally positive views of clergy women, the church is often hesitant to welcome another clergy woman as their leader because of the perceived meaning that has. They worry about stigmas associated with multiple women pastoring their church and fear they will be labeled as the church where women go or that having multiple clergy women as pastors means that their church is failing.

I've always thought it was a mistake to follow a woman with a woman because then the church does start feeling like, well, we're just a woman-identified church, we're the one that's gonna [sic] take all the women and then they're not very nice to the woman who comes, the next one or whatever, and it's kind of been said that when we can follow a woman with a woman and there's no big deal, then we will have made it. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

All district superintendents described instances where they personally, as women, were told not to send a clergy woman to a particular church, and for most of them, this happened multiple times. The district superintendents also described with surprise the fact that the churches’ committees generally showed no discomfort in making this request or any awareness that it could be offensive to them as clergy women.

I remember when I was a DS I would go to churches and we would build a profile for the pastor that would be sent to them. When there is going to be a pastoral change a lot of times that is what you do, you say ok tell me what in terms of qualities ideally the next pastor would have, and I have had more than one church that has said, “Well, we're not ready for a female.” And the first time that was said to me it took me aback, later I realized it was like they weren't thinking of me as a female, they were telling me that as their district superintendent, not even necessarily

seeing the connection and seeing how that could be offensive. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

How they responded to the requests varied by situation and individual district superintendent, but some used humor to address the committees' requests, such as this exchange:

Some churches will say after they've had a woman pastor, they'll say, "Well, we had a woman." Like ok, we did our duty, we took the woman, now don't mess with us anymore. And as a DS I would say, "Well, you've also had a man, what would you like next?" But they'll say something like that, like we've already had a woman, and I'd kind of lift that up to them and say, "Well, you had a man and we followed a man with a man, you had this long string of male pastors in a row. Now, I don't understand." And they would look at me like of course you do understand, you know exactly what we're talking about. Which of course I did. But I would always make that point, I would always say, "Well, you know what? Look. I look back at your history and I see that you've had 25 male pastors...", but you know, that's just the way it is. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Regardless of the current level of acceptance, however, nearly all informants believed that the most effective means of increasing acceptance of clergy women by congregations was exposure to other effective clergy women, coupled with supervisors' methods of presentation of the clergy women to their new churches.

I think they need exposure to effective clergy women and DSs with the gall, nerve, whatever, to put them there and make them fit. You can kind of know what personality churches need...I think it is very important to look at the congregation and see what type of woman would work. I'm not sure that's easy. The way a DS presents women to churches makes a huge difference. I don't know how DSs present them to congregations, but I think they should play up her strengths as being an asset to the church. Don't say, "It is time for you to have a woman," just find some good quality in that woman and present that as an asset to the church, because each woman has her gift. When congregations say they don't want a woman, say "What is it about that that you don't want a woman?"

I'd turn it into a counseling session: "Tell me a little more about that. What are your fears? What worries you about that? What do you think that means?" Approach it as an opportunity to learn and educate. (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

After I had retired [the then-Bishop] asked me if I would preach in as many churches as I could get in that summer. He said he wanted a woman in every pastorate that year if he could work it out. Since I was free that summer he felt I could really concentrate on doing it and I did. I preached in all the little villes up and down the road and many places, well I preached in about 80 places. You see what that does to the week, it meets 2 or 3 times a week in different places. I think that was really helpful. The people had seen a woman in the pulpit and knew she wasn't coming back next week so they didn't have to bother with her. But they had seen one. I think it wouldn't hurt to do that some more. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

Perhaps because this perspective is so pervasive, some clergy women said that they either had the impression or had been told directly that their or other clergy women's tenure in appointments was often short so that the greatest number of congregations possible could have exposure to them and their ministries. While certainly not a majority opinion, several informants described this view and common experiences along these lines. If this is occurring, it likely has unintended consequences as well: previous research has found that to a point, longer tenures tend to produce the greatest growth in churches, but if women are being relocated frequently, the work they can do is greatly limited. The first few years have been described as relationship-making and building, so with each new appointment, clergy have to spend a great deal of time initially building the relationships and the trust required to accomplish the work the church seeks to perform. Many informants believed they were often moved just as they were approaching those most-effective times. This also may have the consequence that it produces great levels of burnout and tremendous stress among clergy women. Nearly

all of my informants said that they had experienced or neared burnout at some time in their ministry, and it was often related to what was going on in their ministries at the time, whether it was difficulties in their church, issues facing their families related to their work (particularly those related to relocating with children or difficulties adjusting), or just the general challenges facing ministers, where there are high expectations in an often twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week work environment.

While the women who have served as district superintendents were among those who said this exposure was important, they also expressed a need to act in what they believed was the best interest of the clergy women.

Certain churches have a receptivity to a female pastor, will have a positive experience, so when the Cabinet's appointing they may end up with another female pastor because there is an openness. And the way the Cabinet looks at it, if the Cabinet or bishop feels like the person to appoint is person A and the church says no because of gender or race or age or whatever, the bishop really trumps the congregation, but as a district superintendent I tried to discern would I want to put a woman through this? And so from my perspective, it was important that there be a level of receptivity and openness in potential for the woman to be effective. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

So both clergy women and their supervisors often face tremendous challenges, not only in performing the work itself, but in having (or providing) the opportunities to perform that work. Much of the receptivity and ultimate success or failure of clergy women has to do with support and resistance, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that the women I interviewed are part of a small, vulnerable population, I will be referring to them by their designation (Elder in Full Connection, Deacon in Full

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Connection, Provisional Elder, Local Pastor), age category (under age 50, 50s, age 60 or over), and whether they are first- or second-career clergy.

<sup>2</sup> Diaconal ministers were consecrated lay ministers called to specialized fields of ministry. Diaconal ministers were first consecrated in the UMC in 1976. In 1996, the UMC Commission for the Study of Ministry recommended that diaconal ministers be phased out and replaced with the ordained order of deacon. As of January 1, 1997, the UMC stopped commissioning new diaconal ministers.

<sup>3</sup> Educational requirements differ for the different types of ordination and licensing in the United Methodist Church. Only elders are required to hold a seminary degree; deacons are also required to hold a Master's degree, but it does not need to be from a seminary or even necessarily a theological degree. Both elders and deacons are expected to complete a basic graduate theological studies (BGTS) program. Licensed local pastors may hold a seminary degree, have completed one-third of the coursework for a seminary degree, or complete a specialized program of study prescribed by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (2008 Book of Discipline ¶¶ 314-315, 324)

<sup>4</sup> This includes all who have graduated from seminary and included that information in interviews.

<sup>5</sup> In most denominations, including the UMC, ministers are not required to attend seminaries that are affiliated with that particular denomination, so whether the informants attended a United Methodist seminary (such as Asbury Theological Seminary) or a Disciples of Christ seminary (such as Lexington Theological Seminary), they often had classmates from different and varied religious backgrounds.

<sup>6</sup> Prior to 1996, deacons and elders were part of a sequential ordination process in the UMC. Everyone who wished to become an elder was first ordained as a deacon for a minimum of two years before proceeding to ordination as an elder. Beginning in 1996, the order of deacon was established as a distinct order that was separate from the order of elder. This move marked the end for a group of commissioned laity known as "diaconal ministers," which was closed to new membership effective January 1, 1997. Diaconal ministers performed many of the same duties as deacons do now; in fact many diaconal ministers who met the qualifications went on to be ordained as deacons,



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although some continue to serve as diaconal ministers. This is clearly an empirical example of Paula Nesbitt's hypothesis about professionalization of previous lay ministries. These roles were (and remain) more often than not filled by women, while elders were and remain more often men (see Table 2.1).

<sup>7</sup> Placement decisions differ for elders, deacons, and local pastors. While all elders "in good standing" are guaranteed placements, deacons are largely responsible for securing their own placements that meet the approval of the bishop. Local pastors are placed based on where they are needed, generally in smaller, more rural churches and as solo pastors, but are not guaranteed placements.

## **Chapter 5: Support and Resistance**

As described in the previous chapter, ministry is a difficult career choice, one that requires tremendous strength and perseverance as well as a strong commitment to one's call and faith. Two overriding and related themes throughout much of the interviews were the importance of support and the challenges of resistance in my informants' lives and ministries. This chapter will examine the nature of those elements and discuss the impact each has.

### **The Importance of Support: Support of Family and Friends**

As most would agree, when facing challenges, the support of loved ones is very important. When my informants were asked how important the support of loved ones had been in their careers, the near-unanimous response was that it was invaluable. Several asserted that without the support of significant members of their lives, becoming a minister and then going through their careers would have been impossible. Family and friends provided encouragement, various types of support, shoulders to cry on, and sometimes the belief in the strength and aptitudes of the clergy women when they themselves questioned or doubted.

Family and friends were generally the first members of informants' lives to learn of their calling to ministry. In fact, in several cases, it was the clergy women's family or friends who first suggested to them that they thought the women should consider ministry. Many others' were completely unsurprised when the women announced their calls and said that they had recognized those calls for some time.

When I finally announced my call, it really wasn't a surprise to anyone but me. When I told my family and friends, especially the close ones, they just said, "Well, yeah, it's about time you realized that too." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

[When she told her husband about her call] My husband said, "You know, I've always seen that in you and I was waiting for you to figure it out yourself." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

In addition to supporting them in their calls and ambitions regarding ministry, several informants also described how their families provided other, more concrete means of support.

My mom came down the summer after my oldest child was born and stayed all summer with me. We stayed where my husband works and I commuted to my location four days a week, but she was there. She'd come down for the four days and go back for three. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The greatest source of support for most of my informants was their husbands:

[Although both felt called to ministry] My husband did not go to seminary, we just could not afford after a while for both of us to do it. We also had a DS tell us early on we will have to make sure who's gonna [sic] be the real preacher, because we'll never be able to place both of you. So he kind of stepped back and let me do it. He took the back seat so that I could go forward. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

My husband has been completely supportive. I think I would have backed off if he wouldn't have been because my commitment to my marriage would in many ways have come first. That was a vow I had taken and I would have seen that through. (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

My sweet husband said you followed me for years in the military and now that God's leading you here, I'll follow you. (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

My husband has been very supportive. Every move we've made he has followed me. He's not involved in my ministry directly, it's more of a "keep the home fires burning" kind of support. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

I think the one who could have made the difference was my husband, I don't know if [the lack of support from] any of the others would...But if he hadn't been on board with it I don't know that I would have moved forward. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Sometimes what they provided was simply the encouragement to leave the known and comfortable for the unknown:

One night my husband was looking at a magazine after supper and he came to an article about women in ministry. He just handed the article to me and he said, "You don't have an excuse anymore." I said, "You know I can't go back to school at this point, I've waited too long." He said, "As long as you want to make excuses, you will." I thought, "I guess he's right." (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

But it often meant sacrifices, such as maintaining two residences or relocating their families:

We just did it [lived in separate households so both could pursue their careers]. It was like this is what it is going to take. He was, and still is, living his dream job. We were creative and had good support from friends and family. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I lived in the dorm [at seminary] for 6 months before we sold our house, and my sweet husband would commute back and forth because I said I

want to make sure this is what God is calling me to before we sell our house and move up here. (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

The first nine months I commuted back and forth, which was really very difficult. We didn't think it would be quite that long; we were just waiting for my husband to get a job in the same area so we didn't have to move the kids twice, and he needed to live in the community where his church was [as a minister in another denomination]. So it ended up being almost nine months before they were able to move here, so [another clergy woman] allowed me to stay in her home graciously. I would come in usually Sunday night or early Monday morning, and if I left by six, I could get here by ten, and then I would work usually through Wednesday night or Thursday morning and go home. It was crazy. It was one of those, "If I had known it would have been that long, would I have done it?" But I did, and it worked out well overall, but it was a rough few months. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

Sometimes it involved one spouse commuting:

He stayed at his place of employment in [a particular city] when we moved to [another city] and that was hard on him. But he did it until he retired and I'm not sure he could have done that for too many more years. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

And in still other cases, it meant giving up his career for the sake of hers:

My husband has been extremely supportive. He gave up his career to support mine—with itineracy the spouse can't really have a regular job because of the moving. He started his own business so that he could move it whenever we move. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

My husband is just wonderful, he told the bishop who did our premarital counseling, "I can dig ditches if I have to, what I make is just money. What she does is our ministry and that is more important." He has been very faithful to leave whatever employment he has been in and start over. For the first time in our marriage he is making more money than I am and

loves his job and only has a few years until he can retire. I see this job as God blessing him for his faithfulness to me and my ministry. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

After I started in ministry, we realized that we couldn't keep going as we had been, that something had to give, and my husband said he would quit his job and follow me wherever I was sent in the Conference. He didn't have to do that, but he did, so we've moved where we were sent, we picked up our lives and our kids and moved. And when we get somewhere new, he finds work. But it's hard. He's made sacrifices. We all have, but him most of all, I think. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

In addition to their husbands' support, the support and encouragement of other family members and friends mattered as well:

My mother has always been an incredible listener and encourager, and over the years she has been my most consistent person in my life to help me process. At different points where things are really rough in particular, she's listened and given some wisdom. She's wise and has given some wise advice. And then always sees it my way [laughing], which helps. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The youngest son has always been supportive. He's kind of always been our "way-out" child so he says, "If mom wants to be way out, let her be." (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

When I decided I wanted to go to seminary and I told my family, I thought my mom would tell me I was crazy to give up my career that I'd worked so hard to establish. Her words were, "I always knew you'd do something like this," so that was an affirmation. And my grandfather had been very important to me; he died when I was 11. But he had been a lay preacher, was very active in the church, and I always felt like he had a strong influence on my life, and my grandmother was still living at the time I decided to go to seminary. She was already in a nursing home and I went to her and told her that I was gonna [sic] go to seminary to be a minister, and her words to me were that my granddaddy would be so proud. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Sometimes the support among family and friends even came from surprising sources:

When I told Mother who is almost 80 and a lifelong member of the Church of Christ about this, it was hard for her to take at first, but she has been very supportive. One day she just said to me, "It is clear God's hand is in this, so who am I to say anything against it?" (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

My grandfather, a retired minister [and opposed to women in ministry], looked at me and said "I need to see you outside on the front porch." I was terrified that he didn't like my husband and was going to tell me I made a mistake or something. I went out and he said, "If I ever felt like God called me to say anything to anyone in all my years of ministry, I feel like God wants me to say this to you. You are definitely called to ministry. What it means to be in ministry doesn't always look the same, but you are definitely called to ministry." Then he quoted to me from Joel where God said he will pour out spirit on all flesh and gave me a copy of the poem "Don't Quit." One line sticks out: "Rest if you must, but don't you quit." I see that poem in odd places and times, but always when I'm at my lowest. It reminds me of him telling me I am definitely called and God has a plan for me. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

I think it's been a little bit more testing on my dad, who was brought up Baptist and remains a Baptist now. When I was ordained, a friend overheard my dad say, "You expect it from your son, but not your daughter." But then my dad will, if somebody comes across and says something negative about female ministers or ordained females, Dad will say, "You don't know what you'll say until it's your daughter. What will you say when it's your daughter who's saying that she's called to do this?" I know they are very proud of me. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

This Baptist young man and his wife were a couple doors down and we were in several classes that overlapped, so we would walk over to the seminary to the classes together, and he finally said one day, "You know, this is how I've come to deal with women in ministry: if God has called you to ministry, who am I to tell God He's wrong?" "So," he said, "I believe God knows exactly what God's doing and I affirm you in ministry because God does." I thought that was a really cool thing—I wish all the Baptists would feel that way. (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

## Supportiveness of Community of Faith

The support of their communities of faith was also important, both the ones of which they were parts when first hearing their calls and those they served in ministry.

When I told my home church about my call, they were so supportive. They had encouraged me in my faith my whole life, and then when I told them, not only did they affirm that call, but they even helped support me. They prayed for me, they did everything they could to help me. That made a difference and left a real impression on me. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

There was a family in that church [her first placement], they were kind of the pillars of the congregation, and the matriarch and patriarch of the family kind of took me on and I became an official member of the family. They were a farming family, so that's kind of where I grew up. I grew up around a big extended family, and this was one of those, so it felt like home to me. When they had family gatherings, I was always invited. There was hardly ever a Sunday in that church where somebody didn't invite me to dinner with them. Just took me in. I became a part of their families. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

The first baptism I did of a little girl, she was 10 and her family had come out of the Christian church, so she wanted to be immersed, and I had no experience with immersion. I'd been sprinkled and everybody I'd ever seen baptized was sprinkled, so the first thing I did was call Brother Barry at the Baptist church and I had to ask him to let me borrow their baptistry and he agreed right away. And then he called me back about 10 minutes later and said, "I better run this by the deacons," because he wasn't sure they would allow a woman to use their baptistry. But they did, they were 100% in favor when I needed to do that. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Most of the other pastors I have met have been wonderful. I have two or three female pastors that have mentored me. Right now working at this church, I am working under a male pastor and he has been very supportive. I also belong to an ecumenical prayer group that is all pastors and they have been very supportive. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)



## Supportiveness of Seminary Officials and Colleagues

In some cases, seminary officials and colleagues also played an important role in clergy women's lives during their preparation for ministry:

[On the breakup of a very bad marriage during seminary] So the relationship ended...but the community surrounded me and I felt a kind of community love that was amazing to me. As I continued through seminary, people started to affirm my gifts that I really should consider speaking and preaching. (Elder in Full Connection, under age 50, second-career clergy)

They've [seminary officials] been very supportive. Asbury was a wonderful experience even though there were so few women when I went through there; I found every professor an encourager. Even the ones who had some issue with women were still very encouraging in their own sense; I never felt like I was any less regarded than any of the men. I just had a wonderful experience and it just gave me a hunger for theology and for the Bible and I just loved Asbury and still do. They were great for me, and the student body, I just had a great relationship with the other students. And the year I graduated, they choose people out of the senior class to be preachers during the last weeks of school, and they chose me to be one of the senior week preachers. I was the only woman that they picked to preach senior week, so that was quite an honor. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

## Supportiveness of Conference Placement Officials

Second in importance only to the support of family and friends, however, was that of placement officials. Nearly to an informant, my clergy women found that placement officials either helped make their careers more effective and positive, or in some cases, even more challenging and painful, as will be discussed below. Many informants felt very strongly that how their appointment was made, announced, and supported throughout their tenure greatly shaped their efficacy in their placements.

As described previously, appointments are made by the Cabinet, which is composed of the twelve district superintendents and the bishop, and are based on the needs and fit of the church or other ministry setting and the clergy member. The phrase “gifts and graces” was used countless times and it means essentially that each person is believed to have particular strengths and weaknesses in abilities, temperament, and personality, and the placement officials’ goal is to create the best possible matches between the clergy and the places of service. Most informants (at least three-quarters) believed that Cabinet officials truly sought to create those ideal matches as much as possible. In fact, the greater the level of perceived support from their supervisors, the more likely the clergy women were to be pleased with their careers, both their placements and their overall effectiveness.

Placement officials may also consider requests made by clergy regarding appointments, although the ultimate decisions lie with the Cabinet. In several cases (at least one-third), my informants noted requests they had made of the bishop and district superintendents, sometimes even as a condition of choosing to be ordained as elders (who itinerate) instead of deacons (who do not itinerate). These requests were typically related to family responsibilities, such as their husbands’ work, their children’s schools (generally not to be relocated at particularly significant times in their children’s education), or their need to be near aging parents or other family members who depended on them. Many of those informants mentioned specifically how important it was to them and how appreciative they were when placement officials considered the needs of their family when making appointments.

My last appointment had a lot to do with my being engaged to be married and it put me square between two big airports, and I was engaged to be married to someone who was looking for employment in the aviation industry, so my DS did me pretty good that way. (Elder in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

Part of the issue with me has been I didn't want to uproot my kids. When I was put in my first appointment I said just leave me alone for five years. Some of my friends when I was ordained have moved up to bigger churches, but I wanted to stay to get my kids out of high school. That's one of the things the bishop and Cabinet will tell you: if you put stipulations on considering your husband's career or staying put for children and stuff it will hurt your appointability, you won't get the prime appointments, and you see that happening more with some of the men now too because you have wives with their careers. So I see people I have mentored who are in bigger churches than I am, but I know part of that was to keep me in the same location where I am. I've been in the same district for twelve years, so that's a good thing. So it is not sour grapes, it has to do as much with the stipulations I've put on this process as with anything. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

The caveat for all of that [itinerancy] is that we have to have access to an airport [for his work], and I've already had that conversation with the bishop because that really affected whether I stayed in Kentucky or would go back...So [the bishop at the time] was willing to say I'll keep you near enough to Lexington or Louisville or Cincinnati so your husband can get to an airport. So I still serve at the pleasure of wherever the bishop is going to appoint me, but I'm thankful that he knows that that's one thing that's very important. (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

We talk to the DS every year and there is the question, "Are you willing to itinerate?" And yes, I'm willing to itinerate, but then there is question of any family considerations and I say my mother lives about 30 minutes outside of [a city] and I'd rather not go to the other side of the state where it would take me half a day to get to her. As long as she is around, I'd rather live in moderate proximity to her. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

In addition to family considerations, placement officials played other key roles in the clergy women's satisfaction and ultimate success. At least one-quarter explicitly said that they believed that the way the appointments were made and announced set them up to succeed (in contrast with poorly-assigned or announced introductions, as will be covered later):

When I went to [church's name], the DS had us meet with SPRC [Staff-Parish Relations Committee], and I sat in one chair and my husband sat in the other, and at that point they still didn't know who their pastor was. He hadn't mentioned the pastor's name; he was just talking about gifts and graces so far. So we are there, and they were talking to us and he introduced us, called our boys in and introduced them and then asked if the person who was going to take the spouse and kids out and about and show them the community was available and that person came in, and that was when he introduced my husband as the spouse. I thought it was kinda [sic] cool and funny. They had already met us as people and looked at my resume, so it was just that initial, "Oh, we never thought it might be her." I appreciated that they had to deal with it as they met and learned the woman, rather than had to deal with the concept of a woman preacher and then try to get rid of all that and have to meet me as a person and disciple of Jesus Christ. That was the only time that happened. He had a handle on how to do it, whereas everyone else was like, "Well, if you don't like it, you'll just have to learn to love her." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The superintendent had the church at [name of town], which is where I ended up for my first appointment, and the chairman of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee there had come from Missouri where his sister had a female pastor, so there was some experience in his family with a female pastor. And that was just a very open congregation, and it was a wonderful place to go and begin my ministry because they were such sweet people. I mean I did have challenges, but didn't have anybody in the congregation that I really didn't get along with. They were just good people and wanted to work with me. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

## Support and Success

Unsurprisingly, those who had generally positive outlooks and felt supported in important ways were more pleased with their experiences than those who had less positive perspectives and experiences with support. Even when they faced challenges in congregations or other placements, as all did at least to some extent, my informants who felt mostly supported (nearly three-quarters) had more positive views and perceptions of experiences:

A committee had formed that started a petition in the church that didn't say they didn't want a woman, but it did say they wanted a young pastor with children—read between the lines "white male"—and presented it to the DS. When I came in the first of July that group was still fermenting, so in the fall he came and said we were going to have a "wisdom session." I really appreciated the way he handled it. First, if you wanted to speak in that meeting you had to sign up in advance, so it wasn't just a free-for-all on the floor. Second, he used a feather; he said, "This is an old Native American tradition, if you are speaking you need to hold the feather," so it didn't turn into a shouting match between two people. I was so nervous about that night—I was afraid it was going to be the end of my ministry career—but it turned out to be very good. The people who were opposed to my being there just looked like blustery old fuddy-duddies. So we cleared the air and got it all in the open and that committee just gradually disbanded and I had a great four years after that. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

You know those things where you take some paths and have some bad breaks but you end up in a really good place? One DS can make a huge difference either way, positive or negative. One church can make a huge difference in how a person develops. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I have had an ideal set of circumstances. And the other thing, I have an optimistic outlook. My tendency is to see the glass half full instead of half empty, although I can see it realistically. And I think optimism is not something you decide you are going to have. It is a gift when you are dealing with people, so I think that has been a part of it, because I look at the world that way. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I think you may find more negativism than I have experienced in my ministry or than I have expressed in this interview. I'm just not a negative person by nature; I don't look for problems under the rocks to come at me. Probably there have been things that I just didn't even read as negatively. I know at the time I took the last Conference position, there were no women on the Cabinet, there were no women superintendents. After that there were, and the bishop said he felt like I had opened the door so he could appoint women as superintendents and in other roles. (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

Because ministry is a difficult and often lonely line of work, I asked my informants about whether they participated in any type of support group, whether with other women in ministry or others. Although there is a group, COSROW (the Commission on the Status and Role of Women), whose purpose is in part to provide resources for clergy women, few of my informants reported participating in any activities provided by the group. The main reasons they gave were that they were unaware of events and functions offered by the Commission, their personal time was already very limited, the proximity of the events was prohibitive, and they did not believe the events of which they were aware were “worth the effort” required of them to take part (in terms of time, travel, energy, and sacrificing other opportunities).

While most did not take part in formal gatherings offered through the KAC, approximately one-third of my informants did discuss other support groups of which they were a part, to which they most often referred as “covenant groups”. While these frequently consisted of other women of faith, if not other clergy women specifically, in some cases, men were also a part of the groups. It seemed that the most significant factor was that the group members had common needs and desires and provided support and encouragement as well as accountability, perhaps most importantly of all. In nearly all cases, the covenant groups were described as being very important sources of support in the women’s lives.

I've got a covenant group that I meet with. There are four of us that meet at least twice a month or so, but there two deacons and two elders. They're the women I can call when I'm freaking out: “How do I handle this?” “Does it sound like I'm leading well here?” “What else should I do, what should I be looking out for?” “What dynamics am I not seeing in this situation?” (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

I have some very good friends in the Conference, close friends. I have a covenant group that has my back, so I know that. I'm in a covenant relationship with [woman's name], she's a go-to person, I can call her up when I need her and say we need to talk. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

There are special challenges associated with being a minister, and informants' support systems help them handle those. Ministry is difficult and isolating, and my informants voiced that. Clergy women are set apart by nature of the career, both because they are in a traditionally-male field and also because of the work itself. They serve their congregations and act as counselors and confidantes but must also keep a distance from them, and that often creates challenges for them. Clergy women frequently feel isolated in their communities as well. In some cases they are the only clergy woman for many miles, or even one of only a very few in an entire district. At least one-third also experienced issues because of the itinerate nature of their work; they felt that about the time they started to build friendships at one location, they were moved to another community and had to start over.

Being a minister does isolate me. From everyone. I'm isolated from other pastors who are primarily male, I'm not one of the good ol' boys, they're not gonna call me up for lunch. Because Lord help them if I go out to lunch with them and have a friendship with them and their wife finds out. I can't be caught as the other woman. There's not that many females that are around me that I can say let's grab lunch, or... the closest one in my district is an hour away. So I'm isolated among my peers. I'm isolated within my congregation, again because I can't and I don't think they are that comfortable with being that close to me. In the church I'm at now, there was a female minister a couple pastors back who had evidently a small cluster of close friends within the church, and the rest of the congregation felt isolated from her because of this small group, her favorites, and so I think the church now doesn't want that to happen again. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I felt like I needed to love my congregation, but not become one of them, I had to keep some separation just to be effective, so there was that isolation and I found that as a clergy woman, I didn't fit in the clergy men's groups. The clergy men everywhere I've been have been very supportive and helpful but they kind of have a fellowship that the women just don't belong to. I never felt it was intentional, but just the nature of it excludes women. I found later in my ministry a group of women, I'm the only clergy woman in the group, but a group of women that just are good friends...we're prayer support for one another and just good friends, get together for lunch sometimes and just do different things. So I get that fellowship and that community with a group of people that I had been missing a lot of years in my ministry. And moving every so often is also uprooting and keeps you isolated in itself. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

There's many times where even pastors have problems and things they go through and you have to be very careful who you share that with and who you say things to that are non-pastors. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

Some thought they had easier times when they had young children because of the children's connectedness to the new community, but for those without children or those whose children were grown and gone, they had no "natural" connections.

When I moved to [her current city], I was 55 years old, so I didn't take my kids to school and find other parents, there was no natural entrance into any kind of social system at all, it just wasn't there. Where you would do with kids or you would do with something, all I did was I came to work every day and I went home. It was hard, and it was really lonely. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

It is not only those in parish ministry who experience isolation, however: those in extension ministries also face special challenges.

I am the only female [in a specific type of ministry] in the Conference, so I feel very isolated because the people I most want to seek out for support are men and they don't really want that. They are very self-reliant and don't want to have a pow-wow. It can be so lonely. It is weird attending a



church and being a pastor at the same time. I can talk to other moms about "mommy things" but they have no understanding of what it means to be a pastor. At pastors' meetings there are no United Methodist clergy women in [location] and pastors have no idea what [her type of] ministry is like. There's not really a relationship and no sense of collegiality there. There's an undercurrent of hostility and distrust between local ministers and [her] ministry, so there is no relationship there. I only see the other [her type of] ministers at business meetings and Annual Conference and in those, the men treat me differently. When I tell other women ministers about feeling isolated, they are like, "Me too, let's get together and talk about this," but the men are dismissive. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

Nearly all informants discussed how crucial support was in handling all of the challenges that they faced, both personal and professional. Those who had stronger support systems, regardless of the nature of those systems, generally felt more positively about their careers and their lives overall. Also pervasive, however, was resistance.

### The Challenges of Resistance

The literature on clergy women generally considers resistance and receptivity, most often examining who is more receptive and who is more resistant to women in ministry in terms of demographic and cultural factors (see, for instance, much of the work of Edward Lehman). We know, for example, that those who hold negative views of clergy women also tend to hold conservative views of gender roles in general (Lehman 1981, Chaves 1997). Lehman's studies (1981, 1985) show that most laypeople do not feel strongly one way or the other about clergy women, but it is that conservative minority who do feel strongly who tend to be the most vocal. Lehman also found that if individual church members perceive that most other parishioners held negative opinions of clergy women, they were more likely to express those attitudes themselves (2002). He

concludes: "One's attitudes derive not from experience with the object of the attitude as much as from experience with the dominant (and thus normative) attitude of one's in-group." Therefore the overall views of women in ministry are related to ideas regarding gender roles in general, and those who feel strongly tend to express those views most loudly (and affect others' views as well). Conversely, those who are most receptive tend to be the silent majority. Unlike the dissenters who air their grievances in the open, those who are more accepting of clergy women tend to show their support simply by continuing to attend services and making their financial contributions (Lehman 1985). Churches that are more accepting of clergy women also tend to be in urban areas and have memberships with higher levels of education than those that are more resistant.

Whereas previous research focuses most attention on that resistance and receptivity, the present study explores not only the sources of resistance, but the effects of this resistance on the clergy women and their ministries.

Every informant in this study faced some degree of resistance. Sometimes it was relatively mild and passive, whereas at other times the resistance was more extreme, aggressive, and even life-threatening. As discussed in Chapter 4, resistance seems to come primarily from two places: that which comes from those who have what they believe are Biblical precepts for resisting or even refusing to accept women's leadership, and that which arises simply from the discomfort associated with a lack of experience with or exposure to women as religious leaders.

Several clergy women discussed what they perceived to be regional differences in receptivity to their ministries; over half explicitly noted such differences and others alluded to them. Other informants, however, did not recognize such a distinct difference within the Conference, but stated more generally that the Kentucky Conference overall

was less receptive and more resistant to women in ministry than many other Conferences, likely, many speculated, because of the strong "Baptist influence", referring particularly to Southern and Primitive Baptists, with deep roots in much of the state. In fact, one of the largest and most prominent Southern Baptist seminaries, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is located in Louisville, Kentucky, across the street from another seminary, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Many of the clergy women interviewed for this research attended one or the other, and some even took classes simultaneously at both seminaries when the schools had reciprocal arrangements.

Regardless of its roots or its regional strength, as expected, this research found that the sources of resistance are varied.

#### Resistance from Family and Friends

Sometimes the resistance comes from those who are closest to the informants. For family and friends, the largest point of contention seems to be when religious beliefs conflict with the loved one's calling.

My father, as a person and as his daughter he's very proud of me, but as the role of a clergy woman, it is interesting that he is not able to connect the fact that when he talks about clergy women, he's talking about me. This took place in a conversation not too long ago. He had a long appointment [as a pastor] at a church back in the 70s and he was talking to a couple of friends from that church and said "You know, the church has gone through some hard times and they really lost a lot of members to death and attendance is down. And now they've got this woman." That's what he said. And I said, "Really?" And he said, "You know, it's her way or the highway." And I said "Well, you know. Didn't you say the church is dying?" "Well, yeah." And I've come this close to saying "I'm that woman." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I have one son that turned Baptist on us. I mean, he just came out and said, "Mom, this is wrong. Women just don't do this, it is not what you are supposed to do." He was very upset, but he has since then toned his rhetoric down a lot. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

My intimate family has been very supportive, my extended family, not so much. My extended family, part of them are Methodist and part of them are Baptist, and the Baptist side, you know, I'm in ministry, but they don't talk about it. My grandmother never talked about it. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The only person who struggled with my call was my mom's dad, and it's ironic because he was Primitive Baptist, that was his background, and they didn't have female clergy, but my grandfather thought that it was great that I did what I did, so somehow he never reconciled it. But it was like no, I don't believe in female clergy but I think it is great that you do what you do. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

#### Resistance from the Community of Faith

Resistance most often and most tangibly came from the churches the clergy women served:

A woman in the church had already told the DS, "Don't send a Black and don't send a woman, but we'll take a Black over a woman." (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

On Sundays they would all cluster together in their pew and give me dirty looks or would be talking amongst themselves and not be paying any attention. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

In one church there was one woman who was opposed to my being there. She had been ill or in a car accident or something and I visited her at her home and took her communion several times and she told me basically, "We don't want you here." One Sunday morning as I stopped preaching or came to the close of the sermon, she said, "Well, when you shut up up

there I've got something to say." And she just started ranting and raving about she's in her 70s and so-and-so's grandmother sat here and this and that. And then it's just like my ears closed and to be honest I don't know what else she said.... The DS came the next Sunday and I had told him "I'm sorry, but I cannot stay here," and he agreed. But I would go out with my dignity, so I would preach one more Sunday. I did, and then I turned it over to him. And then this man shook his finger in the DS's face and claimed I wouldn't let them pray, I didn't give communion often enough and some other stuff. And my husband said, "Get your things ready, we are leaving," and as we got to the door he looked at the DS and said, "I'm sorry to leave you alone, but we are not listening to any more of this rambling." And the man who had been so vocal jumped up and shook his fist in my husband's face and said, "Meet me in the parking lot!" (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

Those first few months [at a particular appointment] were rough, knowing there was a group meeting every month to find ways to get rid of me. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

Nearly every elder who had served as a senior or solo pastor and local pastor (who serve most commonly as solo pastors) noted that some members of churches they served left either before or soon after their arrival. In fact that was so common that a couple of informants specifically mentioned—with some degree of surprise and joy—that at one church where each had served, to their knowledge, not a single family or individual had left because of their appointment.

For the most part, everywhere I went, there would usually be at least one family leave because I was a woman. And they would leave before I got there usually or right after I got there. This is the first time [her current appointment] that people didn't leave in advance of me getting there. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Here at [current church], I am confident there are some people who are guests who come in one time, see me, and decide they are not coming back because they were not anticipating a female clergy person. And then there are others who think it is a really cool thing that this church has a female clergy person! (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Several noted that they were sure that if those who left had remained, they (the congregants) would have ended up with a different impression of them (the informants) than their preconceived ideas and prejudices, and at least eight of the clergy women made a point to contact them and invite them back, whether to be a part of special events (i.e., vacation Bible school, revivals, or concerts) or new activities (i.e., men's Bible study groups, service groups), or simply to give them a chance to change their minds. Some had success while others did not.

I know that when I'm appointed to a church, some people are going to leave, they just are. It happens every time. I always end up having a good, positive ministry while I'm there, but some people just won't stick around and give me a chance. If they would just stay and hear me and get to know me, I know they would want to stay. But getting them to stay or to come back, well, that's another matter. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

You find that a lot, people decide they just don't want a woman pastor. I visited the family [who had left], they were very nice to me but they never came back. You grieve about that, but then you kind of want to say, "This is who we are as United Methodists, and if you are not comfortable with that, then maybe you need a new church home then." (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

Ultimately, the majority of informants seemed resigned to the fact that when they came, others left, and there was likely little they could do to change that.

It's hard, knowing some will leave when they hear I'm coming. It's painful for me to see in some cases families fighting over staying because I'm coming. Sometimes the husband leaves and the wife stays. Sometimes one generation will leave. But I took a vow to go where called and in the end, it's their choice. But it's still hard. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

One of the most difficult things to deal with [is] going to a new church where people never darkened the church door again after they heard they

were going to have a female pastor, and never came once to hear me preach, never introduced themselves to me, just decided before they ever laid eyes on me that I couldn't be their pastor. That happened a number of times, and I felt bad about that, but really, there's nothing you can do with people who refuse to even interact with you. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Before I went to [church's name] they tried to put a woman there a few years earlier and someone in the leadership just threw a fit and said they were not going to have a woman there and the bishop backed down. Then they called me to go and I said, "Wait, they said they weren't going to have a woman there and now you want to send me?" The DS explained that the rest of the leadership was really embarrassed by that and thinks the atmosphere has changed, so I went there and it worked out. Of course that one guy and his wife left the church, but he probably needed to be a Baptist anyway." (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

Sometimes the expressions of resistance go beyond verbal harassment and passive-aggressive behavior, however. In separate incidents, four of my informants actually experienced threats of physical harm and even death, including at least one where a congregant came to the church with a gun with the intention of murdering the clergy woman who was alone in her office.

One of the church members just wasn't going to have it. This was back in the country where people do things with guns sometimes. Just as the gun came out, one of my staunch church members had suspected something and walked in to my office. I was there in the office alone working one evening after dark when this person came to the office and threatened me. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

It had gotten to the point where I was afraid to get out of my car unless there were certain other people to walk in with me because this man had been very...he had called my home and had been very threatening. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

I was at one church for one year. I wanted to stay longer, but the DS and bishop pulled me out because they thought I was in danger. I was not well-received in the county, not just the congregation. There were several churches where I was not allowed on their property or to speak with their parishioners. I had what we believe to be the Klan trying to scare me as well. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

What I found most surprising, although certainly not most disheartening, was that the clergy women went on with their work and in a couple of cases, requested that they be permitted to remain at the appointment beyond that year.

The DS said, "Please don't go back to that church, you can't take your life in your hands like that." But after I had prayed about it a lot, I thought, you know, if they send some other woman down there, they'll do the same thing if I don't clear the way somehow. So I said to the DS, "Please don't ask me not to go there." Because I knew I was supposed to do what he said, but at the same time I said to him, "My children are grown and gone. If anything happens to me they are alright." I said, "More important people than me have given their life for this cause and if that's what it takes, that's what we'll do." He said, "I just don't like it at all." I said, "Just let me try it a little bit longer." I did, and you know, things just smoothed out and we had three good years there. It was amazing. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

None of the four whose lives were threatened left ministry, and in each case, the clergy women went back to their calls to explain why they remained, even when their lives had been in danger. In fact, when describing their experiences, they spoke almost matter-of-factly about the events that could have cost them their lives. While I have no way of knowing how truly common this is, nor how many have left ministry because of similar events, I was surprised and more than slightly disturbed that at least four of thirty-six informants experienced this because of their work.



## Local Communities

It was not only their churches and congregants that presented challenges for many informants, however. Churches play critical roles in many communities in this region. They are certainly important for their members, but they also hold great sway over the communities of which they are integral parts. As addressed above, many areas in the Conference have strong religiously conservative regions where many community members are adamantly opposed to women in ministry. Several informants saw a direct connection between that regional conservatism and the relative difference in the number of clergy women's appointments and acceptance (and success) in various districts, as noted above. District superintendents, as those entrusted with recommending the best possible matches for both the clergy and the member congregations, also noted such a difference in receptivity.

I knew which churches were willing to take a woman pastor and which weren't, and I'll tell you, in a lot of places in this Conference, there are a whole lot more that won't than will. What do you do? You can't in good conscience send them where you know they aren't wanted. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

There are times as DS you have a church that is so adamantly opposed to having a woman that you might want to hold back and not appoint a woman, but I don't think that is punishing a woman, I think that is saying, "I'm not going to throw you out there to those wolves." (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

I know that district superintendents have sat at the Cabinet table and stated very clearly that there were churches who would not receive a woman as a minister. And we don't put women in those positions, why would we do that to a woman? And quite honestly, why would we do that to a church? Well, we have done it, but I'll tell you...they were not nice to them. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

It is hard to place clergy women here in Kentucky, and those years I spent as a district superintendent would bear that out. I saw some fairly horrendous things happen to women in that time when I was superintendent, and very disappointing. I would go and sit with a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and start talking to them about what they would need in a pastor when they were experiencing a move, only to have them say, "Now we don't want no woman! Don't you dare send us a woman!" And I had one congregation kind of act like I would send them a woman to spite them. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Most of the smaller membership churches are pretty sensitive about that [having a clergy woman as the pastor]. I think that we're, Kentucky as a state, we're way behind in placement of women, way behind the other Annual Conferences in placement and how quickly somebody can move up with gifts and graces and results. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

It is hard to place female clergy, particularly in some areas. They just won't have them, and if they are assigned churches there, more often than not, they are chewed up and spit out. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

For many of those who have served in less-receptive communities, even when their churches accepted them, there were sometimes negative consequences both for them and their congregations. Five informants shared stories of how their churches were basically disassociated from local events and gatherings during their time of service:

[The town where she was serving] always had community services for Christmas, and the year I got there, it was our turn to host, but they knew I was the pastor so they moved it and wouldn't hold it at our church and wouldn't let me preach that service. It caused a lot of hard feelings from my church people, people who were every bit as much a part of that community as the Baptists and the others, and I don't know if they ever did fully recover. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

There's been resistance. There's been people who, like in the small communities where there's a woman pastor, where other people, other

denominations, other folks just don't believe that there should be a woman pastor, so they might be resistant to me being the president of the ministerial association or something like that. Thanksgiving services, there was this one Thanksgiving time when everybody's invited to come and they didn't invite me to come. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I joined the ministerial association and we had this Good Friday service where, as one of the newer clergy, I was invited to preach. There was another church in the community where the Board of Elders voted to pull out of the association because I was preaching. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

At my appointment at [name of the church and town], there was a pastor at the Baptist church who had made a comment to his congregation that I would never be allowed to stand in his pulpit, and this is a tiny community where everybody's connected to everybody else in some form or fashion. And we had community events, particularly Thanksgiving and Christmas, where we rotated churches for special services, and when word got out that he had said this, I just had to come back to him and said, "Listen, I am the pastor of the Methodist church, and the Methodist church will take part in the community events. What you said is not gonna [sic] fly, you're gonna have to accept me as their pastor." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

She went on to make the point that it was that pastor who expressed resistance to her leadership and not her congregation nor most of his congregation. But as a church leader, she knew he had influence and she felt she needed to stand up to him for her own benefit as well as both of their congregations' and the greater community of which they were all members.

The reasons for the resistance include those religiously conservative (anti-women's leadership) sentiments that are related to selective use of the Bible, but also simply a history of men's leadership and lack of experience with women in the pulpit:

When I was in [a certain] district, when some churches would specify they weren't ready for a female, I would sometimes say "How come? Help me understand why that is." And I was expecting it would be Biblical and theological reasons, but that was not the main reason. The main reason was, "We've never had one before." That was an "aha" to me because I had assumed it was always about theology and Biblical interpretation. And these were staff-parish committees, so they would be leaders in the church and that [theology] was sometimes shared as the reason, but that was not the majority reason given. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

This is a very Baptist community. I suspect that they tolerate a woman clergy person and they don't know what to do with it because of their theology and their church polity. I just suspect that it is true. The Baptist church, they've run into me...I was challenged by the Baptist preacher, and really what he was saying was, "Get back in line and do what we think you need to be doing." I said, "No, we're not going to do it that way." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Sometimes simple semantics makes a difference for members of the congregations or community:

One time I was doing a whole Sunday for a church down at [name of town] on a missions theme. I was going to teach a Sunday school for adults, then speak at the Sunday service, and then teach again in the evening. So I taught the Sunday school lesson for adults, and when the lesson was over, this elderly gentleman came up to me and I remember this is probably 77 or 78 and he said to me, "Are you a woman preacher?" and I laughed and said, "No, I'm a layperson working in the church" and he said, "Good, I liked you and I'll stay for church if you ain't [sic] a woman preacher." (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

### The Role of Cabinet Officials

As previously noted, many informants felt very strongly that how their appointment was made, announced, and supported throughout their tenure greatly shaped their efficacy in

their placements. Overall, most (approximately three-quarters) believed that Cabinet officials truly sought to create those ideal matches as much as possible (with at least six notable exceptions), although sometimes those plans were not as well-conceived or implemented as possible. As Lehman (1980) points out, placement officials are the guardians of the status quo. Their goal is to cause as little disruption in the life and ministries of the churches under their care as possible when making appointments. Most often, this means that the ministers who are appointed are as similar to the previous ministers as possible. This leads to a more homogenous look to the ministry pool. While this generally means less discomfort for the churches, it also limits opportunities for clergy women (and others) and for exposure of congregations to those who may be different from what they have known in the past.

When they started [a push for more clergy] about 10 years ago, they started this path of new church development and we were going to forge new leaders, we were going to develop new leaders in the Conference, and one of the first images that went up was the image of the "Holy Club" [see Figure 5.1 below]. It's an old lithograph of John Wesley and Charles Wesley and the early members of the Holy Club. It is used to show our Wesleyan roots. And one of the other clergy women said, "I'm not at that table." And of course the silence hits the room like, "Don't rain on my parade, don't mess with my illustration. Don't pierce my worldview right now." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)



**Figure 5.1 "The Holy Club" engraving by S. Bellin**

When those who are different are appointed, congregants are often uncomfortable.

For the most part, people are receiving a woman for the first time, every one of my appointments has been the first time a woman has been the pastor, and so there's some trepidation and you really do have to prove yourself again. And again, and again. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Despite resistance and often-dire predictions of the congregations' futures when a clergy woman was to be the next pastor, however, nearly every informant said that all congregations she served had grown under her leadership, and none had dissolved, as some congregants feared. These findings support Lehman's (1985) work that while there are often predictions that membership and financial contributions will drop off when a church calls a woman to be its pastor, those fears are rarely realized. "After the

woman assumes the pastorate, the church simply goes on being the church.” (Lehman 2002:26)

Although they recognized and accepted that there will likely be at least some level of resistance to their appointments and service, my informants believed that how supervisors handle placements and other aspects of their jobs have profound effects on the clergy women’s experiences. In at least five instances, clergy women believed that their placements were made very poorly and announced in a way that ultimately, if not doomed, then certainly hindered the effectiveness of their work there before they even arrived.

The district superintendent said to me in my house, "Well, we just don't know what to do with you. They're just not too excited about you, but I told them the bishop likes you so they will just have to deal with it." And that was my introduction to the congregation. They just didn't know how to present female clergy. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

When I was placed in my first church the DS forgot to call them and tell them I was going to be their pastor. I show up and they did not know who I was or what was going on. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

Here’s how I was introduced to the congregation [at a former appointment]: the DS stood in front of the congregation with me sitting beside him, and he said, with no warning to me, he said, “I know you didn’t want a woman, but that’s who the bishop decided to send, so you’ll just have to make the best of it.” I mean, really, is that the best way to do this? (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

The bottom line is that nearly every single informant believed that how they were placed and how it was announced to the congregation made a tremendous difference in how they and their ministries were received.

## Punitive Placements

Not only were introductions sometimes problematic, however. In at least six instances, clergy women felt they (or others) were placed in difficult church appointments and then “punished” when they did not succeed.

Sometimes women just get so discouraged that, where they had started with great promise, it just doesn't follow because they get put in a situation that they're not suited to at all, their gifts and graces are not suited there, and people are resistant to their ministry. And so, where had they been placed in a place where their gifts and graces were suited, they might have had positive results. But the negative results seem to follow them exponentially when they end up in a place that is not suited to them. [Even beyond that placement?] Well it's hard, yeah, because then they get a negative connotation attached to them so they don't move up, they might get a lateral move or they might get a bump down or something like that, and to stay stuck in those little, small churches where they're resistant to women to begin with, and to not be able to turn the tide, then it's just a downward spiral. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

One bad appointment, one appointment where things aren't great can derail a career, male or female, but it can really happen with a woman, because it's like, well, it's her fault. One bad appointment where things don't work out right can really mess stuff up for a career for folks. And one bad appointment for a woman, she will be blamed, whereas a man would be more likely to get the benefit of the doubt. I don't want it to be that way, but it is. It can really derail and be very hurtful. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

If a person is in trouble here, to keep them at the same salary level as a male, we'll just make a lateral move here. But if a girl was here, very likely that girl will go down. There's data to support that, and I just gave you my own example [which she asked me not to record]. Look at the ones who have left. We have several women now, you are starting to see the trend where they go from here to disability. You can only get beat up on for so long and either you know how to deal with it or you recognize it...If you recognize it then you can make some choices, if you don't recognize it, you internalize it for the most part. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)



Some informants had especially difficult and traumatic experiences:

They had had a pastor that they just adored. They thought that he had walked on water. And I came in after him, and his wife was very active in the church, so I was not only trying to fill his shoes; I was trying to fill hers too. And the staff were loyal to him, and in that first year, kind of one by one the staff began to resign. Well after the second staff person resigned, the congregation kind of went into a panic and decided that the staff were leaving because I was incompetent. And the superintendent's office was [near] the church and the people were calling him and complaining because the staff were leaving and I was incompetent and he was new as a superintendent...And he decided that I wasn't listening to the congregation and he needed to have a meeting where I would listen to what people in the congregation had to say. So he had me go with him to a meeting and I was not allowed to say anything as one by one people stood up and told everything they didn't like about me and my ministry. And it became a feeding frenzy because they were all there together and they heard what each other had to say and it just kind of fed on one another. It was devastating...something in me broke with that. I've never been the same. I was actually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome...The situation that I had been through at that church with the superintendent and that little session there, every time I would meet with the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee [in her next appointment], and they would start naming issues that they had with me and critiquing me, I relived that awful nightmare. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I'm in a really tenuous situation here. The challenges of this church, the dysfunction of this church, I can do the hard work here—that's what I did in my last appointment was the hard work—and then it was really presented as a punitive move to here from what I could see. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I had begged to leave [a difficult appointment] after the fourth year, and there was just no place that they were willing to let me go, so I stayed another year, just a year of pure misery, and during that year, I thought about just quitting, just quitting completely. But then you get in a place where financially you can't quit. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

In these cases, these events were among the worst and most painful experiences not only of their ministries, but of their lives. They remained in ministry, but one wonders how many other clergy women faced similar situations and left?

In at least three other cases, when informants believed that placement officials did not consider their needs when assigning churches, sometimes those placements cost the clergy women (and their families) dearly, but they felt that their only choice was to accept those assignments or jeopardize their careers and violate an agreement they had made to itinerate as sent:

They moved me when my son was in his senior year of high school. I begged them. I was two years away from having my DMin [Doctor of Ministry], and that church was really supportive of me doing my dissertation and all that, so I begged them to let me stay there two more years to get my son out of high school and let me finish my DMin. Well, he moved me anyway and took my son from a private school with a class of four to the largest high school in Kentucky with a class of 1000. Then, when we were in [city name] we had our grandchildren living with us (our oldest son was going through a divorce) and they moved with us to [another city]. And part of me not wanting to move again was not only had we just closed on our house in November—they told me in April I was moving—but we would lose our granddaughters because the court would not let us move that far away from their father. So in my case, family matters have never been considered.... I've always been at the mercy of the appointive cabinet; they've never cared about my family at all. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

#### Resistance from Placement Officials

The challenges for clergy women come from other sources as well. Resistance often comes from other clergy members, most often from clergy men, and is most commonly directed at women in powerful positions, those who are in direct competition for the positions they want and those by whom they feel most threatened. As discussed previously, this is why those who are ordained as elders likely tend to face much stronger resistance than deacons. Since there are a limited number of more-desirable placements, there is tremendous competition to fill those slots, especially as one climbs higher up the ladder in the organization, and as in any other field, when a member of a

less-powerful group gets that desirable position, members of the dominant group tend to push back against her and others they believe are like her, making it more difficult for all clergy women for at least a time. As the field of the clergy becomes more saturated with women and as those women gain a level of power in the organization, as Paula Nesbitt and others in literature on the feminization of occupations suggest, there tends to be a backlash against women as a group, and my informants expressed those sentiments.

### Good Ol' Boys' Network

One large obstacle that at least six women identified (with no prompting) was a so-called "good ol' boys' network". They believed this was evident in placements, promotions, networking, and general camaraderie.

Clergy men often golf together, for example, and all of the informants who mentioned this said they were never invited. If these outings had no consequences beyond exercise and entertainment, there would be less reason for concern. Just as in the business world, however, a lot of networking and relationship-building occurs during these activities, and those who are absent miss out on those opportunities. In fact one clergy woman said specifically that she believes that the fact that she plays golf (well) has benefitted her in being able to participate as a peer in these interactions; she still is not generally invited, but when she does join them, she sees that as an advantage.

Another example of this good ol' boys' network is closed-door meetings that occur among leadership.

Women are for the most part excluded from the ol' boys' network. The leadership are the perpetrators of it, of the good ol' boy network, they're

building the network, as we experience it. They're building the network, and there was a few years ago where [woman's name] was the superintendent of the largest district, there was a woman who took a big hop from a small church to a large church, and [another woman] was brought on as the Assistant to the Bishop, and [another woman] as the Director of Connectional Ministries. So there for a couple years, there were five fairly high-powered women. And it made the good ol' boy network very nervous. And after we had served for a while, we noticed various kinds of blocking mechanisms being used for leadership in committees and that kind of thing, like getting together for meetings before the meetings to make sure about who was nominated, or that kind of thing. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

When asked how to change this, she responded with some level of resignation:

Well, women would have to be willing to do the same thing, we'd have to be willing to stoop to the same tactics, the meetings before the meetings, building a caucus, building a lobby group, and heretofore, we've not been willing to do that. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Others echoed her sentiments, primarily that not only does this systematic organized resistance against women exist, but that the only way they see to produce real change is for women in the Conference to unite together as a group and push back. She and the others believe that the women, at least at this point, are unwilling to do that.

#### The Future of Women in the KAC

Women have made some inroads in the KAC, and most think this trend will continue.

Four clergy women stated unprompted that they believe they know who the next bishop will be and that it will be a specific clergy woman currently serving in the Conference.

I think we'll elect her first to General Conference, which will put her in position for bishop. We'll do that, but it will NOT be organized, we will

NOT organize that. We will do it, but we won't organize it. See there's a huge distinction. If we organized it, that'd be one thing. We will NOT organize it, but we WILL do it. And she'll be one of the best bishops that United Methodism has ever seen. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)<sup>1</sup>

Those informants who believe this particular clergy woman will be elected bishop also believe that she could have been elected in the last election if she had chosen to run. When asked if they believe that her (or another clergy woman's) selection as the first woman to serve as bishop in the Conference will bring about long-term change, however, nearly every informant replied that they did not believe that would be the case. In fact many went on to say that they thought there would be a backlash "when 'Jane' became bishop" and that it would be even more challenging and difficult for women as a group for some time following that:

[In response to being asked whether she thought that a woman's election to the office of bishop would bring about long-term change for women:] No, no, no! Because then the men will really solidify. Because there are two, at least two, if not three other men who are really vying for that position. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

If this perception is accurate, this is a clear example of Paula Nesbitt's theories regarding the feminization of the clergy and the fact that when women achieve some level of power and equity in an occupational field, they become the targets of retribution and reprisals and they often actually lose ground, at least temporarily.

Not all believed this dim prediction would be the result, however. In contrast, there were two informants who believed that when a clergy woman finally does achieve that highest position in Conference leadership (and nearly all agreed that it inevitably would happen eventually), that it will be a significant factor that finally delivers a major blow to the stained-glass ceiling and further opens the door for other clergy women as well. They

do not believe that any single event, even one of that magnitude, will usher in some utopia and serve as the absolute end of all gender discrimination in the church, but that it will mark a key turning point and make it easier for others who follow.

### How to Increase Acceptance

Regardless of when that day arrives, clergy women are struggling today to have the most effective ministries possible. Despite the difficulties seemingly inherent in ministry, all but one of my informants believed it is possible at the present time to increase acceptance of their leadership as women and thus reduce resistance, and nearly all of those believed that the very best way to do that was through congregations' exposure to effective women's leadership. Views on the best ways to bring about that exposure, however, differed.

There's a real division about that on the Cabinet...when I was going on to the district [as a superintendent], I went with the former DS to do the covenant meetings<sup>2</sup>, and there was a woman who was going to [name of church], and we were going to go down there and introduce her, and I said, "Do they know they're getting a woman?" "No." I mean he just took her down there and sat around that table and we walked in. Of course, first they're getting a new woman DS for openers, and that didn't even hit me until later, like, "Oh crud, they may not like me either." So then we walked in, I think most people knew I was the DS and they knew me from around the district, but then this other couple walks in, this man and woman, and everybody just assumes the man's the new minister. And they sit at the table and the husband goes and kind of sits in the back pew and "Sue" comes on up, and he says this is your new minister. [laughing] It worked out great, she's still there, six years later, they love her to death, she and her husband have done a beautiful job. I would not have done it that way. But it worked. So, there are some people who say you don't give them a choice. We just did a covenant meeting here in [location], and I don't know that [DS name] told them their new minister was a woman, I think he just brought her. So that everybody is being treated equally. You don't call and say I've got a man for you. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I gave them a suggestion, just ask the congregation what gifts and graces they would like their pastor to have, list the gifts and graces of the clergy person you are appointing there and say, "Don't you think that will be a great thing?" and then say, "Your pastor's name is..." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

At least eight informants said they thought that any exposure to clergy women would at least plant the seeds in the minds of those who were previously resistant. Others thought that more casual or occasional contact was not enough and congregations needed to experience women as their pastors, where they would see them at least weekly and get to know them and their abilities over time. Along those lines, at least seven women said that congregations and individuals became more accepting of them after they had gone through funerals and weddings together. It seems that once the congregants saw the women in the role of pastor at the pivotal moments in their lives, they were more willing to accept their routine leadership and authority as well.

Often for people who struggle with women clergy, after you have been at the bedside with them when they are in the hospital or you've done their dad's funeral or you've gone to a big family celebration or something they have invited you to, then the gender issues cease. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Usually it takes a congregation a little while just to get used to seeing a woman in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday. But once they do that and once we do a funeral together, a wedding together, and Christmas, then once you've kind of proved to people you're competent and capable of doing what needs to be done, then it relaxes, it ceases to be an issue. If you don't make it an issue, if you're not constantly trying to make the fact that you're a woman an issue, if you just do your job and love on folks and love the Lord, you're fine. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

After congregants are exposed to those positive interactions over time, the end result is often long-term, producing significant changes in the hearts and minds of previously-resistant members:

I can remember visiting the little old ladies in the nursing home and they wouldn't even speak to me. I had this one woman that wouldn't put her newspaper down and finally, I just keep talking, and finally she put that paper down and said, "You know I don't approve of what you're doing." And I said ok and I talked to her a little bit longer and I said, "Can I make a deal with you? Can I just come visit you as a person and we won't even talk about me being a minister, I won't ask to pray with you, but we'll just visit and get to know each other." And she looked at me and said, "Well I guess so." And within three months, I'll never forget it, she was sitting outside her door in the wheelchair and there was a man sitting outside his room the next room down, and she goes, "George, have you met my minister? Did I introduce you to my minister?" And I was just like whoa! And then the next time I went, she went to the director of the nursing home and wanted to know if I could have the blessing. I happened to be there around lunchtime and she wanted to know if her minister could have the prayer at the meal. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

One of the churches where I served there was some hesitancy at first, they didn't raise a big fuss, but there was this [ambivalent] kind of situation and I was there for three years and then...the bishop asked me to move, the church had asked me to stay. There was a women's circle and one of them reported to me what was said, which I appreciated and I found it extremely affirming. They said we were talking and it was just kind of this conversation kind of thing, it wasn't an official discussion, but one of the women said and several others agreed, "Oh good grief, now we'll probably have to have a man." I loved it, of course I loved it. So I think there was a real turnaround. And they did, and I'm sure that was said partially tongue-in-cheek, and they had a guy they loved who followed me, so it all worked out well. Yeah, there were some people who changed their minds. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The question, then, seemed not to be how to increase acceptance, but rather how best to create those experiences and contact between clergy women and those congregations that are resistant to their leadership (or even their existence).



Overall, my informants widely shared the belief that it is easier for women who followed other successful women in positions, even when their predecessors had a difficult time there. Those informants who did follow in other women's footsteps generally followed women who had served in associate or solo pastor roles (i.e., generally not as senior pastors), and they usually felt they were accepted more readily because of the successful ministries of their predecessors. This supports what my informants viewed as what had the greatest likelihood of changing hearts and minds and encouraging greater receptivity among congregations: the single biggest factor in acceptance seemed to be previous exposure to effective clergy women. When describing her successful ministry at her current placement, one informant directly attributed much of her acceptance as a senior pastor to a former associate pastor's work there:

Here in this setting, by and large people have been very receptive, and part of that has to do I believe with the fact that one of the associate pastors before me, [name of clergy woman], had a wonderful ministry here, and I think she brought down some barriers. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Others believed that successful placements could have wider-ranging and profound long-term implications, as Lehman also found (1985). In fact, sometimes entire communities benefitted:

In Henderson County, there are 13 churches and 11 of them have been served by women. And I think that's because [a clergy woman in the KAC] was there in 1976 and had a positive experience and a positive impact on the community, so it's not hard to place a woman in Henderson County. Or even Union County (a neighboring county). And in fact the Episcopal priest in Henderson County is a woman, which 20 years ago would have never happened. So I think the more that we have good, strong women and they have good, strong experiences, then they pave the way for the next person. And I think that's why we have to be very intentional in making sure women have every opportunity to succeed. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Despite all of the obstacles in their paths, overall the informants for this study believe they have been successful and effective. To the question of whether they would describe their overall ministry as effective, every clergy woman interviewed responded, “Yes.” Further, when asked about the ministries of clergy women in the KAC as a group, they also gave very favorable evaluations.

Related to that, they commonly expressed feeling a sense of responsibility not only to their calls and their congregants, but to the other women of the KAC, both contemporaries and those who will follow, because they knew that if their ministries were not effective, it would likely have far-reaching effects for other clergy women as well.

I think it is similar to racial issues—if someone [of color] does well, people say it is just that person, but if someone [of color] does poorly, it is because that is the way “those people” are. I didn't dwell on that, but I probably kept in the back of my mind: if I fail, it reflects badly on the rest of the women in the Conference. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

Clearly, then, the informants' work and ministries strongly affect their churches and communities, both now and in the future. As importantly, though, their work also affects (and is affected by) their families, as the next chapter will discuss.

## Summary

As the informants in this research described, both support and resistance were critical elements in their lives. The support, both that of loved ones and of others, provided them with the resources they needed not only to persevere, but usually to thrive. While the support from those loved ones was most important, support from within the

organizational leadership was also viewed as very valuable, and nearly three-quarters of informants believed that overall, the leadership was generally supportive.

That support also made bearable the resistance that all informants faced at some points. While this research did not attempt to quantify precisely the strength of resistance informants faced, every informant faced at least minor levels of resistance, at least three-quarters faced at least moderate resistance, and at least one-quarter faced strong resistance. The sources of resistance varied, but perhaps most surprisingly, that resistance sometimes came from within the organizational structure itself. That resistance in particular was discouraging to clergy women and damaging to their careers. While no informant believed that the entire Cabinet was resistant, at least one-quarter believed that individuals who were parts of various Cabinets over the clergy women's careers were resistant to their work and made the informants' careers more challenging. The clergy women generally expected some level of resistance from the outside, but as one informant put it, "You don't expect the mouth to bite its own hand." Because this research was exploratory and I did not ask about the degree of resistance faced, I believe that if I were to conduct a follow-up study and ask specifically about that, I would likely find more informants faced resistance from at least some Cabinet officials, and some may define the resistance they have faced as relatively stronger than I have.

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<sup>1</sup> This informant distinguished between organizing and doing in the quote above, and this is significant. In order to organize such an action, she believes, the clergy women of the Conference (as well as any men who might join them) would have to form a coalition to accomplish a specific goal or set of goals; they would have to make a conscious decision to ally themselves together against another group who currently "runs the show", as the same informant noted elsewhere. This would require a sort of class consciousness as well as a willingness in some ways to defy the current organizational leadership. In contrast, she believes that the outcome—the election of this other clergy

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woman as bishop—will happen, but not because of any organized, unified, conscious decision by the women as a bloc. This distinction is also significant because an organized group of clergy women would likely have much more power to affect greater and more profound change than simply a group of individuals, both women and men, who will presumably elect this particular clergy woman because they believe she is an exceptional minister. In either case, because clergy men in the KAC outnumber clergy women by such a great margin, clergy men, if they vote as a united group, will have the power to vote to elect whomever they choose.

<sup>2</sup> According to a former district superintendent, “In Kentucky Methodism it [a covenant meeting] is a time when the DS introduces the new pastor to the SPRC [Staff-Parish Relations Committee] of the new appointment. They get acquainted and then covenant together to be partners in ministry. Usually the DS shows the new pastor the parsonage (if there is one) also. The leaving pastor is not part of the covenant meeting.

## **Chapter 6: Clergy Women's Families**

This work has previously examined the topic of clergy women's families as they relate to many parts of their lives: their calls, their paths into ministry, how they affect placements, and how their support and resistance affect the clergy women's careers and lives. This chapter will consider other aspects of the family<sup>1</sup>, specifically how they affect and are affected by the clergy women's work.

### Family Structure

As for most of us, clergy women's families are very important members of their lives, members who play fundamental roles in their personal and professional lives, for better or for worse. Sometimes they provide critical encouragement, feedback, and support in a variety of ways, and at other times, they present the largest challenges and strongest and most affective resistance in their loved ones' ministries.

Family structure affected experiences and perspectives of clergy women, both in the literature, as noted in Chapter 2, as well as in the present research. The informant's marital status and whether she had children, especially school-aged children, had a tremendous impact on her ministry.

Informants' family structures varied, although the majority were married with children. While a few questions regarding family specifically referred to the clergy women's husbands and/or children<sup>2</sup>, most provided the informants with the freedom to define the term family however they chose (see Appendix B).

## Single Women

Seven informants were currently single: three were never-married, two were divorced, one was widowed, and one was both divorced and widowed. None of the never-married women had children; each of the formerly-married women had children, ranging in age from school-aged through their sixties.<sup>3</sup>

The informants in this research who were single experienced both benefits and challenges because of their marital status. Since clergy often itinerate<sup>4</sup>, single clergy, and especially those with no children, typically relocate on their own. This offers them at least one significant advantage over those with different family structures: they generally only have to think of their needs when facing a move because they do not have other people that they have to consider.

I think that [being single] is an asset [for itinerancy]. I don't have to think about where I'm going. I don't have to worry with what school district my kids are gonna be in, or anybody else's job or sports or whatever. If I get a call, I get up and go. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Sometimes they even see their availability and willingness to itinerate as needed as a gift that they can share with others:

One thing I feel like I can tell the superintendents to tell the bishop [is] that when you're making appointments that I truly am available to go wherever they need to send me, and that may free up somebody else to stay put or to stay in an area where they can accommodate a spouse, where they don't have to make that adjustment for me. That's kind of a little gift I can give other preachers, that I'm willing to give that. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Single clergy women, especially those without children at home, may also benefit in the performance of their work. Because they generally have fewer people to consider and

fewer schedules to juggle, some informants noted that they were able to focus more on their work and give more to their congregants.

Probably in doing what I do right now, [being single] is a help. I work very long hours, this is a very large congregation, there is always something going on. We laugh about death by meeting, but I just look at my calendar—here's an evening meeting, evening meeting...Busy. Since I am single, it means there isn't a husband being cranky because I'm not there. At my age there wouldn't be small children, but there aren't older children or adult children clamoring for my attention. It gets back to the Apostle Paul's comment on singleness, and those people can be more focused on ministry...I don't have the conflict of "your job is demanding too much of you." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I think being single has been pretty freeing in that fact that I am free to come and go, pretty much all hours, and do what needs to be done without having to coordinate with a spouse. That's been an advantage. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

They were also able to respond more quickly to emergencies in their congregations because they did not need to be concerned with the needs of other people:

If there's a call at 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the morning, I get up and go. I don't have to worry about trying to make sure everybody's in place and somebody's going to be looking out for everybody else. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

At the same time, however, single clergy sometimes faced different challenges than those who are married. While it was easier for them to move, it was perhaps more challenging to fit into the new community, especially for those without children. Single women believed they are often treated differently by their congregations and feel even more isolated than they think their married colleagues do. Some informants, for example, noted that they believe that because of their single status, they are rarely

invited to socialize in the same ways as married couples because they are perceived as “third wheels”.

I don't have that extra body attached to me, so it makes it uncomfortable when a lot of your church members are married, and you become a third wheel when you're by yourself. I think because I'm not attached, I don't have that spouse there, I think it can be a hindrance to some. They just don't know how to take you. I have had clergy friends who tell me that they've been invited over to other couples in their church's house for a meal. It's rare that I get invited. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

My informants also thought they had greater expectations placed on their time because they were believed to have more free time since they were not married, especially those without children.

"You don't have these other responsibilities, so you can do that and be there."...It was like, "I need you to do such and such. I was asked to do that, but my husband wants me at home with him." It was like, "You loser, you don't have a husband who wants you at home with him, so you go do this." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

“She's single so she doesn't have to worry about...whatever.” The kids need a chaperone to go on a mission trip, well the pastor's single, she can do it. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Informants who are not married and who do not have children felt that sometimes their family responsibilities went unrecognized and were perceived as less significant. All single, never-married informants had close extended families and family responsibilities, yet they felt that those were given less respect than they would have been if their families included husbands or children.



As discussed in Chapter 5, ministry is often a lonely profession, and while married clergy most often have a spouse for support and companionship, single clergy usually do not have such a mobile support system.

There are some stresses that happen because you are single, because you don't have the automatic person to be there with and partnered with for emotional support. And, you know, if I had a husband he might get home at a better hour and can take the dog out. Now it is just me and I'm trying to figure out how to get home and take the dog out. Just the little nitty-gritties of life. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Another concern single informants shared was that the never-married (and some formerly-married) women generally wanted to date and marry, but this presented special challenges.<sup>5</sup> Several of them said that they had experienced problems simply finding eligible men to date, especially those in more rural areas. Even when eligible men were available, they found that those men were sometimes hesitant to date a clergy woman.

I think it [her career] has been a hindrance in that not too many men are excited about dating a female preacher. And I think it's been a hindrance because I've been out in rural communities where there just aren't that many available men...There have been times when I have been introduced to men and deliberately not told them what I do for a living because it changes the whole dynamic, every time. In fact there was a guy [who lived near her] who wanted to date me and he asked me—I didn't open up up front with him—but he asked me what I did for a living. When I said preacher, you could have... he just was floored, and that was pretty much the last I saw him. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Another issue informants faced was that even strictly platonic friendships or relationships with men had to be handled carefully. Because of the strong emphasis in Christianity on sexual purity, clergy women worked very hard to avoid any hint of impropriety.

I tried to be very careful, very conscious of my relationships within the congregations, to not ever put myself in a position when anybody would

call to question my relationship with any of the men. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Even when interacting with male colleagues, clergy women were very conscious of this pressure, as were the clergy men:

My predecessor in this district, we live within three or four miles of each other, and when we would do the covenant meetings, he would not let me ride with him. He was not going to be in a car traveling with me by himself! Well, I think it's the stupidest thing I ever heard of! He and I were supposed to go to on a day trip, we were just going to go down for a meeting and come back, and when he picked me up, his wife was in the car with him! (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

At other times, concern about perceptions of inappropriateness meant that even friendships were affected:

I can't even invite a male friend from out of state to stay at my house. What if the house caught on fire in the middle of the night and we both had to run outside? People would never stop talking and it would be the end of my career. If I had a husband at home, no one would have a problem with it. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Never-married clergy women faced another issue as well: since the UMC has an official policy against ordaining homosexual members, there is a sort of compulsory heterosexuality, so I asked my informants if they felt the need to somehow demonstrate their heterosexuality. In all but one case, the women expressed sentiments that they do to some degree feel that pressure.

I think I have been very conscious of the relationships I've developed with other single women in the congregations I've been a part of. The same deal with my relationships with the men, [I] just go out of the way to show that those relationships are above-board and not anything that might be suggestive of something going on that's not right. And I think it's a shame

that we have to be concerned about developing friendships with the same gender folks for that reason, that you're automatically put under suspicion. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I also asked if anyone had ever questioned their sexuality because of their marital status:

The one church that refused to have me as a pastor, his argument was, "Well what if she comes to our church and comes out of the closet?" And that was after some female clergy in the west came out of the closet, so all females then are coming out of the closet. [laughing] (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Even before asking those questions of informants, however, I found a very interesting commonality: when asked about their marital status, each of the never-married women said that they were single and had never been married, but they also each made comments that supported their heterosexuality then and at various other points throughout the interview: "I don't have children and I don't have a husband at this time," "I've been out in rural communities where there just aren't that many available men," and "I had a steady boyfriend and everything was going great..." for example. Because they made most of these comments before I asked any questions about demonstrating their heterosexuality (which, as noted in Chapter 3, I chose to assume), I also assume that they may generally respond to those types of questions in similar ways (i.e., providing "evidence" of heterosexuality), perhaps preempting any suspicions regarding their sexuality.

It was not only the single women themselves who recognized this was an issue for unmarried clergy, however, as one married informant stated with dismay:

I think single women are often viewed as, “Why is she not married? Is she a lesbian?” That's in there, which can be a real issue for single women, and I think that's a societal thing for men and women; if people aren't married it's, “What's wrong with them?” (Deacon in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

So the single, never-married clergy women have the added pressure to demonstrate that they are conforming to all of the organization's (and the larger society's) requirements, including sexuality, and they also recognize that they are being scrutinized on this criterion in addition to all of the other issues on which they are evaluated and judged. This region, informants speculate (and I would strongly agree), has relatively rigid gender role expectations, and in contrast to how mainline churches usually experience less tension with the larger society than more fundamental groups, in some ways, the opposite is true in some areas of this Conference, likely because of the more fundamental character of the communities in which the clergy women often serve.

Although they are also unmarried, none of the single but previously married women (who also each had children) experienced the same pressures to “confirm” their heterosexuality, perhaps because they had been married in the past or perhaps because they have children, which some assumed was an indicator of heterosexuality.

It was not only single women whose marital status affected their work, however; married women also experienced benefits and challenges because of their marital status.

### Married Clergy

As might be expected, many of the benefits single clergy women enjoyed were experienced as challenges for married clergy women, and vice versa. The largest

advantage and challenge for clergy women with spouses had to do with itinerancy. As described previously, elders are expected to be willing to itinerate anywhere they are called within the Conference, which in this case covers nearly the entire state of Kentucky, and theoretically, clergy can be relocated every year, although this generally does not happen. However, it is very rare for clergy to remain in the same area throughout their careers (or even throughout the course of their children's educations), so most still had to relocate and move their families at some point. Unlike single women, though, married women typically had built-in support systems and were usually not moving to the new area completely alone. Having a spouse also meant there was someone else to share the responsibilities that come with relocating. Some also believed, as noted above, that married couples were more likely to be invited to social gatherings, again giving married clergy an advantage in integrating more easily into the new community.

Some married clergy women even found their families to be assets when it came to the performance of their pastoral duties. As noted above, clergy women's interactions with men are highly scrutinized, and several informants discussed this specifically in relation to pastoral visitations. Some talked about taking their husbands along when visiting the homes of single men, for example, to remove any question of impropriety. Others described how their husbands were willing to fill whatever roles were needed at the new church, whether it was as a Sunday school teacher, a Bible study leader, or even a maintenance worker.

At the same time, however, married clergy women face a number of drawbacks that their single counterparts do not, many related to itinerancy. Married clergy women have to consider the impact of a move on other people. In fact, itinerancy was such an issue that it caused a few clergy to question whether to answer their calls:

The biggest hesitancy I had, and it caused me to wait before I was ordained, had to do with my husband and me working out what being an elder meant, and it really was not so much about ordination as it was that in our church, an ordained elder itinerates. And he didn't sign up for that when we married and that was a pretty big change. We processed for several years what that meant. He came to a point where he said, "This will be hard, but do it because I believe God called you to this and I would never interfere with you living out that calling." So it was about a ten-year period from the time I entered seminary until I was ordained as an elder, and that's when the itineration period started for me. There was about a ten-year period where he and I wrestled with the specifics of me being called to itinerant ministry. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

As discussed in Chapter 5, itinerancy sometimes means that clergy husbands have to request transfers, give up jobs, or even change careers in order to share one household. School-aged children may have to change schools, sometimes at critical times, and leave friends and extracurricular activities. When it is in the family's best interests for at least some members not to relocate, the choice for clergy women is either to move without at least part of their families or to turn down the position, which is generally not a good choice for their careers.

Right before Conference the DS calls me and said I have a church for you. And they had a woman before and I knew they would accept me, but it was a two and a half hour drive from my home. And I said, "I can't minister to people two and half hours from me. I can't be part of their life and I can't be part of their sorrow and their joy." And I did the thing you don't do in the Methodist church: I turned it down. (Local Pastor, 50s, second-career clergy)

She did not get another appointment for that year, and as of our interview, had no prospects for the next year either.

Others said that they had turned down or considered turning down positions for the sake of their families, and in some cases, they believe their careers have suffered long-term because of that decision.

I put some constraints on that [where she was willing to go] because my kids were in school and my husband's job at that time, and I just asked to stay in that general area. And if I hadn't done that, I could have probably gotten a better appointment, but I put some geographical limitations on myself then. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I told the bishop that I didn't think we could handle more than an hour of distance [between her and her husband's jobs], and he said, "That's fine, but what you need to understand is if you limit the Cabinet, we will honor that because we will not do anything that puts more stress on your family, but then don't turn around and be frustrated because you don't get an appointment that's challenging." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Refusing a placement is not a good career move, but moving the entire family is not always practical either. Nearly always because of career conflicts, at least seven clergy women interviewed have lived apart from their husbands at some point during their ministries. While the clergy women felt this was a family matter, a few expressed concern that others, whether Cabinet members or congregants or both, believed it was problematic, particularly if there were children involved. The implication seemed to be that marriages and, if applicable, their children might suffer, and with the strong emphasis in the religion on family and the expectation that family should come first, especially for women, clergy women faced additional scrutiny regarding any decisions that affected their families. In all cases, the clergy women believed they were effective and that their living arrangements worked, even if they were not ideal.

Itinerancy is not the only issue for married informants, however. Another significant point of concern is the sheer demands the profession places on its members. In some cases, informants believed that their marriages were negatively affected because their time and attention was always seen as someone else's, never exclusively their husbands'. This placed a great deal of stress on marriages and in at least of couple of cases, endangered the survival of the marriage.

### Clergy Husbands

Married clergy women face another obstacle that neither single women nor clergy men face: the iconic image of the clergy wife and the contradictions that arise when the clergy "wife" is actually a clergy "husband". Clergy wives have traditionally played particular types of roles in their husbands' ministries. While these expectations are generally unwritten, they are nonetheless well-known and strong. When husbands are the clergy spouses, however, congregants, the clergy member, and her husband are all confronted with seeming inconsistencies, contradictions, and unclear gender expectations. When asked about how their congregations view their husbands, the most common response was similar to this:

They don't know what to do with him. So they don't really expect anything of him. They think it's great when he ... whatever, but no one really knows what he is supposed to do. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

The notion of what the clergy spouse is "supposed to do" is one that is very familiar to most church members. The socially constructed roles of pastor and pastor's spouse are



nearly as entrenched as those of women and men in general. The most common result of the uncertainty, however, is that married clergy women, like their unmarried counterparts, are expected to fill both the roles of the pastor and the pastor's wife, while the husband is free to sit on the sidelines, although they frequently choose to play more active roles.

When you are female, you are expected to be the minister and do the potluck. You are expected to be both spouses. I don't come with a ready-made spouse to come and play piano. So I'm expected to do the baby showers, and wrap the gifts, and all that stuff as well as pastor. (Elder in Full Connection, under age 50, second-career clergy)

Sometimes couples negotiated what his role would be in her ministry, although most often, the congregations' (and often the clergy women's) expectations for the husbands' responsibilities as clergy spouses remained ambiguous and usually involved simply staying in the background and occasionally stepping in to do what was needed (ex., teaching a Sunday school class, leading a Bible study, or singing in the choir).

When we married, I made it very clear that you do not need to go to work with me. I said I will not put you in that situation where you are the spouse. They aren't paying you, so you don't have to go to anything. If you want to, if you are a member of that church and decide to join that congregation, then that's your role. If I need you to help me with something, I will ask, and it's yours to say I prefer not to. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

While some clergy husbands do choose to actively participate in their wives' ministries, the primary issue is that they are not expected to do so, neither by the congregations nor (usually) by their wives.

## Uninvolved Husbands

Whereas most husbands played a combination of supportive and background roles, some husbands were actually antagonistic toward their wives' ministries. Sometimes because of role conflicts (wife versus clergy) and sometimes because it affected their husbands' lives in ways the husbands did not like, some informants said their ministries came between them and their spouses, at least on an occasional basis. In fact, a few informants specifically noted that their husbands did not share their strong commitment to their faith, and this affected not only the clergy women's ministries, but their marriages as well. When the person who was most important in their lives came into direct conflict with the work they believed God had called them to do, informants faced incredible challenges, sometimes literally having to choose between their call and career and their marriages. The stronger the resistance, as noted in Chapter 5, the more difficult and painful it was for the clergy women to continue in ministry.

## Informants with Children

As least as challenging as spouses, however, were children. The majority of informants (N=32) had children. Informants with children became ministers ranging from several years before their children's births to after their children were adults. As with marital status, the clergy women saw both benefits and challenges as a result of their parental status.

## Benefits of Parenthood

Parenthood sometimes provides tangible benefits to clergy women's careers. One major advantage for those with school-aged children is more "automatic" entrée into a new community because of the children's ties to schools, classmates, and extracurricular activities. Clergy women who were mothers often found themselves more easily integrated into church life through their children's involvement in the church's children's or youth ministry. Some even believed that having children allowed them to interact with congregants on more of a peer level: not only as their pastor, but as another mother.

I think that probably people see me as more approachable because I had snotty kids like they did [laughing], and I was open with that. When they weren't making good grades, when he was getting called to the principal's office, when he was being a typical ADHD boy, and I was open about that, I didn't try to hide it, I shared frustrations, I sought help, I did all the things I needed to do, and I was pretty transparent about that, and I think that probably made me more approachable. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

At the church I attend I am seen as just another mom and church member and I can talk to other moms about "mom things". (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

Some even felt that motherhood provided them with unique perspectives and insights for their ministries:

I am a mommy twenty-four hours a day. I'm a mommy at home and a mommy at work. I see my ministry as being a spiritual mother hen to these young people entrusted to my care, and I'm not sure men approach it that way. My experiences as a mother have opened an awareness of God's presence that I wouldn't have otherwise....The births of my children have revealed the meaning of the cross to me, and it is a very female thing. All three of my children were born by C-section, and that has made

very real the communion language of "this is my body, broken for you". At a concert over the summer...I did the benediction and was holding my baby in my arms, and it just seemed like God was saying to me, "Was he worth it? Was it worth it to bring him into life for your body to be broken?" Of course! "Then don't you think you were worth it to me?" That totally changed the image of the cross for me...In our lives we do suffer and struggle for a little while, but in that, God is giving life to something that is beyond our wildest imaginations, something wonderful and beautiful and good, and it is worth it. We look back and say, "Yeah, that was totally worth it." (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

[How being a mother affects her ministry:] My understanding of what kind of things we balance as parents. The way I interact with people, common experiences, the way I can identify with others. Compassion. It has made me less judgmental, maybe humbler. Really, it is humbling to be a parent. Primarily in developing my character, developing who I am. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Whether being a mother equips clergy women with different skills and insights or not, several believed that they are perceived as having those advantages, and congregants relate to them accordingly; the clergy mothers understand the experiences and challenges of parenting intimately and they can relate to congregants on a more-equal footing.

I've always been very understanding of families and family dynamics and what's going on behind the scenes before people get to church and all that kind of stuff. I mean, I'm a person who experiences the "unholy hour" before church just like everybody else, where you're trying to get everybody dressed and find those Sunday shoes and do the whole deal, and then I've gotta go teach Sunday school and love on every old lady and preach twice, you know? While my kids are acting like heathens somewhere. [laughing] (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

In addition to the advantages for clergy women, their children sometimes also benefit from their mother being in ministry. Some talked about their children having exposure to

different people and experiences than they otherwise would, and others shared that they think their children are more compassionate, understanding, and flexible because of their work. The children see other benefits as well:

I took an appointment to a four-point charge [meaning she pastored four churches simultaneously], so my boys started going to church with me. My younger one was part of the youth group there. My son was at [one high school] and the youth group drew from three other high schools, so they were a whole different set of kids. One night we were driving home from youth group and my son said to me, "Mom, I'm glad you are pastor of all these churches; I wouldn't have met all these pretty girls if it wasn't for that!" So that was his comment, it just broadened his range of people that he met. So I think, if anything, it was a good thing for them. (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

#### Challenges of Parenthood

Being a clergy woman and a mother is not always easy, however, either on the parent or on the children. As a group, those clergy women who had children at home during their ministries seemed to have faced the most difficulties and concerns regarding their families. In fact, family structure even played a key role in the type of ordination some clergy women chose to seek:

It's a lot easier being married and being a deacon rather than an elder. I don't know if my marriage could survive me in ministry as an elder. It probably plays a great deal in being a deacon. And I am pretty sure I could not be a mommy and be an elder. So it [her family structure] has been more of an internal navigator for my career rather than an external gate holder. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

As with spouses, itinerancy was a huge issue with informants who had younger children, as noted above, because it meant that children's best interests also had to be

considered. While most informants believed that Cabinet officials considered their needs and requests when making placement decisions, in a few cases (at least three) informants and their families had very bad experiences, which made difficult jobs even harder and affected not only the clergy member, but her entire family long-term. Although this quote was included in the preceding chapter, it deserves further consideration here:

They moved me when my son was in his senior year of high school. I begged them. I was two years away from having my DMin [Doctor of Ministry], and that church was really supportive of me doing my dissertation and all that, so I begged them to let me stay there two more years to get my son out of high school and let me finish my DMin. Well, he moved me anyway and took my son from a private school with a class of four to the largest high school in Kentucky with a class of 1000. Then, when we were in [city name] we had our grandchildren living with us (our oldest son was going through a divorce) and they moved with us to [another city]. And part of me not wanting to move again was not only had we just closed on our house in November—they told me in April I was moving—but we would lose our granddaughters because the court would not let us move that far away from their father. So in my case, family matters have never been considered.... I've always been at the mercy of the appointive cabinet; they've never cared about my family at all. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

Even when itinerancy did not present significant challenges, though, mothering and ministering frequently created tremendous conflicts for informants. Children often had to make sacrifices for their parents' ministries, usually without their consent. Because children often see the worst parts of ministry and the negative treatment that their parents receive, they sometimes develop a negative perception not only of the profession of ministry, but also of Christianity by extension, and choose to distance themselves from their parent's faith when they grow older. Some return but some never do. One of my informants described the agonizing realization that answering her call might ultimately drive her children away from the faith that she was dedicating her life to

promoting and sharing. Others questioned whether they might be sacrificing their own children for those of others.

Often I had to put my kids second, and I had to choose somebody else's kids over mine. It was hurtful to my children. And I had pastors come me when I was a superintendent and talk about what was happening to their kids and to their grown kids and that their kids don't go to church, that kind of thing, and finally, I remember telling this one pastor, I said, "You know, I think there's a special heaven for pk's [preachers' kids], even if they don't go to church, because they're special. Because they've given something up, they've sacrificed in order for their parents to be in ministry." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

In some cases, their situations were so concerning that the clergy women felt their mothering role had to come first, even if it meant leaving ministry:

I had my oldest son while I was in that mission. I was pregnant with him when I moved up there, and soon after I moved into that appointment I developed ringworm, and I'm sure it was because of the nature of the building and the filth in the building. Well, then I had him, so I'm pastoring in that culture, and I was Rev. [her first name] and he was Rev. Baby and in that culture, everybody's baby belongs to everybody else, so he was everybody's baby. So I went to the bishop, and as a new mom I was very concerned for his health, and I said—I had been in this appointment for two years with very little support—and I said "Well, you've heard of preventative medicine? This is a preventative move because if I'm not moved, I probably won't be in ministry very much longer." I looked at the bishop and said, "I want my baby to have hair before he has lice." And that was how I was feeling. I was burning out and stressed with a new baby and I said, "Move me." (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I think that it was really after I was at [an extension ministry] and life was going nuts for me that I realized I had to prioritize my life. My statement was, "[That ministry] can go out and get another director. My children cannot go out and find another mother," and so that's when I had to prioritize. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Clergy women's children sometimes faced other challenges as well. Some were opposed to the very thought of their mothers as ministers. For a few informants, it was a matter of their children's opposition to women in ministry. In other cases, though, their children were simply embarrassed that their mother was a minister, especially if their friends disapproved.

[Her daughter] was always a bit embarrassed that her mom was a preacher, that people would say, "You mean your dad?" And she would say, "Well, my dad but also my mom." So she was always a little embarrassed by that. She's proud of me, but she really did start to straddle the fence about "my mom the preacher". (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Finally, clergy women confronted the same role conflicts and other issues that all working parents do. Unlike many professions, however, clergy are never "off duty". As clergy members and as mothers, they are expected to work multiple twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week jobs, and both demand their best. As one informant noted,

It was hard, I mean it was hard on them and it was hard on me. Think about it, a nurse does not take her children to work with her, but I do. And so the kids learned early on how to manipulate that. You know, they know just when to misbehave to embarrass you the worst. They know just what to say to get you flustered or to get you. It was hard on all of us. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Families, then, both aid and challenge clergy women in their work. As for most of us, though, their families and their careers are important enough to them that they do everything they can to find ways to make both work as well as possible, and most informants believe that they truly are doing the best job at both that they can be.



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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will be using the term “family” to refer to informants’ spouses and/or children unless otherwise noted; while I recognize that each informant has a family, regardless of marital or parental status, this is the term that the clergy women used and the way in which they used it, so I will do so as well for the sake of consistency.

<sup>2</sup> When discussing informants’ children throughout this research, I am including their biological or adopted children and any stepchildren who were parts of their lives. Of the thirty-two informants with children, thirty-one had a combination of biological, adopted, and stepchildren, and one had only stepchildren.

<sup>3</sup> I will primarily be considering single women without children in this section because they had the most in common; informants with children will be addressed below because in this case, parental status seems to affect clergy women’s experiences more than marital status alone does.

<sup>4</sup> All three of the single, never-married women in this study were Elders in Full Connection; as previously discussed, elders are expected to itinerate.

<sup>5</sup> Some of those who are married but were single when entering ministry also voiced some of these same concerns.

## **Chapter 7: Symbols and Symbolic Actions**

The final area I explored was the importance of symbols and symbolic actions in my informants' lives and ministries. Religion is constructed on symbols and symbolic actions that are very meaningful to its adherents, and as official representatives of the organization, clergy are directly responsible for relating and perpetuating the meanings and significance of those symbols. Many of the challenges that clergy women encounter have to do with very powerful social constructions of what it means to be a minister, including who can and should serve as a minister, as well as strong power structures filled with traditional, patriarchal images and hierarchies, as discussed previously.

The resistance that clergy women face often comes as a result of the challenges they present to some of those iconic images and the long-held assumptions that some believe are central to the religion. Clergy women raise questions both by their presence and by the fact that they call into question the validity of those very assumptions.

For clergy, one of the fundamental issues is the authority with which they are invested. The ordination process grants the official authority of the organization to the clergy member to perform the most significant and meaningful rites and rituals. For men, this authority is easy to claim: if they have the credentials, most often they are automatically granted the authority by congregants. For women, however, simply having the credentials is not enough to secure their authority and ensure their perceived right to lead in the eyes of congregants.

Clergy women are aware of these disparities and act in both conscious and perhaps less-conscious ways to challenge and reduce them. I explored several ways that they seek to overcome obstacles and claim this authority.

## Clergy Women and Authority

Part of the issue with authority has to do with social distance: the person in power is presumed to be somehow set apart from others. In this case, the clergy member is set apart by God and by the organization and authorized to lead, perform important rites and rituals, counsel, and conduct official business of the church. That person is also viewed as an official representative of God, one authorized to speak on behalf of God, who is traditionally a masculine image in Christianity. When the one representing that masculine God is a man, argues Laura Geller (1995), congregants have no problem directly, generally unquestioningly, and even unconsciously, transferring that authority onto the clergy member. When that representative is a woman, however, that process is less-automatic. Congregants often have to face questions and assumptions they did not know they held, and may suffer cognitive dissonance when trying to resolve the conflicting images of an assumed male God and a female representative.

To quote Geller, herself a rabbi and scholar, "People experience women rabbis [and other clergy women, she notes] differently from the way they experience male rabbis. And that difference changes everything: the way they experience prayer, their connection to the tradition, and even their image of divinity," (Geller 1995:245). She goes on to say that when women function as clergy, the division between clergy and laity begins to break down and that people do not attribute the same power and prestige to women as they do to men, so there is less social distance between them. Even the most sacred rituals become more mundane and lose much of their mystery. This reduced social distance and the lessened power and status afforded to women lead to the breakdown of the hierarchy in the organization. People see women on more of a peer-level, regardless of their position or other authority status. In short, the gender of

their clergy member matters in how congregants experience religious services, rites, and rituals.

Gender also matters in how congregants relate to clergy: clergy women are more freely hugged, frequently receive personal comments and questions, and are asked to do things that clergy men are not. Several informants shared that they had been asked to be childbirth coaches of congregants, for example, and noted that not only would their male colleagues not have been asked, but that it would have been inappropriate for them to have served their members in that way.

Further, Mark Chaves (1997) argues that religious traditions that reject clergy women tend to be those that take a more literalist and gendered approach toward views of God. So, the thinking goes, in order to represent a masculine God accurately, a minister must be male himself. Women are not able to represent God because they are not male, and thus should not be ordained. It is the visual representation that matters, as well as all of the presumed characteristics that accompany those visual cues.

Most who follow the Christian faith likely do not consciously possess these ideas, but they are nonetheless evident in teachings and tradition. Unquestionably, there is widespread resistance to women as clergy, as discussed previously, particularly clergy who are higher in the hierarchy and those who have full authority to perform all rites and fill all roles in the organization, such as those who are ordained as elders in the UMC. In contrast, those whose authority is more limited to performing some rites and filling some roles, or those ordained as deacons, and those who have limited authority over particular groups, such as children, for example, face less resistance, even within denominations that grant full ordination rights to women, as discussed previously. When the face and the voice representing the church are a woman's, congregations have to

consciously choose whether to follow, even among gender-open denominations. Even when what the clergy are saying is the same, the reception may not be:

I think the message is the same [whether presented by clergy women or men]. I hope the message is the same. I think it just takes them a little longer to get used to hearing it out of a female voice. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

For the most part, people are receiving a woman for the first time, every one of my appointments has been the first time a woman has been the pastor, and so there's some trepidation and you really do have to prove yourself again, and again and again, and after you've been somewhere for a while, it's not an issue anymore...But usually it takes a congregation a little while just to get used to seeing a woman in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

As voluntary organizations, churches only operate as long as they have members, and the threat of losing members often motivates leaders to perpetuate the status quo in the organization, as discussed in Chapter 4. In more religiously conservative regions, individual churches tend to be more religiously conservative. They also often tend to have ministers who are very similar to past ministers. As was also discussed in Chapter 4, congregations are often resistant to changes and tend to hold strong opinions on whom they will permit to serve, regardless of the larger organization's policies. In the words of one informant,

This is one of the few jobs in the world where it really depends on whether people like you. If you're a nurse and you're drawing blood and you draw blood one after another after another, you see people for like five minutes or whatever. It doesn't really matter if people like you. But it really matters whether or not they like you when you're their pastor. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

People have to like and feel comfortable with their pastors; they have to respect them and accept their leadership and authority. While men as a group have an easier time, women have to work harder to gain that acceptance.

Clergy women are aware of these challenges and often use various means to achieve that acceptance and thus be able to have successful ministries. I explored several factors that I suspected at least in part serve as symbolic gestures that help clergy women claim that authority.

## Language

Because most religions, including traditional Christianity, are rife with androcentric language and imagery, I asked my informants, as women and professional promoters of their faith, about those gendered concepts (see Appendix B). Perhaps surprisingly, few had any problems with either the traditional language or the images.<sup>1</sup> Most choose to use inclusive language when it is not grammatically awkward, but many do so primarily only because it was stressed very strongly in seminary. A few women said that inclusive language is important in its own right because using more inclusive language reflects a more inclusive character of the church and reflects what they see as the original intentions of God (i.e., God as both female and male, a loving parent, etc.), but for most, the use of inclusive language is simply a matter of habit. Regardless of their use of more inclusive interpretations of the Bible or sermon language and illustrations, nearly all still use terms like “Father” to refer to God because it is a relational term and because Jesus (always a specifically masculine image) called God “Father”.

I am keenly aware that some life experiences cause some individuals to tune out to masculine imagery, so I try very hard to be sensitive to that. I did have an opportunity in my twenties to attend a workshop around language, and found it moving to experience using language that I'd not used before in reference to God. I had only been exposed to masculine God-language, which I'm very comfortable with, but some of the Psalms use metaphors from Scripture that are female and it was like I had this expanded view of who God was. It did not diminish the masculine views, but it enhanced and made larger my personal experience with God. I remember it was extremely moving to me, and I was not expecting that at all. That's a tough one in our culture, it's like we went one way in our culture and now we're going another trying to find a happy medium, I suppose. I do struggle with exclusive language related to people and I think that it just shows great insensitivity. I don't know why you would do that. I understand with the God-language, that's a much bigger piece, but I don't understand why you would use "men" instead of "people". (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I try to be reasonably inclusive, but don't get hung up on it. I was saying something in my meditation for the early service about Father-language for God and talking about it being about relationship and not gender. I will often refer to God using the male pronoun. I find it awkward to say "God can do whatever God wants." You know, you go on and on and on for a whole paragraph, and somewhere along the line, that just starts sounding stilted. I don't think God is a *man*, but I was brought up that "he" could either be gender-neutral or gender-specific, and so for me to say "God can do whatever he wants" is... I find myself doing that from time to time and figure they'll just have to live with it. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I always use gender-neutral language. At Presbyterian Seminary, we were used to that, so it had become a habit to me. It became important to me at seminary. It became important to me not to ever say "God-he." Now I don't know if the people ever noticed it because I did not ever say "God-she" either. I would just arrange the words so that I didn't have to say it that way. I would say, "Our God is so and so." But of course when it came to Jesus Christ, that's "he". (Elder in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

I really try [to use gender-neutral language], but I'm traditional and that's my age and I will call God "Father" and I know, for instance, when we do the communion ritual, it says "Father Almighty," but [the senior pastor, also a woman] says "God" or "Creator God". And I just say "Father Almighty" until I remember "Oops, I need to say God". I do gender-

neutral except with God. I mean Jesus called him Father, and I know he's not a male, but to me, now there's the relational. Creator God is not relational and I believe uniquely as Christians we are in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and so to me, the Father thing is a relational thing that you don't get with Creator God...When I'm reading from the Bible and it says "brothers", I'll say "brothers and sisters" and try to be gender-neutral in many respects; it is just hard to be gender-neutral all the time. (Deacon in Full Connection, age 60 or over, second-career clergy)

In seminary we never used male language for God. Then, when I got into the local congregation, it became alienating and became more of an issue than what was going on in people's lives. In my own personal life, when I was in college and seminary, I had a hard time relating to God as father; it was just so repulsive to me, because of own relationship with my earthly father, but God has healed that, so now it is not an issue. With [the people I minister to], who are mostly coming from the South, to try to use gender-neutral language, even though in my head and heart God is not male or female, God is spirit, I think to use gender-neutral language would make that what is most important. And that isn't what is most important in this ministry. For me, what is most important is relationships, and I want to connect them to a vibrant, life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ, however that happens...There are women clergy for whom this is a serious issue, but it isn't for me. I probably failed Feminism 101 because I call God "he" all the time. At the same time, my very presence and the way I embody ministry is such a juxtaposition to that, that it breaks all the expectations and all the biases. Because when you see God work through me, it breaks the expectation that God can't work through someone who looks like her. So it is just that unspoken "God does what God wants to do." When you present God as a healing and affirming and life-giving presence rather than judgmental and unforgiving, to me that corrects a lot of misogyny. (Deacon in Full Connection, under age 50, first-career clergy)

Over the course of several interviews, a number of informants related their use of language with their views on feminism and whether they considered themselves feminists. I did not ask specifically about their personal philosophy related to feminism, but several informants broached the subject themselves when I asked about other topics, most often the matter of whether they choose to use more inclusive or more traditional language when preaching or performing other ministerial duties. While a few



do espouse explicitly feminist perspectives and tie those to their very theologies, most do not. In fact, several seemed very antagonistic toward feminism in general, making a specific point to disassociate themselves from feminism. Those who strongly denied being feminists in a few cases even connected the philosophy and those who self-identify as feminists with negative treatment and discrimination that they and other clergy women continue to receive, that they “make too much of it” and that those who consider themselves feminists often alienate others in the church. Others, though, connected their self-identified feminist views directly with their theologies.

### Body Language

It was not only verbal language that informants used to establish their authority. Several informants described particular body language that they consciously used to demonstrate that they were the leaders in given situations. Some specifically made a concerted effort to shake hands (and to do so firmly); others quickly volunteered to lead committees and other groups. One shared what she considered valuable advice that she had received earlier in her career:

A woman encouraged me to do that [to sit at the head of the table] when I was superintendent and I was made [head] of the [Conference-wide committee] and I was sitting in a chair like this [on the side of the table] to be non-authoritative because I knew who I was and I knew that I was in charge and didn't need that, and I was told by someone, and she was right, “You need to get up there because they're not going to get it otherwise.” (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

## Robes

In addition to these types of actions, informants also commonly choose to “dress for the job” by wearing robes or other clerical attire when appropriate. As several informants noted, when they are wearing “regular clothes”, people see the woman in the pulpit, but when they are wearing robes, members of the congregation see the pastor (or other clergy member).

My informants gave two main reasons for wearing robes: to remove the focus from what they were wearing and thus to neutralize their gender or sexuality, and to serve as a visual symbol of the authority they had been granted.

The most common and important reason given was so that others would not focus on what they were wearing or on the fact that they were women. Nearly universally, informants thought that congregants and others focused too much attention on their attire and too little on their messages, and they also believed they had to think much more carefully about what they wore and how it might be perceived by others if they did not wear robes (i.e., too flashy, too sexy, or otherwise inappropriate). They believed others were more likely to see them as pastors or other clergy than as sexual beings and they (the clergy women) wanted to remove that focus from their physical body.

I wear a robe to neutralize my gender. I want to take away every barrier that I can to people hearing what I'm presenting. I don't want to personally be a barrier to the gospel, so if the robe neutralizes it, that's what I am going to do. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

I preached last Sunday [without her usual robe] and for the majority of the people, they have a comment or two about the sermon, but there were probably ten, and usually women, only one man and he always kids me about wearing the ugly black robe, but of the ten people, nine I bet were women and they all had comments about my hair or the dress or, you

know? And I don't think they do that to [the senior pastor, a man]....That makes me think, "Man, I must have preached a lousy sermon! They're really concerned about the color of my dress or my hair this week? Come on!" (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

I feel that putting on a robe neutralizes me. When I've got a robe on, they can't see my dress, or they're not paying any attention to the fact that I'm wearing slacks, and so they're not seeing what I'm wearing, they're just seeing the minister. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

The second most common reason for wearing robes was that it was a visual symbol of the authority they had been granted. As discussed above, men are automatically granted authority when they take on the role of minister. Women, however, are often not automatically given that same level of respect and power. Robes serve as visual reminders, both for the congregants and the clergy members, that they are the clergy.

I normally do wear robes. I think it was one way to identify me as the pastor, where people, especially going into a church where I was the first female pastor they'd ever had, and I most of the times followed pastors who had worn robes, so that was easy just to put on the robe and I was the pastor. And it kind of was a reminder to me that I was the pastor. It just kind of takes the focus off of what I'm wearing when every Sunday you wear pretty much the same thing, the robe. I think it just puts me in the pastor mindset and the congregation. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

I think it is a sign of authority. And I think that especially for women, I think that's important. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

Similar to the wearing of robes, some informants discussed wearing a clerical collar when going on official church business, such as on hospital or other visitations or when going to prisons to visit inmates.

The associate pastor I had [in another state] would tell me she would always wear the clerical collar whenever she would go to the prison because they would always let the male pastors go right back and talk to the prisoners, but they would always make her sit and wait and wait and wait, so she started wearing a clerical collar because it didn't matter that she told them she was Rev. Betsy 'Smith', they disregarded her as a woman, so she started wearing a collar and it helped a little. (Provisional Elder, 50s, second-career clergy)

While the ministers often want to be viewed as the pastor and not as “the woman up front”, most clergy women do not try to completely mask signs of their gender.

I've had the opportunity to observe other women in ministry too, and some women will take on more masculine tendencies, from the way they dress to whatever. But probably the best descriptor of that is when I go get my hair cut. They'll say, “What do you want?” I say, “It needs to be feminine and professional. I need to be able to do it quickly and get out and get on with things, but it doesn't need to be so short as to make me look masculine at all.” (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, first-career clergy)

#### Individual versus Gendered Gifts

In fact, some see their gender as offering distinct advantages in some ways. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, previous research reveals that some, both clergy and laity, believe that God tends to instill differing abilities (“gifts and graces”, to use my informants' terminology) in women and men on the basis of their gender.

Some of my informants, though certainly not most, believed in this gendered gifting. This perspective proposes that women and men generally have qualitatively different gifts and abilities (i.e., talents, temperaments, relational styles) according to their gender; although either women or men may have any given traits, women are more likely to be collaborative, nurturing, and other-focused, for example. Therefore women who accept

this viewpoint do not want to completely neutralize or downplay their gender in any way because they believe that as women, they bring unique abilities to ministry that men cannot. Because of that, everyone benefits when women use those unique gifts to serve God and their communities.

Most informants (over thirty) disagree with this perspective, however, and believe that women and men are gifted individually and not on the basis of gender, but that women and men are socialized to develop different strengths and skills. These women also generally do not feel the need to remove their gender from the equation and also believe that everyone is better-served when women are fully included and are able to use those gifts as official and full members of the organization's leadership. Most of the informants who accept this view also acknowledge that, regardless of the nature of the gifting, congregants often respond to them as if they have those gender-specific strengths.

I think we are gifted differently as individuals, but I also think the male-female aspect is part of it. I found that there were things that I could do as a woman that were more comfortable for folks, like personal care kinds of things, that nurturing, caring side of when folks are sick or really troubled or especially when they were having difficulties with children, I found that they could turn to me as a woman more easily than they would a man. That part of it I felt is one area of giftedness where I fit really well. I think they would turn to a man in a different way. In fact there were several situations where I referred different people to male pastor friends because I felt like they really needed that ministry that I couldn't give and I had the same reciprocal thing happening where people were referred to me because they felt like they needed a woman, which is a good, healthy way to cooperate with one another. (Elder in Full Connection, 50s, second-career clergy)

#### Use of First Names

Finally, during the course of interviews, another issue emerged that I believe is related, at least in part, to social distance. After conducting several interviews, I began to notice

that clergy women much more often than not referred to each other by first names, even if they only knew the others in the most casual way (i.e., “Have you talked to ‘Mary’ about that?” “You know, ‘Sue’ was the first...”). It may be in part because there are so few clergy women in the Conference and they are generally well-known, at least by name, and they sometimes share a sense of camaraderie as members of a unique group, but I suspect that it may also be because there tends to be less social distance with women, as described above. It is worth noting, however, that when referring to men, even men with uncommon first names who are also well-known throughout the Conference, my informants tended to use titles and/or full names [i.e., Do you know John Smith? Or have you met Bishop Davis (the current bishop of the KAC)?]. Obviously in the case of the bishop, that may simply be because he is the head of the Conference, but in other cases, they referred to peers differently based on gender. While there is no way to be certain of the reasons why, it was an interesting observation, and one wonders how and whether it will change as more and more women become members of the Conference.

## Summary

Symbols and symbolic actions are important because of the meanings attached to them. Since, as a rule, women are generally given less value and respect and their leadership tends to be more limited in scope and authority, clergy women, as members of one of the most symbol-laden and powerful institutions in society, have to work to establish that they do in fact deserve the authority that they have been granted, and then they need to work continually to preserve it. Through language, attire, and actions, the informants in this research strive to present the image that they need in order to further the goals of

their work and ministries, and they actively seek to break down any barriers to that work that remain, including any presented by their gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Some speculated that their general unconcern regarding gendered language and images was likely due to their ages. Since most grew up in some branch of Christianity, it may also be the case that they were less likely to question those because they were so accustomed to them.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions for Future Research**

As an exploratory study, this research has considered the journeys of clergy women of the KAC into and through ministry, the support and resistance that often profoundly affects their lives, the families who accompany them on those journeys, and the symbolic means by which they claim and demonstrate the authority they have been granted. While many of the findings here support previous research with clergy women, several merit special attention.

### **Conclusions**

This research found that the news is mixed for clergy women of the KAC. As this work highlights, most informants believed that their overall experiences were in many ways positive, and all described their ministries as successful. As discussed in Chapter 4, some parts of their journeys were not unreasonably difficult: answering their calls, seminary and ordination experiences, and the support and encouragement of loved ones throughout those processes were generally good experiences. Chapter 5 addresses the support that many informants receive, and in some cases, that includes support from within the organization itself. Nearly all experienced strong support from at least some important members of their lives. Chapter 6 describes how clergy women are sometimes presented with choices, not necessarily easy ones, but they often have some freedom to affect the courses their ministries take. They also typically have families accompanying them on their journeys, and those families usually provide incalculable support and encouragement. Finally, Chapter 7 examines the agency that the clergy



women exercise in order to claim the authority that they have been given; they often consciously choose to act in ways that secure and demonstrate that authority.

At the same time, however, clergy women also face challenges, both from outside and, perhaps more discouraging, from inside the organization. The official policy of the UMC is that women and men are to enjoy full equality in all aspects of life, and although there has been progress in welcoming women as clergy, problems remain, particularly when women compete with men, the traditional professional leaders of the church, and when women's presence challenges the assumptions of congregants who are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with women's religious leadership.

The clergy women believed—and placement officials interviewed support their perceptions—that they sometimes had a difficult time receiving placements, and when they did, they often faced even more challenges to their leadership. They also had a difficult time receiving “more desirable” placements, if it happened at all. As this study points out, few women have reached the higher levels in the organizational leadership of the KAC. Men are more likely to pastor larger churches and to be senior pastors instead of associates. Men are also more likely to be members of the Conference leadership: as of the year of this research, only men have served as bishops in this Conference and only four women have ever served as district superintendents. Even though the official policy states that there are to be no distinctions in the church on the basis of gender, in practice, one must question how the policy is being applied.

Clergy women also continue to face tremendous resistance. That resistance takes a variety of forms, both overt and more subtle, comes from many fronts, and has an impact on those who are the targets. Nearly all of the informants for this study have

considered leaving ministry at some point, and while some of that can be attributed to the difficult nature of the work of ministry itself, much of it is because of the resistance they face and, in many cases, the lack of adequate support. In fact, when discussing the nature of my research with a seminary faculty member, he said that the KAC leadership really needs to know “what’s going on with clergy women and why they are dropping like flies”. Clergy women often felt isolated, alienated, and lonely, and in many cases, they had little support to help them. No doubt, many very promising, or even very accomplished ministers have left the profession because of the unreasonable and unfair challenges and difficulties they faced, many times strictly because of their gender.

Most concerning for many of the informants, however, was the perceived lack of support from those in power in the organization. At least one-quarter of informants believed that at least some of their concerns were not taken as seriously as they should have been at some point, and they did not feel that adequate, meaningful efforts were consistently being made to produce the changes they believe are crucial, granting women true access to all rungs of the organizational ladder and to all churches and regions in the Conference. While they recognized that the leadership could only do so much with individual churches, they did not believe that the leaders were necessarily even doing that on a regular basis. At least six also voiced concerns about past unfair treatment and retribution by some of those in positions of power if they “made too much noise”. Others described the pushback they thought was sure to come as women gain more power in the organization.

Overall, then, the greatest sources of resistance, at least for the clergy women who are serving in this Conference, are those whom they are serving and those with whom they are serving.

### Implications of Findings

If in fact clergy women are confronting these obstacles from within the KAC, and this research presents strong evidence of that, then anyone with the power to make changes has a responsibility to do so. When an organization built on love, fairness, and caring allows such poor treatment of some of its own ministers, or worse, perpetrates some of that, changes are necessary.

Several of the findings of this research should raise red flags for the leadership of the KAC, particularly as they relate to the strong resistance clergy women continue to face, both from within and outside of the organization. Nearly half explicitly stated that they do not feel that they receive adequate support or equal opportunities in the Conference. While many acknowledge that this is in part due to regional receptivity to them and their ministries, most believe that the leadership can play a significant role in producing meaningful changes in their acceptance. Most of those who perceive inadequate support and unequal opportunities also believe that an important part of the problem is that many in more powerful positions are either unaware or unconcerned that serious barriers remain, sometimes barriers constructed and maintained by the leadership themselves.

## Discussion of the Study

Because I have used social constructionism, I have chosen to focus most attention on the perspectives, meanings, and interpretations of interactions and experiences of my informants. Since I have also used standpoint theory, I have allowed their words to speak for themselves as much as possible. As noted previously, this both limits the possibility of my misinterpretations and also provides some degree of empowerment for my informants. While I believe that a more macro-level analysis, particularly one with a political economic focus, could add additional insight into the lives and work of these women and the other women in the Conference, that sort of focus would require more “objective” data and statistics that are not available at this point, such as more detailed records of total salary, career trajectories, and academic credentials, for example. As the number of women in the KAC grows and more data becomes available, however, I believe this type of analysis would be a worthwhile project.

As described in Chapter 1, the present research, conducted primarily from a micro-level of analysis, contributes most to the field of social inequalities, particularly in the areas of women and work and women and religion. Much of the research on clergy women to this point focuses on the structural issues at play and attempts to provide statistical analyses of some aspects of the lives and/or work of clergy women, and as a primarily quantitative researcher myself, I appreciate and value that work. This present research, however, attempts to fill in some of the gaps that quantitative research cannot, especially how clergy women in this particular Conference make sense of and navigate their lives and ministries. I believe they are serving an organization that they believe is good and very meaningful, although some of the people involved are mistaken in how they apply

the basic precepts of the faith. I also believe they are very actively working to counter and ultimately to change the most oppressive parts of the institution, challenging those ideas and actions both by their presence and by their actions. The few women who serve in this Conference are not merely tokens presented to appease those who want women in these positions, but instead are aware, conscious, intentional actors who work every day to make positive changes in the organization and in the communities of which they are parts. While quantitative research could (and, I believe, should) add additional layers to this research, it cannot provide the richness of these women's stories and experiences. Further, as an unstudied group, this group of women were able to add previously unheard voices to the literature on women in ministry.

As a sociologist, I have designed and conducted this research at all steps along the way from a sociological perspective; as a feminist scholar and an active member of the organization under study, I have also sought to provide different perspectives and insights that have not been included in the scholarship to this point. In many ways, these women's experiences are similar to women working in other traditionally male fields, but I believe that perhaps clergy women's experiences are somewhat unique as well. While a full analysis of how those experiences compare is beyond the scope of this work, I believe that is something that should be considered in the future.

Finally, as one with an academic specialization in research methods, I believe the work also contributes to the methodological areas of exploratory, qualitative research and to feminist research, particularly as it focuses on the stories, experiences, and meanings of my informants' lives and because it provides a forum and a voice to those who, although they seemingly have a regular platform and the power and authority to be heard, in

reality must often quiet those voices and views in order for their formal and official clerical messages to be heard and accepted.

### Further Research

The field of study of women in ministry is still fairly new and the realities and opportunities of clergy women are constantly evolving and, one hopes, expanding, so many areas remain to be examined. Based on this research, I believe that the issues of support and resistance, particularly from within the institution, need to be explored more closely. Especially in a denomination that advocates for gender equality in all parts of society, the clear inequality in the acceptance and placement of women should be cause for concern. More broadly, as women become ever more powerful members of some parts of society, religion is sometimes serving to control or even limit that power in others.

I also believe that oral histories should be recorded of those who are pioneers in this Conference, as well as in other Conferences. Most of the earliest clergy women in the KAC are still alive. In many cases, they are still serving as clergy members, and others, although retired, are still willing to share their stories. It is rare when there is an opportunity to speak with most members who were “the firsts” in an organization, but this is one such case. Unfortunately, if this work is not conducted soon, it will be lost forever.

Finally, as a primarily quantitative researcher myself, I believe that a statistical examination should be conducted to determine where the disparities are greatest and then suggestions based on that analysis should be made and provided to the

Conference. I also believe that a comparison should be made between the KAC and other Conferences, as well as a comparison of the KAC with national statistics of the UMC. In many cases, the KAC is far behind other Conferences, and I believe that this type of analysis could then provide compelling evidence of those disparities for those with the power to make changes, and perhaps produce ideas about how to bring about those changes.

### Final Thoughts

Why do the clergy women do the work that they do? It is difficult, painful, and often thankless work. In short, in the words of several informants, they do it because they “can’t NOT do it”. Despite the fact that nearly all informants had considered leaving ministry, as noted above, when asked if they thought they would actually leave before retirement, only one said that it was as likely that she would leave as would not. Everyone else said that they believed they were likely to remain in ministry until they retired. When asked why, most gave the response that they did not have a choice: God had called them to this work and they had no other choice than to persevere, whatever they faced.

The work that they do is good, both for congregants and for their larger communities, and it matters. While conducting one telephone interview, an informant asked me to wait while she responded to someone at her office door. It was a staff member, and they discussed buying shoes. When she returned to our conversation, she explained that they were helping to care for a homeless boy and he needed shoes, so she asked this

staff member to take him and buy him a couple of pairs of shoes. This child's life has been changed for the better by the work of this clergy woman, and there are countless other lives also being affected.

It is important that clergy women's work be acknowledged, encouraged, and supported because in most cases, they embody the very mission of the church. If the church does indeed want its most-able members to serve, those members need to be treated fairly, justly, and equally, regardless of their gender. The alternative is an even greater degree of alienation, likely among both clergy and laity, and possibly even more clergy women "dropping like flies".



## **Appendix A: The History of Women's Ordination in Methodism**

Methodism developed as an evangelistic reform movement within the Anglican Church centered around the work of John Wesley. One of the significant and distinguishing characteristics of the movement was the inclusion of women in positions of leadership. While those women were largely performing more diaconal roles (i.e., caring for the sick and poor) than pastoral ones (i.e., leading congregations and preaching), they were still recognized as official leaders.

At least in part because of the strong leadership and influence of his mother, Susanna, Wesley had a deep appreciation for the spiritual leadership of women. In 1761, he began licensing women as lay preachers based on their demonstration of an “extraordinary call.”

After his death in 1791, Methodism went through a period of flux regarding the role of women. In 1866, Helenor Alter Davisson, a circuit rider in the Methodist Protestant Church, became Methodism's first ordained woman, a move that was followed by a series of resolutions seeking the elimination of women's ordination. After Anna Oliver was denied ordination by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1880, she and her followers began lobbying the General Conference to remove all gender distinction regarding ordination from the *Book of Discipline*; they instead voted to revoke the licenses of all women who had been previously licensed to preach.<sup>1</sup> Anna Howard Shaw's 1880 ordination by the Methodist Protestant Church was later ruled out of order.<sup>2</sup>

This struggle continued until the 1956 General Conference when Rev. Zach T. Johnson, notably a member of the Kentucky Annual Conference, proposed amending the

provision on clergy rights in the *Book of Discipline* to state that the provisions for clergy are also to apply to women. The proposal was approved, and shortly thereafter, Rev. Maud Jensen became the first Methodist clergy woman to be granted full clergy rights. Three years later Rev. Gusta A. Robinette of the Sumatra Conference in Indonesia became the first woman to serve as district superintendent. The first American woman to become a district superintendent was Margaret Henrichsen in 1967; she served as the district superintendent of Maine's Bangor District. In 1980, Rev. Marjorie Matthews was elected as the first woman to serve as a bishop of the United Methodist Church.<sup>3</sup> As of this writing, twenty-one women have been elected as bishops in the United Methodist Church, although none have served in this capacity in the Kentucky Annual Conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Oliver was the first woman to graduate from the Boston University School of Theology. After her graduation in 1876, Oliver served successfully in two churches before her license was revoked.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Howard Shaw was the second woman to graduate from the Boston University School of Theology (1878) and became a prominent member of the women's suffrage movement. The Boston University School of Theology opened the Anna Howard Shaw Center on the centennial of her graduation. The Center's mission is to "promote structures that empower women and honor diversity."

<sup>3</sup> She was the second woman to be appointed as a district superintendent in the UMC (Western Michigan). She served four years in the Wisconsin Episcopal Area (which serves the Wisconsin Annual Conference) before retiring.

## **Appendix B: Interview Schedule**

Although the interviews were largely open-ended in terms of questions asked, I collected some common information from each of my informants:

- basic demographic information as related to education, family structure, age [see questions below]
- story of their ministry, from call through present
- questions specifically related to experiences and perceptions of their ministries and careers

I asked them to tell me about their ministry, from their call to ministry through the present time. I also asked about the following topics, if informants didn't include on their own:

- how they received their call to ministry (and how and when they responded)
- seminary experiences and other training (especially those that may be different because of their gender, as a lot of literature suggests most women experience)
- ordination experiences
- placement(s)
- career path (including perceptions of whether their careers are progressing as they planned)

### **General Questions**

Education (highest degree); where (including college and seminary)?

Age:

Marital status/family structure?

Do you have children? If so, what are their ages? If children are older, were you in ministry when they were very young?

### **General Questions Regarding Career**

Is this your first career or second (or subsequent)?

Position: What is your current position?

Length of time at position: How long have you served at your current position?

Previous appointments: What previous appointments have you held?

When were you ordained? What is your classification (elder in full connection, deacon in full connection, local pastor, etc.)?

In what other positions have you served? Where? How many other ministers worked at

the church(es) [or other appointments]?

What is your dream job? Or ideal career path?

What factors do you believe have affected your career path, including positions offered and accepted [I directed the discussion to whether she believes those are due to choices she made or to external factors if the clergy woman did not address those on her own]?

What obstacles have you faced over the course of your ministry [if she didn't mention gender specifically, I asked if there were any that she relates to her gender]?

Do you believe you have or have had different experiences because of your gender?

### **Support and Resistance**

How has your family responded to your career? Close friends? Colleagues? Your community of faith? Would you describe them as supportive? Resistant? Ambivalent?

Have you ever felt resistance to your work in ministry? If so, from whom? Family? Friends? Colleagues? Seminary professors? Other ministers? Congregations (or individual members or small groups within congregations)? Why do you think that is?

Do you believe any of that is because of your gender? Have other clergy women you know experienced any resistance?

Do you believe that your gender has ever kept you from being offered a job? What about support? What role has the support of others played in your career? What types of support have you received? From whom?

Are you involved in any form of support system? To your knowledge, does the KAC have any formal support system for clergy women? How important are connections with other clergy women? Do you have those? What role does that play in your life and ministry?

### **Differences in Ministry by Gender (Including Symbols and Symbolic Actions)**

How would you describe your ministerial style? Do you believe your gender affects that in any ways? If so, how?

Do you do anything differently because you are a woman? Do you feel it is because you want to or because you have to?

Do you use more traditional language or do you try to make it more gender-neutral?

Do you find any symbols or rituals particularly problematic?

Do you wear ministerial robes? Why or why not?

Do you do anything else specifically because you are a clergy *woman*?

Have you ever felt pressure to behave in certain ways because you are a clergy *woman*?

Is your ministry on the path you envisioned? How/how not? If not, to what do you attribute that? Do you think you will achieve your professional goals? Why/why not?

What do you know about the history of women in ministry? In Methodism?

Do you believe that the spread of United Methodism to new regions/countries is affecting policies here, such as who can be ordained? If so, how do you feel about that?

### **Single Women**

Do you believe your marital status is a help or hindrance in ministry?

Do you believe your marital status has affected what positions you were offered or what roles you were assigned?

Do you feel people have different expectations because you are not married?

Given some recent events in the denomination, do you feel that as a single woman, you need to somehow demonstrate your heterosexuality?

### **Married Women**

Do you believe your marital status is a help or hindrance in ministry?

Do you believe your marital status has affected what positions you were offered or what roles you were assigned? Your career path or advancements?

Does your husband affect your placement decisions? Your ministry? If so, how? Have you ever chosen not to take a position because it meant relocating your family?

Does your husband see you as his pastor? What are the effects of that?

How do congregants treat your husband? As a typical "clergy spouse" or differently?

### **Informants with Children**

Has having children had any effects on your career? Placements? Decisions on whether to accept particular placements?

Has your ministry affected your children? If so, how? How have they reacted to your

ministry?

Has having children affected your ministry (meaning how you minister/your role as a minister)? How you are perceived?

**Other**

I tried to incorporate other topics as the clergy women introduced them or if they arose from processing earlier interviews, although as anticipated, nearly all of those were related to the above questions; this Interview Schedule includes the added questions.

## Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Dear Rev. \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Tammy Reedy-Strother and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Kentucky and also a member of St. Luke UMC in Lexington. I obtained your contact information from Rev. Julie Hager Love at the Conference office (through Rev. Debbie Wallace-Padgett, my pastor at St. Luke), and I am contacting you to request your participation in a research study for my Doctoral dissertation, which will focus on the experiences of clergy women in the KAC. Unfortunately, only a few studies have been conducted concerning women in ministry at all, and none focusing on women in the KAC, and I would like to interview you and offer you the opportunity to share your stories and experiences confidentially. For references, please contact Rev. Debbie Wallace-Padgett at St. Luke in Lexington at either [her email address] or 859-XXX-XXX.

If you may be interested, I would like to talk with you about the possibility of meeting to discuss your personal history and experiences, from your call to ministry through your current placement. I will also be glad to discuss what I would like to ask you in more detail before meeting in person. I anticipate the interviews will last approximately 1-3 hours, and I would be happy to meet with you at your convenience at a location of your choice.

If you are willing to consider participating, please contact me either at [my email address] or at my home at 859-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you; I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate any assistance you can offer.

Sincerely,

Tammy L. Reedy-Strother, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate  
Department of Sociology / University of Kentucky

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