

**CLERGYWOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN MINISTRY:
REALITIES AND CHALLENGES
2003**

By

Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns



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Clergywomen's Experiences in Ministry: Realities and Challenges 2003

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The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) conducted a survey of all Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) clergywomen. The results were analyzed by the REFT Institute, Inc. The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns is especially grateful to the clergywomen who responded to the survey and shared their experience and wisdom with the committee.

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**CLERGYWOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN MINISTRY:
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Profiles of Clergywomen¹

Individual 1

Joanne Neville is a married, 50-year-old woman, with two children in college and one in high school. She worked full-time in a secular job for about seven years before she felt called to the ministry and began her second career.

After she graduated from seminary in 1992, she was in the call process for about three months before being called as an associate pastor in a medium-sized church where she stayed for five years. She then became interim pastor in two different congregations. She is currently seeking a solo pastorate or head-of-staff position in a medium-to-large church, but has found it difficult to secure her coveted position.

Initially, Joanne loved her associate pastor position and felt blessed to have gotten a job so close to her home. Eventually, though, it became a toxic environment for her. Several factors began to mount. First, many of the women in the congregation who were near her age were competitive with her and increasingly uncooperative. Two key female staff members were also resistant to her authority.

Second, the male head-of-staff was oppressive and controlling. When Joanne tried to push back respectfully and assert her own method of ministering, she was dealt a crushing blow. The head-of-staff became determined to undermine her communication with the Session, eventually turning the Session against her.

Joanne watched as her stress level rose, and her health deteriorated. Despite her love for preaching and ministering to her local community, she made the decision to move on.

Looking for a healthier position, she took an interim pastor position. She did not notice any systemic gender discrimination at this church; however, when her term ended, the church hired a male associate pastor, with equivalent experience to hers, and paid him \$15,000 more than she has been paid as an associate pastor in a similar sized congregation.

After two more months in the call process, she took her second interim position. Having seen the effects of pay differentials, she tried to negotiate for a higher salary. She eventually compromised and took what they offered, because she felt her options were limited since she was

¹ These profiles were developed from the stories clergywomen told in their responses to the ACWC survey. These individuals are fictional representations of an aggregation of clergywomen's experiences.

geographically bound to her present location. Joanne really needed a position within a two-hour drive from her home, as her husband had a secure job that offered good health insurance. One of their sons had a disability that required medical attention from a facility in the neighboring city.

When her second interim service ended, Joanne began her search for a head-of-staff or solo pastor position at a medium or large church in hopes of avoiding some of the bickering she had experienced in the smaller churches. She went through several interviews, but afterward felt, as if she had been interviewed as a token woman rather than because they were seriously interested in hiring her.

Individual 2

Elizabeth Cranston is a 40-year-old woman, with two small children. When she graduated from seminary in 1996, she knew she would have to find a church near her home in which to carry out her ministry. She also knew she would need to find flexible childcare. Her husband's job was somewhat flexible, but she expected that she would need to rely on more than him and her nearby parents to care for the children once she started working.

After four months in the call process, a medium-sized church offered Elizabeth a position as associate pastor. She thought it was a good opportunity and liked what she saw of the church. She accepted the position, even though the pay was quite low, and the church was more than three hours from her home.

Elizabeth was the first woman pastor at this church. Initially, the church was thrilled to have a woman in an associate pastor position. However, as time wore on, she began to notice she was treated differently than the men. She found, for instance, that she was expected to take over the nursery when the children needed care. She was also subject to repeated sexual advances by male members of the staff. When she reported this sexual harassment to the presbytery, she was basically told to look the other way.

The welcoming feeling she initially received from church members faded slowly, and people began to say "Perhaps our church isn't ready for a woman." She learned from others that one of the reasons the church had hired her was because they knew they could afford her, even though they would have preferred a male.

After a year and a half, Elizabeth was worn out by her long commute and the unequal treatment she was receiving relative to the male associate pastors. Her family was worn out by her demanding weekly schedule, her nights on call for parish emergencies, and her being required to attend meetings that did not provide childcare.

Finally, Elizabeth and her husband decided a full-time pastor position just wasn't going to work for her unless he worked part-time. They were faced with the difficult decision of choosing between their two careers.

Introduction

The 212th General Assembly (2000) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) directed the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) "to look at emerging issues related to clergywomen serving in parish ministry, including the decreasing numbers of clergywomen available for service; proportionately lower numbers of women serving congregations; and the increasing numbers of women leaving parish ministry, and report back to the 214th General Assembly (2002)." (2000 *Minutes*, p. 53 and 317).

In January 2002, ACWC constructed a survey to gather clergywomen's perceptions and experiences relating to the 212th General Assembly (2000) referral. In March 2002, the survey was mailed to 3,853 clergywomen in the PC(USA) database. The survey cover letter stated, "We need your help, especially in discovering why women leave parish ministry and why lower numbers of women serve congregations." At the 214th General Assembly (2002), ACWC held a consultation, inviting clergywomen to share their experiences and concerns.

By July 2002, with only one mailing, ACWC received 1,404 responses to the survey, a response rate of 36%. A number of respondents expressed thanks for receiving the survey. As one woman wrote:

"I want to thank you for sending this survey. I believe the issues surrounding the unique situations and problems of women clergy need to be addressed locally and nationally. I am one who is seriously considering leaving the parish ministry . . . I believe that one of our major problems is that no one is listening!"

Data Collection and Analysis

After reviewing the surveys, ACWC requested that data analysis be conducted by the REFT Institute, Inc., an independent research firm located in Centennial, Colorado. ACWC identified key questions it hoped the surveys would begin to answer, and REFT focused the analysis around these questions. In addition, REFT reviewed past survey data for comparison with the 2002 ACWC survey data.

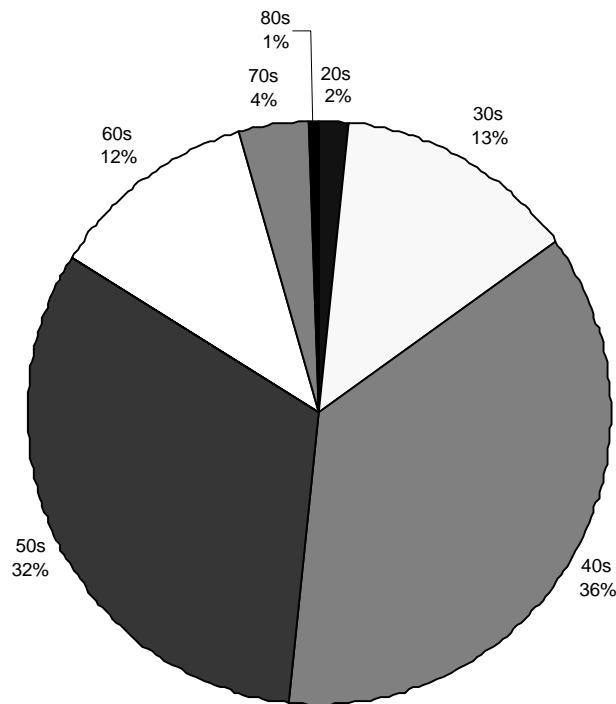
Characteristics of Responding Clergywomen

Overall, the women who answered the survey average 50 years of age, are married (68%) and have children (74%). They are predominantly Caucasian.

Age:

Most of the women who responded to the questionnaire are mature persons, averaging 50 years of age.

Figure 1: Clergywomen's Current Age (n²=1388)



Only 15% are in their 20s and 30s. Almost 70% are middle-aged persons in their 40s and 50s. Finally, 17% are seniors in their 60s or above. For the most part, this latter group has been practicing longer, and therefore, able to report on their many years of experience as clergywomen. This sample of clergywomen is older than that of a 1993 survey.³

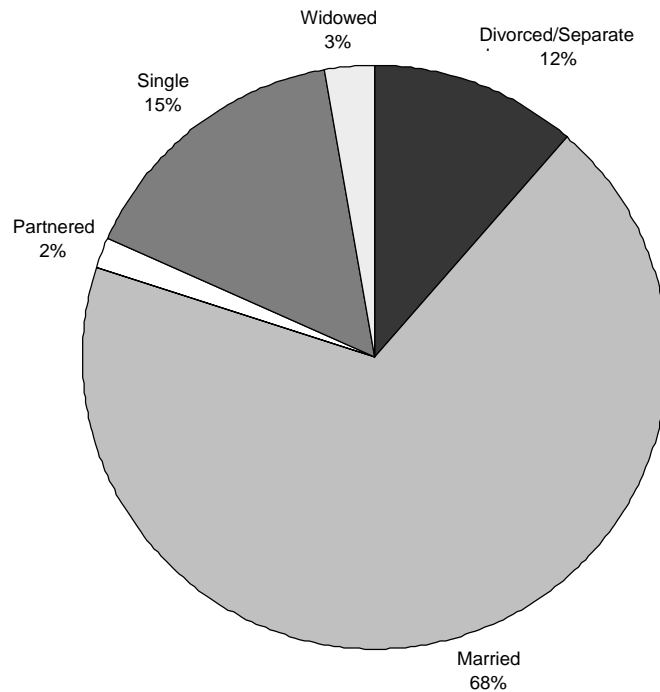
² N=the number of clergy providing information used for each calculation of each figure and table.

³ Research Services. *Presbyterian Clergywomen Survey: Final Report*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). General Assembly Council. Congregational Ministries Division. 1993.

Marital and Family Status:

The women's ages are reflected in the fact that 68% report being married. Fifteen percent are divorced, separated, or widowed, while another 15% are single and 2% have a partner.

Figure 2: Current Marital Status (n=1388)



When the 15% of clergywomen who reported being single are removed from those who have no children (26% of the clergywomen), there are 9% who are married, widowed, divorced or partnered who have no children. Seventy-four percent of the clergywomen have children. About 40% have children under 18 years of age and 35% have children who are 18 or older.

Both marital status and family status have remained similar in the 1993 and 2002 study, although there are fewer never-married clergywomen in 2002.⁴

Race/Ethnicity:

Most of the PC(USA) clergywomen who returned completed surveys are Caucasian/White. Only a little more than 4% are women of color. African American clergywomen were the second

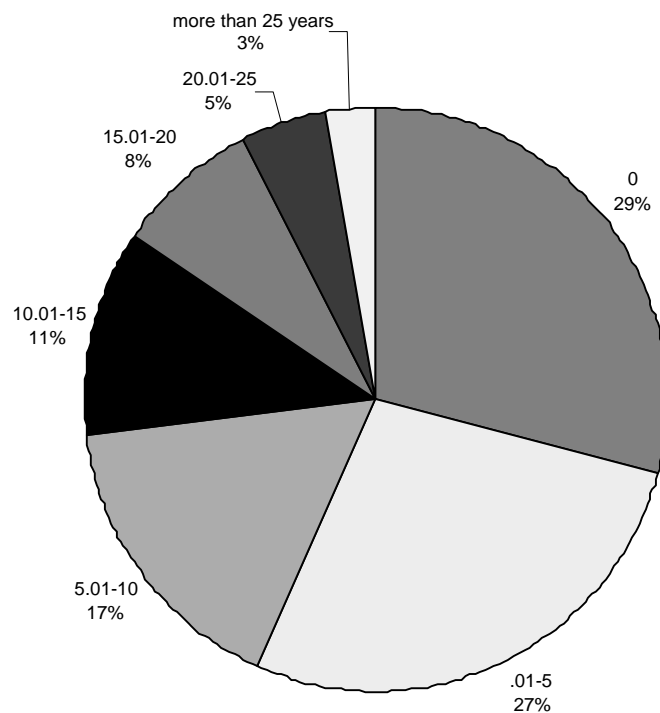
⁴ In 1993, the researchers found that two-thirds of clergywomen had children. One-third of those had older children who no longer lived at home (Research Services. *Presbyterian Clergywomen Survey: Final Report*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). General Assembly Council. Congregational Ministries Division. 1993).

largest group to respond, with 21 clergywomen. Additionally there are 16 Hispanic/Latina and 12 Asian American clergywomen. Native American and “other” backgrounds accounted for an additional 11 clergywomen who responded.⁵ This profile is also similar to 1993 data.⁶

Employment Prior to Ordination:

Twenty-nine percent of the clergywomen reported having no full-time employment prior to ordination. Nineteen percent had full-time employment up to five years and another 17% worked five to ten years prior to ordination. Another 19% were employed for 10-20 years prior to ordination, and the other 8% were employed for more than 20 years.

Figure 3: Years of Full-time Employment Prior to Ordination (n=1361)



Therefore, about a quarter (27%) of the clergywomen were called to ordained ministry as a second career, defining a first career as 10 years of full-time employment.⁷ This is a smaller

⁵ These statements include only those groups with 10 or more clergywomen. The few clergywomen who listed more than one of the racial/ethnic categories were only included in the category with the smaller number.

⁶ In 1993, clergywomen respondents were 97% Caucasian/White (Research Services. *Presbyterian Clergywomen Survey: Final Report*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). General Assembly Council. Congregational Ministries Division. 1993).

⁷ This is consistent with a 1999 study that defined second-career clergy as “those who worked in another field for more than 10 years before going to seminary.” (Research Services. “Ministers Ordained in the 1990s: a Look at Clergy Who Have Left the Ministry.” Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). 1999. p.5)

percentage of clergywomen when compared to a 1995 study that reported “about half of the women but only one-third of the men report that ministry is a second career for them.”⁸

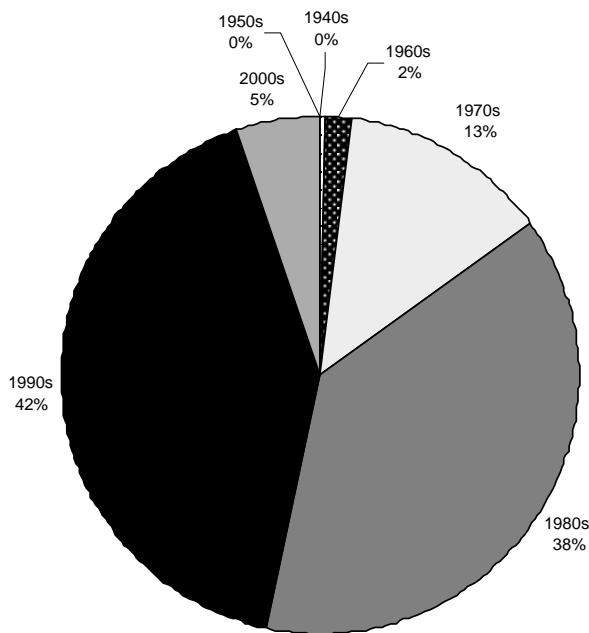
Call Characteristics

Most of the clergywomen (47%) were ordained in the 1990s. On average, the clergywomen in this sample served congregations in some form of pastoral leadership for 10.6 years and served in ordained ministry outside congregations for an average of 3.7 years. Additionally, they had worked at other occupations full-time, on average 7.1 years, before being called to Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Ordination History:

Almost half (47%) of the clergywomen who returned the surveys were ordained after 1990. Many (38%) were ordained in the 1980s. Around 15% of the clergywomen who responded were ordained between the 1950s and 1970s. These are the living pioneers among clergywomen today.⁹

Figure 4: Decade of Ordination (n=1388)



⁸Deborah Bruce and John P. Marcum. “Comparing Female and Male Pastors in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).” Presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion annual meeting. St. Louis, MO. 1995.

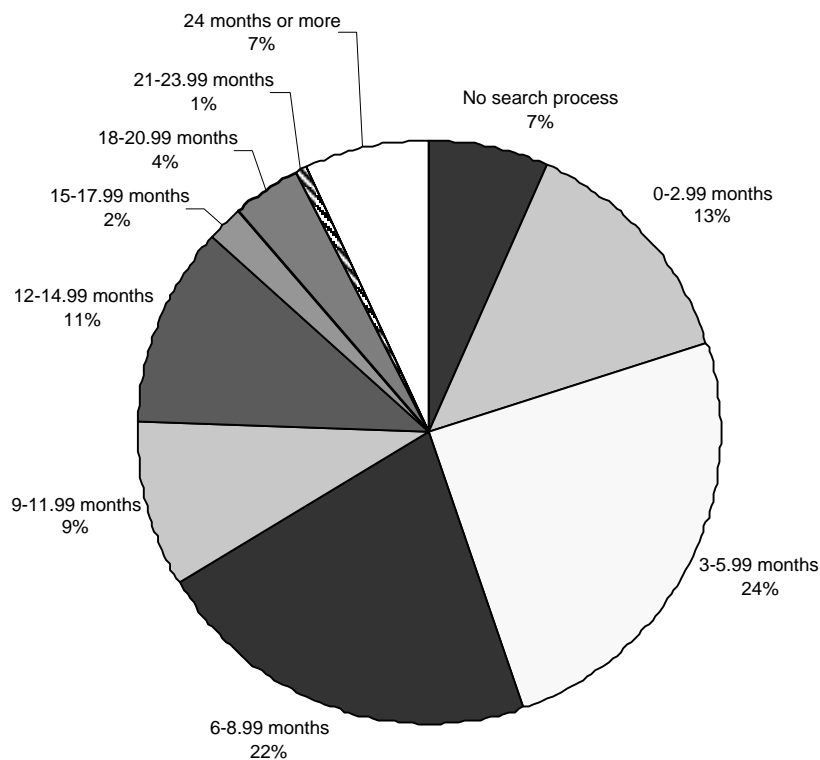
⁹ Unfortunately, the 1993 data cannot be compared to the 2002 data because it uses different categories of dates.

Changes in Calls:

There are two measures of the early changes in call of these clergywomen. One is the average length of time it took for each woman to find a call when she sought one. The second measure is the average time it took for the clergywomen to move from graduating from seminary to receiving ordination.

The average length of each clergywoman's search processes was 9.5 months. This includes not only the average length of the first search process, but also the averages of all other search processes the clergywomen reported.

Figure 5: Length of Each Clergywoman's Average Search Process (n=1298)



Seven percent of clergywomen reported never having a search process. Another 13% of the clergywomen had an average search process of less than three months. Another 46% reported an average length of 3-8.99 months. Thus, most clergywomen experienced less than 9 months' average search processes. However, 25% did experience average search processes that were a year or more long.

Most clergywomen (60%) in this sample report that they were ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament within a year of graduating from seminary.¹⁰ Another 19% were ordained within the second year. However, 21% took over two years (2-10 years or more) to be ordained. Sometimes this was by choice, while in other cases, not.

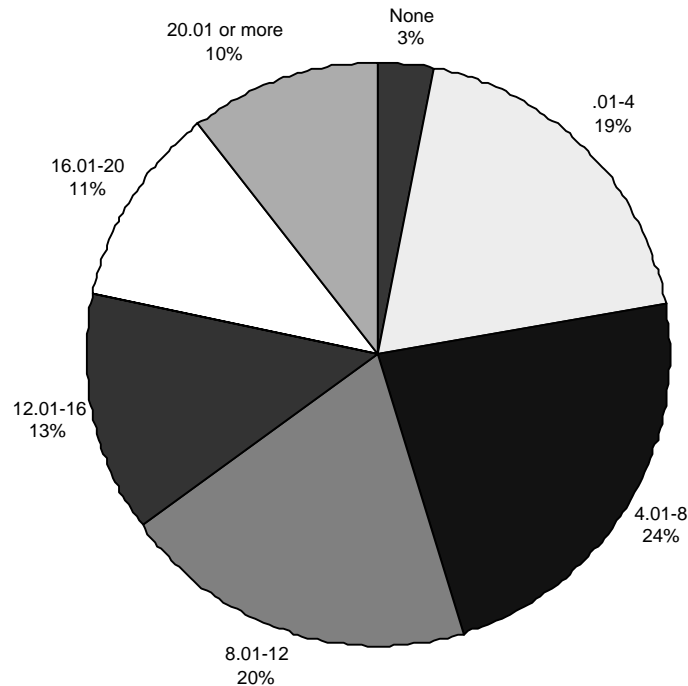
Types of Calls

Congregation-based:

The clergywomen reported on the number of years they served “a congregation in some form of pastoral leadership.”¹¹ They reported an average of 10.6 years in that capacity.

Twenty-one percent of the clergywomen reported having over 16 years of pastoral leadership experience in congregations. About one third (33%) had 8-16 years experience as pastors in congregations. A substantial number of clergywomen (43%) had eight or fewer years in congregational settings as pastors. Finally, a very small number (3%) reported having no experience of pastoral leadership in a congregational setting.

Figure 6: Years of Pastoral Leadership in a Congregational Setting (n=1376)



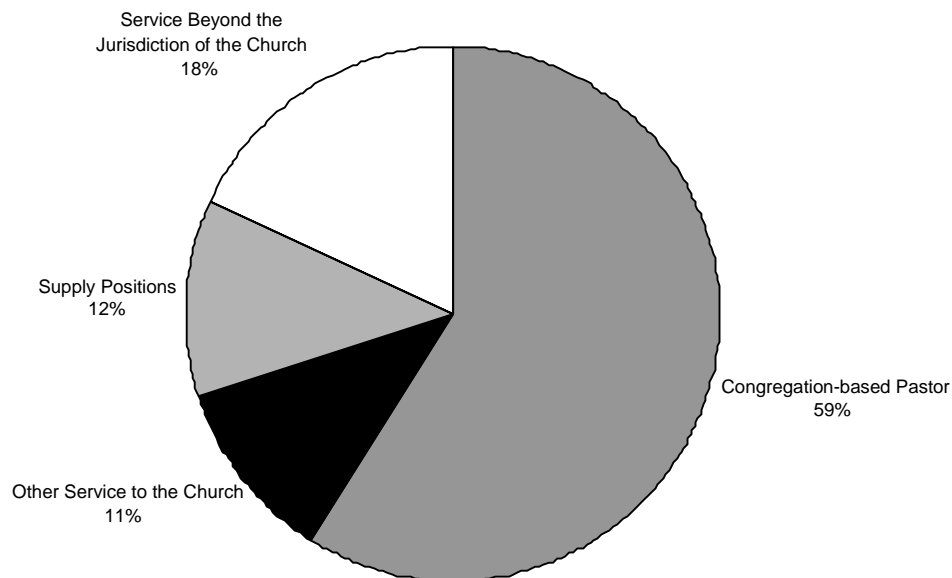
¹⁰ This is a lower percentage than the 70% reported in a 2000 study. (Susan Fox. “Office of Field Education and Placement Study of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Master of Divinity Graduates – Draft.” Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education. October 2000. p.3)

¹¹ There appeared to be some disagreements among clergywomen as to what situations count as “pastoral leadership.”

Figure 6 describes the number of years that clergywomen spent in 3,158 calls during their years as clergywomen. (See Appendix, Table B for details.) The clergywomen averaged receiving 2.8 calls.¹²

Clergywomen have spent almost 60% of their professional life in congregation-based calls. Twenty-six percent of the time was spent as pastor, solo pastor, or head-of-staff. Another 24% of the time was spent as associate and or assistant pastor. Almost 10% of clergywomen’s time was spent in co-pastor calls. While past studies¹³ have generally indicated that men accepted calls to solo or head-of-staff positions more often than women, lack of comparability makes it difficult to compare with the current information.

Figure 7: Clergywomen Service Type (Totaling 15,291 Years of Service)



Clergywomen in this sample have filled supply positions for 12% of their time. They have been primarily interim pastors or associate pastors (6%) or stated supply (3%). Temporary supply pastor (1%) or designated pastor (.7%) are other calls they have accepted.

¹² The average is based on a total of 3,896 calls reported by 1,404 clergywomen. Table B reports on 3,158 calls because 738 provided no time allocated to the calls.

¹³ Susan Fox. “Office of Field Education and Placement Study of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Master of Divinity Graduates – Draft.” Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education. October 2000. p.3.

Data compiled in 2001¹⁴ followed men and women clergy through a span of five calls. The data indicated that an increasingly higher percentage of clergywomen took on interim calls as they moved through their calls. Men, on the other hand, were represented in permanent positions consistently more often than women throughout their five calls. No data is available as to what percentage of men moved into interim positions as they progressed through their calls.

Non-congregation-based calls:

Only 26% of the clergywomen in this sample have served in ordained ministry outside a congregation for more than four years. Over half (54%) of the clergywomen reported never having served outside the congregational setting. Another 20% reported having worked outside congregational settings for fewer than four years.

This pattern is explored through examining the time clergywomen accepted calls in other service to the church or in service beyond the jurisdiction of the church.

It is not clear whether or not the patterns have changed for men and women since there is no comparative data for men in 2002. In 2000¹⁵, a study found that “men are more likely to move from a first call in a non-parish setting to a second call in a parish (70.0%) than are women (53.8%). Women are considerably more likely to move into a non-parish setting following a first call parish setting (41.9%) than are males (12.3%).”

In Other Service to the Church (11% of the years). About a tenth of the professional time has been spent in other service to the church. The time of these clergywomen has been fairly evenly distributed between General Assembly entities (2%) and the middle governing bodies (3%). Parish Associate (3%) roles are another place where clergywomen have found their call as well as in pastoral counseling (1%) and in Christian Education positions (1%).

Service Beyond the Jurisdiction of the Church (18% of the years). Service beyond the jurisdiction of the church reflects calls that are accountable to entities other than PC(USA). These entities were divided into those that were faith-based and those that were secular.

Clergywomen accepted calls primarily (15% of the years) to faith-based environments. Most of these calls were as chaplains (9%). Various types of services in PC(USA) seminaries (2%) and with other denominations (2%) also attracted many clergywomen. Only a small percentage (3%) of the years was spent in non-faith-based environments.

Pastoral Service Ratio:

The pastoral service ratio was created by dividing the number of “years in pastoral leadership” by the total years the clergywoman has been employed in both the congregational and non-congregational settings.¹⁶ The higher the number, the more time the clergywomen spent in

¹⁴ Dean Foose. “Emerging Issues Related to Clergywomen – Draft.” Analysis done by ACWC member based on Susan Fox’s study of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Master of Divinity graduates study. October 2001.

¹⁵ Susan Fox. “Office of Field Education and Placement Study of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Master of Divinity Graduates– Draft.” Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education. October 2000.

¹⁶ This ratio does not always equal the proportion of time spent in “pastoral leadership,” since some clergywomen counted time in neither and/or both categories.

congregational settings as compared to non-congregational settings. The clergywomen's experiences were examined by decade of ordination. The data shows a steady increase in the ratio from .53 prior to the 1970s to .85 in the 1990s. This indicates that those who were ordained more recently are spending more time in congregational settings than those who were ordained in earlier decades.¹⁷

Race/Ethnicity and Call Trajectories

Women of color not only have to struggle with many of the issues shared by their Caucasian/White, but additionally they often have to contend with issues stimulated by their race/ethnicity. Therefore, we examine the influence of race/ethnicity on the call trajectories of this sample of clergywomen¹⁸.

Full-time employment before ordination:

African American clergywomen average more than 13 years of full-time employment prior to ordination. Hispanic/Latina clergywomen follow with almost nine years, Caucasian/White with almost seven years, and Asian Americans fewer than four years. This pattern suggests that the years of full-time employment may be related to economic resources of families.

Length of average search process:

The length of each clergywoman's average search process by race/ethnicity suggests that clergywomen of color continue to encounter more resistance to their employment than do their Caucasian/White sisters. All the clergywomen of color report longer average search processes than do the Caucasian/White clergywomen. Possible explanations may be that clergywomen of color encounter racism when they seek a call in the predominantly Caucasian/White congregations of PC(USA), or that they seek calls in the lower number of congregations whose members are predominantly people of color.

Pastoral service ratio:

Hispanic clergywomen spend the least amount (.62 ratio) of their service in congregational settings. Caucasian/White clergywomen spend more time in that setting (.80) than all of the clergywomen of color combined. Asian American clergywomen have higher ratios (.68) than African American (.66) clergywomen in this sample.

Key Question #1: Are the Numbers of Clergywomen Available for Service Decreasing?

The 212th General Assembly (2000) directive to ACWC suggested that the number of clergywomen available for service may be decreasing. However, the statistics from the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) do not support this suggestion. The statistics indicate that the

¹⁷ Another possible interpretation is that clergywomen tend to serve congregations early in their careers and move to non-congregational settings later in their careers. Since so many of this sample were ordained in the 1990s, it is not possible to explore this possible interpretation now.

¹⁸ Racial/ethnic background was analyzed only for those groups with 10 or more clergywomen. Statistical analysis becomes extremely unstable when there are fewer people in an analytic category. Clergywomen who listed more than one of the racial/ethnic categories were included in the category with the smaller number of answers.

number of clergywomen in service is in fact increasing each year. What we do not know is whether the increasing number of clergywomen in service is in step with the increasing numbers of women who complete seminary education.

The ACWC survey asked, “Do you think the number of clergywomen serving in congregational ministry is decreasing?” The answers varied widely. Thirty-six percent (504 clergywomen) believed the number of women has not decreased; 33% (458 clergywomen) believed the number of women has decreased; and 25% (346 clergywomen) said they did not know. As these are perceptions rather than a systematic analysis of actual behavior, and as there is no clear consensus, this question is not analyzed further.

ACWC suspects that the truth about numbers is that they are increasing in some presbyteries and decreasing in others, and that the climate of acceptance and support for women is stronger in some presbyteries than in others. Furthermore, we believe the embrace of women's gifts for ministry depends upon a number of factors, including a congregation's exposure and level of familiarity with clergywomen; the recognition that women and men often have different approaches to ministry; a congregation's relationships with former pastors, both male and female; and the cultural climate of a particular congregation/presbytery.

ACWC believes that the perseverance of clergywomen, rooted in a strong sense of call (the call of God through the voice of a particular congregation) may be strengthened by support networks available to and/or intentionally created by those who affirm women's call and practice of ministry. We believe that listening to the voices of women begins to address the loneliness and isolation many clergy, male and female, experience in the practice of ministry.

Key Question #2: Do Clergywomen Feel Geographically Bound?

Of the 1,404 who responded to the survey, 62% said that they would feel geographically bound if searching for a new position, while 30% stated they would not feel bound to a particular region. Five percent responded with ambivalence, as they were not bound in the strictest sense, but either had reasons for staying in a particular area or the new area would have to meet specific criteria. Approximately two percent reported that the question was not relevant to them. These figures are slightly less than the 69% who reported being geographically bound in 1993.¹⁹

Geographically Bound:

Clergywomen who are geographically bound (872 clergywomen, 62%) gave several reasons why they felt that way.

¹⁹ Research Services. *Presbyterian Clergywomen Survey: Final Report*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). General Assembly Council. Congregational Ministries Division. 1993.

Table 1: Reasons Clergymen Feel Geographically Bound (n=872)

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Family Considerations	267	31%
Spouse Considerations	200	23%
In Preferred Area	193	22%
Aging Parents	103	12%
Children in School	87	10%
Other	63	7%
Clergywoman's Age	27	3%
Special Needs	25	3%

Family Considerations (31%)

This category includes proximity to extended family or shared custody of a child.

“I’m a half-time stated supply pastor and a half-time psychotherapist (Fellow-AAPC). My practice is here. Also, if I moved, my daughter wouldn’t be able to see her father very often.”

“My family. We value staying in one community and raising our children.”

Spouse Considerations (23%)

Spouse’s employment was the second most common reason clergymen felt they could not relocate. Thirty people cited the fact that their spouses make the money that supports their family.

“We depend on my spouse’s income to sustain our family.”

“[My] Husband [is an] attorney who doesn’t want to ever take the Bar exam again.”

“My husband is a clergyman, so any move involves both of us seeking a call. I have followed him, since his income is so much greater.”

Of the 185 responses citing spouse employment, 18 noted that, since their husbands were tenured at a local college or university, moving prior to his retirement was not an option.

In Preferred Area (22%)

One hundred and ninety-three responses were recorded in this category. Criteria for inclusion were: (1) regional preference—whether for cultural or climatic reasons, or proximity to a metropolitan area or airport; (2) having roots where they are—whether owning a home or feeling established in the community; (3) people did not specify why they liked where they lived. Thirty-three of these people (17%) preferred their area because it was near family, so there is some overlap with family considerations.

Aging Parents (12%) or Children in School (10%)

These reasons reflect care-giving responsibilities.

“[I have] Responsibility for husband’s and my aging parents.”

“I live with my father giving emotional support after my mother passed away, and this is his home, and he wants to stay here.”

And children:

“We have also moved our kids halfway across the country two times and do not want to put them through that again.”

“A pledge to our children that they would graduate from our local high school.”

Other (7%)

Some mentioned having another profession established in the area. Some wrote of their sense of God’s will. Some cited being single and not wanting to uproot, while others said they are half of a clergy couple and are limited to finding two positions or a shared position.

Clergy’s Age or Special Needs (each 3%)

Some clergywomen specifically said that they considered themselves “too old to move” (11), while others simply cited their nearness to retirement as their reason for not wanting to uproot (15). For example:

“[I am] Near retirement and wish to be somewhat near family and in an area where I could do interim or supply work, especially in smaller church that need solid leadership.”

They or family members may have special needs:

“[My] Spouse [is] tied to handicapped-adapted home and his medical team.”

“Our son has special needs educationally, so we want to remain in a stable situation for his junior/senior high years.”

Not Geographically Bound:

The 427 (30%) clergywoman who did not feel geographically bound also expressed their reasons.

Table 2: Reasons Clergywomen Do Not Feel Geographically Bound (n=427)

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Regional Considerations	353	83%
Spouse Considerations	13	3%
God’s Will	7	2%
Financial Considerations	3	1%
No reason stated	51	12%

Regional Considerations (83%)

Most of these women were open to moving, depending upon the region to which they would be relocating. Some required a metropolitan city, an airport nearby, etc., while others required a progressive mindset or particular weather patterns. Some simply like the area in which they reside.

Other Considerations (5%)

Sixty-seven clergywomen struggled with this question, primarily citing family and spouse considerations:

“I am deeply committed to this presbytery and this state; also my husband and children are happy in their employment and school situations. But we’d all move if we felt God’s call elsewhere.”

“Would have to be a move that is good for my kids. My husband can move his headquarters, but has employees to consider.”

Twenty-seven clergywomen (2%) were either retired or did not intend to look for a new position.

Key Question #3: Why Do Clergywomen Leave Parish Ministry?

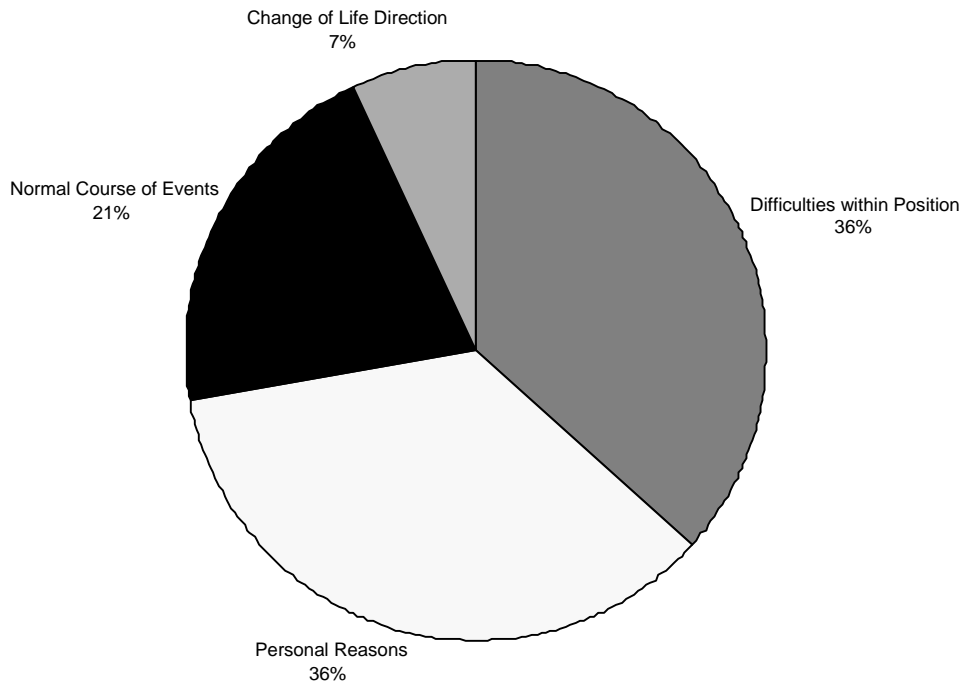
The ACWC survey asked: “If you have ever ceased serving a congregation, why did you leave?”

Eight hundred eighty-five clergywomen (63%) reported having left a congregation for reasons other than retirement. Reasons for leaving varied widely. For instance, they may have left one congregation for financial reasons, and another because of spouse’s job relocation.

Some mentioned leaving a particular congregation for several reasons. For example, their spouse’s job was relocated, however they already felt unfulfilled and ready to leave (anyway). Or they were “burnt out” from the schedule *and* the congregation conflicts were overwhelming. The 1,286 reasons given are shown in the figure below. (See Appendix, Table C for details.)

The REFT Institute clustered these reasons into four thematic categories: Difficulties within Position, Personal Reasons, Normal Course of Events, and Change of Life Direction. These are shown in the Figure 8.

Figure 8: Reasons Clergywomen Leave Congregations (1,286 total responses)



More than a third of all clergywomen reported leaving a congregation because of the difficulties within the position, including church politics, gender discrimination, schedule expectations, low pay, etc. Thirty-seven percent of all reasons related to difficulties with the position.

More than a third also reported leaving for personal reasons, including the need for more family time, a lack of fulfillment in the position, and changes. They made 36% of all their comments related to this topic. Their comments are included below.

Difficulties within Position: (462 clergywomen, 37% of the reasons)

Internal Church Politics—Issues with Staff (12% of all reasons)

Not all clergywomen identified the staff members with whom they experienced significant conflict. However, approximately half were specific, and 65 indicated conflict with the senior pastor/head-of-staff, 13 with the Presbytery, 11 with members of the Session, and 7 with the Committee on Ministry.

Senior Pastor/Head-of-staff

“I left my first Associate Pastor job because...[the newly hired pastor] was constantly putting me down in front of staff, session and members. I was humiliated, and discriminated against by this man.”

“When I served as an associate, I felt my work was undermined by the senior pastor and did not receive support from personnel committee.”

“[I] eagerly left 1st call once a new call was secured. Horrendous situation. Pastor of 25 years at that one church had never had an associate ...Without strong support network, I would have left the ministry.”

“Advised to do so by center on ministry psychologist—to get out before the senior pastor destroyed me. Was told by COM I needed to find a Senior Pastor who was secure enough in his own identity and ministry, not to be threatened by mine and how I approached my ministry.”

“Head-of-staff was destructive and controlling.”

“The relationship with my head-of-staff was oppressive. The situation was very painful.”

“Unable to work with new head-of-staff. This was clear immediately, and I knew as an associate, I was to ‘step aside.’”

Session

“Conflict with session—very toxic situation. They did not handle my remarriage well. Became possessive of my time, micromanaging, several ‘clergy killer’ type persons.”

“I left after a senior pastor retired, and all ordained staff were expected, even told, to leave by session. This session action displeased the congregation, but other pastors did leave.”

Presbytery or COM

“Presbytery/COM/Executive encouraged me to go out on a limb saying they’d be right behind me and would ‘call in their chips’ and then ‘forgot’ to stand behind me as the limb was sawed off. Made to feel ‘the sick one.’ Felt voiceless—patronized with lip service or pats on the head! It was more important to the congregation and the presbytery (congregation was its deep pocket) that the head-of-staff be propped up at all costs (even though 30 staff left in the 3 years).”

“I was in a presbytery which was not particularly female-friendly...except as interims and supplies. I was geographically bound (then as now); my GP [General Presbyter] made it explicitly clear that she would recommend me only as an interim; and I knew that doing interim positions would kill me, emotionally, spiritually, and professionally.”

“I had no Presbytery support or backing.”

“The COM chair told my session, while I was on sabbatical, that the only choice they had was to dissolve the relationship. This was after an anonymous survey showed there was some dissatisfaction. In agreement with the session, I stayed 5 months to correct my problems but felt the lack of support and help in the congregation and in the presbytery wouldn’t change enough for a good relationship of trust to be re-established.”

Internal Church Politics—Issues with Congregation (7% of the reasons)

Many clergywomen wrote about “congregational dysfunction.” Some specified feeling female parishioners are competitive with a female pastor, while some just described a high degree of interpersonal conflict.

“Frustration with congregational dysfunction.”

“Because the small congregation turned inward and refused to change or reach out in mission. Ministry is no longer enjoyable at this church.”

“Too much of a meat grinder! What satisfied half the congregation was sure to be unacceptable to the other half. Also secrets and desire to turn me into something I’m not. At first, they wanted the gifts I offer.”

“I left a pastor position after 2 ½ years. I followed a 38-year pastorate. The church was growing financially, numerically, and structurally. The growth was causing growing pains. When I got pregnant, it was more than they could take, and conflict erupted everywhere.”

“I left because my contract as designated pastor was ending and because the tension and animosity between the two congregations was such a heavy burden that my health was ruined! Anxiety and stress induced the onset of diabetes. I was glad to leave that place where I had to literally beg for my salary check every two weeks. The health of the town congregation was septic! There is no hope there!”

Discrimination against Women (5% of the reasons)

Although a relatively small percentage attributed their leaving a congregation to due to gender discrimination, many clergywomen commented on gender discrimination in other sections of the survey. Those who did leave a congregation because of sexism wrote relatively long explanations.

These clergywomen felt gender-based discrimination in a variety of ways. On the individual level they felt not respected, promoted or paid as well because they were female, and sexually harassed. Some experienced individual discrimination, but it was so pervasive that it was not attributable to a few people, but rather to an entire group or system.

Individual-level discrimination

“I also followed a retired associate (woman) who left worship with the children every Sunday and took care of the nursery. I refused to do so.”

“I resigned because the administration committee did not raise my pay at the same rate as the male pastors. The congregation fought the committee but the senior pastor covered his ears and pretended not to hear anything. I was the first woman pastor in the church and the staff and pastors were so happy to have me at first. But then when I didn’t clock in and out with the rest of the women, the staff disliked my hours. One of the male pastors made advances towards me and several other women, but it was ‘hushed-up.’ He now serves a large church elsewhere.”

“Ministry was not life-giving and even though they hired me and my husband as a couple to share one call, he was definitely the pastor and I was the pastor’s wife.”

Sexual harassment

“I left because the first congregation I served had a head-of-staff who was a sex addict. He was also the chair of COM. When he made advances toward me, I couldn’t go to COM (him), so I went to the Presbytery Exec. He didn’t believe me because the senior pastor told him I was lying to cause dissension in the church. This is doubly troubling because the Exec. was well aware of what was going on.”

“Sexual harassment case of a close colleague at same church; handling of it by presbytery and church.”

“After being raped by a resident of the village where I served.”

Systemic-level discrimination

“Lack of support from male counterparts, especially at presbytery level.”

“Patriarchy and resistance to my ordination.”

“I was unprepared to cope with the attitudes toward women in ministry that I experienced in the church.”

“I dropped out of the call process for installed positions because larger churches (above 300) were not calling women as senior pastor/head-of-staff.”

“I was given severance, because the (then) new head-of-staff did not want to work with a woman clergy and the PNC told him I could be gone in 6 months if he would accept the call.”

“[The] ‘senior’ pastor (even though we don’t have that title) asked me to resign, saying ‘my call there just hadn’t worked out,’ and I could stay home with the baby (I was pregnant at the time) and concentrate on my husband’s career. The church administrator told me in my first month at the church he didn’t think women should be pastors. I was pretty devastated.”

“In my first call, I was asked to leave because I used inclusive language in worship and prayed for peace during the Gulf War. In my third call, I was asked to leave because I used inclusive language in worship and attended the 4th world conference on women in Beijing. In my sixth position, I was asked to leave because they did not want an interim pastor, especially one who was female.”

Schedule Too Demanding (4% of the reasons)

Of the 55 counted in this category, 21 used the general term “burnout” to describe why they left a particular congregation. A number also mentioned long commutes—up to four hours. Although the percentage of clergywomen who proffered schedule as a reason is relatively low, their comments were vehement. Additionally, demanding schedules seems to be part of why some clergywomen felt they needed additional family time (i.e., a personal reason).

One woman who is seriously considering leaving commented:

“I am considering leaving soon if certain things don’t change. But personnel is willing to work with me. I am working 60-65 hours/week with little administrative help, and I can’t

see keeping this pace without further repercussions to my health—physical and emotional.”

Others who had already left wrote:

“Due to long hours and burnout, I am not looking for another full-time call. I have decided that the hours that entails are crazy and inhumane, not healthy!”

“Just last summer I resigned because I was exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. Also I wanted freedom to be home in the evenings and go places on the weekends. I was tired of the public role.”

“Small children, not conducive to be in parish working 70 hrs. a week and also not free to leave for pastoral emergency at drop of hat.”

“I did find the demands on clergy in a congregation extreme, and I do think particularly so for women clergy.”

Emotional Distress (4% of the reasons)

Two persons cited non-work-related emotional distress as their reason for leaving. Others described emotional distress as a result of the job itself, the location of the job, the conflicts inherent in the job, the lack of privacy, the lack of appreciation, and so on.

“Burnout” was again a popular term to describe emotional distress as a result of working with congregations. Although there was some overlap with other categories, this category was used for reasons described as sadness, loneliness, frustration, and the like. The number of responses under “emotional distress” could have been higher had we included all those who experienced discrimination, conflicts with congregations, etc.

“First call, because after three years, I felt lonely and isolated, and moving did help.”

“Being the only female pastor in a small rural town (conservative town) was very difficult, particularly on a social level.”

“Burn out: I always felt on the edge of burn out—feeling I had to work twice as hard as a male pastor plus wanting to be an active mother, spouse and friend.”

“Professional burnout: this is not limited to female clergy, but I would say that many women simply leave the ministry rather than put up with unreasonable and abusive expectations.”

“I have left active ministry because I was more and more having to twist myself into a pretzel in order to be able to do ministry. I truly felt it was an issue of integrity and faith in the PC(USA). Also, three of my close clergy sisters had died premature deaths (at 49, 50, 60) of stress-related conditions—I decided I wished to live! It was a sad decision because I had a real commitment to ministry.”

Financial (4%)

Either the church could no longer afford to fund the position, or the clergywoman needed to make more money than the church was offering.

“I was asked to take a pay-cut to meet budget; ‘one woman needs less money to live on!’”

“They didn’t want to give me a raise. Instead they wanted me to work full-time for the same amount of money.”

“I left my most recent parish position to accept a call to presbytery staff because I am paying tuition for two sons and was offered a significant increase in salary.”

Sexual Orientation Discrimination (1%)

The majority of comments were about the Church’s stand on the ordination of lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual Presbyterian clergy.

“I responded to a GA [General Assembly] call to participate in dialogues on homosexuality. As an out lesbian, I knew that would end my career in parish ministry.”

“I resigned from another call because people met me in the parking lot to say I would be in trouble if I let a lesbian be nominated for session.”

“The only reason I left was the church’s position/policy on the ordination of gays/lesbians. I love pastoral ministry. Especially miss preaching.”

Personal Reasons (457 clergywomen, 36% of the reasons):

Family Time (10% of the reasons)

Family time includes pregnancy, wanting to stay home full- or part-time to care for children, needing additional time to care for other family members, and simply wanting more time to spend with family.

“My parents were entering their nineties and I wanted more time with them; then the birth of my granddaughter made me say, ‘I’m working 24/7, but I want to know you and you to know me.’”

“I had a baby and wanted to be a full-time parent.”

“I left my first call because the pressure of being a solo minister and a mother of young children is enormous. I was the primary care giver for both the church and my children! As the child of a minister myself, I also know the kinds of expectations placed on a minister’s family (both by the minister and the church). I wanted to remove my family from that difficult environment.”

Felt Unfulfilled (9% of the reasons)

Fifty-eight women wrote comments such as, “It seemed time to leave” or “I had done the work I could and needed a change.” These were all categorized as “unfulfilled.” Also in this category were those seeking new challenges because they became professionally or theologically unfulfilled, and those who expressed general dissatisfaction with some aspect of their work situation.

“I just did so [left] 15 years in one congregation; just left Dec. 31, 2001. I had come to the end of ways I could grow in ministry there. I did not want to stagnate or plateau for my own sake or the congregation’s.”

“It was time to leave—I had exhausted every new idea and my spirit was in need of nurture. I needed a change and a new vision and so did the congregation. I left and it was both a shock to them and a great favor. . . It taught them how to be church. It taught me how to find the spirit in my life again.”

“In my 2nd position, after having the rare opportunity to be acting head-of-staff, the choice was either go back to being associate or move on.”

“Unfulfilled as associate—gifts and skills fit better in solo position.”

“Desire to grow spiritually and professionally, desire for a change of pace and setting.”

“No good opportunities: poor pay (especially for full-time positions). Poor work conditions, i.e., lack of professional development. Lack of creative opportunities, lack of engaged (spiritually) congregants.”

Spouse Job (7% of the reasons)

When the spouse's job was listed as a reason, it usually entailed a geographical move, but not always. Some clergywomen with children could not maintain the pace of both parents working, especially if the church position included strained relations.

“My husband was working an hour and fifteen minutes away. The commute became prohibitive when we started our family.”

“Once I left after 5½ yrs. because my husband had another call. Once because the interim was over. (Again) once because my husband had another call.”

Moved (3% of the reasons)

Most of these clergywomen moved as a result of family urgency—usually the spouse's job. Some, however, left to seek a more suitable region—urban as opposed to rural, for instance.

“I left my second congregation to move closer to my husband's work.”

“Needed to move closer to sick parent.”

“I got married and moved from Iowa to Wisconsin, but I was looking to leave.”

Finished/Began School (3% of the reasons)

These reasons include spouse or self returning to school or completing educational programs, either of which caused a move from the congregation. Approximately half left for further religion-focused education, and the rest for training in a different field altogether.

“Graduated from Ph.D. program; moved on to accept a teaching assignment at a seminary.”

“To pursue full-time MSW degree studies.”

“Twice because husband (also clergy) sought further education in pastoral counseling.”

Marriage/Divorce (2% of the reasons)

Many of the clergywomen simply wrote “marriage” as their reason for leaving. Others explained that marriage meant she needed to move, to be with her spouse or near his job. Of those who wrote “divorce,” the main issues were the congregation's lack of support and/or the emotional or financial turmoil that resulted.

“I had gotten married, husband was trying to commute 75 miles one-way, and stepson living with us was [an] impossible situation. Did that for two years but finally had to change for the sake of marriage and sanity.”

“Conflict within congregation and long-distance commute strained my marriage.”

“I got married and my husband began serving a church in another state. The congregation assumed I was leaving to be with my husband and began treating me like a short-timer. I decided to leave, as it appeared my ministry there was finished.”

“Left because of divorce—not my choice—voted [by the congregation] while I was on vacation.”

“Didn’t want to bring a congregation through my divorce . . . felt vulnerable due to sexual identity.”

Illness (2% of the reasons)

A small percentage left their positions because of personal illness or that of a child or spouse. In a few cases, the ensuing death of a spouse caused the clergywoman to leave her position.

“Significant hearing impairment limits my ability to do certain functions, moderate session, work with youth and children’s groups, [and] social situations.”

“I had health issues that made it difficult to work all day and attend meetings at night and work all weekend including Sunday morning sermon and Bible study.”

Normal Course of Events (273 clergywomen, 21% of the reasons):

This category had a lower percentage than the personal or professional reasons.

Received Another Call (11% of the reasons)

Some left for a call outside of congregational ministry, some left for another parish, and some left because they felt called by God to work in alternative ministry.

“To go somewhere else. I haven’t been forced out anywhere.”

“I was called to pastor a church closer to home.”

“Left 1st pastorate to seek a solo position, because I wanted that experience, no unhappiness.”

In some cases, the clergywomen indicated they felt they were being led in a new direction.

“I felt a definite calling to older adult ministry as a chaplain.”

In 19 instances, comments about accepting a new call reflected anguish over past experiences.

“Felt called to preach, not plan youth programs.”

“Chose to seek a new call to get “relief” from extensive conflict within the congregation.”

Interim Ended (7% of the reasons)

These responses were relatively straightforward. It was clear from some answers that some women go from interim to interim. It appears that some women choose interim work for family reasons. For example:

“At the end of our co-pastorate, [my husband] took a call as an EP, and I had to do interim work in order to fit work with family responsibilities. Then he chose to return to pastoral work, so I continued doing interim until he retired.”

Change of Life Direction (94 clergywomen, 7% of the reasons):

This category captured those moves from a congregation that resulted in disassociation from parish ministry. Very few left for a secular job.

Alternative Ministry (6% of the reasons)

Examples of alternative ministry mentioned were counseling, mediation, teaching in a seminary, social activism. Some of these shifts were a direct result of negative experiences with congregational ministry, while others were a result of refining personal goals and reflecting on individual talents.

“I’m a good preacher and teacher, but loathed all the administrative junk that absorbs a pastor’s time and prevents him/her from really sharing the gospel. I seem to be doing much more ‘behind the scenes’ mentoring, teaching, etc., now.”

“Sense of call to specialized ministry. Limitations of working as associate in a system where the glass ceiling limits gifts.”

“Positive reason—loved doing pastoral care and chaplaincy was perfect fit. Negative reason—my time as a single woman pastor was the loneliest period of my life.”

“I went to be a volunteer-in-mission. I felt ‘called’ to serve in a more hands-on-way tired of preaching the gospel and wanted to live it.”

Left for Secular Job (1% of the reasons)

Very few clergywomen stated that they left ministry for a secular job. Ambiguous responses were defined as “received another call.”

“I resigned from a church to support my husband while he did doctoral work.”

“I was exhausted and definitely needed a change. A 9-5 job Mon-Fri seemed like a vacation by comparison to parish ministry.”

“I chose to enter another profession and trained to be a clinical psychologist.”

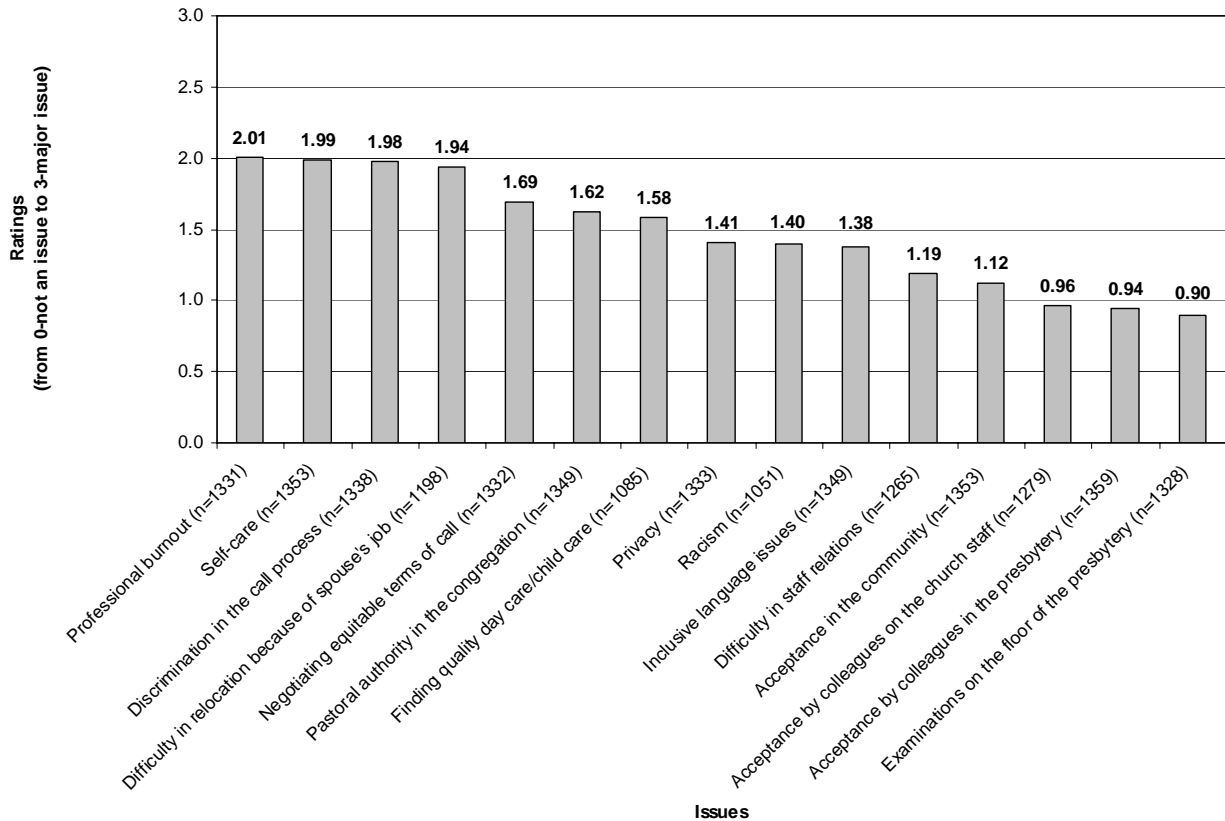
Key Question #4: What are Issues of Concern to Presbyterian Clergywomen?

Clergywomen were asked to rate 15 listed issues using a scale of 0-3, with 3 being a “major issue” and 0 being “not an issue” in their experience. The average importance they gave to the issues is displayed in Figure 9. (For further details, see Appendix, Table D.)

Issues of Major Concern

Six hundred and ninety-one clergywomen responded to the invitation to comment on any issues they ranked as “major.” About 75% of the clergywomen rated four issues as “definitely an issue” or “a major issue” discrimination in the call process, professional burnout, self-care, and difficulty in relocation because of spouse’s job.

Figure 9: Intensity of Issues Faced by Presbyterian Clergywomen (n=1,404 Clergywomen)



Discrimination in the call process (76% of the clergywomen):

Fifty-eight comments were offered on discrimination within the call process. Comments made in other sections of the survey support the importance of this issue: the glass ceiling perceived by many clergywomen, the perception that few appealing positions are truly open to women, the sense that they are often simply token interviews in order to satisfy representation requirements.

Some comments about call process discrimination:

“The cousin system/good ol’ pastors’ network in the call process.”

“I’ve been on Committees on Ministry for the past 20 years (in 3 different presbyteries). To this day I continue to hear from PNC’s that they do not want to call a ‘woman pastor.’”

“Many search committees appear to list minimum salary on CIF. But if a man is called, offer significantly more money than they would to a woman.”

Difficulty in relocation because of spouse's job (75% of the clergywomen):

A sample of 22 comments on this issue follows:

“Many of us (men and women) are facing complex decisions about our careers vs. our spouses' careers.”

“The Presbyterian system was not set up to consider the needs of the family if the pastor is also the primary care provider nor was it set up with any regard to a spouse's occupation.”

Professional burnout and Self-care (74% of the clergywomen):

These issues received 289 comments and often echoed one another:

“This is a clergy issue—male and female. But health issues—spiritual and physical—are different for women. Also, women seem reluctant to seek out what they need to be healthy and whole. Women are natural givers—burnout is very real!”

“The difficulty in balancing healthy care of self and responsible care of others, I believe, is the most difficult challenge to women in ministry. Women are socialized by church and society to excel in care of others. Clergywomen struggle (more than men) to pay attention to themselves.”

“Self-care and burnout seem to be very much related. Women have a sense that they need to succeed not only for themselves but also for the women who may come after them. Rather than seeing things which don't work as (at least in part) the fault of the committee or session or group involved, it is seen as a personal failure, to be avoided by over-functioning and not taking care of self.”

In 2000, male and female clergywomen also felt strongly about self-care and achieving balance in their lives.²⁰ In 1993²¹ and in 2000,²² clergywomen discussed their loneliness and isolation as well as the difficulty of establishing boundaries.

Issues of Intermediate Concern

Finding quality day care/child care (60% of the clergywomen):

Thirty-five clergywomen wrote specifically about their experiences with childcare; a larger number discussed the choice to stay home to care for children so that they would not have to use daycare.

“Also adequate child care for continuing education, retreats, upper judicatory meetings, etc., even for presbytery committee work.”

²⁰ Susan Fox. “Office of Field Education and Placement Study of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Master of Divinity Graduates – Draft.” Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education. October 2000. p. 8

²¹ Research Services. *Presbyterian Clergywomen Survey: Final Report*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). Congregational Ministries Division. 1993. p. iii.

²² Susan Fox. “Office of Field Education and Placement Study of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Master of Divinity Graduates – Draft.” Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education. October 2000. p. 9

“With regard to the child care issue specifically; this presbytery remains the only presbytery in the state . . . that will not offer childcare during its stated meetings. As a clergy couple, one of us must choose not to attend each meeting. My husband and I have pursued this topic through presbytery council and staff without success.”

“A line item in our salary packages for day care would be a huge incentive to remain in the ministry.”

“Childcare—when church members care for my kids, complicate dual roles. Can be okay if done right, but there are concerns.”

Negotiating equitable terms of call (60% of the clergywomen):

Clergywomen volunteered 40 comments on this issue. Some examples follow:

“I resigned because the administration committee did not raise my pay at the same rate as the male pastors (three of them who’d been in the church 12, 14 and 17 years). The congregation fought the committee, but the senior pastor covered his ears and pretended not to hear anything.”

“It is assumed women have a spouse whose job pays well, so they need not be paid as much. To ask for it is viewed as being greedy by those in the church.”

“Equitable term of call—even though my husband and I have the same degrees and number of years in ministry—only one congregation has paid equitable calls and that was because my husband took a cut in his!”

“Women get paid less at same pastorate than men. Church depends on spouse’s insurance to free them of that cost—women aren’t able to negotiate as well because the options are fewer.”

“I have turned down positions where the inequality was apparent, and they weren’t willing to budge. The man who took one position got \$50,000 more than they offered me!”

“In co-pastorates, my husband was referred to as ‘pastor’ while I was ‘Mike’s wife.’ Congregation’s feeling that I ‘didn’t need’ equitable pay or pension.”

Generally, there were many comments about low wages clergy received. Comments about low clergy pay were written in response to three questions on the survey. Eighty-seven of the clergywomen who felt that women are leaving the profession discussed low pay as a major reason.

Fifty of those who had ceased serving a congregation at some point cited pay as a reason for leaving. In addition, 78 clergywomen added comments about wages, while elaborating on what they considered to be the “major issues” of those listed on the survey. Another 24 clergywomen wrote responses to “Other Issues” that concerned wages.

Low Pay for Pastors

Thirty-four clergywomen wrote about the low wages clergy receive:

“Churches are looking to save; have lots of excuses for why they don’t financially support their pastors, male and female, but the bottom line is that leaving negotiation to pastors isn’t working.”

“To be able to have a continuing ministry, I have accepted positions that are grossly underpaid in relation to the amount of work involved.”

“Salaries—if I had not had other sources of income, I do not think I would have been willing to stay in ministry.”

“Terms of call (not equity issue) most are so low as to be impossible to accept (especially small, rural churches).”

“In 25 years of employment in Presbyterian Church and related agencies, I’ve had 6 years of pension/medical coverage.”

Low Pay for Women

Sixty-four clergywomen wrote about the particularly low pay given women clergy.

“In the church where I am a parish associate the #2 associate pastor (woman) is paid 1/3 of what the senior pastor is paid. Number 1 assoc. (male) is paid 2/3 of senior pastor’s compensation.”

“Churches will not hire women as the pastor in medium and large churches!! So you never can make a living wage.”

“I have been paid on a par with male colleagues in the Presbytery in only one call over my years of ministry and that was an interim for 1½ years. (I’ve been on COM in 3 different Presbyteries).”

“As a member of this presbytery’s Committee on Ministry I work with churches seeking pastors. The more rural/conservative, the more they believe they want a guy, but the more willing they are to accept a woman because they believe (and it is true) that they don’t have to pay her as much. It appears that churches are willing to pay more for male clergy.”

“The idea that a woman does not need as much money as a man still prevails. I think there is also a feeling that a woman pastor is a bargain because you can call a really good minister for a lot less money.”

Pastoral authority in the congregation (57% of clergywomen)

On this issue, 105 comments were made. Forty-two clergywomen specifically mentioned “pastoral authority,” and another 63 discussed leadership issues—largely, how women’s leadership styles were not as well respected in the church as were men’s.

“Sometimes others on the staff look at male clergy as having more authority. Female support staff can try to triangulate female pastors to get what they want from the male clergy on staff.”

“Discrimination can occur simply because one is a woman. . . As my husband and I were interim co-pastors, there was a deep-seated feeling that he was staff and I the deacon.”

“Working with female secretaries or volunteers (women) my age or younger is not good. Competition? Authority issues?”

“I think the ‘pastoral authority’ issue can be a problem for second career women moving into head-of-staff from associate positions. The issue is getting committees to understand their qualifications.”

Gender-related Leadership Issues

“Being disrespected for having qualities that are ‘male’ in our culture (aggressive, decisive, tough, etc.)”

“Male power still viewed as more valuable than female power.”

Racism (55% of clergywomen):

Seven clergywomen offered comments about racism. For example:

“In my work on COM and membership in two different presbyteries, I have definitely witnessed discrimination in the call process and racism.”

“Racism—not [an issue] for me, but I’m sure it is a major issue—how many white congregations have a non-white female pastor?”

Issues of Lesser Concern

The issues categorized as of “lesser concern” are those that were identified as a concern by fewer than 50% of the clergywomen. From 22-45% of clergywomen considered these concerns, however, so they do merit attention.

These may be issues that the church is currently addressing in various ways as the leadership comes to terms with having women colleagues. Most are related to relationships with professional colleagues (e.g. difficulty in staff relations, acceptance by colleagues on the church staff and in the presbytery and examination on the floor of presbytery). Some are related to relationships with others in their community (e.g., personal privacy, inclusive language, and acceptance in the community).

Other Issues

Clergywomen were given the opportunity to list “Other Issues” beyond the 15 provided on the survey. Three hundred and sixty-two clergywomen (26% of total) responded. Eight percent or more of these women wrote about three points: the dearth of good positions available to women (12% of other responses); the difficulties of balancing family responsibilities with ministry responsibilities (11% of other responses); and theological or philosophical incompatibility (8% of other responses).

A lack of positions was attributed to gender discrimination. Difficulty balancing work and family was attributed to women having more family responsibilities than men. Theological or philosophical differences included feminism vs. patriarchal conservatism as well as some clergywomen’s evangelical leanings vs. serving “maintenance-oriented congregations.” There is overlap between these categories in that some of the clergywomen lamented the lack of part-time positions for women who must balance family upkeep with work, for example.

Lack of good positions available to women (43 write-in responses):

“Delegated to smaller churches with lower pay but responsibilities just as great or greater than pastors of larger churches.”

“Availability of desirable positions. The ones offered to women men won’t even consider.”

Difficulties balancing family with ministry (40 write-in responses):

“The pressure of having sick kids, poor day care and a full schedule is very wearing and leads to burnout. Dragging a sick kid to work erodes pastoral authority in many cases.”

“The pastor's position is set up, historically, for men with wives at home to do the childcare, the housework, the cooking, etc. 55 hours a week, with lots of night meetings. For women pastors who have full-time jobs at home, this set-up is extremely difficult. But to be a senior pastor, a woman must accept this set up. This is the major bind I perceive for female clergy, who have families. Very few find themselves able to take on full-time pastoral positions, and good part-time positions are unavailable.”

Theological or philosophical incompatibility (29 write-in responses):

“I also grew tired of fighting the same battles over and over again, abortion, inclusive language and images, women in leadership, etc. We could never seem to move forward in the church because we had to go backward to re-fight battles we fought 30 years ago. I decided it was time for me to go and do the ministry I felt called to do. I couldn’t wait for the church anymore. I am now an M.D., working in a central city hospital and a free clinic.”

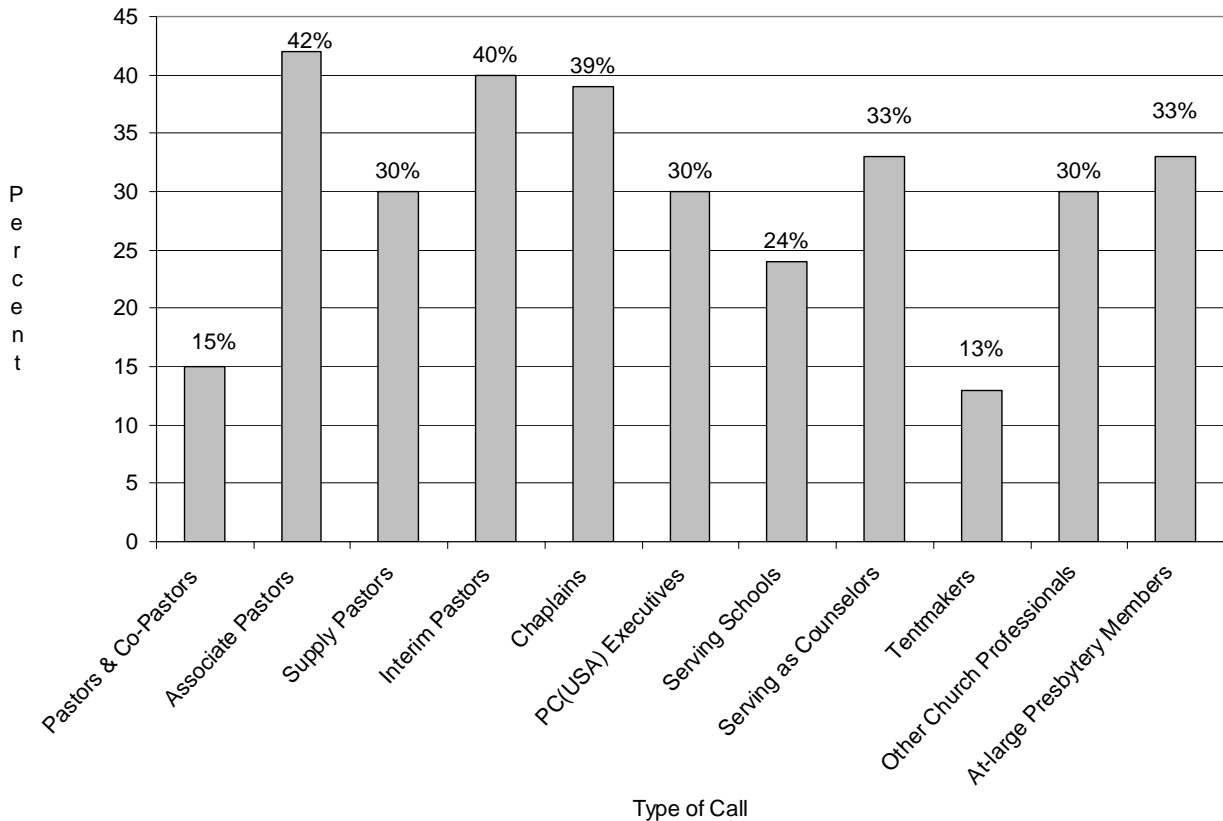
“1. The rejection of feminist theologies and biblical studies, and ethics as serious responses to an elite, white, male tradition. 2. Different styles of ministry challenge male concepts of power and authority.”

ACWC Conclusions

A glance at *Comparative Statistics 2001*²³ reveals how far clergywomen have come in almost 50 years. In 2000 in the PC(USA), women comprised 18% of all 21,065 clergy, including those who were working, retired, and classified as “at-large” members. If women and men were distributed equally among all the calls, clergywomen would be 18% of each call. However, as seen in Figure 10, there are more than 18% of women in most call types, except for pastors or co-pastors.

²³ Research Service. *Comparative Statistics 2001*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA). General Assembly Council. 2001.

Figure 10: Percent of Clergywomen in Each Call Type (n=21,065 clergy-2000)



As to position, women now comprise 15% of clergy who are pastors or co-pastors, 42% of associate pastors, 30% of supply pastors, 40% of interim pastors, 39% of chaplains, 30% of PC(USA) executives, 24% of clergy serving in schools, 33% of clergy serving as counselors, 30% of other church professionals, and 33% are classified as “at-large.” The disproportionate percentage of women serving in each position is notable, with the exception of pastors and co-pastors. The call types they hold affect their experiences as clergywomen and as professionals.

ACWC celebrates the fact that women are being called to positions of leadership in the PC(USA). At the same time, we note that, for many Presbyterian congregations, a woman serving in pastoral leadership is still an unfamiliar and unknown phenomenon. Clergywomen are still commonly introduced with the phrase, “I’d like you to meet our woman pastor.” And, as one General Presbyter noted at the 214th General Assembly (2002) Forum on Clergywomen, “Women continue not to get the big jobs. Women are able to get calls to dying congregations, but that prevents any sort of movement along a typical career path.”

It seems that many Pastor Nominating Committees (PNC) are reluctant to seriously consider interviewing clergywomen. One clergywoman wrote:

“I have read that statistically, it still takes women longer to receive a call, most calls are to small or rural churches. The second call to a solo position in a mid-size church is more difficult. In my own experience, I know that the PNC in this [mid-sized] church did not

even want to look at women clergy and they interviewed me under pressure. They were gracious in receiving me, and the committee felt led to extend the call but would not have without the initial pressure from the Presbytery committee. I have heard members of PNCs of other churches make the comment ‘I don’t think we’re ready for a woman.’”

ACWC believes that the church is called to address the reality of discrimination in the calling and treatment of clergywomen.

One way Presbyteries could help address the problem of discrimination would be to encourage Sessions to call women to interim positions. A former seminary dean noted that, in her experience, churches whose interim pastors have been women seem more open to seriously considering women for permanent positions. Presbyteries could help by actively recruiting women for interim positions.

Furthermore, Presbyteries, including Presbytery Executives, General Presbyters, and Presbytery Committees (especially committees on Ministry, Preparation, and Education) could collaborate to conduct gender and racial ethnic awareness training with congregations. When a church is calling a woman for the first time, issues of leadership and gender could be addressed in the congregational meeting. Committees on Ministry could expose PNC’s to gender differences in gifts for ministry and in ways of doing ministry.

We believe that the church needs to address issues regarding fair compensation for all clergy, but especially for women clergy.

We dream of a time when PNCs will consider women candidates, not because they are mandated to do so, but because of the gifts the candidate will bring to a church. As one surveyed clergywoman put it, “Then perhaps women will become more ‘human’ in the process and not just a gender option.”

ACWC also dreams of a time when the church will value the diversity of calls and gifts of all clergy. We heard from a campus minister who previously served as an Associate Synod Executive. She surveyed over 300 clergywomen in her area regarding their sense of call and how it was working itself out in reality. One of the significant issues that emerged was the large number of clergywomen, with significant time in ministry, serving in calls other than the parish. She wrote:

“The PC(USA) continues to view ministers who are called to ministry in places other than the traditional parish setting with significantly less ... respect. As women in ministry increasingly find themselves in these situations, it is painful to hear regularly the question, ‘You are such a good minister. When will you get a congregation?’ It is the age-old struggle to balance our desire to value a diversity of calls and gifts with the wider societal perception that bigger is better. Our own parish-based biases continue to marginalize women who minister beyond the bounds of the traditional parish setting or those in ministry in parishes with smaller populations.”

As we reviewed the surveys, ACWC found tremendous amounts of stress among the women who practice ministry. We know that the nature and practice of ministry are changing as the church moves forward in time, and that change is not always for the better. Clergy are prepared by seminaries to be spiritual leaders, but they encounter many other expectations in the actual practice of ministry. We know that the needs for family time, for personal time, and for fair compensation cut across lines of gender, race, and sexuality, and believe these issues need to be addressed by the church at all levels. Clergywomen remind us that the gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't call its servants to burn themselves out. ACWC believes that the church needs to be a better place to work.

Certainly the survey results indicate that the church needs to give greater attention to the matter of staff relations. Stories of painful conflict in staff and parish relations point to the serious need for work in this area. One clergywoman recommended the book *Becoming Colleagues* by Carol E. Becker.²⁴ A seminary professor, Becker has conducted seminars on women and men in leadership roles as colleagues in ministry. Training for heads-of-staff and for all working in multi-staff situations seems to be a critical need.

In November 2002, ACWC received an inquiry from a joint task force of a Committee On Ministry (COM) and Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) in the Northwest, inquiring about the results of the survey, and posing the question, "What can we do to attract and retain women pastors in our Presbytery?" ACWC finds this to be a refreshing question. So, the questions we pose to the church are these: "How can the church be a more welcoming place for clergywomen? What would attract women to serve?"

Finally, ACWC wishes to thank the REFT Institute for its assistance with coding and analyzing the surveys.

Above all, we wish to thank the clergywomen who responded to the survey and shared their experience and wisdom with us. We are grateful to God for the presence of women in leadership at all levels in the PC(USA). It is our hope that this report will be a tool to engage the church in conversation about important issues and that the church will, with God's help, become a more welcoming place for all its ministers.

Recommendations to the 215th General Assembly (2003) - Approved

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns calls upon the church at every level to raise awareness about gender-discrimination in the church. It made the following recommendations to the 215th General Assembly (2003):

1. Instruct General Assembly entities and request middle governing bodies and seminaries to encourage congregations to call clergywomen from various racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as Caucasian clergywomen.

²⁴ Carol E. Becker. *Becoming Colleagues*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley. 2000.

2. Instruct ACWC to research current programs and support for clergywomen, particularly racial ethnic and single clergywomen and to bring recommendations to the 216th General Assembly (2004).
3. Instruct Churchwide Personnel Services and request middle governing bodies, seminaries, and congregations to address the difficulties frequently encountered in the position of associate pastor.
4. Request that presbyteries and congregations review their policies and practices in relation to clergywomen, including salaries, pension, Social Security, health insurance, dependent care, family-leave and other benefits and correct any deficiencies or inequities found.
5. Request Committees on Ministry, Committees on Preparation for Ministry, and congregations to emphasize the importance of integrating self-care and care of family with the demands/expectations of the practice of ministry, for clergy and for candidates.
6. Call congregations to new openness in considering clergywomen for positions of pastoral leadership, especially as solo pastors and heads-of-staff.
7. Call upon PC(USA) seminaries to develop courses, including continuing education, addressing the importance of holistic health as it relates to the demands/expectations of the practice of ministry.
8. Recommend for study the biblical and theological background and policy proposals incorporated in the study papers *All the Live Long Day: Women and Work*²⁵ and *God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community and Christian Vocation*.²⁶
9. Instruct the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns and the Women's Ministries Program Area to partner with the Committee on Representation and the Racial Ethnic Caucuses to monitor clergywomen's call processes and equity issues related to terms of call.
10. Instruct ACWC to provide a forum at future General Assemblies for clergywomen to comment on issues raised in the 2002 ACWC survey and offer continuing feedback to the church.
11. Instruct the Stated Clerk's Office to make this report and any follow-up information available to the church electronically.

The recommendations were approved with slight amendments that are reflected here and in the 215th General Assembly (2003) minutes.

²⁵ The Office of the General Assembly. *All the Livelong Day: Women and Work*. Louisville, KY: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). 1988.

²⁶ The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. *God's Work in Our Hands: Employment, Community and Christian Vocation*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Office of the General Assembly. 1995.

APPENDIX

Table A. Type of Call Filled by Sampled Clergywomen

Types of Calls	Number of clergywomen	Percent of clergywomen
Pastors & co-pastors	1000	28%
Associate pastors	607	17%
Supply pastors	175	5%
Interim pastors	242	7%
Chaplains	247	7%
PC(USA) executives	150	4%
Serving in schools	129	4%
Serving as counselors	63	2%
Tentmakers	7	.2%
Other church professionals	122	3%
“At-large” presbytery members	808	23%
Total:	3,550	100%

Table B. Number of Years* Clergywomen Served in Each Type of Call (3,158 calls)

Types of Calls	Years spent in the call type	Percent
Congregation-based Pastor	9,071	59%
Pastor, solo pastor, head-of-staff.	4,015	26%
Associate and/or assistant pastor	3,749	24%
Co-pastor and/or co-associate pastor	1,242	8%
Organizing pastor, new church development, etc.	65	0.4%
Supply Positions	1,777	12%
Interim pastor	951	6%
Stated supply	425	3%
Temporary supply	212	1%
Designated pastor	102	0.7%
Interim non-pastor position	86	0.6%
Other Service to the Church	1,682	11%
Middle governing bodies – presbytery or synod	404	3%
General Assembly entities	248	2%
Parish Associate	396	3%
Pastoral Counseling	211	1%
Christian Education	194	1%
Missionaries; Mission Co-workers	90	0.6%
Honorary calls – visitation, emeritus, etc.	36	0.2%
Youth ministries and/or camp staff	44	0.3%
Other	58	0.4%
Service Beyond the Jurisdiction of the Church	2,741	18%
<i>Faith-based</i>	2,266	15%
Chaplain	1,342	9%
Seminaries	370	2%
Other denominations	264	2%
Teaching	115	0.8%
Other	176	1%
<i>Non faith-based</i>	474	3%
Teaching	164	1%
Other	214	1%
Social service/non-profit agencies	97	0.6%
Retired or On Disability	22	0.1%
Total	15,291 years	100%

* When more than one call type is listed together, the total number of years is added to each of the calls, treating them as concurrent calls rather than consecutive calls.

Table C. Reasons Clergywomen Leave Congregations (1,286 reasons)

Reason for Leaving	Number of Comments	Percentage of Reasons
Difficulties within Position	462	37%
Internal Church Politics—Issues with Staff	154	12%
Internal Church Politics—Issues with Congregation	91	7%
Discrimination Against Women	59	5%
Schedule Too Demanding	55	4%
Financial	49	4%
Emotional Distress	46	4%
Sexual Orientation Discrimination	8	1%
Personal Reasons	457	36%
Family Time	122	10%
Felt Unfulfilled	111	9%
Spouse Job	89	7%
Finished/Began School	44	3%
Moved	42	3%
Marriage/Divorce	28	2%
Illness	21	2%
Normal Course of Events	273	21%
Received Another Call	146	11%
Interim Ended	93	7%
Part-Time to Full-Time or Vice Versa	34	3%
Change of Life Direction	94	7%
Alternative Ministry	79	6%
Left for Secular Job	15	1%

Table D. Clergywomen Identified Issues and Intensity of Concern* (n=1,404 clergywomen)

Issues	Intensity Rating	Importance of the Issue			
	3=major issue 0=not an issue	Major issue	Definitely an issue	Minor issue	Not an issue
Professional burnout	2.01	442 33%	550 41%	252 19%	88.1 7%
Self-care	1.99	451 33%	553 41%	241 18%	109 8%
Discrimination in the call process	1.98	376 28%	643 48%	235 18%	85 6%
Difficulty of relocation because of spouse's job	1.94	398 33%	507 42%	118 10%	176 15%
Negotiating equitable terms of call	1.69	310 23%	494 37%	339 25%	189 14%
Pastoral authority in the congregation	1.62	216 16%	557 41%	418 31%	158 12%
Finding quality day care/child care	1.58	235 22%	408 38%	191 18%	252 23%
Racism	1.40	153 15%	416 40%	179 17%	304 29%
Privacy	1.41	213 16%	388 29%	471 35%	262 20%
Inclusive language issues	1.38	203 15%	375 28%	508 38%	264 20%
Difficulty in staff relations	1.19	107 8%	359 28%	471 37%	329 20%
Acceptance in the community	1.12	67 5%	365 27%	587 43%	335 25%
Acceptance by colleagues on the church staff	.96	50 4%	290 23%	503 39%	437 34%
Acceptance by colleagues in the presbytery	.94	64 5%	226 17%	630 46%	440 32%
Examinations on the floor of the presbytery	.90	83 6%	214 16%	518 39%	513 39%

*Some clergywomen gave a range of values in response to some issue questions. These responses were coded as the midpoint of the range. When the midpoint was halfway between two responses, the response is listed half in one category and half in the other on the table.