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# Staying in Ministry: a Qualitative Study of Seventh-day Adventist Women Pastors

Leslie Helfer Bumgardner  
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Andrews University

School of Education

STAYING IN MINISTRY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WOMEN PASTORS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Leslie Helfer Bumgardner

March 2005

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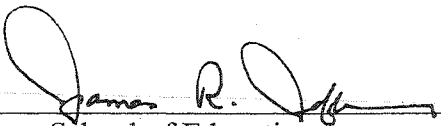
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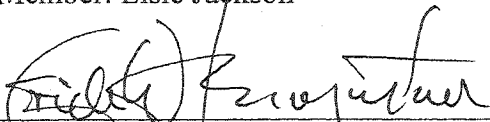
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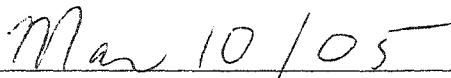
  
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ABSTRACT

STAYING IN MINISTRY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WOMEN PASTORS

by

Leslie Helfer Bumgardner

Chair: Shirley A. Freed

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: STAYING IN MINISTRY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST WOMEN PASTORS

Name of researcher: Leslie Helfer Bumgardner

Name and degree of faculty chair: Shirley A. Freed, Ph.D.

Date completed: March 2005

### Problem

Women pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist Church function under limitations not imposed upon their male colleagues. This study explored the pastoral experiences of 11 Adventist women clergy serving in the United States and what contributed to their longevity in ministry.

### Method

This qualitative study followed a narrative design. Data from the purposive sample were obtained through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The constant comparative method was utilized to code data into emergent themes. The following methods were utilized to enhance internal validity: triangulation; member checks;



clarifying researcher bias; rich/thick description; including negative or discrepant information; and peer debriefing. Two composite women were used to represent the themes from the interviews. The image of what a female pastor with longevity in ministry looks like can be formed by the reader and provides the ability to assess if the results of this analysis fit a particular situation, thus providing external validity. Hughes's (1945) conceptual framework, *Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status*, provided further understanding of the findings.

### Results

The women in this study show they are responding to the call of God. For many, their entry into ministry and subsequent service involved challenges, a lack of female role models, and juggling multiple roles, notably that of pastor and mother. Their joys revolve around connections with people and making a difference in the lives of individuals.

Thoughts of leaving have entered their minds. Ultimately, deep commitment to their pastoral calling overrides thoughts of leaving. A life changed as a result of their work as pastors further solidifies their decision to stay. When speaking of needed supports, they express a desire for greater trustworthiness in church leaders, and appeal for equality in function, if not ordination.

### Conclusions

The women show depth of conviction about their calling. Making a difference in the lives of people is a focal point of their ministry. When challenges come from church members, colleagues, or church leaders, they remember that the authority by which they

live their lives exceeds the authority of any earthly power, and until God makes clear to them that they should change course, they will remain pastors.

To my children, Michael and Sara,  
and my parents, Billy and Yvonne Helfer

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Finally, “to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21, NRSV).

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of the Problem**

A note of concern is sounding in the American Christian church. Numerous denominations report a possible clergy shortage. Of particular interest to this study is the prediction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is not exempt from this possibility.

A Clergy Shortage Study commissioned by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod reported that if current trends continue, by 2017, 38% of churches in this denomination will experience a “calling vacancy” (Klass & Klass, 1999). In addition, clergy shortages are being experienced or are predicted in the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Disciples of Christ, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Adventist) (Carroll, 2000; Klass & Klass, 1999; Oliver, 2002; Wind & Rendle, 2001). In an Adventist News Network story dated April 2, 2002, Dave Osborne, ministerial secretary for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD), predicted a shortage of pastors in the Adventist church, “It’s a crisis that’s absolutely looming in our church” (Oliver, 2002).

How to prevent or alleviate a clergy shortage can be categorized in two ways: (a) the need to recruit new pastors into the ranks of professional clergy, and (b) strategies to

retain clergy already employed. Studies of recruitment issues found that the overall numbers of seminarians are staying flat or decreasing; however, the number of women seminarians is increasing; the average age of seminarians is increasing, with women older than men; and there is less interest among seminarians in serving in congregational ministry (Carroll, 1992, 2000; Charlton, 1997; Settlege, 2000; Wiborg & Collier, 2001; Wicai, 2001). The fact that overall numbers of seminarians are flat or decreasing and there is less reported interest in congregational ministry points toward a possible decrease in the number of clergy available to serve in local churches.

Studies that aid in understanding the problem of clergy retention identify a number of issues. Some studies report high levels of job satisfaction (Carroll, 2000; Dart, 2002; DeVogel, 1986); other studies reveal challenges which include: negative effects on the pastor's family, high levels of stress and burnout, relatively low clergy salaries, a possible increase in the number of clergy being fired or removed, loneliness, and few resources to help (Carroll, 2000; Charlton, 2000; DeVogel, 1986; Kilcher, 1987; Klass & Klass, 1999; Wind & Rendle, 2001).

Additional studies that focused on issues facing women clergy relate to morale, job satisfaction, and the reasons why women leave or think of leaving congregational ministry (Albee, 2000; Carroll, 2000; Charlton, 1997; Keen, 1999; Lummis & Nesbitt, 2000; Wiborg & Collier, 2001). Most important, documentation confirms that women leave or think of leaving pastoral ministry in greater numbers than their male colleagues (Carroll, 2000; Wiborg & Collier, 2001).

### Statement of the Problem

The Adventist Church has wrestled for many years with the place of women in the ranks of the professional pastorate. Women are preparing for ministry in Adventist colleges and at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. However, during their employment as pastors, women have functional limitations that male, ordained pastors with comparable education, responsibilities, and service do not have. Women clergy are not eligible to organize a church, unite churches, and ordain local elders and deacons (North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003-2004). And women pastors are denied ordination. Alternatively, they can be commissioned after demonstrating a call to ministry and having served at least 5 years as a licensed commissioned minister.

Since women are not ordained, they are prohibited from serving as conference/mission presidents, as those positions should be filled by an ordained minister (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003-2004). Also, the ordination credential for male clergy allows them to perform ministerial functions anywhere in the world. In contrast, "a commissioned minister is authorized by the conference to perform substantially all the religious functions within the scope of the tenets and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the members in the church or churches to which the minister is assigned and elected as a church elder" (North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003-2004, p. 463). In other words, men are able to serve globally, women only locally.

A possible application of this policy: if asked to conduct wedding or baptismal services outside her local conference, a woman with a commissioned minister credential (not the ordination credential her male colleague would hold for similar experience and

training) could be asked to receive permission from both the president of the local conference in which she serves, as well as the president of the conference in which she has been asked to conduct such ceremonies. If a female pastor serves as the sole pastor of a congregation, policy prohibits her from presiding over the ordination service of the local elders and deacons in her church. If strictly applied, an ordained pastor would need to be called in to conduct this service.

In light of the ordination issue and lack of advancement, the questions arise, Why do these women stay in ministry? What keeps them faithfully serving in these circumstances?

The research upon which to base conclusions is limited. The literature review in this chapter outlines the results of studies by Dudley (1987a; 1987b), the views of women in ministry by pastors and religion teachers; Dudley (1996), a study of Adventist lay members attitudes toward their woman pastor; and Vance (1999), a comparison of the experiences of female and male Adventist clergy. In addition, a survey conducted for Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry (Hamilton Chandler Communications, 1992) provides an assessment of the attitudes toward ministry of Adventist women pastors, chaplains, Bible teachers, and pastoral counselors after the 1990 vote at the General Conference Session to deny ordination to women in ministry.

To date, no in-depth studies ask Adventist women in ministry to share their experience. More specifically, no one has asked Adventist women pastors why they stay committed to pastoral ministry. If the experience of Adventist women clergy is similar to women of other denominations, likely, both internal motivations and external supports will be important to them. If reasons for women staying can be identified, then those who

wish to provide a climate and resources to promote longevity for these women will know what the women find important.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify what contributes to longevity in ministry for women who have chosen to stay in pastoral ministry in the American Seventh-day Adventist Church for at least 5 years.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study: How do Adventist women come to pastoral ministry? How do they experience ministry? What challenges do they face as pastors? How do these difficult experiences affect their desire to stay? Why do these women choose to stay in pastoral ministry?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are given in order to provide clarity of the terminology utilized in this study.

“Ministry” and “pastoral ministry” refer to the work done in a local church by a paid employee of the church or denomination.

“Pastor,” “clergy,” and “minister” are used interchangeably to refer to employees of a church or other denominational entity to do the work of ministry in a local congregation.

“Adventist Church” is used to refer to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the denominational affiliation of the women interviewed for this study.

“Conference,” “union conference,” “North American Division” (NAD), and “General Conference” (GC) refer to organizational units of the Adventist Church, increasing in territory size from conference to the General Conference, which covers the entire world field. Church structure and governance is covered in more detail on page 7.

“Call” or “calling” is the conviction by a pastor that she or he has been designated and gifted by God to function in ministry.

“Ordination” refers to the service that recognizes the calling and giftedness of individuals to work in ministry. The Adventist Church ordains only male clergy.

“Commissioning” is the term utilized in the Adventist Church for the service that sets women apart for work as pastors, as the church forbids the ordination of women.

### **Significance of the Study**

The body of research on Christian women clergy is growing; however, apparently no research exists on Adventist women clergy and their longevity in ministry. An analysis of the Adventist clergywomen’s experience will show what has contributed to their continuation in ministry. If common characteristics, influences, and themes can be identified, then the church and its members can support women in pastoral ministry in ways that are helpful. This could aid in creating a climate in which women would remain in pastoral ministry. In addition, this study can provide women newly entering pastoral ministry with an understanding of what has been helpful and challenging to their female colleagues. With these insights, they can then be intentional about receiving support that will lead to their own longevity in ministry. Finally, this study would add the voices of Adventist women in pastoral ministry to the body of literature on women clergy.

In part this study begins telling the stories of women pastors, an approach Dybdahl (1998) encourages. One step he suggests toward understanding the differing opinions among members over the role of women in the church, especially the question of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, is to “tell our story and listen to each other’s feelings” (p. 430). He continues, “Those who believe in women’s ordination need to tell about their daughter who in tears shares how she desires to minister for God but feels discriminated against. They need to discuss the pain of the mature woman who has the same education and experience as her male counterpart but never has received the same recognition” (p. 431).

### **Church Structure and Governance**

The organizational units of the Seventh-day Adventist Church need explanation. Each pastor ministers to individuals in a local church; however, they are employed by a local conference, not the local church. A local conference directs and supports the work of that local church, as well as a number of churches within a state, province, or territory. The local conference is a part of a union conference, which is comprised of conferences within larger areas, often a grouping of states. The North American Division (NAD) has administrative responsibility for the nine union conferences in the United States and Canada. The General Conference (GC) encompasses the 13 divisions throughout the world.

All levels of the church structure have a representative form of governance, using a democratic process to elect officers, boards, and committees that oversee the work of each level of the church organization. An elected president directs the work of each local conference, union conference, the NAD, and the GC. The GC is the “highest earthly



authority for the Church” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church: World Church Structure and Governance*, 2005, paragraph 6) and is the final authority when differences arise between church organizations and institutions. The GC sets the policies for application throughout the world church.

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of literature for this topic included a search of these databases: Dissertation Abstracts, ATLA Religion, Wilson Select, RIM, Sociological Abstracts, PsychInfo, and the Adventist Periodical Index. These topics are reviewed below: studies of women clergy, studies of women, clergy gender differences, and pastoral calling and vocation. Major studies are briefly summarized below, while detailed findings of these and other studies that informed, paralleled, or contrasted with the findings of this study are integrated in the chapters that follow.

#### **Studies of Women Clergy**

One of the earliest studies of Christian female clergy, confined to data collected from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (Bock, 1967), “produced a composite picture of the female clergy that *at least suggests* professional marginality” (p. 539, emphasis in original). Bock (1967) concluded from the data that the total number of women clergy remains small; they are usually older and less educated than their male counterparts. They are also more likely to work part-time and have a lower salary than male clergy. He also commented on the “conflict between roles expected of clergy and other roles expected of females” (p. 533). Because of the “exclusive and extensive demands” (p. 533) of the clergy role, the conflict between career and family may be more acute for women seeking

to enter this profession. Finally, he pointed out one significant challenge for women in the clergy profession: it is considered not only a masculine career, but “sacredly” masculine (p. 531).

A number of more recent studies have been conducted that address issues pertinent to female clergy, many confirming and extending the conclusions of Bock (1967). The following are generally quantitative in methodology. The major findings of these studies will be integrated into the findings of this study of Adventist clergywomen.

Hale, King, and Jones (1985) studied the problems and satisfactions of United Methodist clergywomen, distributing an extensive questionnaire to over 900 women, either ordained or proceeding toward ordination. Their study was based upon the 838 that were returned. While 40% of the women interviewed reported negligible problems; 35% reported significant difficulties. Sources of help included parents, husband, colleagues, and church administrators; although in some instances these same individuals were a source of difficulty. A lack of female role models and mentors was noted. Overall, these women found satisfaction with their work; however, “as a clergywoman feels more vulnerable to ‘the system,’ she experiences less satisfaction” (p. 17).

Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis (1983) compared male and female clergy in the nine mainline Protestant denominations with the highest number of female clergy. The team conducted telephone interviews with 636 clergywomen, 619 clergymen completed a mailed survey, and 120 clergymen responded to telephone interviews. Some clergywomen and clergymen who participated in the study distributed 1,383 surveys to three key lay members of their congregations, with 737 surveys returned. A final source of data was telephone interviews with 80 women faculty at seminaries.

A study by Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang (1998) that built upon and expanded the work of Carroll et al. (1983) included a research base of 16 Protestant denominations. They surveyed over 5,000 female and male clergy, and then followed with 248 short telephone interviews with an equal number of women and men in parish ministry. They conducted longer interviews with 26 women and 4 men serving in a variety of ministry settings. In addition, they included 600 key lay leaders from some of the congregations whose clergy were a part of the study. Taken together, Carroll et al. (1983) and Zikmund et al. (1998) provide a broad picture of women clergy, including their seminary experience, calling to ministry, job placement issues, relationships with colleagues and family, complexities of their jobs in the local parish, and clergy leadership. They also contribute to an understanding of how the situation for women clergy has changed over the 12 years between these studies.

Lehman's study (1985) focused on the receptivity of women clergy in the United Presbyterian Church USA by their congregations and other clergy. He found increasing receptivity for women clergy through contact as they ministered in congregations and worked with other pastors.

The 70-year longitudinal study of women clergy in the Episcopal Church and Unitarian Universalist Association by Nesbitt (1997) looked at their impact on the ministry, and the effects of feminization on these denominations.

A number of qualitative studies of women clergy conducted over the past 20 years also informed my study and provided points of comparison and contrast between the women in those studies and the women included in my study. Those across multiple denominations include studies of clergywomen's worldviews (Ice, 1987), a feminist

vision of ministry (Rhodes, 1987), a focus on clergywomen's work and family systems (Bingham, 1992), bureaucratic and cultural underpinnings that exclude women clergy from positions of authority (Schmidt, 1996), and the experiences of women clergy in parish ministry (Arnold, 2001; Lawless, 1993). The more limited study conducted by Purvis (1995) used the congregational studies method and a feminist analysis to study the leadership of two women senior pastors, in the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church, and their impact on their churches.

A number of qualitative studies on women clergy are confined to single Protestant denominations and include Pentecostal churches (Lawless, 1988), the United Methodist Church (Bennett, 1993; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Kleingartner, 1999), and the Episcopal Church (Holzgang, 2000). A study of women rabbis (Kolton, 1999) provided an interesting comparison of their experience to that of Protestant women clergy. Wallace (1992) studied lay women and nuns in "priestless parishes" in the Roman Catholic Church. Wallace (1992) and Lawless (1988) are relevant because these Roman Catholic and Pentecostal women, like Adventist women clergy, are generally not ordained, and while functioning as pastors, they are not always viewed as such by others. Yet, they differ somewhat from the women in this study whose title is pastor.

Sellers's study (1997) of nine clergywomen who thought seriously of leaving parish ministry provided an important framework by which to assess the findings in this study, as several in this study of Adventist women have seriously considered leaving pastoral ministry at some point in their career. Sellers's findings will be analyzed and compared with the findings in this study in chapter 4.

Studies of Adventist women clergy are limited to those of Dudley (1987a; 1987b; 1996), Hamilton Chandler Communications (Hamilton Chandler Communications, 1992), and Vance (1999). Dudley studied how Adventist women pastors are viewed by other pastors, college and university religion teachers and seminary faculty, and lay members in the churches they serve.

The pastors Dudley (1987a) surveyed indicated strong support for women to speak before groups of men and women; to serve on institutional boards and committees, to serve the denomination as departmental directors, and to be involved in shaping the theology of the church. He found support to a lesser degree for women to serve as local church elders and to function as associate pastors of churches. More were favorable than not to the ordination of women: 46% supporting and 41% opposing. Support was not evident for women to serve as sole or senior pastors of a church, to serve in positions only open to ordained men, or for a woman to serve as the president of the General Conference.

Dudley (1987b) also surveyed religion teachers in Adventist colleges, universities, and seminaries both in North America and outside North America. The results indicated that “overall, these scholars give evidence of overwhelming support for women in ministry” (p. 17). Each of the 10 items relating to the role of women in the church received overall agreement of over 60%. Even on the controversial issue of the ordination of women as gospel ministers, 83% of North American teachers and 57% of non-North American teachers showed support for “women who have demonstrated their calling to the ministry to be ordained as gospel ministers” (p. 16).

Dudley (1996) also surveyed the members of 20 Adventist churches in the United States and Canada who are served by a female pastor or associate pastor to determine how these female pastors are received by their congregations. He found a favorable rating of women clergy's effectiveness by their members with 91% receiving an overall rating of excellent or good. In addition, after a congregation experienced the ministry of a woman, favorable attitudes toward their woman pastor rose from 75% to 87% during her tenure.

In 1992 Hamilton Chandler Communications conducted a survey of Adventist women pastors, chaplains, Bible teachers, and pastoral counselors for Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry (TEAM). The aim of this survey of 72 women in ministry was to explore their attitudes toward ministry and their intentions after the vote to deny ordination to Adventist women at the General Conference Session in 1990. Major findings of this survey include: Adventist women do not connect their call to ministry with denominational procedures, mixed opinions about their denominational credentials and denominational policy toward women in ministry, many women pastors did not find specific problems as a result of the General Conference decision, 70% still felt a strong call to ministry, and less than 10% were planning to leave ministry, although two-thirds have thought of leaving.

In her general study of gender and change issues in the Adventist Church, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion*, Vance (1999) included a chapter with a brief overview of the history of women serving in the church, and with a comparative study of 24 female clergy and 45 male clergy and their ministry experiences. Interestingly, her review of the involvement of

women in the Adventist Church found women's participation in church leadership to be not simply a current trend, but a renewal of a practice which began during the early days of the Adventist Church. However, she found that Adventist women clergy today face gender barriers in their attempt to serve as pastors, including less support than their male colleagues from other pastors, parents, and friends. Upon entering seminary, the women found an absence of female faculty role models and female peers. They reported greater difficulties than their male colleagues in obtaining employment, some citing difficulties because of gender. But their report of increased acceptance from their parishioners over time parallels the results found by Dudley (1996).

Several of these studies of women clergy discuss issues that either directly or indirectly affect women clergy's longevity in ministry. These include their call to ministry; mentors; support; challenges; relationships with church members, colleagues, and administrators; and self-care. For those women in faith traditions that ordain women, some identify official recognition as an important point, especially when challenges arise. Others find that mentors are a source of encouragement, as is the opportunity to serve as a mentor to others. For many, their calling is foundational to their ministry.

While not focused on women clergy, the Carruthers (2003) study, *The Impact of Faith, Family and Career on the Identity Formation and Internal Conflict of Christian Women in Academia with Children*, found that a personal faith commitment is an important aspect of their identity. The women in her study are challenged in fulfilling the demands of their professional calling and their family commitments, and if forced to choose between profession and family, they would choose their family. Finally, the women shared how they manage their multiple roles.

## Studies of Women

A number of studies addressing issues of women's development have informed this study. These works are based on the premise that since women have largely been left out of the construction of psychological theory, the study of women is vital if we are to understand their development and how it compares to that of men.

Among other findings, Jean Baker Miller's (1976) foundational work pointed out the importance that women attribute to emotional connectedness, cooperation with others, and creativity. Miller, a professor of psychiatry, states, "Women, more easily than men, can believe that any activity is more satisfying when it takes place in the context of relationships to other human beings—and even more so when it leads to the enhancement of others" (p. 53). She lists cooperation and creativity among women's strengths. "Serving others is one way of describing the fundamental form in which women's ties to others are structured" (p. 73). She continues the theme of connectedness by stating, "One central feature is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others" (p. 83).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) studied 135 college-age women and 45 women who work in family agencies that provide parenting information and assistance to clients. They developed a theory about how women gain knowledge and voice. The progression begins with received knowledge, moves through subjective knowledge and procedural knowledge, and concludes with constructed knowledge. The women in their study utilized the "metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development" (1986, p. 18). They also found that women are generally concerned about relationships and connections to others.



Gilligan's (1982) research on the process of women's moral choice was based on her view that Kohlberg's theory of moral development did not accurately describe women, who were believed to be less developmentally advanced than men. She pointed out the complex challenges women face as they seek to address the needs of others while remaining attentive to their own needs. She found that women generally operate from a concern for responsibility and care for others, while men more often seek impartial and fair decisions based on abstract laws and universal principles. In her view, relationships and connections are an important part of women's identity.

Josselson's (1987, 1996) longitudinal studies of identity formation and development began with a study of the identity status of 60 female college seniors. She followed 30 of these women through mid-life. She conducted two additional interviews: one 10 years after their graduation from college (1987) and a final interview 10 years after the second interview. In her final analysis of this group (1996), she found common psychological developments among the women, irrespective of earlier differences. Competence derived from a "sense of effectiveness in the world" (p. 180) and a "feeling that one makes a meaningful mark on the world" (p. 181) were important to these women. As is true of earlier studies cited, Josselson also found connection with others to be an integral part these women's identity: "These women have sought and worked for relationships of mutuality and empowerment" (p. 211). Finally, their lives encompass constant revisions: "As identity progresses, many forces, both internal and external, affect its revision" (p. 258).

Bateson's *Composing a Life* (1989) continues the examination of how women find ways to caringly integrate the conflicting commitments in their lives. This study of

herself and four other women uses the metaphor of the creative act of composing to discover how women bring meaning to their lives. She traces the ways in which women blend their family and professional lives to achieve harmony.

Other studies of women in politics, education, business, and management document women's different styles of leadership, management, and communication (Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Helgesen, 1990, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Rosener, 1995; Statham, 1987; Tannen, 1994).

### Clergy Gender Differences

The topic of gender differences has, not surprisingly, spilled over into the clergy profession, again with mixed views and results. Those who recognize the differences between men and women clergy and see women as committed to care and relationships, and as more approachable and less hierarchical include: Frame and Shehan (2004), Ice (1987), Nason-Clark (1987), Simon, Scanlan, and Nadell (1993), Stevens (1989), and Willhauck and Thorpe (2001). The Pentecostal women pastors in Lawless (1988) were viewed by the women and their members as mothers to their congregations. However, in their interviews with male clergy and rabbis, Simon and Nadell (1995) found that the majority do not perceive significant differences in how men and women function as pastors and rabbis. Finlay (1996) questioned men and women in a Presbyterian seminary to explore whether the placement differences between men and women graduating from seminary might be related to women's preferences. While not denying the possibility of gender discrimination, she concluded that women's differential placement may be related to their preferences for settings in which they can build strong relationships.

Lehman's (1993) study of men and women clergy in four mainline denominations sought an answer to the question of whether there is an identifiably male or female approach to ministry. He found the group as a whole generally viewed themselves in relatively feminine terms, especially on the measurement of interpersonal style. Lehman acknowledges that the answer to the question of gender differences is complicated. He found support for the following differences: men exhibited more "willingness to use power over the congregation," women showed more "desire to empower the congregation to manage its own life," men had more "preference for rational structure in decision making," and men had greater "legalistic tendencies when dealing with ethical issues" (p. 182). However, there was little support for the following differences: "desire for positions of formal authority, openness and vulnerability in interpersonal style, approach to preaching, acceptance of traditional criteria of clergy status, and involvement in social issues beyond the congregation" (p. 182).

In her in-depth study of two women pastors, Purvis's (1995) findings did not substantiate gender differences in the leadership styles of these women clergy. However, her study is limited in that it is based on the experiences of only two women, both of whom were senior pastors of their congregations.

By contrast, Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang (1998) found significant gender differences in their study. They found that many clergy believe women are more caring, more pastorally sensitive, more nurturing, and relate more personal experiences in their preaching, teaching, and counseling; while men seem more interested in the politics of the church, using power over others, and in job prestige. Women's style of leadership was seen as more cooperative and less hierarchical than that of men.

## Calling and Vocation

Pastors employed by the Adventist Church are expected to demonstrate a calling to ministry: “The ministry is not merely a profession; it is a calling” and a life commitment (North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003-2004, p. 491). Three spiritual qualifications for pastors are included in the first chapter of the manual published for Adventist clergy (*Seventh-day Adventist minister's manual*, 1992). They are “a personal call from Christ,” “a personal relationship with Christ,” and “a personal empowering by Christ” (pp. 17-19).

The personal call from Christ recognizes that the entry into ministry as a profession is different from the choice of other professions. Ministry is first God’s choice for the pastor. Recognition of the need for a personal relationship with Christ is crucial if the minister is to effectively serve. In fact, potential pastors are counseled to “stay away from the ministry unless you catch a vision of Christ” (*Seventh-day Adventist minister's manual*, 1992, p. 18). The gifts to effectively serve as a minister will become evident in those who are called to serve. These gifts include “moral earnestness, leadership, intelligence, common sense, relational skills, and teaching ability” (p. 19).

In the policy addressing those preparing for ordination to ministry, a number of additional qualifications are listed, including the proof of their calling as evidenced in “soul winning.” The calling for ministry extends so far that “even when he reaches his retirement years he should feel the call of God to the same standard of life as he did in his most active years.” The Adventist Church does not ordain women to pastoral ministry. However, those who serve as commissioned ministers, generally the classification for women serving as pastors, are also expected to “have demonstrated a divine call to

ministry” (North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003-2004, pp. 490-491, 157).

Adventists are not alone in their belief that those who serve as pastors are fulfilling a special calling from God, not just working in a profession. The essence of Niebuhr’s (1956, p. 64) four elements of a call are as follows: first is the “call to be a Christian,” which includes discipleship, “hearing and doing the Word of God,” repentance, faith, and responses common to every Christian. The second element is the inner or “secret call” of the individual which comes from God and leads the individual to recognize God’s invitation to do the work of ministry. Third is the “providential call” or the equipping of the person with the gifts and talents necessary to assume the work of ministry. Finally, the “ecclesiastical call” is the official invitation of a church body or institution to a person to work in ministry. These elements parallel the qualifications for Adventist ministry presented above as the relationship with Christ, the call from Christ, and an empowering by Christ (*Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual*, 1992).

Both the personal conviction of a call to serve as a pastor and the public evidence of this call, as seen in the giftedness of an individual and in an offer of employment, continue to be recognized by others as elements of an individual’s identity and work as a pastor, although issues of changing culture may affect the working-out of calling in individual lives (Aleshire, 1995; Christopherson, 1994; Neufeld, 2003; Peterson, 1992; Stackhouse, 1987; Willimon, 1983). In part, the importance of an ongoing discussion of the calling for pastors can be seen in the fact that the major theme of a recent issue of the clergy journal *Leadership* was devoted to ministerial calling (Shelley, 2003).

An additional body of literature that informs this discussion of ministerial calling is related to a tie between calling and vocation: “Vocation is based on the Latin verb *uocare*, which means ‘to call’” (Nesbitt, 1997, p. 204). Bronson (2002/2003), Palmer (2000), and Peterson (1992) point out that those who seek a vocation are those committed to not just a career or profession. They are following an inner call that speaks to their personal identity. Palmer (2000) speaks of this connection, “Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. . . . I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I *must* live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life” (pp. 4-5, emphasis in original). Peterson (1992) ties together the themes of calling to pastoral ministry and vocation. “Somehow we American pastors, without really noticing what was happening, got our vocations redefined in the terms of American careerism. . . . The moment we did that, we started thinking wrongly, for the vocation of pastor has to do with living out the implications of the word of God in community” (p. 20). These views of pastoral ministry as a calling and vocation, not just a profession or career, matches well the view of ministry as articulated by the Adventist Church as stated above.

### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework that is particularly helpful in understanding the overall experience of the women in this study is that of Everett Hughes (1945), in his article “Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status.” He uses “status” in “its strict sense as a defined social position for whose incumbents there are defined rights, limitations of rights, and duties” (p. 353). Individuals may be born into a status, for example, through race, or they may enter a status through training, education, or achievement, such as

nurses or lawyers. A status may be associated with certain determining characteristics, some of which may be formalized or legal. For instance, in the case of a nurse, an individual must legally be licensed in order to practice.

However, in addition to determining characteristics, Hughes (1945) speaks of “auxiliary characteristics which come to be expected of its incumbents” (p. 353), although these characteristics are not necessary for functioning in a particular status. For example, an important determining characteristic for a nurse would be someone who is educated as a nurse, and licensed. However, an auxiliary characteristic is that a capable and caring nurse is a woman.

A conflict occurs when someone entering a profession does not match the auxiliary characteristics expected. Of particular application to this study is what occurs when a woman enters the “‘sacredly’ masculine” (Bock, 1967, p. 531) status of clergy. A conflict is created for those who see “male” being tied to the status of “pastor” as a determining characteristic. Others, for whom there would be no contradiction, identify “male” as an auxiliary characteristic, and thus not a *necessary* characteristic for a pastor. Hughes (1945) suggests that many people do not systematically “carry in their minds a set of expectations concerning the auxiliary traits properly associated with many of the specific positions available in our society” (p. 354). In other words, most people do not consciously think through the difference between characteristics that are required for a particular profession (determining characteristics), as opposed to those that have become accepted, but are not actually necessary (auxiliary characteristics).

To continue the example above, the conflict that arises when a woman enters the ministry results in various types of dilemmas for the woman, for her colleagues, for the

individuals to whom she ministers, and for the institution by which she is employed. Charlton (1997) summarizes the conflict and resulting dilemmas in this way: "No matter what one personally thinks about it, the contradiction is there in the expectations of other people. The dilemmas, on the other hand, are what one experiences when one embodies such a contradiction" (p. 601). An example of a dilemma for the woman is how to respond to disapproval that comes from those who see a contradiction in her work as a pastor. If her colleagues see a contradiction, a dilemma they may face is whether to treat her as a woman or as a pastor. For those parishioners who believe it is necessary for a pastor to be a male, the dilemma can be whether or not they wish to accept her as a pastor. Church administrators may wrestle with the problem of how to apply policies that were established with only male clergy in mind.

A number of ways of dealing with these contradictions and dilemmas of status have been suggested. Women can identify with women's issues and groups, with the goal of redefining the status of clergy to include women. Conversely, they can ignore, downplay, or push to the background gender differences in their clergy roles, which results in the minimization or even disappearance of the contradiction. Other strategies include adding feminine characteristics to the role definition of clergy; moving to a church or denomination which does not expect clergy to be male; or leaving pastoral ministry altogether, thus removing the contradiction from their lives. Individuals or the institution for which the women work can also utilize strategies to deal with the dilemmas: excluding or isolating women from positions which contain a contradiction; or redefining the clergy status to include both men and women (Carroll et al., 1983;



Charlton, 1997; Hughes, 1945). Another alternative is limiting the ways in which women can function in roles previously defined as male.

In the late 1970s Charlton (1997) interviewed 30 women enrolled in two Protestant seminaries. Her second interviews, 15 years later, included 27 of the original group. These women were of the “pioneer” generation, “part of the first generation of women to enter Protestant ministry in large numbers” (p. 599). In this longitudinal study, she found that when in seminary the women in her study used two basic strategies for dealing with the dilemmas created by the contradictions seen in their status as women clergy. They either actively engaged in women’s groups and confronted the contradictions head on, or they downplayed their status as women. However, when the women in her study began actually working in congregations, Charlton found that they downplayed their gender identity, and some either talked of leaving or did exit ministry.

### **Organization of the Study**

The results of this study are organized into six chapters. The literature informing the themes is integrated with the results. In this way the stories and themes of these women clergy are connected with what has been found to be true in the literature about women generally, and, more specifically, women clergy.

The remaining chapters are organized as follows: Chapter 2 contains the methodology of the study. Chapter 3 describes these clergywomen’s ministry experiences: (a) their call to ministry; (b) their preparation for ministry; (c) their route to initial employment; and (d) their experiences in ministry, including role models and mentors, female predecessors, gender differences in ministry, family issues, and ministry supports. The difficulties of ministry are contained in chapter 4. These include:

challenging relationships, sexual harassment, dilemmas in and disapproval of their ministry, and their thoughts of leaving pastoral work. Chapter 5 addresses why these clergywomen choose to stay in ministry. They speak of commitment to ministry, the impact of their call to ministry on staying; the people who influence their staying, the strategy of minimizing gender issues, the change of people's attitudes, and the methods of self-care. This chapter also looks at supports these women need, and concludes with metaphors that describe their experience as a woman in ministry. Finally, chapter 6 contains a summary of the study, discussion, and recommendations that emerge from this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

In identifying the criteria for selecting an approach for research, Creswell (2003) suggests three considerations: a match between the problem and approach, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the audience for the report (pp. 21-22). These criteria influenced my choice of a research design.

As no studies have been conducted exploring Adventist women clergy's commitment to ministry, there is a need to develop a knowledge base on this topic. Since qualitative studies are exploratory in approach, Creswell (2003) states this method is "useful when the researcher does not know the important variables to examine" (p. 22). A qualitative approach fits the goals of this study. More specifically, narrative inquiry is the basis for this study, as it is the stories of the women in the study that provide the data: "Narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40). My commitment to a narrative approach has been in part influenced by the works of Coles (1989) and Bateson (1989) who use narrative as an engaging way to share experiences.

The personal experience and training of the researcher are also important considerations. As an Adventist woman in ministry, I have a deep interest in this topic. My own training and experience in ministry include work in conducting interviews,

listening to and reporting the stories and experiences of individuals, and a commitment to sharing the results. A qualitative study methodology is the best match for my interest, experience, and training.

Finally, the audience within the Adventist Church toward whom this report is particularly directed includes my colleagues in ministry, church administrators, and female theology students. Each of these groups is accustomed to hearing stories shared by individuals. The sharing of the stories of these women in ministry fits the considerations for qualitative research.

### **Purposive Sample**

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative researchers often use a “nonrandom, purposeful, and small” sample (p. 8). Purposeful sampling is used to select participants who “will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell, 2003, p. 185). While there are a number of ways to limit the sample, I chose those women who have the greatest longevity in ministry. Given my desire to explore in depth the reasons why Adventist women clergy stay in pastoral ministry, purposeful sampling allowed me to select those women whose stories best illuminated this question.

In order to delimit the study, participants were selected in the following manner.

I first contacted groups and individuals who helped identify Adventist women in pastoral ministry in the NAD who appeared to meet the following criteria:

1. A degree in religion or theology, or meeting the criteria necessary for a commissioned minister’s credential
2. A minimum of 5 years working in pastoral ministry
3. Service within the past 2 years if not currently working in pastoral ministry

4. A salary received for this work
5. Residence in the United States.

I mailed a short questionnaire (Appendix A) to 77 women so I could identify both who would actually meet the criteria and be willing to participate. Three letters were returned as undeliverable for which I was unable to obtain a current address. I received 29 responses. I sent a follow-up e-mail to those who did not respond, inviting them to return the questionnaire. No additional questionnaires were received. I picked the 11 with the longest tenure in pastoral ministry who were currently working as Seventh-day Adventist pastors. All had a minimum of 5 years in pastoral ministry with a cumulative total of 150 years.

### **Data Collection**

I scheduled face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interview protocol (Appendix B) provides the questions that guided the interviews, which evolved as the participant shared her stories and experiences. I guided the process only as much as necessary to see that the general topics were covered. The interview questions gave these women the opportunity to reflect on pastoral ministry from their calling to the present. The interviews were both audio- and videotaped for later transcription. In addition, I took written notes during the interviews. The interviews were conducted between July and November 2003.

Each woman received a copy of her interview transcript for review, and as need arose, I contacted the women by e-mail to clarify details in their stories. Preliminary findings were also sent to the women for their comments, and to provide an opportunity to respond to the stories of other women.

### **Self as Researcher**

In undertaking this study, it is important at the outset to identify the fact that I meet the qualifications of the group of clergywomen I studied. I began my ministry as a clergywoman in 1984. I served as an assistant pastor in a church of over 500 members for 6 years; established a new church where I served as pastor for over 4 years; and currently serve as an associate pastor in a congregation of almost 2,000 members, a position I have held for over 10 years. In total, my service as a parish pastor totals 21 years.

I knew most of the participants who agreed to participate in this research. This relationship provided me with a connection that brought rapport and honesty as they shared their experiences. My own background aided me in this study by providing experiential understanding of issues that emerged, and insights into their joys and challenges in ministry.

### **Ethical Issues**

When speaking of ethics for the qualitative researcher, Robert Stake (2000) comments: "Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p. 447). The following ethical considerations were a part of my research:

1. My research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University.
2. Informed consent agreements were signed by each participant (Appendix C).
3. Participation was voluntary.
4. Questions by participants were welcomed.
5. Preliminary findings were shared for further comment.
6. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis began by reviewing the questionnaires and transcribing the interview tapes. The initial transcription was from the audiotape, followed by two videotape viewings. During the first viewing, I corrected the audio transcription for content errors. The second viewing was to add notes about body language, verbal pacing, pauses, and other field notes. This was followed by several readings of the data. This allowed me to gain an overall perspective. This processing began as soon as the first interview was completed.

During the process of analyzing the data, I utilized the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). While originally used for deriving grounded theory, “because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). This method was compatible with my goals for this study and entails comparing “units of data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179) within each interview and then between interviews. My data units for each interview were coded onto index cards, a different color for each interview, to visually facilitate not only the strength of a particular theme among the interviews, but also within each interview.

As I repeatedly reviewed the data by reading the transcripts and listening to the audiotapes, I continued to identify and code themes and subthemes that emerged. The process included moving back and forth from the data to the identified themes, back to the data, and comparing and refining the themes (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Thorne, 2000). I continued this process

“with the comparison of each new interview or account until all have been compared with each other” (Thorne, 2000, p. 69).

The units of data, or index cards, were sorted thematically. I then questioned whether a particular grouping of themes and subthemes was coherent; then assembled and reassembled the index cards until the categories showed coherence and all data were accounted for. This process allowed me to see the predominant themes, as well as the more specific subthemes from the interviews. I interpreted what I found, looking for common experiences among the women, and, more specifically, explanations of why these Adventist women clergy continue in pastoral ministry over time.

Creswell (2003) states the following about data analysis: “It is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 190). In keeping with Creswell’s comment, I kept a personal research journal in which my impressions, questions, thoughts, and analysis about the data were recorded. The journal was a continuing part of my research.

Then I organized the themes to reflect the experiences of the women pastors that provide insight into their movement into ministry and the setting in which they work (chapter 3), the more specific experiences that challenge their commitment to stay in pastoral ministry (chapter 4), and, finally, the reasons they stay (chapter 5). The final report uses “rich, ‘thick’ description” (Eisner, 1998; Merriam, 1998, p. 211), generously using the words of the participants to provide illustrations of the emergent themes. After receiving further comments from participants, as referenced above, I finalized the written analysis of the research.



### **Emergent Themes**

The following major themes emerged from the interviews either in response to direct questions or from the stories the women shared: their calling to ministry (chapter 3), their experiences as pastors (chapter 3), their frustrations and challenges in ministry (chapter 4), and their reasons for commitment to staying in pastoral ministry (chapter 5).

### **Validity and Generalizability**

Qualitative research utilizes different forms than quantitative research for establishing the trustworthiness of a study. The methods used to provide internal validity and generalizability, also known as external validity, are outlined below.

#### **Internal Validity**

Methods for enhancing the internal validity of a qualitative study include: triangulation; member checks; long-term observation; peer examination; participatory/collaborative research; clarifying researcher bias; rich/thick description; including negative or discrepant information; and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Eisner, 1998; Merriam, 1998). For this study I used the following from those listed above: triangulation; member checks; clarifying researcher bias; rich/thick description; including negative or discrepant information; and peer debriefing.

I am aware that my bias affects what I hear in the stories of others, how I analyze the data collected, and my findings. The following protocols assisted in providing internal validity for my study.

Triangulation, which Eisner (1998) describes as structural corroboration, is “a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or

contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs” (p. 110). My data collection included multiple means: a written questionnaire; an interview; and participants’ comments after preliminary data analysis. The interviews were both audio- and videotaped, and I took notes during the interviews. I examined the notes and transcripts after the interviews to assure that I listened carefully to all aspects of the stories. In addition, the inclusion of 11 women in the study provided multiple sources for data collection. Utilizing a number of means and sources for gathering information provides credibility for my conclusions.

The women were invited to participate in member checks by sharing their comments at two points in my research. First, after the interviews were transcribed, the participants were provided a copy of their own interview for review and comment. Four women responded that they had read the transcript, but none added corrections or clarification. Second, I sent the written preliminary findings to the women for their review and comment, three chose to respond. In this way, the participants themselves have provided needed checks, both of my understanding of their own story, the conclusions I draw from the stories of all participants, and whether their identity was successfully masked.

As I wrote I used thick, rich description and participants’ quotations to enhance the validity of the research report. The inclusion of negative or discrepant information aids the reader of the study in recognizing that not every theme or finding was confirmed by every participant.

I selected a male, pastoral colleague to serve as the peer reviewer. He has served in pastoral ministry for over 25 years. In addition, he is noted by his colleagues for his

analytical abilities. We met to review each transcript and also discussed my research findings. During this process, he asked probing questions about the emerging themes and my analysis of those themes. At times, he challenged my thinking in ways that broadened my perspective on issues and assisted me in writing the results with clarity.

### Generalizability

Generalizability in research, also referred to as external validity, refers to whether the findings of one study can be applied to similar groups, individuals, or situations. Merriam (1998) states, “[a] small nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 208, emphasis in original). Eisner (1998) comments about generalizability in qualitative research: “The creation of an image—a vivid portrait of excellent teaching, for example—can become a prototype that can be used. . . . Because qualitative writing is often vivid and concrete, its capacity for generating images is particularly strong” (p. 199).

In this study I looked in depth at why Adventist women clergy remain in ministry, and reported the results with thorough description. By doing so, an image of what a female pastor with longevity in ministry looks like can be formed by the reader. This in turn can become a prototype, as Eisner (1998) suggests, that can be used by readers to assess for themselves if the results of this analysis fits a particular situation. As my goal was to study these women in detail, it is not my expectation that all results of this study will be broadly generalizable to all women clergy. While there may be some aspects of this prototype that fit, certainly not all aspects will.

### Composite Women

In this study, I have used the stories of Gail and Helen to represent the themes and subthemes that emerged in the analysis of the data and, more importantly, as a vehicle to protect the identity of the participants. During the interviews some women expressed concern that details of their stories be adequately disguised so their identity would not be compromised. This generally came while telling stories of significant challenge, and while referring to specific individuals who were involved in these situations.

Since the number of women in pastoral ministry in the United States is limited, their concern is valid. As will become clear later in this study, because of the significant challenges that came to these women, often because of their gender, at times they were close to leaving pastoral ministry. I do not want to precipitate any further challenges for them by presenting their stories in such a way that they can be identified.

Richardson's (1990) "collective story" is informative as a way of understanding the importance of using narrative to give voice to those who otherwise remain silenced. "The collective story displays an individual's story by narrativizing the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs, rather than by telling the particular individual's story or by simply retelling the cultural story" (p. 25). In this study I have used the composite stories of Gail and Helen to share the experiences of Adventist clergywomen, rather than telling their individual stories. Using a composite guards their identities while still allowing their voices to be heard. In addition, the telling of their experiences allows others to expand the base of stories from which they make sense of their own experiences.

The representation of data in a "composite" manner is not new. In presenting the results of his study of 12 retired New Zealand athletes, Denison (1996) utilizes three

short stories to reflect their experiences. In part, his reasons for using stories, which is also true for my study, include, “stories show instead of tell; they are less author-centered; they allow the reader to interpret and make meaning . . . and, most important, they effectively communicate what has been learned” (p. 352).

In addition, Malvicini (1999) utilized “composite dialogs” to represent the findings of his fieldwork in the Philippines which included 53 individual and focus group interviews and additional documentation. When addressing whether or not the dialogs actually occurred, he answers with a qualified, “no.” The dialogs are the actual words of the interviewees, yet they are also a construction or representation of many different interviews.

A final example of the use of composite representation, as is employed in this study, is Radomsky’s (1995) work. She shared the stories of chronic pain and abuse in the lives of female patients in her medical practice. “All of the women in these stories are fictional. I created them to carry the accounts of personal stories of pain that many women shared with me. By reconstructing in this form I have protected women in my practice” (p. 5). Her method and goal parallel mine, using a composite story to represent the stories of multiple women in order to protect their identity.

Gail and Helen are not actual individuals; they are a blending of the stories of the women interviewed. Gail’s story generally represents the strongest themes from the interviews, often those in the narratives of 8 or more of the 11 women in the study. Helen generally represents the themes that were expressed by at least 6 of the women, but not necessarily with the same strength as the themes in Gail’s story. In some instances this pattern is not strictly followed in an attempt to keep the narratives of Gail and Helen

consistent, but those occasions are few, and Gail and Helen always represent the views of a majority of the women.

Discrepant data, data represented in fewer than 5 interviews, are noted by the introduction of Jackie, Marion, and Sara, pastoral friends of Gail and Helen. Even though these women are identified in this study as friends or colleagues of Gail and Helen, their stories do represent data from the interviews of the 11 women in this study.

An additional step taken to protect the anonymity of the participants is by changing the events, names of people, and situations they describe. While the themes are represented in the stories, the specific places, people, and events have been changed.

My goal of masking the identity of the women in this study appears to have been reached. After reading the composite stories, two women specifically commented about the preservation of their identity. "If anyone can detect her unique story it would be a miracle. You have disguised us well." When commenting on the use of the "composite women," another observed, "I enjoyed seeing pieces of me spread through the stories."

### **Summary**

This study utilizes qualitative methodology and a purposive sample of 11 Adventist women pastors with at least 5 years' service. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using the constant comparative method. Emergent themes include: their call to ministry, ministerial experiences, challenges of serving as a woman pastor, and reasons why they have stayed in ministry. Methods for enhancing validity and generalizability included: triangulation, member checks, rich/thick description, including negative or discrepant information, and peer debriefing. The

findings were written in a narrative style using composite women in order to protect the anonymity of the women in the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ENTERING PASTORAL MINISTRY

#### **Introduction**

The experiences of the women in this study include joys, challenges, satisfactions, disappointments, and frustrations. This chapter includes their call to ministry, preparation for ministry, experiences surrounding employment, role models and mentors, female predecessors in ministry, ways in which they perceive differences from their male colleagues, their views on the ordination and commissioning of women pastors, and family dynamics.

#### **Group Profile**

The 11 women in this study represent a total of 150 years in pastoral ministry, and have served in a total of 31 churches. In 22 of these churches, the women served as the first woman pastor for the congregation. Although not the first women to serve as pastors in the Adventist Church, several would be listed among the “pioneers.” Their experience is similar to a woman in Charlton’s (1997) study who identified herself as a pioneer, not a scout: “A scout goes forward alone, without a map, faces danger, charts the territory, reports back. Pioneers, on the other hand, at least have a map, if rudimentary, and they have some company” (p. 605). Additional studies have focused on first-wave or pioneer clergywomen (Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999), among the earliest women to enter the



professional ministry or rabbinate; others studied second-wave women clergy, those who entered ministry in the next “wave” (Arnold, 2001). Although most of the women in this study were not personally acquainted with other Adventist clergywomen early in their careers, many knew of those who had gone before them.

The group splits almost evenly between those who have served in staff settings with other women pastors and those who have served by themselves or only with male colleagues. For several women, pastoral ministry represents a second, third, or even fourth career, as is typical of women clergy more generally (Arnold, 2001; Carroll et al., 1983; Charlton, 1987, 2000; Holzgang, 2000; Lawless, 1993; Zikmund et al., 1998). Their previous experience includes management, stay-at-home mothering, teaching, nursing, and government service. Only 3 entered pastoral ministry as a full-time career directly after their educational preparation. A number of professional firsts exist among them; however, to enumerate those firsts would jeopardize their anonymity.

The family circumstances of these women have varied through their years of service. Among them are single, married, and divorced women. While serving as pastors, they parented 17 children; the group includes several who are now empty-nesters.

Their self-descriptions include the following: “planner,” “shy,” “a pastor who happens to be a woman,” “competent,” “lonely,” “peacemaker,” “works best in the background,” “assertive,” “workaholic,” “evangelist,” “gifted by God,” “takes care of others,” “people-pleaser,” “nurturer,” “doesn’t have an agenda,” “thinks outside the box,” “teacher,” “private person,” “loner,” “distrustful,” and “not a feminist.”

They have in common their personal commitment to God (which in part forms the basis for their identity as Christian women called by God to serve as pastors); longevity

in pastoral ministry; a focus on relationships; changing circumstances in their lives; and a desire to make a difference in the lives of people with whom they come in contact.

### **Call to Ministry**

I began the interviews by asking the women to describe their call to ministry. These narratives reflect the deep sense that their call originated with God, and was not something of their own devising. They acknowledge that this call was not just an event at the beginning of their journey into pastoral ministry, but something that has stayed with them throughout their tenure. In fact, several see God continuing to reaffirm this call at pivotal points in their ministry. Their stories epitomize the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Tim 1:12: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service” (NRSV).

### **Gail’s Call Narrative**

Gail’s call began with the early influences in her life that set the stage for an unfolding of her call to pastoral ministry over a period of time. She is a third-generation pastor who from the age of 3 was up front doing things in church. Gail described experiences in which she began to do pastoral-type work at an early age: “If the church had a Week of Prayer it wasn’t young people’s Week of Prayer, it was a church Week of Prayer. They would ask me to speak.” She continued by describing her experience in the local church as a young person. “When I was probably about 13 years old I wrote my own sermons and presented them at evangelistic meetings our church hosted. One woman I studied with was baptized at the end of the series.” While Gail had not yet thought of a career in pastoral ministry, she was already involved in the work of a pastor and showing

evidence of her calling through “soul winning” (North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003-2004).

However, Gail had never seen women serving in the role of pastor, so during her high-school years, speculations about what she might do with this calling did not include serving as a pastor. She chose to be a social worker. She prepared for this career thinking that it would be a way to serve God. She worked in the public sector for 3 years. After the birth of her second child, Gail decided to spend a few years at home with her children.

After both her children were in school, Gail decided to reenter the social work profession. However, out of a desire to be able to talk more directly about the Bible and Christian values to her clients, she began working at an Adventist church community center. This fulfilled what she saw as her broader calling to witness about God to those in need. During this time she volunteered at her local church. She led women’s Bible study groups, studied the Bible with individuals, and worked with children and teens in her church. Gail found the work she did more directly fulfilled her desire to serve God.

After working at the community center for 2 years, she began to sense God’s call to paid ministry in her local church. She states, “I continued my work as a social worker for about 6 to 8 months after I really sensed this call. During this time I was leading people to Christ. In fact, that year five people with whom I shared the gospel and studied Adventist beliefs were baptized into the church.” Gail described her call as something that just unfolded both around and through her over time.

However, when she announced to her family that she planned to enter seminary to prepare for ministry, to her surprise she found “my parents discouraging me at first because women don’t get calls in ministry.” She believed this was because her parents

were concerned that Gail would finish school and not find a job. In addition, her mom struggled with the knowledge that she would likely face significant challenges during the course of her ministry. And she said, "I think she just didn't want me to face difficulties." She went on to state that she received their support once they had time to reflect more fully upon the subject. In fact, their earlier concerns have given way to unqualified support now that she is pastoring.

She entered seminary with the view that women could serve in the church as Bible workers. She stated, "I didn't know women could be pastors." As she continued her education, her vision of ministry grew. In part, the influence of one of her classmates made a difference in her thinking. Gail's friend, Sara, came to seminary after working as a physical therapist for a number of years. Unlike Gail, who grew up as a Christian, Sara became a Christian as an adult, and then felt God's call to become a pastor so she could tend to people's spiritual health, not their physical health. It never occurred to Sara that she could not be a pastor even though she, too, had never seen a female minister.

Over time Gail found encouragement to respond to and stay with her call from a variety of people: her husband, seminary professors, church members, and pastors. During a moment of discouragement, her husband said to her, "Conference leaders may not want you to be a pastor, but I know that Jesus does." A professor affirmed her calling by stating, "I know God has gifted you." Gail summarized this time by stating, "Different people would say to me, 'You know, you should really go into ministry.' My call to enter pastoral ministry kept coming back at me."

However, she did not find all church members supportive. On one occasion some well-intentioned church members prayed for her when she announced God had called her

into ministry. She laughs about this now: “I thought they were going to pray for me to go to school. But they really prayed that this evil spirit in me would go, and God’s Spirit would direct me to be a nurse or a teacher, but not a minister.”

A few months after graduating from seminary, Gail received an invitation to serve at a mid-size church near the seminary she attended. Over time she experienced the ups and downs that accompany ministry. During the challenging times when she had been tempted to walk away, Gail reminded herself, “These are the people I have been called to serve and I will do that faithfully.” She also commented about the ways through which God would bring people into her path to remind her of her call. During one particularly difficult conflict with her senior pastor, a conference leader said to her, “Don’t let this separate you from the call God has given you.” Her call to ministry keeps returning to her through both people and circumstances. It just never goes away.

In fact, as Gail looks forward she envisions this call remaining with her into retirement. She said passionately, “I can see myself working for people’s eternal salvation until the day I die. That’s my call.”

#### Helen’s Call Narrative

Like Gail, Helen’s call to pastoral ministry unfolded over time, beginning when she was a young child. She remembers always feeling drawn to spiritual conversations. The death of a brother at the age of 13 had an impact on her life: “It helped me get closer to God. I was pushing away but at the same time trying to bring God closer.” Then in high school, Helen saw a picture of an Adventist woman pastor performing a baptism. She was drawn to that picture and describes herself as “mesmerized by it.” She stated, “I

felt something inside of me saying, 'You have to become a pastor.' The more I thought about it, the more I was convicted of God's leading. I felt a deep calling."

Here her story diverges from Gail's, as Helen had seen women pastors and knew that was an option for her. When she entered college, she thought about preparing for pastoral ministry; however, doubts plagued her about whether her calling was to serve as a pastor. Yet she did want to do something service-oriented. She knew that her doubts were not unique. Her friend, Marion, described her own resistance to the calling of God when she openly taught in her Sabbath School class that God would not call women to ministry. This really became a crisis for her when she heard the Holy Spirit calling her to ministry. She stated to Helen, "I knew God's voice and there was no question what God was telling me to do." Yet in the end Marion knew that to deny or run from this call of God would be to disobey His voice to her and the gifts for ministry that others affirmed in her work.

There were other women at the college Helen attended who were preparing for pastoral ministry. Helen remembers Sara, one of her classmates, telling her she had ruled out pastoral ministry earlier in her life. She described to Helen a conversation with her mother when she was 12 years old. Sara reported to her mother her interest in being a pastor's wife. Her mother said to her offhandedly, "You could be the pastor." Sara replied, "Mom, girls are not pastors." Yet now she was preparing for pastoral ministry.

One of Helen's theology professors encouraged her preparation for ministry. He said to her, "Look what you're doing in your spare time," referring to her leadership in campus spiritual activities. Her doubts returned and she responded, "No way. Absolutely not." In her mind she perceived some of the challenges that come with pastoral ministry.

She then set up a whole series of hurdles for God in order for her to accept that she was called to pastoral ministry. In the next few months every one of her hurdles was overcome, and she changed her college major to pastoral theology and began preparing for ministry.

Surprisingly, Helen talked about faculty and students whose comments and actions led her to count them among those who discouraged her ministry goals. My surprise comes from my expectation that since Helen had entered college more recently, the faculty and students would have come to accept women as theology students. From her experience, it can be seen that while a higher level of acceptance of women preparing for pastoral ministry may be true in some colleges and seminaries, it is not universally so.

One of her fellow ministerial students really had an issue with women in ministry. Helen would find in her campus mailbox large stacks of papers with quotes from the Bible on why women should not be in ministry. Yet she was feeling this should not be an issue in a school that was so welcoming. She sincerely tried to figure all this out. How should she process these texts or answer this question? However, the pressure she felt against her presence in the ministerial training program was generally more indirect and underground.

During their sophomore year in order to continue studies in theology, all students at Helen's college were required to take a psychological evaluation. Helen said the counselor told her all the indicators showed she would do well in ministry. But he encouraged her to be a nurse. This is how she reports the ensuing dialog. "I said, 'But I don't think I could be a nurse.' He responded, 'Well, you don't know until you try.' I said, 'There are a lot of things I haven't tried, but I'm not going to go try them.' He kept

insisting on nursing.” In spite of his discouragement, Helen continued her pastoral preparation.

Helen went directly from college into an internship in a large, institutional church where she found the congregation accepting and welcoming. However, as time went on, she found that she did not always respond to God’s call upon her life with enthusiasm. She described a time when she started having questions. Was this really a call? Or was it just some human beings who had encouraged her and thought she could be a pastor? Did the Lord really want her to serve in ministry?

During a difficult time in her early ministry, Helen remembers getting in her car and just driving and driving and driving. She found herself going around for probably an hour crying and saying, “Lord, could you just give me a Damascus Road experience?” But none came. She took her Bible and wrote in the front of it, “Lord, I’m here. Please use me if you want me to be here.” She realized more clearly that ministry is not going to be easy, and if you are truly called, you will stick it out. She has continued to serve faithfully for 10 years.

#### Jackie’s Call Narrative

Jackie’s recognition of her call to ministry is different from that of Gail and Helen. Her first recollection of her calling to ministry came when she was 9 years old and God spoke to her directly and specifically about her future in sharing the Bible with people as a pastor. She remembers the event well. She heard her mother call her name from the kitchen while she was playing the piano one Sabbath afternoon. She turned around and called to her mother, “What do you want?” Her mother denied calling her, so Jackie resumed her playing. The scenario repeated itself, with Jackie accusing her mother



of teasing her, a charge her mother denied. When she heard her name a third time, Jackie ran outdoors to the garden shed, as that was the only quiet spot on the planet, and dropped on her knees. She said, "Speak, Lord." She heard the response, "I want you to give the Bible to my people." Jackie concludes, "To me that has always meant relationships and how we treat one another." As she reflected on her call, Jackie remarked how much like the story of the prophet Samuel it seems (cf. 1 Sam 3). She describes her calling in these words, "My calling to ministry began in third grade and I basically never wandered from that call. I went through college with a theology degree, and just stuck on that goal."

Jackie spoke only once of an individual who discouraged her call to ministry: "The person that did not encourage me, at least for a long time, was a theology professor. I remember she spent the first week in class on why women should not be in ministry. I was the only woman in the class so obviously she was talking to me. She wasn't terribly supportive, but I think she saw reality. They hardly hired men, much less women." This comment did not deter her, as Jackie has now served as a pastor for over 15 years.

### Call to Ministry

What becomes clear in listening to the stories of Gail, Helen, and Jackie is that their entry into ministry was tied to their deep sense of calling. They are doing what God has opened doors for them to do. They are doing what God has gifted them to do. For them, to ignore this call would be to deny God's specific direction in their lives. Ministry becomes more than just a job to these women; it is a sacred vocation. They are following the inner call of God that leads them to identification with and commitment of their lives to pastoral ministry (Bronson, 2002/2003; Palmer, 2000; Peterson, 1992).

This deep sense of call was also found among all the Adventist women in the Hamilton Chandler Communications survey (1992). Ninety three percent could identify when their call first come to them, with 2/3 of them specifying it came during childhood or their formal education.

Craley (1990) stated the importance of call: “A woman in ministry must be grounded deep within her call and possess a secure sense of empowerment from God. . . . In order to withstand the difficulties of ordained leadership, a woman’s identity must be well founded, worked through and secure” (p. 89). The foundation of this secure identity for the women in this study is their Christian commitment. Gillespie (1991) addressed the connection between secure identity and religion:

Religion identifies us as children of God; the situation in which we find ourselves—we are a people in need of saving. In religion we find out where we belong—in the family of God. Through religion we learn how to belong to God—through commitment. We learn how to relate to others by loving, caring responses. Finally, in religion we focus on our future—identity with God (p. 158).

The women in this study have then taken the next step and found their vocational identity in their calling to pastoral ministry. This is similar to the women in academia studied by Carruthers (2003) for whom

personal faith appears to be a shaping factor of identity rather than simply a commitment that is made as one navigates the developmental task of identity development. . . . As they discovered their giftedness, or how they were created by God, the women felt called by God to use that giftedness in the world around them (pp. 101, 102).

The stories of their calls to ministry contain the elements of a call outlined by Niebuhr (1956) and the spiritual qualifications described for Adventist clergy (*Seventh-day Adventist minister's manual*, 1992). Other clergy studies overwhelmingly reported this same conviction of divine calling that led women to ministry (Arnold, 2001; Bennett,

1993; Carroll et al., 1983; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Hale et al., 1985; Holzgang, 2000; Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993; Rhodes, 1987; Sellers, 1997; Zikmund et al., 1998).

Of particular interest is that Adventist “women reported aspiring to the pastorate for reasons identical to those cited by male respondents (primarily, they felt ‘called’ to the ministry)” (Vance, 1999, pp. 209-210). It is not surprising to find this similarity between Vance and my study, as common responses led me to believe some women in my study also participated in Vance’s research.

Dr. John McVay (personal communication, July 22, 2004), Dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, described his conversations with both male and female seminary students about their call to ministry. He expressed with earnestness in his voice that these stories of ministerial calling were equally compelling whether the student was male or female. Both men and women spoke passionately and with conviction about God’s leading them to prepare to serve in ministry as pastors.

Early experiences and church involvement in the lives of women clergy are not unique to Adventist women clergy. Carroll et al. (1983) included a number of women who had clergy fathers and were involved in church life as they grew up. He found “the predominant pattern for these clergy is one of consistent and active religious socialization in one denomination” (p. 59). Other studies of women clergy also found these early opportunities for church involvement and, for some, an early interest in ministry (Arnold, 2001; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993).

Carroll et al. (1983) outlined three patterns for women entering ministry. The first involves those women who decide in their teens or earlier to pursue a career in pastoral ministry, and follow that call straight through into employment, as did Helen. The second group may come to the decision to enter parish ministry in adulthood, but likely thought of a service-oriented or other career, including marriage and mothering, before coming to a decision to serve as a pastor. Gail's experience parallels this pattern. The third pattern includes those who enter ministry after some years of service in a related field to ministry, such as chaplaincy or teaching. One woman in this study followed this path into ministry.

The unfolding nature of their call to ministry was also evidenced in the lives of other women clergy. Sometimes this unfolding was also preceded by a specific revelation, similar to Jackie's experience, and sometimes not (Arnold, 2001; Bennett, 1993; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993; Zikmund et al., 1998).

The importance of encouraging and nurturing their call emerged in other studies of women clergy. Those who influenced the lives of these women included pastors and family members (Arnold, 2001; Carroll et al., 1983; Hale et al., 1985; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993; Lehman, 1985). However, the women in some studies (Hale et al., 1985; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988; Zikmund et al., 1998) did not always find support for following their call. In her study of Adventist clergy, Vance (1999) found that women interested in a career in ministry received a lower level of support from parents, pastors, and peers than did male clergy. As was the case in my study, some even discouraged the women from responding to the call of God.

The preparation for ministry after one or more previous careers, as in Gail's experience, is not atypical of clergywomen generally. As Carroll et al. (1983) stated: "In spite of the influence of religious families and long activity in the church, women give evidence here of interrupted career paths toward the ministry" (p. 71). Carroll et al. also found that not all women in their study who entered seminary were planning on a career in ministry. In part that was because they were not sure how or if they would be able to utilize their seminary education. While Gail's announcement to attend seminary did not contain uncertainty about her future career, the concern expressed by her mother parallels that of family members of clergy found in Carroll's study.

Other studies (Arnold, 2001; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993; Lehman, 1985) have documented the doubting of or resistance to women's call to ministry, as was true for Helen. Holzgang (2000) found the doubt of some women was related to the lack of female role models and was eased by the support they received. Yet this doubt did not negate the evidence of God's leading in their lives. In speaking of the special calling from God, Hayes (2001) commented on this dynamic: "Those called in this way testify to their reluctance to accept the call, and they often speak of their feelings of unworthiness. Yet those who attest to a special call often display boldness and confidence in God's power in their lives" (p. 93).

#### Summary of the Call Experience

Observe the deep commitment to their call to ministry as reflected in these final comments. Gail stated, "I want to be a pastor. And that's where my passion is. It's the everyday opportunity to do that." This comment reflects Helen's commitment after a particularly discouraging event: "For me it's about working with the people God has sent.

And so I'm not going to run away. I'm not going to quit. I will serve." During my interview with Marion, who initially resisted God's call in her life, I asked if she would ever have dreamed where this call would take her. This is her response: "No. I never dreamed of this. Never dreamed, never dreamed, never dreamed. It was too big to dream."

The following statement summarizes well the sentiments of the women in this study: "These women use language which points to their understanding of God as loving, helping, but firm in guiding them towards a particular vocation. They have an understanding in their faith that God will take care of them" (Holzgang, 2000, p. 123). It is difficult for me to convey in words the impact these stories had on me as I heard them in person, and then later listened to the tapes and read the transcripts again and again. Their strong conviction of God's call to ministry, the providential timing of events, the recurring evidences of God's leading; and for some, the knowledge that to do anything else is to disobey the voice of God, left me with deep respect and admiration for these women and a similar conviction that God called them to be pastors.

### **Ministry Preparation**

In the course of the interviews, I asked the women what had best prepared them for ministry. As I expected, most talked about education and life experiences. In addition, they mentioned family, previous careers, and actual participation in the work of ministry. For several, their education began with undergraduate study in theology or religion. Others began their educational preparation in seminary. Because of family commitments and other constraints, most did not follow the often-seen pattern of an undergraduate degree in religion or theology at an Adventist college, followed by a Master of Divinity

degree at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. A few completed the M.A. in Pastoral Ministry through the Andrews University off-campus program. Some attended seminaries near where they lived and ministered. A few have found that the difficulties outweighed the opportunities and have yet to complete a graduate degree. These women gained their education how and where they were best able to do so, as was true of the women in Holzgang (2000). The stories of Gail and Helen recount their preparation for ministry.

### Gail's Preparation

Gail's father was a pastor and she acknowledged that her life as a "PK" was probably one influence that prepared her for ministry. She stated, "I would imagine that there are things I learned just growing up watching my father. He's a good pastor." She also described her involvements in her local church as a part of her preparation. Because it was small, they were always looking for people to help.

Gail entered ministry as a second career, and her formal educational preparation began when she entered seminary. She loved studying for her master's degree and believed that this educational experience was a great boost in her training. She thought her experience in chaplaincy while attending seminary was a positive influence because it was dealing with people on a real level. That helped her begin to understand what ministry really was. Jackie, a friend of Gail's, once told her, "I hated seminary, but I think God used that experience to build my character."

Gail found her earlier career as a social worker helpful for her pastoral ministry. It immediately gave her the base for what she realized was her pastoral calling. Sara, a pastoral colleague who taught before entering ministry, told her once, "I think my

teaching experience prepared me perhaps more than anything else. I just look at the church as my classroom.” Gail’s social work experience helped her learn management skills and how to understand people’s needs. These skills were easily transferable to the church setting. So, in a sense, that was her schooling for the practical aspects of ministry. She stated, “There’s not a day that I don’t draw on something that I learned during those years. It’s been the foundation.”

### Helen’s Preparation

Helen spoke of always having leadership responsibilities while in school and believes people saw her as a spiritual leader. She would plan activities for her friends to be involved in. When reflecting on her experience at seminary, Helen spoke of spiritual retreats that were key to her preparation for ministry because they grounded her and gave perspective as to what is real and what is not. Helen’s classmate, Jackie, however, found the seminary helpful only in sermon preparation. For practical parish ministry, she found that nothing prepared her adequately.

Helen also spoke of life experiences of various kinds as significant preparation for ministry. This comment was made with tears in her eyes. “I think it was my life of pain. I had significant losses very early in life and have been unwilling to let other people walk that path alone. And I think that experiential knowledge has given me power in how I do ministry and in how I preach.” Helen also sees parenting as helpful preparation. She said, “Parenting has taught me huge things about ministry, as has life in general.”

With a laugh in her voice, Helen remembered a conversation with Marion who told her, “I was not prepared at all. I was so unprepared for the level of intense emotion and trauma and crisis the church was going through. I was just terrified.” Yet she



described some experiences in her education that gave her skills in working with children, which was her main responsibility at the church where she pastored.

Helen acknowledged the need for better educational preparation, especially in the practical aspects of ministry. “I think it would be good to have more programs that prepared people for ministry. You go through a time in college and you’re learning certain things, but on-the-job training is where it really happens.”

Helen’s final comment on the topic of ministry preparation centered on her experience during her pastoral internship. She spoke directly to the influence of her pastoral colleagues in preparing her for ministry. She described doing ministry beside people who did it well. Being on a staff with pastors who were experienced, and who really made it their business to mentor her and to make her a pastor was her best preparation.

Zikmund et al. (1998) inquired of their respondents about the benefits and shortfalls of their seminary education. These clergy appreciated the preparation they received for the practical skills of parish ministry, especially preaching and counseling, although they did not find the preparation for parish administration to be adequate. This differs from the women in this study, as they spoke more highly of life experience and previous employment than seminary training as preparing them for ministry. The men and women in Zikmund et al.’s study were less positive about preparation to face “the unpleasant realities they face as clergy—such as sexism, racism and class differences” (p. 103). The issue of preparation to face these “unpleasant realities” was not brought up by the women in my study.

Some women entering seminary found no role models or mentors (Carroll et al., 1983; Hale et al., 1985; Holzgang, 2000), while other women did find role models and mentors available (Holzgang, 2000). The Adventist women in Vance (1999) also had few, if any, female classmates in seminary and virtually no female faculty role models. Gail and Helen reported few female classmates in their interviews.

Helen identified ways in which her role as a mother enhancing her ministry. In her study of clergywomen's experience with work and family, Bingham (1992) also found sentiments about parenting influencing ministry in a positive way.

### Entry into Ministry

All of the women in this study have been employed by the church for at least 5 years, several for significantly longer. For most, their entry into ministry involved challenges of some sort.

Gail identified challenges in being hired initially that were directly related to her gender. Her concerns about job placement began while still a student in seminary. She observed a female classmate, ready to graduate, who had no job. She began to wonder what would happen to *her* next year. In addition, one of her seminary professors actively discouraged her from pastoral ministry because he told her the conferences had few vacancies and they were not hiring many men, and no women.

During her final year at seminary when conference leaders were scheduling appointments, Gail was overlooked in the notification for these job interviews. "I remember showing up one day in class and the guys were all dressed up. When I asked what was going on they responded, 'Well, the conference presidents are here to interview and we have appointments.'" They had gotten a call from the secretary of the department.

Gail had not been informed. She quickly scheduled appointments with the apologetic secretary, ran home to change her clothes, and returned for the interviews.

There were other discouraging events related to her job quest. When she interviewed with conference administrators, Gail remembers one official telling her, “We don’t hire women. Our conference isn’t ready for that.” She worked in a business office for a short time while she continued to apply for pastoral positions. Although she was eventually hired by a conference, her experiences leading up to employment left her feeling frustrated and hurt.

Helen heard the following comment from a conference leader who interviewed her as she was graduating from college. “You’ve got the talents. It looks like you’ve got the grades. You’ve taken the right classes, but it’s just not going to happen for you. We only hire men.”

Helen, however, was hired by a different conference before she finished her senior year in college and felt welcomed by them. She experienced challenges related to her gender, but unlike Gail, it came from local church leaders. When the conference leadership suggested her name to a local church for a pastoral position the church leaders were unwilling to consider her. A conference official told Helen, “They won’t even talk with a woman.” The conference placed her in a different church where she felt welcomed by the congregation.

The final element in Niebuhr’s (1956) framework of a call to ministry is the “ecclesiastical call” (p. 64). The women in this study have acted upon their “call to be a Christian” and their “secret call” by preparing for ministry. Their giftedness for ministry has been affirmed by others, their “providential call”; now an “ecclesiastical call” has

been extended to them (Aleshire, 1995; Christopherson, 1994; Stackhouse, 1987; Willimon, 1983).

A number of studies have found that entry into pastoral ministry is often more difficult for women because of gender bias (Arnold, 2001; Lehman, 1980, 1985; Nesbitt, 1997; Hale et al., 1985; Zikmund et al., 1998), something experienced by both Gail and Helen. Sometimes it is because lay members have difficulty envisioning a clergywoman (Carroll et al., 1983). In contrast to the women in this study, many seminary faculty and church officials in Carroll et al. (1983) believed entry-level jobs were not as problematic for women clergy as subsequent placements. However, there must be a willingness to accept whatever entry-level position is available.

In addition, routes into ministry for women are not always direct after completing the necessary education (Arnold, 2001; Carroll et al., 1983; Lehman, 1985), as evidenced in the story of Gail, who worked outside of ministry while waiting for employment. Vance (1999) confirms this to be true for the Adventist women in her study who “cited protracted, difficult, and often unsuccessful attempts to procure employment” (p. 211). They also noted “resistance, particularly on the part of local conferences, boards, elders and congregations to hiring a woman as pastor” (p. 211). This opposition to placement as a pastor was experienced by women of other denominations as well (Arnold, 2001; Bennett, 1993; Carroll et al., 1983; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Kleingartner, 1999).

Lehman (1985) anticipated women clergy would be well received by members, with pastors even more supportive. Yet that expectation was tempered by the finding that in certain instances church members would be unwilling to hire women for pastoral positions, especially in the face of resistance by some in their congregation. In his study

of the placement of men and women, Lehman (1980) concluded that the reason women are less easily placed is accounted for by structural forces, not that women are less gifted for ministry than men. He suggested the following strategies for women seeking pastoral placement: (a) careful selection of their seminary degree program; (b) development of a network with denominational leaders who can later advocate for them; and (c) careful choosing of strategies for placement.

If women are to serve as pastors, Carroll et al. (1983) came to the insightful conclusion “that for women to be placed it is necessary for judicatory officials of all denominations to be more than pleasant but inactive in support of women clergy; rather, they need to be active advocates if women are to find jobs” (p. 122). The need for advocacy, especially from those who work within the formal placement structure, was confirmed by Lehman (1980, 1985), and several women in this study would concur.

### **Women as Church Employees**

All the women in this study shared both positive and negative experiences with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and church leadership and expressed a wide range of attitudes toward these experiences. One woman identified only one significant challenge related to interactions with church leadership, and she was quick to moderate the experience by sharing her understanding of their position. For another woman, the only exception to her negative experiences was a single conference leader who was extremely supportive of her ministry, even including him as one of her mentors.

The words that seem to best describe the relationships between these women and the church are varied and complex. As they have moved from church to church, their experience with church leaders has changed. Their experiences have varied as they have

served under different conference leaders, sometimes because they moved to a new conference and at other times because the conference leadership under which they served changed. Some also find a particular individual supportive in one instance and challenging in another.

Some commented on experiences with the church hierarchy at the union, division, and General Conference levels as well; however, these comments were few. Sara comments regarding these levels of church leadership: "The union, NAD, and GC are kind of non-entities to me. If they all disappeared it wouldn't make any difference in my life." Most references to church leadership in the interviews were about the conferences and local churches in which they worked.

#### Gail's Employment Experiences

When Gail entered ministry her job title was that of Bible worker rather than pastor. She found this puzzling, as she functioned as a pastor. At times this led to confusion about her role in her own mind as well as for the members of her church and for the administrators in her conference. This was highlighted for her when she was being introduced to a church member by a conference leader who seemed awkward and uncertain about her role. She remembers these words uttered by the conference leader. "This is Gail. She's. . . . She's. . . . a Bible worker, but she works as a pastor. I guess we'd call her a pastor." When commenting on this first position in ministry she considered it a pastoral position even though it was not officially designated as such. It took almost 5 years of ministry before she was officially reclassified as a pastor.

In his discussion of the role of professional clergy, Carroll et al. (1983) note that tension has existed over the definition of clergy roles generally. Adding women to this

“‘sacredly’ masculine” (Bock, 1967, p. 531) role can create tension and ambiguity, as is seen in the case of Gail.

The issue of pay equity came to Gail’s attention when she discovered she was being paid significantly less than her male pastoral colleagues with comparable service time and responsibilities. A conversation with the conference treasurer clarified that the difference was because she was classified as a Bible worker, while the male pastors were classified as pastors. Over time she heard stories from female pastors who also experienced salary inequities. Marion made this comment to her about the attitude of the conference where she was currently working when they discovered what she had been paid in her previous position. “When I moved here the conference was appalled that I was making so little money for the work that I was doing.” Jackie, working on a stipend basis when she began, commented to Gail, “The problem was the conference wanted me to work but didn’t want to pay me. And the problem for me was that now I was starting to go into financial debt. They finally managed to squeak out \$600 a month, so my salary was doubled.”

Although salary structures of denominations differ, women clergy in general are paid less to do the same work as their male colleagues. The earliest major study of women clergy (Carroll et al., 1983) found such inequities present among women when compared to male clergy with similar positions and experience. Zikmund et al.’s (1998) more recent study, even when adjusting for factors such as women’s part-time employment, less experience, and preference for lower-paying positions, still found a gender-based difference in lower salaries for women. Studies of women in other denominations identified similar discrepancies (Kolton, 1999; Lawless, 1993; Nesbitt,

1997; Wallace, 1992). The Adventist women in Vance (1999) described pay inequities similar to the women in this study.

In the Adventist Church women classified as pastors, even though not ordained, are generally on the same salary scale as their male colleagues. The inequities mentioned by Gail, Marion, and Jackie came because they did the work of pastors but did not have the title that would place them on the same scale or were employed by the local church, not the conference. Also, those hired by the local church do not receive the health and retirement benefits of conference employees. The 1992 survey of Adventist women in ministry (Hamilton Chandler Communications, 1992) found that 46% were being remunerated at the level she would receive if she were ordained. Of the remaining women, 26% were receiving a lower level of remuneration than if she were ordained or were sharing a salary package with their spouse; 27% received a stipend, were contract workers, or were volunteers.

Gail also identified “politics” as being a frustrating and painful part of her experience with church leadership. In the midst of a conflict between two staff members with whom she worked, Gail observed that the local conference refused to deal with the situation directly, and she felt caught between the conference leaders and the members of her staff. “I was told if they had done something about the situation it wouldn’t have been popular with the church members. That was a political eye-opener for me.” She felt caught between the parties and did not want to be part of the political back and forth of the situation. In the time since that event she has become more reflective. She recognized the politics and the pressures did blatantly show up, which was disappointing. However, in the end she learned not to take these types of situations personally.



The women in the study by Gorham and Waitschies (1998) discussed their experiences with politics in the church. These women stated, "It interferes with a woman's need of and value for relationships, being connected" (p. 79). This parallels Gail's experience of being caught between the pastors on her staff and the conference leaders. It made it difficult to have constructive relationships with all of them.

Over time, as Gail had contact with other women clergy, she found some whose experiences with church leadership were also quite discouraging. Jackie's comments expressed some of the strongest sentiments Gail heard from her female clergy friends. She described church leadership operating like a "police state" where you play by the rules, but they do not. "I would be perfectly happy if the conference office just went away. They cause more problems than they fix." Her friend Marion spoke of the conflicting messages she heard from many well-meaning leaders. They said one thing to her privately and then acted out something else when they were in committees and public meetings. Gail understands Marion's difficulty with the contradictions and sympathized with her statement, "The duality has been disappointing to me. It's almost duplicity."

Yet Gail heard some of these same women express optimism that attitudes were changing. Some experienced significant support during difficulties and declared their appreciation for increasing sensitivities toward women. At one point in her own ministry when facing burnout from the challenge of working with a difficult parishioner, Gail described the conference response in these terms. "The support from the conference was huge. Huge. I would have left except for the fact that my conference president and the ministerial secretary said to me, 'No, don't go. God has called you to this ministry.'" When she moved to a new conference Gail felt welcomed. They had intentionally chosen

a woman and she sensed their support. In our interview she smiled as she stated, “My conference president has been a marvelous encourager, an amazing support. At the same time he’s given me some grief—probably deserved.”

### Helen’s Employment Experiences

Helen spoke of her conference in glowing terms. “This conference is great. They’re doing what they’ve been able to do.” She made a point of noting a change in attitude toward women clergy on the part of the conference president. She observed that he never had to deal with those issues until she joined the conference ministerial team. This is an example of the change of attitude noted in studies by Lehman (1985) and Dudley (1996) that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, the section entitled “Attitudes Changed.”

Gail and Helen both talked, at times with amusement, about the difficulty conference officials and male colleagues have in knowing how to treat women pastors. Gail shared a story about her conference not knowing what to do with her since the Adventist Church did not allow them to ordain her. She found herself “stuck” in the unordained pastors group long after her male colleagues were getting processed out because they were being ordained. Since women are not ordained, the conference finally agreed that she would not need to stay in this group for beginning pastors any longer. She had been pastoring at that time for over 9 years. Over time she had heard similar stories from other women.

Helen laughed when remembering her first pastor’s retreat. When she arrived, the housing coordinator was not sure where to put her. She related, “Prior to my arrival their greatest dilemma was whether to put pastors in a snoring or non-snoring cabin. Then I

arrived and they did not know what to do! I was the only woman there.” Some of her male colleagues found it awkward to be around her. They seemed uncertain whether they should talk theology or children when in her presence. At Camp Meeting later in the year, they didn’t know whether to invite her to sing in the pastor’s choir. In all these interactions she got the clear message that somehow she did not fit in.

Women in clergy studies of other denominations spoke of this awkwardness and sense of being different, as well. Wallace (1992) comments on the awkwardness experienced by a Catholic woman in her study. “Her words, ‘everything stopped,’ and ‘they didn’t quite know what to do with me’ point up the awkwardness for both the ‘only woman’ and for the men in such a situation” (p. 159). Women in other studies also talked of feeling different, estranged, and being “very aware of their gender” when in settings with their male clergy colleagues and have also found a mixture of support and challenge when dealing with denominational leaders (Arnold, 2001; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999; Lawless, 1993; Sellers, 1997; Wallace, 1992). The level of support depends in part on factors such as denomination and the particular individual involved. This points out that these situations are not unique to Adventist women.

#### Summary of Employment Experiences

I want to make clear that while these women brought up employment and salary inequities, for most, they were not a major focus of their conversation. On most occasions the comments came up in passing when speaking of another topic. In addition, the comments were generally made in an explanatory fashion, not as complaints. Some

acknowledged that what seemed to be gender-related issues may in fact involve other factors.

Arnold's (2001) comment summarizes well the perspective of the women in this study. "The women in general were not boastful or eager to share their stories of gender discrimination in the interviews. . . . Several knew that they were denied a job because they were female, or that members of the congregation left because they were an incoming female pastor. But they were also open to other possibilities when encountering rejection" (p. 112).

Overall the Adventist women pastors' experiences in their local conferences have been mixed. They experience challenges in these relationships, such as gender bias, which is sometimes inadvertent, and several expressed distrust of some in leadership in part because of what they see as political motivations. Yet they also experience support and are encouraged to see changes in the attitudes of their conference leaders.

### **Role Models and Mentoring**

During the interviews I asked the women about mentors for their ministry. However, even before addressing this topic directly, a number of women spoke of individuals who had influenced their lives and visions of pastoral ministry in significant ways.

With one exception, all the mentoring these women received was informal. Generally, when Adventist pastors are first assigned to a church they enter an internship, which provides them with mentoring for ministry. However, because of the non-typical routes by which many of these women entered ministry, few had a formal internship when they began serving as pastor. Much of what they described as mentoring was

observation of people they respected, including teachers and family members, and then integration of aspects of their approaches to their own lives and ministries. Additionally, they all identified more than one source for this mentoring. Helen's comment reflects this, "Probably little pieces from a different collection of people." What they share about those who influenced them reflects a range of experiences with both common and diverse themes.

### Gail's Story

Gail's experience with role models and mentors began early in her life with stories of family members. Her clergy father provided her first glimpse of what pastoral ministry encompassed. In addition, she cited her paternal grandmother and mother as women who were not bound by traditional expectations. They demonstrated to her that women could effectively serve in non-traditional roles. However, she went on to observe, "I didn't know any women pastors growing up. And my friends didn't either. That really wasn't a big option." Holzgang (2000) noted a similar experience for some women in her study.

When Gail responded to God's call and began her formal training for pastoral ministry, there were no women she could look to and say this is how they did it. She could not think of any women pastors who were a part of those years. While there were actually women serving in ministry at this time, they were few in number and not widely known. The female role model for paid professional ministry that Gail had during these years was that of Bible worker. A seminary friend found that true as well. When Marion wrote a paper on her career goals during her senior year in academy she wrote about Bible workers, thinking that was pretty much her only ministry option as a woman. Once

Gail entered seminary she did find a few women preparing to serve as pastors, which she decided was the direction she would go. So she shifted her vision to pastoral ministry.

When she entered her first ministry position, her male colleagues were her most significant mentors. She found them to be very supportive and encouraging. With a great deal of emotion, she reflected on the senior pastor at this church. She worked with him for 8 years and found him to be a huge influence on her. She shared several instances in which this pastor had closely mentored her through experiences as a new pastor. Included in those memories was baptizing her first candidate with him in the school swimming pool seven times before the actual event. As we talked she realized how instrumental he had been in mentoring her. With tears in her eyes she stated, "Pastor Jim was the one who really, really took me aside and mentored me and moved me into pastoral ministry. So I guess I have a lot to be thankful for. I didn't really realize until right now how much he really did mentor me." Later in her ministry she had a formal mentoring relationship with a clergyman, of whom she stated, "This pastor really helped me for many years because he knew the issues."

Over time as Gail conversed with other women clergy, they mentioned their mentors. Some mentioned what they considered to be rather unusual sources of mentoring: books, seminar speakers, and tape and film presenters. Much of this mentoring was from a distance with persons they did not even know personally and who were not always pastors, but persons whom they admired and wanted to emulate. In part, they talked about these sources as important because of the lack of female clergy mentors.

Gail summed up her perspective: "I wish for a little more connection with another woman in ministry. However, I don't have anyone in my life right now that I look to as a mentor, either formally or informally. There are so few of us who are in ministry with the length of tenure that I have. There are not many women still in ministry who have journeyed enough further down the line that there's anybody to look to for advice."

### Helen's Story

Helen spoke of a male pastor she had as a young church member who provided a role model for her. She recalled with fondness, "To this day I have this deep sense of respect and admiration for Pastor Charles. I notice I probably model some of my behavior after him."

When Helen attended college the woman pastor at the church nearby would come to classes to talk to and pray with the students. She knew the pressures of college and family life brought challenges for these men and women, so she took a personal interest in them. Helen acknowledged that experience as a great influence on her.

Like Gail, most of Helen's mentors were the male colleagues with whom she worked. She remembered one senior pastor whom she admired and respected. She would often go to him for his opinions about ministry. Helen also identified an Adventist woman pastor who served as an informal mentor. Helen gained confidence by watching her, interacting occasionally, and getting words of support along the way. Although she wished for a more formal mentoring relationship with her, it simply did not work out for them because they lived several hundred miles apart.

Helen expressed her specific desire for mentoring by other women in ministry. "I'm kind of hungry for women in ministry. I didn't have a lot of mentors." For Gail's

generation of women there was simply a scarcity of women serving in pastoral ministry. Although there were more women in ministry when Helen was entering the field, geographic distance from other women clergy made mentoring relationships difficult if not impossible. She commented, "I see mentoring as one of those kinds of things that needs a relationship and at least periodic contact, and I'm so far from women in ministry."

Helen knew of a few other women in ministry. However, the challenge for her was that they, too, were just beginning in ministry and also wanting mentors themselves. She spoke of a peer relationship with another beginning woman pastor. "Marion and I were kind of together helping each other. Who was I going to look up to? Who was I going to talk to? There wasn't anybody that I knew of."

Helen thinks more formal mentoring between women would better prepare women for ministry. She wishes conferences and unions would do more to foster mentoring relationships, even though it might prove to be difficult. She is convinced the benefits would outweigh the logistical challenges.

#### Lack of Female Mentors

The women in this study acknowledged the absence of female mentors and their wish for mentoring relationships. When looking closely at the ministry of these women and at the churches they have served, it becomes understandable why they have had so few women clergy role models and mentors. These women have served as pastors in a total of 31 churches and as the first woman in 22 of those churches. A majority of the women began their education and ministry when there were few other women serving. In addition, geographical disbursement during their years of ministry has generally placed



them in settings in which there were no other women clergy in close proximity. In 19 of the 31 total churches, they have been distant from other women.

Studies of women managers and professionals have shown a similar lack of female mentors, and as a consequence women's mentoring relationships are more often with men (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Noe, 1988a; Ragins, 1989; Schwiebert, Deck, Bradshaw, Scott, & Harper, 1999). Studies of women clergy have shown this lack of female mentors or a wish for more mentoring to be true for them as well (Bennett, 1993; Craley, 1990; Frame & Shehan, 2004; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1993). The lack of and desire for female role models for clergywomen were especially pronounced in a study of United Methodist clergywomen (Hale et al., 1985). In looking at the problems experienced by clergywomen at different stages of their career, Hale et al. (1985) found the lack of role models to be "the most consistently troublesome problem important to clergywomen at every career stage" (p. 73).

Some reported their male colleagues serving as mentors (Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999), as did the women in this study. Some women in Arnold (2001) had male and female mentors who encouraged them in their early ministry. They did not report these mentors helping to guide them in the actual practices of pastoring. However, there were fewer mentors as these women grew older. Kolton (1999) found that older rabbis in her study had no female role models, whereas younger rabbis did.

Studies on mentoring for women in organizations have also found that female mentors are seen as especially important when addressing issues of the balance of work and family, avoiding sexual issues that can arise in cross-gender mentoring, and understanding how to negotiate the challenges of working in a male-dominated career

(Egan, 1996; Ragins, 1989; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990; Ragins & Scandura, 1994). These are issues which the women in my study have had to address, generally without access to female mentors.

Other studies see peer relationships as a source of mentoring (Bierema, 1996; Burke & McKeen, 1990; Noe, 1988a, 1988b; Ragins, 1989), address the value in developing multiple mentors—both formal and informal (Inman, 1998; Simonetti, Ariss, & Martinez, 1999), and family members and friends serving as mentors (Burke & McKeen, 1990). All of these are evidenced in the mentoring relationships in this study.

### Mentoring Young Women

A final note on mentoring includes the perceived need for mentoring of young women in college who are preparing for careers in pastoral ministry. Gail expressed her willingness to serve as a mentor to young women. She would be interested in offering whatever she can for others who could benefit. “I feel very strongly about some type of mentoring for these young women who are in college. Some experiences in ministry will be positive and some are going to be negative. It would be really good if the universities and the colleges would help them connect with women who are already out there in the field because it is different for a woman than it is for a man.” This opportunity for mentoring is more readily available for women who attend colleges where a nearby church has a female pastor on staff.

Many women in Arnold (2001) and Kolton (1999) found opportunities to mentor young women. This parallels the experience of some women in my study who have been in positions that enabled them to mentor young women.

### Counsel to Young Women

As they addressed opportunities to mentor young women, I asked the question, “How would you respond to a young woman inquiring about a career in pastoral ministry?” In coming to know the personalities and ministry journeys of these women through the interviews, their counsel seems to be a reflection of their own experience. Those with more challenges in their ministerial career generally inject more words of caution. The women who have experienced less difficulty generally are more enthusiastic and encouraging toward these young women. Almost all of them have opportunities to talk with young women about ministry.

Gail’s comments reflect those who were more cautious or even discouraging in their counsel to young women about pastoral ministry. She tries to be very honest with young women, as she believes they simply do not understand that women and men are not treated equally in the church. She sees it to be a foreign thought to them. She has observed women leave a college setting that has fostered the idea that men and women are equal in every way. When they get out into the church, they find it is not so.

So Gail cautions them about the realities that they will face. She advises them to be sure this is what God has called them to do, because it is not going to be easy; yet it is not impossible. Her own experience has taught her that if you have the full confidence that this is God’s choice for you, you can weather some very difficult circumstances. You can look back on the challenging experiences and say, “This is what God called me to.” Gail also suggests the young women had better have a back-up plan. She just hates to see women not have a plan B that they can fall back on, because they may have to fall back on it sporadically or even permanently. Knowing a motivation to ministry can be driven by her own emotional issues, she wants them to be sure that they are not doing it for their

own emotional healing or for their own self-fulfillment. Gail summarizes her counsel in these words. "I try not to show any fear for her. I would tell her, 'You need to make sure you feel called by God to do this. The rest will fall into place. If you feel called by God, you'll be able to withstand anything.' I tell them it's difficult. I think people are more open to it now. But don't make any mistakes about it. It is difficult."

While she did not have any women clergy role models when she was growing up, Gail is serving as a role model to young girls where she serves. With a smile on her face she remembers a little girl who came up to her and said, "I think I'm going to be a pastor when I grow up." She thought to herself, "Ah! That's really neat, because that's a mindset that I never had. And that will always be a possibility to her. She may change her mind, but she could be a pastor if she wants to." Gail finds the parents of these young girls grateful because this would never have been thought about when they were children. As we were ready to continue the interview, Gail stopped with one additional memory. A third-grade girl inquired about women clergy. "She looked at me and said, 'Well, can women be pastors?' I said, 'Yes.' And she said, 'Well, can they preach?' I said, 'Yes.' She had to sit there and think about it for a little bit because she had never witnessed it."

In contrast to Gail, Helen is more positive in her outlook. "I'm always very encouraging. Amazingly enough, they have usually encountered some road blocks already, maybe even within their own family. But they seem not to let those roadblocks stop them if they feel called." She thinks earlier women had to go through more to get into it and she really has not had that much persecution. As a result, she could not caution someone against it for that reason. Helen also believes we need more women in ministry. So she would offer herself to be available to young women as a mentor.

Helen's daughters find their mother providing a role model of women pastors for them. Helen believes it is in part because she takes them with her on visits to the hospital and on Bible studies. She chuckled as she reported they are known for singing to hospital patients whether or not they are alert. One morning her youngest daughter was talking about what she might be when she grows up. She said to Helen, "Mom, when I grow up I might like to be a teacher, an artist, or a pastor."

A woman in Kleingartner (1999) shared her advice for women seminarians that included both cautionary and encouraging sentiments, similar to the counsel of the women in this study to younger women. "Sexism hasn't gone away. It's just gone underground. . . . and gotten more subtle. I'm glad you'll be a part of us" (p. 141). Several other studies of clergywomen cited the importance of reaching out to younger women as an important aspect of their ministry (Arnold, 2001; Carroll et al., 1983; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999). This seems important, as Carroll et al. (1983) found and expressed their concern that the women seminarians in their study seemed unaware that they might have difficulty in entering ministry because of their gender.

### **Predecessors in Ministry**

Gail mentioned women who had preceded her in pastoral ministry. Her ideas about the contributions of these predecessors to her own ministry and their influence on attitudes toward women clergy in general were mixed. She saw these women as "trail blazers" who broke down barriers and paved the way for the women who followed. However, she also acknowledged that at times their actions created conflict in the church that made her own role more difficult.

Gail knew of some of the earliest women who served as pastors. She heard the stories of the conflicts in which they were involved and believed she could understand why some of them had left pastoral ministry. She believes they were deeply hurt and did not have the support system that is now available to her. It saddens her as she talks to those women who left. It also leaves her with feelings of respect for these women who have gone before. Gail states, "Because of what they have done, I think my entry has been a welcomed one. I think if it weren't for what all of these other women had done for our generation, we just wouldn't have what we have today."

Gail's perspective agrees with what Carroll et al. (1983) discovered in their study. The authors found that women seminarians, when asked about job prospects for women, frequently believed their entry into ministry would be easier than those who had gone earlier because "the increased exposure of women has made them more acceptable" (p. 114). Arnold (2001) found that the "second wave" women in her study felt they were under a good deal of scrutiny even though they believed their predecessors suffered more pain and exhaustion.

Gail's experience, however, is in contrast to that of Helen, who served in a different conference. She spoke of a woman who had gone before her whose actions had left conference leaders with a negative view of all women clergy, an attitude Helen believed unfair. This resulted in their reservations about Helen's coming to serve even though the local church wanted her. In summarizing her views, Helen stated, "It is the earlier women who seemed radical that have really paved the way for those of us who now serve. So we owe a lot to them. On the other hand, some of that radical behavior has made it more difficult. People tend to judge all women clergy the same."

### Gender Differences

I did not specifically ask the women in this study how they functioned differently than their male colleagues, or ways in which they were treated differently than male clergy. However, it was not surprising to me that the women brought up this topic at various points in the interviews. The differences they described ranged from their more relational approach in ministry, to being the lone soprano among a chorus of tenors, baritones, and basses in the pastors' choir. In addition, they cited specific ways in which they were treated differently by church members, colleagues, and the institutional church.

### How They Function

There were a variety of ways in which the women in my study described gender differences in the way they function in their role as a pastor. Both Gail and Helen see themselves as more intuitive and better at relating to parishioners than their male colleagues.

After a difficult meeting with parishioners, one of Gail's male colleagues commented on how well it went. By contrast she commented on her perspective of the meaning behind what the parishioners verbalized. Her impression from the meeting was that members left deeply angry and frustrated. She saw this as a gender-related difference in her greater sensitivity to the feelings of others.

During her internship, Gail remembered the comment of her supervising pastor after her first sermon. "As I listened to your sermon I realized that the criteria I used to critique sermons of young men don't work. I'm not sure why, they just don't." That was her first realization that her sermon content and delivery were different from that of her male colleagues.

Gail has found a common concern with other women in ministry who serve in staff settings. It relates to the ways in which they feel excluded from having the same working relationships with their male colleagues that they see the men having with each other. In their attempts to avoid the appearance of inappropriateness or questions about their relationships, or simply because they do not play golf, they miss the collegiality they see among their male peers and at times feel excluded from situations where they believe important decisions are discussed and made. Gail said, "I miss the fact that I cannot have the same kind of relationship with my senior pastor that my male colleagues can have. The men get together and have a camaraderie that's not there for me. They can go off and do their business on the golf course, but I can't do that."

As her relationships with her male colleagues in the conference developed, Gail reflected on their attitudes toward her. "Even though I love the pastors I work with, I don't find a huge understanding of the issues that concern me. Some of them just don't get it." While some of the pastors are sympathetic to the challenges she faces, Gail finds that others simply "roll their eyes and say, 'Oh, there she goes again with this gender stuff.'" And while she wishes for a closer working relationship with her male colleagues, Gail also understands the need for appropriate boundaries within these relationships. "When you're working on intense spiritual things with people, you have to be careful or things can get out of hand. I'm very careful. And I think I understand how problems could happen."

Helen initially denied experiencing challenges in her ministry because of her gender. "You know, I've never felt challenged because I was a woman. It's been such a non-issue to me." Then as she continued to share, she enumerated challenges she faces in



perceptions of her leadership style, questions about her ability to parent effectively, and her lack of assertiveness. She reflected, “So it’s interesting. As I’m thinking and answering I’m going, yeah, I guess maybe there is more.”

Helen spoke of her joy in mingling with and greeting people on Sabbath morning. “I love to make sure people get touched, because I think that is so important. So many people don’t get touched. And I feel as a woman I can do that in ways my male colleagues can’t.” Helen thinks people are a little more interested in your appearance when you’re a woman. She has received notes about the length of her hair and how she might dress more modestly. She also remembers when, after pastoring for several years, she realized she did not have to “dress for success”; she could wear whatever she wanted. Then there was the day she ordered business cards with a feminine touch because it was a thing of beauty. “I realized I had stepped into my own as a woman in ministry.”

Helen has served in the same conference with male clergy who have not worked with a woman before. At her first conference clergy retreat she remembered a dialog with some of her male colleagues. “The first time I went to a pastors’ meeting some of my peers in ministry asked, ‘So, how do we relate to you? Are you just one of the guys?’ There was awkwardness at first.”

Overwhelmingly, studies of female clergy of other denominations have noted some of the same issues related to gender differences as noted by the women in my study. Notably, many perceived themselves to be more relationally oriented than their male colleagues (Bennett, 1993; Bingham, 1992; Frame & Shehan, 2004; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988; Nason-Clark, 1987; Simon et al., 1993; Stevens, 1989; Willhauck & Thorpe, 2001; Zikmund et al., 1998).

The topic of the way male and female clergy use body language was addressed by Nuechterlein and Hahn (1990). They referred to Susan who “learned to convey gentleness and sensitivity through body language” (p. 3) much the way that Helen expressed her caring. Women in Lawless (1993) told stories about members of their congregations who were upset over issues of dress. Smith’s (1993) study of male and female seminary students confirms what Gail’s pastor observed to her about sermon delivery. Men and women “differed in the way they displayed themselves as exegetes of a fixed sacred text” (p. 172). Women in Gorham and Waitschies (1998), Lawless (1988), and Arnold (2001) also cited differences in their preaching style. This finding differs from Lehman (1993) who did not find differences between preaching styles of men and women clergy. Finally, others have noted the importance of male and female clergy being attentive to issues of attraction and establishing boundaries to avoid sexual inappropriateness in these close working relationships (Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Nuechterlein & Hahn, 1990).

#### How They Are Treated

Gail spoke of her experience with people tending to judge all women pastors the same. “If one woman has done something this way, we must all do it this way. Or if two of us are feminists, then we’re all feminists.” While Gail has similarities with her female colleagues, she knows they are not a monolithic group. She describes her temperament as that of an introvert with good boundaries around her time. Yet she sees her friend and colleague, Jackie, as an extrovert and workaholic.

This perception was reinforced when on one occasion Gail was invited to deliver a series of sermons at a camp meeting. Several weeks ahead of the date she heard from a

friend in that conference that people were beginning to speculate about the series, some with a good bit of skepticism about the abilities of a woman. Gail said, "I knew if I failed not only would *I* fail, but all women coming after me would be judged by my failure." She then became more reflective as she commented on her belief that in some situations, it seems women have been set up to fail. This can then give a bad name to women clergy in general. So, what began as the failure of one woman will be globalized into a reason why all women should be excluded from ministry. This perception of being judged as a group and not as an individual was mentioned in other studies of women clergy of various faiths (Arnold, 2001; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999) and so is not unique to Adventist women.

Gail also expressed her belief that women work harder and many are held to a different, and often higher, standard than their male colleagues. "The number one remark I keep hearing from parishioners is that if previous male pastors had worked as hard as I did, maybe the church wouldn't have needed an associate." She went on to describe that for a while at her previous church her job description was five pages long, whereas those for the male pastors were about two. Gail wonders if more leeway is given to men than women. In their study of United Methodist clergywomen, Hale et al. (1985) found these women perceiving higher work expectations for them than for their male colleagues, as did Lawless (1988) in her study of Pentecostal women clergy.

When one of Gail's pastoral assignments followed that of a man, she found members questioning her leadership style. "Things I would do that a male pastor would do, people did not like. These are things that if a man had done them would have just been a man leading. But for me it was that she's a pushy, bossy woman." Gorham and

Waitschies (1998), Kleingartner (1999), and Bennett (1993) found women in their studies expressing this same concern with perceptions of their leadership style. Zikmund et al. (1998) conclude, "Even when ordained women display 'masculine' traits, these traits will be interpreted differently when displayed by a woman" (p. 75).

Helen recalled experiences at church potlucks when church members treated her differently than her male colleagues were treated. Helen laughed as she acknowledged, "I've never known a male pastor to bring any food to a potluck unless he grabbed a bag of rolls somewhere. And they don't go in the kitchen and prepare the food. But women parishioners expect me to be in the kitchen making food. If I'm not, I hear, 'Well, she's out there just flitting about.'" She also remembers experiencing a great deal of criticism for not attending, with food in hand, all the expected social functions at the church, including potlucks. In frustration one day in conversation with friends she blurted out, "I need a wife to make the casseroles."

Ice (1987), in her study of women in mainline Protestant denominations, points out that one challenge for women clergy is the "absence of back-up persons. . . . no 'pastor's wife' to 'fill in' at church and at home" (p. 109). A number of other studies of female clergy also found the expectations of women clergy bleeding over into what are usually expectations of clergy "wives" (Bennett, 1993; Bingham, 1992; Kleingartner, 1999; Sellers, 1997; Wallace, 1992; Zikmund et al., 1998). From her interviews with Catholic female pastors, Wallace (1992) remarked about one woman in her study, "In spite of the fact that the woman pastor had a full-time job, and that all of the previous pastors had housecleaners, because she happened to be a woman, she was expected to work the 'second shift'" (p. 161).

Women who served while pregnant and parenting young children spoke of differences in attitudes they perceived. Helen knew when she announced her pregnancy to the congregation, things were going to be different when she got stopped in the hallway by a church leader who questioned, "So, can you now accomplish your job with being pregnant?" Helen thought to herself, "Well, did you ask that question of the men on staff just because their wife was having a baby?" She never heard questions about a male colleague's ability to continue doing his job. But there was clearly that question about her ability. She knew the glasses were on and people were watching.

Kolton (1999), Zikmund et al. (1998), and Bennett (1993) also found the views of congregations challenged when their female pastor was pregnant and when parenting small children. As Zikmund et al. (1998) found, "Clergy women take more responsibility for raising children than do clergy men. . . . and [are] nearly three times more likely than clergy men to report having difficulty in carrying on a full-time ministry at a time when they have children under ten years old" (p. 89). Helen would concur with this assessment; yet as will be discussed later in this chapter, the Adventist women in this study find ways to make pastoring and parenting work.

It was interesting that some women in my study described themselves as a pastor who happened to be a woman. Yet these same women went on later to describe some of the different expectations and views for women experienced by Gail. Charlton (1997) found women in her study who downplayed gender as an identity, yet experienced gender bias.

I did not specifically ask the women in my study about what differences exist between their ministry and that of their male colleagues. The responses above were

offered spontaneously as the interviews progressed. Zikmund et al. (1998) summarized in this way, “Women clergy often bring a different charisma from men, a different style of leadership, and different communication styles in their interactions with parishioners” (p. 75). Even with the mixed results reported in various studies of women and men clergy, what is overwhelming in the studies cited here, as well as in my study, is that women and some men *perceive* differences.

Gail summed up her view this way, “God made us different and all those differences I bring into ministry. I don’t have to try to do it just like my male colleagues do. I realized I can add my own touch. I began to make it my own and that’s when I truly came to see all the wonderful differences, why God needs women to represent him as well as men.”

#### Difference in Treatment—Ordination

The subject of the ordination of women to ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has generated significant controversy in the Adventist church during the past 20 or more years. Although women clergy in the Adventist church are denied ordination, church policy provides for a commissioning service to affirm the calling and giftedness of women for pastoral ministry. During the span of time encompassing the ministry of the women in this study, some have chosen to be commissioned, others have declined.

After Helen had completed almost 10 years of pastoral service, her conference administration inquired about her interest in being commissioned. She felt honored that her service would be recognized in this way. She knew that her male friends who graduated from seminary with her had been ordained several years earlier; however, she

viewed the inquiry from the conference to be an affirmation of her ministry and chose to participate in a commissioning service.

Jackie was caught in controversy over the issue of ordination, controversy of which she did not wish to be a part. Before the world church voted to deny the ordination of women in July 1990, a union official vocally expressed his displeasure toward the ordination of women. As this man was a personal friend and had previously expressed his support for her ministry, Jackie felt deeply hurt by the intensity of his negative reaction to what she saw would be an affirmation of her calling and giftedness for ministry.

Jackie reflected on why she subsequently chose not to be commissioned. While she would love to see ordination for women, she believes the commissioning service does not change anything she does. Moreover, she sees the potential for significant conflict in her local church if she were to be commissioned. The people in the congregation who feel she should be ordained are insulted. And the people who feel ordination is not appropriate for women are going to look at the commissioning service as ordination and be offended. All that has been accomplished for the congregation is to cause division. She does not see the need for this service because, as she states, "I've been called by God and ordained by God."

Gail knows several women who participated in the same process for approval for ordination as their male colleagues, yet were not ordained. Her friend, Marion, spoke to her about the frustration and hurt she felt at the inequality shown men and women who function equally in ministry. "I work for a church that says you can do everything a man can do, but you're not equal. And I don't feel that's biblical." When speaking of why she

believed her conference was not more supportive of her ordination, Marion revealed that she believes people do not feel safe enough to take a stand.

Both Helen and Gail agree that the issue of ordination is not a focal point of their daily ministry. However, both spoke of their view that ordination for women is right and wish that affirmation of their ministry if the church votes to approve ordination for women.

Sara used language that expressed her strong feelings about women being denied ordination, going so far as to call that position immoral, then shared this story of her unexpected ordination. This is an example of the way in which women take steps to be inclusive when others are not.

My first year in ministry, I was invited by another pastor to an ecumenical women's clergy group in town. Women were there representing most religious traditions, probably 40 women in all. I was only 25 years old and most of them were older than me. The big topic for the day was menopause and how to celebrate it. I was feeling quite out of place. Somehow the conversation turned to the fact that Adventists weren't ordaining women. Before I knew what was happening, this group put the two of us in the center and laid their hands on us and ordained us. I didn't go to any more meetings. I thought if the conference knew I had been ordained by this highly ecumenical group I might get kicked out.

I want to emphasize that generally the women in this study spoke reflectively and did not express strong anger at the church decision that forbids their ordination. While this might be surprising to some, I attribute that response to Gail's view. "I've spoken with several lay members who are involved in the movement within the Adventist Church to ordain women. When they urge my taking a public stand on the issue I respond, 'If I take a position on a controversial issue like this, then I have compromised my work as a pastor because it will create a conflict within my congregation. And I have been called to do ministry in the church.' If the world church reopens the discussion of



the ordination of women and asks if there are women who are successful, then I want them to be able to point to women who are effectively serving.”

The survey of Adventist women taken after the 1990 decision to deny ordination to women at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis (Hamilton Chandler Communications, 1992) found that 70% of the women still felt a strong call to ministry and would continue to “take advantage of the reasonable opportunities for employment and credentials that the denomination offers” (p. 21). In addition, this vote did not diminish their commitment to fulfilling their call. “Two out of three women pastors indicated that they felt affirmed and would remain in their ministry so long as they continued to sense the Lord’s leading” (p. 21). Finally, while they still believed in full ordination for women, they saw the commissioning service and commissioned minister credential created for women to be a step in the right direction.

One thing is clear in the studies of ordained women clergy of other denominations. Ordination has not solved all the problems or answered all the questions about their ministry (Zikmund et al., 1998). Many of the challenges previously mentioned in this study, such as pay inequities and more limited opportunities, have remained over time, despite ordination.

One study on the topic of ordination that has particular relevance is Chaves’s (1997) study of the relationship of organizational policy and structure and social forces that push against policy. He observed that the Adventist Church is an example of “loose coupling,” which is “produced when an externally generated organizational characteristic is at odds with an internal, pragmatic organizational activity” (p. 5). He bases this

conclusion on the fact that while the church forbids the ordination of women, in most instances women are allowed to fully function as clergy.

While I did not ask the women about their views on ordination, it did not surprise me that they chose to comment on the subject. There has been significant discussion and study of this issue in the Adventist Church; however, it is beyond the scope of this study to go into more depth on the topic. What is pertinent to this study is the fact that while these women support the ordination of women, the denial of ordination by the world church does not deter them from continuing to serve in pastoral ministry. They stay in spite of the difference in treatment because of their gender.

### **Family Roles and Issues**

It was not unexpected that the husbands and children and their roles in the lives and ministry of the women entered our conversation. Of the women interviewed, seven were married. The overall tenor of the comments was positive, with them seeing their families as supportive of their ministry. There were some exceptions, as will be noted below.

#### **Pastors as Wives**

As Helen and Andy dated she had a growing sense that she could marry him because of the encouragement she received. When I asked about supporters of her ministry, Helen responded with a laugh in her voice, "One is my husband, but that probably doesn't count." A short time later I suggested she need not rule Andy out as a supporter of her ministry and asked her to share how he supports her ministry. Her demeanor changed and with tears in her eyes and a voice full of emotion she shared, "In

every way. He's the first one to always encourage me. He's proud of me and makes that clear to everyone." As Helen reflected about Andy's support, she observed it might be in part because his parents did not have traditional roles in the family.

At one point in her ministry, Helen experienced a crisis directly related to her gender. She had been invited to speak at a camp meeting service in a neighboring conference. A union conference leader expressed his strong opposition to allowing a woman to preach and demanded that Helen's invitation be rescinded. The situation escalated as the conference insisted the invitation stand. Knowing his wife was feeling caught in the middle, Andy cancelled a business trip he was to take to stay with her because of the emerging complications. She reflected, "I didn't know when I got married the degree of support I would receive from my husband. His support never ends and I value that."

In contrast to Andy, Bruce keeps a significant distance from Marion's pastoral ministry. She describes him as tagging way back. Involvement in his own busy career limits his church attendance to only twice a month. Given the large size of the congregation in which Marion serves, she speculates that few members would even recognize him. She sees this as advantageous in that she is more understanding of families in similar circumstances.

The women in Carroll et al. (1983), Hale et al. (1985), and Arnold (2001) cited their husbands as a primary support. Bennett's (1993) study of United Methodist women found their husbands adapting to this role in a variety of ways.

### Pastors as Mothers

The women in this study have a total of 17 children. Eight of these children are high-school age or younger. The remaining 9 children are college age and above. These women loved to talk about their children. Their eyes lit up and at times they laughed about their experiences. Occasionally, the regular course of the interview diverted from the topic at hand to a story or memory about their children.

For those women whose children were born while they pastored full-time, adding the role of mother to their already busy lives brought both joys and challenges. Helen shared her stories of pregnancy and mothering young children while she pastored.

When she announced her first pregnancy to her congregation, Helen began to hear both pregnancy and miscarriage stories. The stories did not make her afraid. They instead provided a new connection with women of her congregation in that she had now entered a journey others had traveled and felt free to share. As her due date grew closer, she invited guest speakers to fill the pulpit because she realized her pregnancy was becoming a distraction to the congregation. With a laugh in her voice she reflected, "One of my young adult members said to me, 'I watched you up there preaching this morning and your ankles aren't swelling.'"

Three weeks before her baby was born, a member of her congregation died and Helen had to do the memorial service. Although she had wished to serve more in the background until the baby was born, she found herself up front again. She remembers, "It was such a challenge. It was hard to act professional and keep my composure when the baby was kicking. . . . hard."

After her maternity leave of 4 short weeks, she returned to work with her baby in tow. "When Mary was born, I took her everywhere with me. It was especially workable

because I nursed her and didn't have to worry about bottles and formula." On Sabbath mornings Andy would take the baby to Sabbath School and church while Helen taught a Sabbath School class and preached. As Mary grew older she still accompanied Helen to committee meetings and on visits and Bible study appointments. Helen describes it in this way. "It was really a shared journey. And people loved to see her."

Helen grew to depend even more upon the assistance her husband provided when their second child was born. The addition of Susan to their family intensified the challenges they experienced. There were now two children needing attention on Sabbath morning. When Andy was unable to watch the children because of his own work schedule, Helen found it more difficult, if not impossible in some situations, to take both children with her to meetings and appointments. Helen and Andy decided to hire a caregiver to be available to watch the children. They liked the consistency of one person their children knew well.

Helen also began to refuse requests to speak outside her own church at retreats and in other settings that would take her away from her children. When reflecting on the challenges of juggling the roles of both pastor and mother she chuckled, "The great thing is I get to be with them a lot. I don't feel like someone else is raising them, which is important to me. The bad thing is that it's just really busy. In the good times I almost make it work."

The downside of parenting emerged at times. On one occasion Helen recognized the pressure being exerted on her daughter to act more "grown up" than was appropriate for her age of 3 years. "I felt a woman in our church was putting pressure on Susan that I didn't think she deserved." Helen recognized that some of this comes with the public role

into which her children were thrust. "Pastors' kids are always feeling the pressure of being the pastors' kids, being on stage all the time." She works hard to set boundaries that allow her children the freedom to be normal. Bingham (1992) also found clergywomen working to protect their children from the stresses of being the child of a pastor.

Helen shared the challenges when her daughters were younger. "It's very busy. My life would be busy if I didn't work at all, and to combine mothering to ministry adds another whole level of complication." When she gathers with other women in ministry Helen hears their stories of the juggling it takes to pastor and raise young children. She remembers a colleague with two preschool children telling her, "It's hard with a family. I don't think my husband and I go out as much as we should."

Surprisingly, Bingham (1992) found one woman who liked juggling the roles of pastor and mother of small children. She now uses those "juggling" skills in her current, demanding pastoral setting.

Yet Helen does express the priority her children have in her life, a view she notes other women in ministry to whom she has spoken also hold. "I take the time I need for Mary and Susan. While I really value my role in ministry, I don't feel obsessed to have to be perfect in it. Parenting is more important. I really don't want to be the mom whose daughters felt like they never knew me." Helen stated that having children has given her a new perspective and sensitivity to issues facing parents, especially working mothers.

Helen knows that not all her female clergy friends have dealt with the balance of motherhood and pastoring as she has. Marion's experience differed from Helen's in one respect. Marion saw a significant advantage to combining pastoral ministry and motherhood, and never found the need for child care for her children. She states, "This is

the only job I can think of where I can include my kids. My sons were part of my ministry. Anything I was doing, they were there at the church. They learned to play at the church.” She went on to express the loss she feels now that her children are away from home. Her current pastorate is the first place she has been where her children are not a part of her ministry because they are in college. She sighed and with tears in her eyes stated, “It just feels like my ministry is not complete without them.” She also remembers with a chuckle a statement from a colleague without children, “It’s not fair. You’ve got kids. You’ve got the best sermon illustrations.”

Sara described the consequences to her children of ministering as a single parent. Her children are now grown, so her experience was a number of years ago. She spoke of times in the lives of her children when her responsibilities at work conflicted with what needed to be done at home. And she said with a measure of sorrow in her voice, “Most of the time I put my work first. Not that I didn’t address the issues. It was at the point in my life when I didn’t feel that I could say no to my work to take care of my family needs.” Sara felt she was not present as much as would have been helpful to her children. If I were to speak with her children, she speculated, they would describe her as never being there, although she sees that as an exaggeration. She goes on to state that her children are now grown and they are best of friends. She and her children weathered the earlier difficult years.

Some studies on women clergy conclude that significant role strain comes from balancing work and family (Carroll et al., 1983; Hale et al., 1985; Lehman, 1985; Zikmund et al., 1998). It is interesting to note that in the years between Carroll et al. (1983) and Zikmund et al. (1998), the situation for women has not changed. This

statement summarizes Helen's situation well, "The conflict between motherhood and career came not from the macho hours demanded by ambition but from the challenge to provide direct and sustained caring in two different places" (Bateson, 1989, p. 154).

Women clergy in several studies found themselves both rewarded and challenged with the dual roles of pastor and mother, as is true of the women in this study (Arnold, 2001; Bingham, 1992; Carroll et al., 1983; Foster, 1989; Holzgang, 2000). Other studies of women clergy identify this juggling of multiple roles as a challenge for women clergy (Carroll et al., 1983; Holzgang, 2000; Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999; Zikmund et al., 1998).

In a study of 60 professional women who were also mothers, Gilbert, Holahan, and Manning (1981) found these women to be both fulfilled and stressed from the dual roles they carried, as is typical of Helen. The Christian women in academia in Carruthers's (2003) study experienced the challenges in juggling the demands of both career and family needs. Carruthers found these roles "constantly being worked out, sometimes on a daily basis" (p. 103).

Wolfman (1984) studied "roles and their development in the lives of Black and white women of all social classes" (p. 1). She found that a variety of roles and responsibilities were a part of the lives of almost all the women, a pattern they had been preparing for all their lives. In addition, "Most women are able to combine many parts of their lives with competence but also with some stress" (pp. 2-3). Similarly, in this study, Gail juggled multiple roles and admitted to facing stress. In addition, Wolfman found that women manage these multiple roles "in a context of those who taught them to care *and* to be competent" (p. 3, emphasis in original). That blending of competence and caring is



demonstrated in the lives of the women I studied, who also showed flexibility, as did the women in Wolfman's research.

Lehman (1985) raised the concern of some lay members that because of the pressures of these dual roles they "expect clergywomen to develop emotional problems in this situation and anticipate that their children will suffer because of their absence from the home while attending to pastoral responsibilities" (p. 30). My study also identified both church members and male clergy as perceiving problems with a woman's ability to juggle these multiple responsibilities. Although Sara's experience would validate these concerns, her experience is not typical of the women in this study, who find ministry providing positive experiences and opportunities for their children and who make their children a priority.

In his study of Adventist religion teachers' opinions on the role of women in the church, Dudley (1987b) found some qualifying what level of involvement women should have depending "upon whether or not the women have children to care for" (p. 15). One respondent saw this as an issue on "how to balance family stability against individual rights" (p. 15). Given the strong calling that propels the women in my study into pastoral ministry, this statement misses the essence of the challenge for these women. For them it is not family needs in conflict with their individual rights. They are seeking balance between family needs and God's call upon their lives. They admit wrestling with this issue and not always doing this as well as they would like.

Bingham (1992) specifically studied work and family in the experience of clergywomen. A number of commonalities can be noted between her study and the experience of the women in this study. Common stress points for the women in both

studies were: the expectation of fulfilling both the role of a clergywoman and the clergyman's wife; the stresses for their children, including high expectations; and the busy pace of life. Commonalities also existed in the rewarding aspects of combining parenthood and a clergy career. These include the flexible schedule of pastoral ministry, the variety of work experiences, new spiritual understandings that come with parenthood, and doing work they love and being paid for it.

Common themes are evident between my study and Carruthers's (2003) study of Christian women in academia. Both found motherhood to be a role highly valued by these professional women. They acknowledged that the intensive demands while they have small children are seasonal and recognize that a time of less intensity will come. These women also found their personal identity to encompass more than their role as mothers. Their professional role, which they see as a calling of God, is of high priority to them. As mothers, they admitted to looking for balance and figuring out how to make it work as they go along. Yet they also admitted to stress in their attempts to find balance, and at times the balance tipped toward work.

Overall, the family experiences of the women in this study were positive and even an enhancement to their ministry. They see their varied roles as wives and mothers providing a whole wealth of experiences that have helped them to be better pastors. They know people can relate to them more when they have had similar life experiences. Knowing that other women have struggled with finding balance between their profession and family, it would seem helpful to have female mentors to help guide them in this quest. Unfortunately, the women in this study have typically not had mentors to aid them.

This extended comment from Helen summarizes the views of those women in this study who have pastored while raising children.

I think changes in my family experience have broadened my ministry. When I was single, I was focused on the singles ministry. When I got married, I could understand what it was to have a husband and to understand another whole segment of my congregation. And then, of course, having a child meant I was now walking the journey of those with a child. It brought a sense of camaraderie with other parents. Then, as my child went to school, I became involved in the school system. And I found myself doing ministry there. So, I think my journey through these varied life stages has opened doors and broadened how I do ministry.

### **Contradictions and Dilemmas**

Looking at the call to ministry, preparation for ministry and the employment experiences of these women in light of “dilemmas and contradictions of status” (Hughes, 1945) provided interesting insights into their experiences. Hughes’s conceptual framework was presented in the literature review. Bock (1967) highlighted the added contradiction for women clergy because the position of pastor is seen by some as not only “masculine,” but “sacredly” so (p. 531).

### **Contradictions**

The women in this study find no contradiction between their roles of pastor and being a woman. The expectation that a pastor be “male” is seen by them to be an “auxiliary characteristic” (Hughes, 1945, p. 353), or something that has come to be expected by many, but is not required. Their call to ministry serves to provide a secure foundation and source of identity as a pastor. Any doubt or ambivalence they exhibit relates not to whether they are called, but whether they will find employment. They also have family, professors, church members, and pastors for whom there is no contradiction.

These individuals fully support the decision of these women to work as pastors, and find no inherent contradiction.

However, there are others who have a great deal of difficulty with the thought of a woman serving as a pastor. Initially, Gail's parents saw a contradiction, as "women don't get calls in ministry." Some church members and conference officials were opposed as well. Helen experienced disapproval from a fellow ministerial student, a school counselor, church members, and conference leaders who also did not believe a woman could be a pastor. For these individuals the status of "male" is a "defining characteristic" (Hughes, 1945, p. 353) for the role of pastors, not an "auxiliary characteristic," and these women are transgressing this boundary.

#### Early Dilemmas

Although both Gail and Helen were eventually hired, it is interesting to note how those around them sought to resolve the contradiction of a woman serving as a pastor. Gail's parents wanted her to consider another career, while the members of her church prayed that the Holy Spirit would withdraw her call to ministry. Helen's fellow student was more indirect about his appeal that this could not be God's wish for her, invoking the Bible as his source of authority. The school counselor used a direct approach in his attempt to persuade her to consider another career. The conference and local church leaders were the most blunt in their attempts at resolution. "We won't hire or even talk with you."

The approach of Gail's parents seems to come from a desire to protect her. However, the others appeal to various types of authority: the authority of the Bible; the authority of a position as school counselor, one whose job it is to provide career

guidance; and the authority of withholding employment. None of these approaches, however, are satisfactory for Gail and Helen, as the authority of their call by God outweighs authority from any other source.

### Dilemmas as Employees

The dilemmas that accompany women who are called by God to serve as pastors become more apparent as they began their work as pastors. Dilemmas for those who interact with women clergy relate to practical concerns of whether to talk to or treat them as a woman and mother or pastor, where to house them at the clergy retreat, whether they should be expected to bring a casserole to the potluck, and where women find role models and mentors.

The dilemmas are particularly acute for women who are mothers of small children. What do they do when a sick child is home and they are also scheduled to chair the church business meeting? How do they relate to the church member who believes they should be home taking care of their children, not serving in ministry? Other dilemmas pose more significant challenges, such as how to treat women equitably when church policies and practices are different for men and women.

### Resolving the Dilemmas

On the practical side, the women in this study often, although not always, talked with amusement about the relatively minor dilemmas resulting from the role of female clergy. "Do we treat you as a woman and mother, or a pastor?" They have never been without a place to stay at the pastors' retreat. "Should we talk to you about theology or your children?" They are pastors and enjoy talking shop; however, they also love to talk

about their children. The dilemma about potlucks was not answered by these women. I do not know if they take a casserole or a bag of rolls when they attend.

Solving the dilemma of how to get mentoring has not always been easy, although the women have found mentors, sometimes from atypical sources. Faced with a lack of women clergy role models and mentors, they have looked to women in other professions, to Bible workers within the church, and to books, films, and other resources. Their male colleagues have also served to fill the void in mentoring, although this creates another dilemma for the women. With their belief that they function differently in ministry from their male colleagues, how do they sort out ministry styles that are non-gendered from those that are unique for women? Ideally, more women will enter pastoral ministry, resulting in an increased ability to find female role models and mentors. It is impossible, however, to predict if this will happen, and thus bring resolution to this dilemma.

More difficult dilemmas arise when questions are raised about whether they should even be serving as pastors. As demonstrated in this chapter, the women in this study depend on the support of their husbands and church members to deal with this challenge. To a limited extent, they downplay the gender differences, and to a large degree, they remember that God has called them to the role of pastor.

There are some dilemmas for which there is no apparent solution. The women in this study perceive differences, sometimes significant ones, in the ways they function and are treated as pastors. There is no way to process a woman out of the unordained pastors group in the same way as her male colleagues because the church prohibits her ordination. Pay inequities will only be resolved when women with comparable education and skills are initially hired as pastors and not Bible workers. The women in this study

generally deal with these contradictions and dilemmas by either ignoring or minimizing the gender differences, or they add feminine characteristics to the role.

### Summary

The stories of these women clearly show that they are responding to the call of God in their lives. They demonstrate the “three distinct spiritual qualifications” as set forth in the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual* (1992). These are a personal call from Christ, a personal relationship with Christ, and a personal empowering by Christ. They show “that inner persuasion or experience by which a person perceives himself or herself to be called to ministry” (Aleshire, 1995, p. 23). For them ministry is not simply a job, but a passion, a calling by God, an integral part of their identity. They do not work as pastors; they *are* pastors.

They find their life experiences, previous careers, and education preparing them for ministry. While not all have completed graduate-level education, they have taken at least some ministry/theology-specific coursework as an undergraduate or in seminary. While for some their routes into ministry have been circuitous, they have all persevered through the challenges on the route to employment and have become employed as full-time pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Once they are on the job, the women in this study have a mixture of experiences. They find joy in serving as a pastor, yet find difficulties because they lack role models, are treated different from their male colleagues, and juggle multiple roles. In the midst of these challenges are joys, as well. They find their identity as pastors brings rewards. They face the demands of combining motherhood and a career, acknowledging they do not always find the right balance.

However, not all questions, contradictions, and dilemmas are easily addressed, as will be seen more clearly in chapter 4. In fact, the magnitude of some challenges led them to thoughts of leaving pastoral ministry.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### SO MANY REASONS TO LEAVE

#### **Introduction**

Challenges and discouragements have been a part of the experience of the women in this study from the time they first made public their call to ministry. The disapproval and doubt came from family members and college and seminary professors who first questioned the wisdom of a career in ministry, to conference officials who expressed pessimism toward employing women, and additionally from pastoral colleagues, church members, and circumstances. However, these women continue in ministry.

It was interesting to note that during the interviews when asked to describe the joys and challenges in their ministries, the women went into significant detail about the challenges they experienced, often citing specific situations or people and sharing detailed conversations. By contrast, the joys they shared were more general in nature and took significantly less time in the interviews. What follows are the major challenges these women have faced during their ministry. The reasons they choose to stay will follow in chapter 5.

#### **Challenging Relationships**

In the interviews, I asked the women about people who had either encouraged or discouraged them in their ministry. Their answers were varied, and while some counted

teachers, church leaders, colleagues, and parishioners as supporters, at other times or in different circumstances they found these same people to be sources of discouragement. Several of them shed tears during the telling of these stories. Here are their comments about those who discouraged their ministry.

### Employers and Colleagues

Helen expressed challenges in some working relationships, both with pastoral colleagues and with conference leaders. In speaking of a pastoral colleague with whom she worked closely, she shared this observation. "He was a control person. And his wife was, too. They pretty much wanted to control every aspect of my life." Another time she encountered difficulties in the staff of men with whom she worked. She commented that she "doesn't sit at the table and play political games" like she feels the men do. In private, any one of them will tell her openly about the issue they are dealing with. But when they meet as a staff she describes the dynamic this way, "It's like there's a muzzle on their mouths. They can't say in public what they've been saying in private." Helen's friend, Sara, described the pain she felt when a colleague was spreading false information about her among church members. She thought she could handle the situation, but she could not understand why these things were being said about her.

When she accepted a pastoral assignment in a different conference, Jackie did not feel welcomed by her male colleagues. She described them as unkind for most of the years she worked with them. She was shocked at what little support they gave her. She also shared the lack of support she received from the senior pastor with whom she served. In fact, Jackie was deeply hurt because as time went on he lied about her. "I think that

was what was most painful. He lied and said he completed the work on a report for the church board that I had done.”

Jackie does not find all the challenges she faces in ministry to be at the local level. She states bluntly that she does mind the disrespect and politics she sees at the conference and union levels of the church structure. When the senior pastor in her church left abruptly in the midst of difficult circumstances with which she was uninvolved, Jackie described her frustration and resentment at the church leaders’ treatment of her. She stated, “I got called down to the conference several times for inquisitions. They wouldn’t have thought of it that way, but that’s how it felt.”

#### Church Members

Generally Gail spoke of the support and welcome she felt from the congregations she has served. However, she is aware that has not been the experience of all women. Her friend, Marion, spoke of church members whose attitudes and actions led to a time of discouragement. When she arrived to serve this new congregation, Marion remembered the members’ reaction this way: “There was a lot of prejudice against my being in a position having any authority at all. But they weren’t open about it. It was all underground.” In this situation she resented the indirect way in which the discouragers expressed opposition. Jackie had also once commented to Gail about a woman who was creating subtle conflict over her role as a pastor. She did not want Jackie studying the Bible with her daughter, but was unwilling to talk about this directly. Jackie heard about the problem from a friend of the mother.

In an expression of opposition to her functioning in a pastoral role, Sara described a situation in which an extended family member of the baptismal candidate chose not to

come to the baptism because she was conducting it. She stated that women were more opposed to her ministry than men. She qualified that by saying, "And not all women. There were some exceedingly supportive women. But I did have women who would pull me aside and tell me my first responsibility was to my home and family. I was putting too much time in at the church."

Other studies of women clergy uniformly report similar challenges from colleagues and church members. Bennett (1993) notes hostility and lack of acceptance from colleagues and parishioners. Others cite similar responses to clergywomen (Arnold, 2001; Carroll et al., 1983; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Hale et al., 1985; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999; Wallace, 1992).

In his study of women clergy, Lehman (1985) found lay members to be "fundamentally and philosophically open to women in ministry. . . . Yet many of them do have reservations" (p. 51). He found clergymen "tend to take a very positive stance in relation to women in ministry" (p. 76). So, while these groups are generally supportive of women clergy, their positive view is not universally held by church members or pastors. It is with these more resistant individuals that Gail and Helen experience challenges.

This conclusion in Carroll et al. (1983) expresses the experience of Marion and Jackie, who found the opposition to their ministry underground and subtle.

Laity who object to a clergywoman because of her gender are unlikely to voice this complaint directly to the clergywoman or to those in the church who have hired her; instead, they often couch their objections in more acceptable terms having to do with her competence, personality, or style (p. 166).

Opposition couched in more covert forms rather than overt was also found in Hale et al. (1985). In general, many of the challenges experienced by Helen, Sara, Jackie, and

Marion are rooted in disapproval of either the way they fulfill their role as women pastors or of their being in ministry at all.

### **Other Sources of Challenge**

In addition to challenges mentioned above, the women described additional unequal treatment and negative attitudes, as well as job stresses. Some of these challenges are unique to women; others are not.

#### **Invisibility**

Gail described situations in which she felt “invisible” to others, including times when language was used in a public setting that ignored her presence. She winces with a hint of anger in her voice when she recalls her first retreat for pastors’ meetings and the lack of sensitivity by some speakers to her presence. This was really pronounced to her because at the winter meetings only pastors are in attendance. After several hours of speakers referring to the collective group of male and female pastors as “men” and “brethren,” one morning midway through the speaker’s talk she began to tally how many times he referred to the group as “men,” “brethren,” and “gentlemen.” She stated, “I counted over 40 times in just a couple of hours. And it was obvious I was there as a pastor.”

Gail continued her story of invisibility as she described the attitude of conference leadership where she had recently been employed. A church in the former conference was interested in having her return and interview for a pastoral position. However, the conference leadership replied to the church, “Well, Gail is not a pastor.” She found that hurtful, as they had recognized her as a pastor while she was employed there previously.

She exclaimed, "I was just dumbfounded that after all that time working in that conference, they now seemed to disown me."

She also told of a time when a representative from the General Conference Ministerial Department called her at home. When she answered the phone, a cheery male voice asked to speak to the pastor. When she responded that she was the pastor, the silence and change in tone made the awkwardness apparent.

Helen also recalled attending pastors' meetings where speakers overlooked her presence. She chuckled, "All the comments are addressed, 'Well, guys.' And at a lot of ministers' meetings, the speaker will be talking about what we need to do for our wives." She also remembered the inquiries when she would attend pastors' meetings. "'Oh, you're here. Is your husband a pastor?' I want to say, 'No! I'm here. It's me!' I'm often reminded that I'm a woman and shouldn't be or something."

Invisibility and exclusive language lead women to feel that they somehow just do not fit in. These challenges are not unique to women clergy serving in the Adventist Church. Women in other studies identified feeling invisible (Arnold, 2001; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Kleingartner, 1999; Wallace, 1992). Sellers's (1997) comment summarizes well the experience of these women: "Specifically, they spoke of feeling invisible or of perceiving that their gifts were neither seen nor valued" (p. 82).

#### Ministry Stresses

Other challenges faced by these women are the stresses that generally accompany ministry, such as the never-ending work load and filling the gap when short-staffed. However, these situations are at times complicated by factors unique to women clergy.

Gail discussed the heavy demands of pastoral ministry. “There is so much work to be done in ministry. I’m on call all the time. Last week I came home from a finance meeting at 10:00 p.m. I no sooner put up my feet than the phone rang. The mother of a church member was in the hospital critically ill. I went back out to be with them. It’s hard with a family.” Up to this point, what Gail states is also true of her male colleagues. However, as she continues, the additional challenges for a clergywoman become apparent. “I have children ages 2 and 5. My husband also works, and I carry the primary responsibility for their care. It adds a layer of responsibility I don’t see my male colleagues dealing with.”

Helen described the challenges she experienced serving as a “stabilizing force” during a difficult pastoral transition. While she had planned to be on maternity leave, 2 weeks after the birth of her daughter, she instead found herself chairing the church board, preaching regularly, and visiting members who were upset over the loss of their senior pastor. So instead of being at home with her newborn, she was at her office and attending meetings while squeezing in nursing and changing diapers.

Helen’s friend, Jackie, spent time pastoring before her marriage. She had talked at length with Helen about the stresses of dating. There were times Jackie felt very lonely, and people told her that most men would not ask her on a date because she was a pastor. The major explanation given by single women in Zikmund et al. (1998) for an obstacle in romantic friendships was “that men are threatened by the thought of dating” a woman pastor (p. 35). This matches Jackie’s assessment.

### Sexual Harassment

All the women in this study expressed challenges they experienced in their ministry. Helen expressed specific occasions when male colleagues, parishioners, or church administrators were insensitive or thoughtless. However, these two experiences of sexual harassment were so blatant and damaging they warrant addressing separately.

During her years at seminary, Sara experienced a significant level of sexual harassment from male students and some from male professors. The intensity in her voice as she spoke of this topic indicated to me the high degree of challenge this presented. The incidents Sara described happened while she was an unmarried student in seminary.

She described her initial impressions of seminary this way. "When I got there I just felt this atmosphere. It was a cold climate. Cold in more ways than just the climate." (She offered the partial explanation of being affected by seasonal affect disorder.) She thought to herself, "I'm just going to focus on my studies and get out of here."

She went on to unfold her perceptions. "What really bothered me was the 'looks.' It was a checking out kind of look. 'Oh, you're a woman.' And these were married ministerial students. It was blatant." One time a seminary student turned and looked at her shamelessly. One specific incident at the end of a class stands out in her memory. "I went to the front of the room to pick up a paper. A guy came up from behind and squeezed my shoulder. Then close enough to my ear that my hair was in his mouth, he said, 'Oh, you always smell so good.' I started shaking. I wanted to hit him, but I just couldn't do anything. Nobody had ever done anything like that to me before." As she talked with other female students she heard similar experiences.

Sara also described two occasions where instructors made comments about women that included sexual innuendo and blaming a woman for becoming a victim of



sexual abuse. When a female friend spoke to one professor after class, he acknowledged the inappropriateness of his comment and made a public apology in class the next day.

During this time she describes friends, both male and female, who provided support and encouragement. "Some people were a shield. During this difficult time they kept me focused on my reason for being in seminary." She also found advocacy from her employing conference. In addition, as the seminary became aware of these incidents they were addressed by conducting seminars for students addressing the subject of sexual harassment. She concluded by stating, "From what I hear I think the climate has changed completely from when I attended. But at that time I was just in complete awe of the whole thing and ministry was no longer attractive to me."

Sara made sure I knew that the situation was addressed by the seminary as soon as they became aware of it. And her understanding is that the climate now is much different from when she was a student. Her story also speaks of the support and encouragement she felt during what was for her a dark and difficult time. However, it is still a wonder Sara stayed.

One other incident of sexual harassment was reported in this study. In that case after working together for about a year Jackie's senior pastor confided to her that he was emotionally attracted to her. Jackie was advised by a conference official to leave her position at that church, which to her felt like punishment for something she had not done.

The presence of women in what is traditionally seen as a male profession, as is true for ministry, makes Gilbert and Rossman's (1992) conclusion informative. "Women in nontraditional jobs, for whom mentoring may be particularly important for professional advancement, are especially likely to be harassed" (p. 233).

Women in other clergy studies also experienced sexual harassment (Arnold, 2001; Kolton, 1999; Sellers, 1997; Zikmund et al., 1998). In Kolton (1999), “the sexual harassment reveals itself in the form of physical or verbal advances” (p. 95). These two incidences were the only reports of sexual harassment by the women in this study.

### **Major Dilemmas**

The call of God to serve as pastors has led to the deep conviction by these women that they *are* pastors. Their view of themselves is wrapped up in serving God through pastoral ministry. However, they often find themselves the focal point of disapproval which, as was previously shown, is sometimes related to gender, sometimes not. But, while not all the challenges women in ministry face are related to gender, an overall gender issue is always present. Charlton (2000) states, “Ordained clergywomen by their very presence as well as their actions in positions of power—and in this case in positions symbolizing and representing divinity—are involved in changing some fundamental religious understandings as well” (p. 421).

While the presence of women clergy results in the change in attitudes toward women on the part of some, others continue to disapprove of them simply because they are women. Although there are many reasons that both male and female clergy may sense disapproval, for example, an unpopular decision, theological differences, or personality differences, only women experience disapproval because of their gender.

### **Disapproval by Church Leaders**

Gail experienced significant anger, frustration, and pain over the actions of a conference official when she prepared to preside at the wedding of two members of her

congregation. She considers herself a nurturer who faithfully serves the people God sends. She values loyalty and is generally non-confrontational. As she met with the couple to attend to the details of the ceremony, Gail relished this opportunity to minister to this young couple at such an important point in their lives. The families of the man and woman were well known in this large community and they planned for a large number of people from around the conference to attend.

As plans progressed and invitations were sent out, Gail began to hear discontent from the president of the conference in which she served. He told the parents of the bride that it was inappropriate for Gail to do the service and they should consider a different pastor. What had to this point been a fulfilling experience of ministry for Gail now became a time filled with conflict. She did not want her role as pastor to compromise the joy of the day for the family, yet she was filled with bewilderment and anger that her ability to function as a pastor to this family was being called into question. "Why should I not do this just because I am a woman? What happened? I wasn't doing anything wrong. Why is it right for my conference president to deny me the opportunity to minister to this family when the world church has stated its approval?" These questions and others plagued Gail as she wrestled with what to do.

The conference president then came to her directly and told her she should not do this service and that she could put her job at risk if she proceeded. She also discovered his position was based on the opposition of several powerful church members in her conference. She saw this as a blatantly political position on his part. Gail was unaware that the actions of the conference president had come to the attention of the president of the union conference in which she served. He contacted the conference president to

remind him that church policy did not prohibit Gail from officiating at the wedding, and he would fully support her participation.

Gail was grateful for the support, but frustrated that the problem had even arisen. She had been hired as a pastor, was functioning in a role approved by the world church, yet had been the center of conflict. The situation hurt her, as she knew it was another example of disapproval of her ministry simply because she was a woman. She thought seriously about leaving ministry in the Adventist Church. The wedding day was joyful for those in attendance, but sadness lingered in the background for Gail as she realized again how the actions of one person who opposed her ministry could bring such needless conflict.

#### Dilemma for the World Church

Helen tried to keep herself from the controversy surrounding the ordination of women in the Adventist Church. She rarely found her ability to minister to her congregation hampered by her lack of ordination. However, the topic became more personal to her in 1990 when the General Conference in business session debated the issue, and voted by a substantial margin to deny ordination to women. Then in 1995 when the General Conference met in business session, a proposal that would have allowed each division in the world church authority to decide whether to ordain women to ministry was also defeated.

She read reports of the comments against the ordination of woman that were made during the debates at these two world church sessions. Some believed pastors should be male, just as priests in the Bible were male, others believed that men and women are equal but have different roles, and some believed that unless the Bible specifically

endorses the ordination of women the church should not do so. She also read of those who spoke in favor of equal treatment of women pastors because they are called by God, and the Holy Spirit works in both men and women. Also, ordination is simply an acknowledgment of the gifts God has already given a person, male or female. Others spoke in favor of righting an injustice and for recognizing that many things our church engages in are not expressly endorsed in the Bible ("Eleventh Business Meeting: Fifty-fifth General Conference Session," 1990; "Ninth Business Meeting: Fifty-fifth General Conference Session," 1990; "Tenth Business Meeting: Fifty-fifth General Conference Session," 1990; "Thirteenth Business Meeting," 1990; "Thirteenth Business Meeting: Fifty-sixth General Conference Session," 1995; "Twelfth Business Meeting," 1990).

She chuckled a bit when she read the statement of Neal C. Wilson, General Conference President and chairman of the commission that studied the role of women in the church, when he commented on the action of the church to approve the ordination of women as local church elders but not as pastors. "I would like to point out to you that at least the commission has been consistent in its inconsistencies" ("Eleventh Business Meeting: Fifty-fifth General Conference Session," 1990, p. 13). Yet she remembered thinking that if the speeches against the ordination of women had been made against the ordination of a Black or Hispanic man, they would not have been allowed. But women sat and listened to these speeches denying equal and fair treatment to women who have been called by God to serve as pastors.

The discussions left her feeling that she was out of place and excluded from full recognition of her call to ministry, knowing it was not different from the call her male colleagues received. She felt her gifts for ministry were not valued as gifts empowered by

the Holy Spirit. She felt dismissed and marginalized by the church she loves and serves. Questions arose: “Why can’t God’s blessing and empowerment be recognized equally for men and women? Why are we even talking about whether or not women should be ordained? Why do I do this? Why can’t my life be free of this passion?” She thought seriously about whether to continue as an Adventist pastor. Yet Helen knew that God called her. She would not leave; she would not quit. She would serve.

The feelings of disapproval present in the stories of Gail and Helen were also present in Arnold (2001). She states, “All participants had faced some disapproval for their ministry, both from internal denominational battles and from congregation members” (p. 127).

#### **“Should I Leave?”**

In light of the disapproval she felt from the world church as well as individuals, Gail mused about her commitment to Adventist pastoral ministry and what might precipitate her leaving. At times it seemed like the never-ending drip of the faucet. What at first she could ignore began to build until it seemed intolerable. Would the disapproval of her ministry stop and her call from God ever be fully accepted by individuals and the institutional church?

She thought if the pain of ministry ever outweighed the joy, she might consider that a signal that God was saying it is time to do something else. She felt like maybe she would leave when the conference president had threatened her with a loss of her job if she conducted the wedding. She stated emphatically, “I can’t work where I’m not wanted.” With the exception of that difficulty, her thoughts of leaving are related to stresses over arguments between members, difficulty in balancing the church budget, or

personal fatigue. She admits that she gets over the idea of leaving for those reasons fairly quickly.

Gail has heard other women state they would leave if asked to do something against the will of God, if not allowed to preach a true gospel, or if political agendas in the system dominated. Her colleague, Sara, is more emphatic in her views about leaving. Sara once stated emphatically: "Force me to do something I believe is wrong and I would leave." She explained that she does not find the church to be healthy and lately has seriously been thinking of getting out of the system. She believes it is much easier to go out and start something new and put a healthy imprint on it than to try to change the existing system into something healthy.

Helen reflected with mixed emotions about leaving. "If I were to leave it would have to relate to a huge sense of betrayal." Yet she envisions leaving would entail a call to another area of ministry, or a church in a different location. Then she laughed as she shared a fleeting thought she had when her kids were small. "I've thought it would be nice if my husband was independently wealthy and I could volunteer here."

Gail and Helen both expressed the view that employment by the church is different from ministry, and that whatever else they might choose to do, they would consider it ministry. Gail commented, "I see ministry in a lot of different ways. And I have to be open to however God calls me. I don't believe I have to be paid by the church in order to be a pastor. So I'll just have to keep my ear to God." Helen commented, "I was called by God to do this and I have to be faithful to his call. I also believe ministry is bigger than pastoring. Now whether or not leadership wants me in a church is up to them. But whether they keep me or not, I'll go do ministry somewhere."

Sara remembered ministering in the midst of significant challenges. She spoke of her repeated desire to leave and the many ways in which God brought people to her that made the difference in her staying in pastoral ministry. Her challenges began in seminary and continued into the local church. She once told Helen, "I was itching to leave." When she went to the local conference leaders and told them with tears streaming down her face, they responded, "We called you to the ministry. We've sent you here, and we want you to stay. However, we will support you whatever your choice. We know it's difficult." That support gave her the freedom to stay, which she has done now for over 10 years.

A substantial number of women in this study have had challenges significant enough to precipitate thoughts of leaving. This is similar to the results in the 1992 survey of Adventist women (Hamilton Chandler Communications) in which two out of three women pastors had thought about leaving employment in the Adventist Church. Also, in Kleingartner (1999) all but 1 of the 17 women in her study thought of leaving ministry after a major trauma. A significant difference between her study and this one is the nature of the event that precipitated thoughts of leaving. Kleingartner found three general categories: personal issues, family issues, and organizational/institutional issues, and only 4 of the women in her study thought of leaving because of organizational/institutional issues. By contrast, of the women in this study who had serious thoughts of leaving, a majority were related to individuals who challenged these women's right to work and fulfill the functions of a pastor. Just under half were related to organizational discrimination.

In addition, all the United Methodist women in Bennett (1993) "conceded that they, too, consider leaving from time to time" (p. 203). Carroll et al. (1983) and Zikmund



et al. (1998) found that within the past year, one-third of the clergywomen in their studies had thought of leaving. These lower numbers may be related to limiting the question to thoughts of leaving within the past year. There was no such qualifier in the question I asked the women in this study. Zikmund et al. (1998) also found that women are leaving at higher rates than men, and Charlton (1997) found the stories of leaving central to the women in her study.

Differentiating their call to ministry from employment by the institutional church is not unique to Gail and Helen. Other studies of female clergy have found similar ideas (Kleingartner, 1999; Sellers, 1997; Zikmund et al., 1998). Zikmund et al.'s comment summarizes this well:

Our interviews with women clergy show that they have a deep and abiding commitment to ministry. It is important to understand that even when women leave the employment of the institutional church, they likely have not forsaken their call or their sense of vocation. Rather, they have become disenchanted with the institutional church (p. 7).

When considering what might prompt these women to leave pastoral ministry, I looked at their comments in light of Sellers's (1997) research of women clergy. She found that "thinking seriously about leaving church-related ministry (a) responds to the feeling that one's well-being is threatened, (b) is part of a deeply spiritual process, (c) reveals profound ambivalence, and (d) results in feeling stuck and seeing few appealing alternatives" (p. 71).

All of these themes were present in the stories of Gail and Helen. The first theme is evident in their stories as they spoke of ways in which they do not fit in or when their very identity and functioning as a pastor are challenged. This results in conflict and

threats to their psychological well-being. The internal struggles can leave them angry, discouraged, and overwhelmed.

Their thoughts of leaving are not flippant or reactive, but a serious process that weighs their deep sense of call, their identity as a pastor, and their commitment to ministry with the challenges and hurts of very specific injustices and the actions of individuals, most often those with some type of authority or power over them. To leave ministry is not simply to change employment but to sacrifice their vocation and identity, a part of the deeply spiritual process in the second theme (Sellers, 1997).

The third theme (Sellers, 1997) addresses the profound ambivalence that accompanies thoughts of leaving ministry. Several women in this study felt that tension between their call to ministry and commitment to serve God within the Adventist Church and the deep hurt they experienced from this very organization.

The final theme (Sellers, 1997) of feeling stuck with few alternatives was the weakest among the women in this study, although it was present. Two women talked of wanting to leave but feeling bound because to do so would be to disobey God, a way of feeling stuck. Two others realized that leaving would not solve the problems they were facing, so they chose to work through them instead.

Sellers (1997) also commented on the strong feelings evoked in the women she studied as they thought about leaving church-related ministry. The same was true of the women in this study. Here are some of their comments and feeling words: "This is the most livid I've been in my whole life." "I about died." "I was kicking against the control of this man." "I'm the one with my neck out on the line and I'm getting chopped." "I want to leave; I cried." "I started shaking." "I just lost it, and I'm not the kind of person

that loses it very easily.” “My heart was racing.” They felt “helpless,” “confused,” “disheartened,” “invisible,” “fearful,” “embarrassed,” “ambivalent,” “torn,” “bewildered,” “stunned,” “anxious,” “confused,” “shocked,” “speechless,” and “angry.”

What is apparent in these dilemmas, stories of disapproval, and the women’s thoughts of leaving is that most came to a point at which either a traumatic situation or a consistent flow of disapproval and challenge led them to think of leaving. All have entered pastoral ministry at a time when women in ministry are few in number and when the church denies them equality of function and recognition. So why are the women angry and hurt over what they knew was true? Sellers’s (1997) comment about working within a church system that is not based in equality is enlightening: “What none of them predicted accurately, however, was how it would feel to function for an extended period of time as a female authorized leader in an organization so structured” (p. 88). The women in this study have faced the question, “Should I leave pastoral ministry?” and have chosen to stay.

### Summary

The contradiction of a woman serving as a pastor with the resulting dilemmas (Hughes, 1945) continues to plague these women, many hinging on the unspoken question posed by others, “Do we treat her as a woman or a pastor?” They do not find most people willing to address this question directly; they may not even see this as the root of their discomfort and disapproval. Avoidance of the question by others seems to be their method of dealing with the dilemma.

However, for the clergywomen the result is the same. They are at times ignored and isolated, either intentionally or unintentionally. Maybe some people just wish these

women would go away. Other times their status as pastor is overtly challenged, for example, the woman who told Helen she should be home taking care of her children. They see her status as a mother to be primary. Or the conference president who stated, “Gail is not a pastor.” He dealt with the dilemma by denying she could hold the status of pastor. Gail, however, is faced with the dilemma of how to respond to what to her are two equally compelling statuses: pastor called by God and mother.

I conclude this section by quoting without comment some of the feeling words used by the women when speaking of the challenges they face, many because of gender, some not: “anger,” “betrayal,” “helplessness,” “exclusion,” “embarrassment,” “despair,” “outsider,” “pain,” “discouragement,” “empathy,” “tension,” “hurt,” “depression,” “disillusionment,” “loneliness,” “frustration,” “disappointment,” “resentment.” I am inspired by the fact that despite the intense feelings some of these situations have generated, these women continue to serve in ministry. Why they do so is addressed in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EVEN STRONGER REASONS TO STAY

#### **Introduction**

The heart of this study is the question, Why do Adventist women stay in pastoral ministry? Over the course of the interviews a number of reasons emerged, both indirectly as they shared their stories of ministry and in response to the direct question, “When you consider why you’ve stayed in ministry, what internal and/or external influences, ideas, or people have contributed to your staying?” Most of the women took their time in responding to this question and were thoughtful in their comments.

#### **Commitment to Ministry**

Gail described herself as very committed to pastoral ministry in the Adventist Church. “I’ve had lots of offers to become a teacher. But I want to be a pastor. This is what God has called me to do.” She acknowledged the challenges that come, some related to politics, but she also knows political motivation is everywhere.

Gail also confessed that there are times in ministry where she is frustrated by people or situations. However, the frustrations do not make her want to leave. “They just make me aware of the difficulties of being a woman in ministry.” Gail explained further that this is where God has placed her and she sees that God wants her to be in pastoral

ministry. Then as an afterthought she added, "I am absolutely committed to pastoral ministry until God makes it clear it's time for a change."

When they once talked, Gail's friend, Marion, expressed ambivalence about her commitment, yet Gail said the longer they talked, the more passionate Marion became. Gail remembered Marion's comments this way. "On a scale of 1-10, my commitment to ministry in the Adventist Church is probably about a 5. If you say ministry to God, I'm at a 10. But to the Adventist Church I don't see that I have to have my salary from the church in order to feel good about who God made me to be or to feel good about my calling. God called me. Presidents of conferences didn't call me." While she expressed her commitment to pastoral ministry, Marion acknowledged that if another opportunity came along that still allowed her to use her ministry gifts she would not kick at a change. She stated to Gail, "I guess I'm grounded enough in my personal convictions of what ministry is that I really do know that God could use me in any environment."

Helen strongly expressed her commitment to being in ministry of some type. "I really feel called to be in ministry. I am committed to ministry." Yet she was candid in stating that she and the women in ministry with whom she converses are not highly committed to the institution of the Seventh-day Adventist church in which to do their ministry. When explaining why, she revealed, "I'm not sure I have the level of commitment to say I'm going to stay and put up with a very unhealthy situation." Yet she also commented, "At the same time I very much might end up staying. When I first started I thought I was only going to pastor for 3 years. I'm amazed that it's been over 10 years now."

Their responses were quite honest and led me to wonder if the ambivalence about pastoring in the Adventist Church is in part a mechanism they use to protect themselves from actual and anticipated challenges with the church and its leadership. In addition, it may be a tacit recognition that their employment opportunities are more tenuous than for their male colleagues. They know that some churches will not be open to talking with them about employment, simply because they are women.

Another light in which their commitment level can be seen is that they view their call and commitment to be to ministry which, as was seen earlier, they do not necessarily equate with paid employment in the church. So while they are called by God and committed to ministry, they view ministry holistically and are open to opportunities outside pastoral ministry, such as teaching, chaplaincy, or something else to which God may direct them.

Kleingartner (1999) and Sellers (1997) also found that the women in their studies looked at their call to ministry as extending beyond formal employment by a church. Sellers commented about the women in her study, "They believe that no matter where their spiritual journeys take them they will continue to do ministry" (p. 101).

For the women who thought seriously about leaving ministry (Sellers, 1997), their call to ministry tended not to be doubted. Sellers reached this conclusion: "For these clergywomen leaving church-related ministry is not a diversion from a call but a choice to follow the deep call that led to church-related ministry and now may be urging them beyond that" (p. 95).

### **“It’s My Calling”**

Gail finds her strongest motivation to stay is her call to ministry and her willingness to hear God’s voice. That means she has to be centered enough in him to hear. And she acknowledges she does not always clearly recognize God’s voice. She states, “My staying really comes from my passion. I believe that God has called me to do what I’m doing.” She knew she had a ministry to reach people’s hearts and would do that no matter where she was. She continues, “I really feel that I am making a difference.” She says, “God keeps affirming it, the pleasure of it, and the joy of it.” And her joy is touching the lives of people in need of the gospel. She also speaks of the sense of fulfillment that ministry brings. “This is what God has gifted me to do. Ultimately my staying is rooted in the deep sense of satisfaction that I have in what I’m doing.”

Gail once had a particularly difficult clash with a church member and was fully ready to go back to social work, because she was facing burnout. Gail went so far as to call the conference president to share her decision. He reasoned with her. “We are positive that God has called you into ministry. Please don’t leave now.” As she prayerfully considered his plea, she realized that although it had been a rough journey, it was so clear that this was the place God wanted her. Gail admitted she had never had that clarity before. Through all the mess she had gone through she kept looking back and saying, “This is what I was called to do.”

Helen admits that the challenges came to her repeatedly, and she was looking for a reason to leave. However, over and over she saw God bringing people and events together to keep her focused. “My call was confirmed again and again, not necessarily by big things, but little things here and there.”



Helen's motivation to stay aligns with Gail's. "God called me to this for all my life. I'm committed to the Adventist Church. If I didn't have that sense I would never have been able to stay because it would be so difficult." She finds that time in meditation and prayer and a connection with God empower her to keep going.

Personal growth is important to Helen and when she sees that she has grown in an area it gives her hope and a desire to stay. Although she has at times been tempted to leave, she reflected on another reason she stays: "Sometimes the Adventist Church is very frustrating. I'm going to stay in and make it better. And sometimes I have to say that gritting my teeth." At the time of the interview Helen had just returned from leadership meetings where she got her sights lifted. She came home feeling like the church is important and she wants to be a part of that.

Ministry has not always been easy for Helen. She remembered when things got really tough and she faced a time of depression. She said to herself, "The only way out is through." To end too soon would have been giving up and she would not have been satisfied with herself.

The depth of Helen's call to ministry is best summarized by this statement. "That internal call has been there forever. I guess it will be here until the day I die. So when I retire from formal work, I will informally be in people's homes making a difference."

The deep sense of calling that brought these women into and keeps them in ministry is not unique to them. Other women expressed similar sentiments (Arnold, 2001; Bennett, 1993; Carroll et al., 1983; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998; Hale et al., 1985; Holzgang, 2000; Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993; Rhodes, 1987; Sellers, 1997; Zikmund et al., 1998). Interestingly, among the Adventist women surveyed

in the Hamilton Chandler Communications study, there existed “a strong correlation between a childhood sense of call and length of tenure in ministry” (1992, p. 13).

Holzgang (2000), who studied women in the Episcopal Church, stated, “Their belief in their calling as being from God gives them strength to face resistance as well as reap the rewards” (p. 103). While the following statement epitomizes what is true of the women in Craley’s (1990) study, it also speaks to the experience of the women in my study: “Those who remain endure it because, even with the struggle, they are called by God to serve” (p. 95).

### **“It’s About People”**

For Gail the joys of ministry are tremendous, including seeing people finding Jesus Christ in their lives. When she watches people’s lives influenced and changed because she is able to be there for them during times of stress, “that keeps me staying.” She continued reflecting on this question. She concluded that if she left, some of the members in her local congregation would probably never walk in the door of the church again because they have established a relationship with her that helps them see Jesus more clearly. Many parishioners have had difficult experiences in church prior to attending Gail’s church. She firmly believes our local members want pastors who exhibit honesty, integrity, and vulnerability. One of her goals in ministry is to model these values.

If she left, Gail believes somebody might not get the picture of God that they need, as there are so many dysfunctional Adventist churches. She said, “I am very driven to prove that Adventists are gospel people. I am very driven to show Adventism in its

best light. I'm very driven to prove that Seventh-day Adventists are evangelical Christians with a passion for lost people."

Gail knew there were times when it appeared her impact has been minimal, when she does not feel like she has made a whit of difference. Then later on she might hear a story from someone about how a moment with her has really changed their life. She acknowledged, "Some of the people whose lives I've touched I don't think I'll know until eternity." And that is her goal in ministry, to influence people's lives for eternity. She stated, "If I felt I wasn't making a difference, I would leave."

To her delight, Gail found her ministry opening the eyes of a male colleague to the value of ministry to children. He said to her, "When you told that children's story it struck me that ministry is for children, too." She went on to reflect, "Here is a pastor who has been in ministry for years and he saw the children's story just as the children's story. He didn't see it as pastor opening up the Bible and revealing God. It was a good experience."

In addition to the impact she makes in the lives of people, she also stays because of the people God had ready to help her during a huge conflict. These people made a difference in her life. With a sense of deep gratitude she said, "I think God surrounds me with people. I was just again asking, 'Why do I do this? Can you give me a good reason why?' And then God sends people."

Helen's experience parallels that of Gail. She finds fulfillment when she feels like she is bringing Jesus to people in a time of crisis. She remembers ministering to a member of her congregation who lay dying in the hospital. She brought comfort during the last moments of his life. For her, that is making a difference to people. There are also

the joyful moments of ministry. She treasures the planning with members for weddings, the birth of a child, and graduations. Being present during times of celebration and sorrow is deeply satisfying.

When she preaches it is with the awareness of the challenges in the lives of those hearing. She has been unwilling to let other people walk a path of pain and stress alone. She believes her experiences have given her power in how she preaches and does ministry.

Yet her ministry is not without struggles and thoughts of leaving. "I think about the verse in the Bible where Jesus says, 'Are you going to leave me, too?' And the disciples say, 'Where else are we going to go?' There have been times when I've been disillusioned with the church and I talk with my mom. They have the same problems at her work place. It's just not for such a lofty goal." Overall, Helen thinks the good experiences cover a lot of bad experiences. "Baptizing a 15-year-old girl covers a lot of chauvinistic statements."

During a time of conflict she valued her senior pastor. "I think he provided grace and space and backbone to provide me time to work through issues." In fact, she expanded her thinking about the support of her colleagues and concluded they all supported her through some very difficult times. She says, "They were there. There's always been somebody there." So Helen stays.

This statement by Ice (1987) could well refer to the women in this study, "They have strong urges to make a difference in the world—strong convictions about better ways of life for people" (p. 111). This theme was strong in my study. In addition, a number of additional studies found the importance of connections with others and

impacting them in positive ways during the everyday moments of their lives, as well as during the special and challenging occasions (Arnold, 2001; Bingham, 1992; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999; Lawless, 1988, 1993; Rhodes, 1987).

### **Attitudes Changed**

Gail spoke of a number of situations in which people or groups who were initially opposed to her ministry. They changed their minds after she served as their pastor.

Gail remembered her first Sabbath in the local church which she served for 7 years. As she was preparing to walk onto the platform a member stopped her and said, "You know, I don't think we should have women pastors." Several months later this same man came back to her and apologized for that statement. Two years after she had left her first pastorate Gail reported visiting a former church leader who was in a nearby hospital. He had been opposed to her ministry while she had served in the previous congregation. With tears in his eyes he apologized for the way he had treated her. He said, "You are the only one who has come to visit me. Thank you."

With a chuckle as she thought back on the event, Gail describes a time when her Bible study group heard she was planning to leave to attend seminary. They were so opposed to her going that they pleaded with her to change her mind. "However, when I preached for the first time, people were so moved by the sermon that I think just about everybody apologized to me and to God and said, 'You definitely have a calling on your life.'"

Gail later joined a professional organization that had a reputation of caution toward women clergy. After her involvement and leadership over a period of time she made this statement, "I believe I helped the organization, opening their eyes to some

things about women pastors. All that helped change people's minds." Her effective work as a pastor also led to a change in the attitude of her conference president. He never had to deal with those issues, and was somewhat uncertain about women in pastoral ministry, until she came to the conference. He voiced his support after a particularly challenging experience for her. He said, "I believe God has called you to ministry and that he calls other women."

Some of Gail's pastoral colleagues had not before worked with women clergy. Their attitudes have been changed, as well. When Gail joined the staff as the first woman in a larger congregation the senior pastor wanted to refer to her as Director of Women's Ministries. When she stated that in the past she had been known as pastor she reports, "He was taken aback for a minute." And in a very short period of time she was fully accepted by the pastors on this staff, as well as the entire congregation and they were proud to call her pastor.

This comment by the head elder of Gail's church is a good way to summarize this topic. "You came here, and we didn't want you. Number one, you wanted change, and we don't like change. And number two, you're a woman. But we have learned to love you. You have had the ability to step on our toes without scuffing our shine."

Both Lehman (1985) and Dudley (1996) addressed the issue of church member attitudes toward women clergy changing with contact. Lehman (1985) summarized the contact hypothesis by stating, "For many years social scientists have assumed that social interaction—contact—with a flesh-and-blood member of the group toward whom prejudice exists will present the prejudiced person with information about such people that doesn't jibe with what he/she already knows" (p. 143). This can result in a change of

attitude as a result of exposure. Lehman's (1985) study dealt with many issues surrounding the receptivity of church members toward women clergy. One conclusion from his study is pertinent here, "Levels of receptivity [of clergywomen] increase as a result of contact" (p. 191).

Dudley (1996) addressed the attitudes of Adventist church members toward women clergy in their own church. His study of 20 churches that have been served by a clergywoman for at least 1 year found that "by a wide margin members of congregations served by female pastors believed that these pastors were doing their job well" (p. 135). He also found that while three-fourths of the church members initially expressed a favorable attitude toward having a woman pastor, support rose to 87% during the woman's tenure. He concluded, "Actually experiencing the ministry of effective women pastors does tend to create more positive perceptions" (p. 139). As Adventist women clergy are generally placed in churches willing to have a woman on staff, the high level of favorable attitudes toward the ministry does not mean that same level of acceptance in the church at large. The discussion of the challenges and prejudice the women in my study have faced makes that evident.

This change of attitude has been noted in other studies of clergywomen (Carroll et al., 1983; Holzgang, 2000; Kleingartner, 1999; Zikmund et al., 1998), and of particular note is Vance (1999), which confirmed the findings of Dudley (1996). Vance found Adventist congregations initially less receptive to women pastors; however, over time their acceptance of their women pastors increased.

In summary, Craley's (1990) comment on this issue may provide a needed practical perspective on the issue: "Frequently when a pastoral crisis occurs, the person in

need does not really care who arrives so long as he or she receives pastoral care. Indeed, many opportunities for dialogue have emerged from a woman's simply going about her business" (p. 90).

### **Supports**

The women in this study talked about the support they received from pastoral colleagues, church members, and friends. With only one exception the women spoke of support they received from their pastoral colleagues, usually men. A number of groups provided advocacy and support for these women, and a significant number of the women intentionally looked for support outside the Adventist Church. As addressed earlier, the family is an integral part of the larger support system for women clergy.

#### **Pastoral Colleagues**

Gail spoke with admiration in her voice of the pastors with whom she worked. She remembers with a note of nostalgia in her voice some colleagues through the years of her ministry that she definitely could share everything with. She found that a wonderful experience, something that has not always been present. As was noted in the section on mentoring, the support these women received from their fellow pastors also included significant mentoring. Gail's colleague Jackie admitted that she needed urging to grow in her ministry skills. "Every single step of the way it was the men that I was working with who not only opened the door for me, they pushed me through. Then they shut the door behind me and locked it so I couldn't turn back."

One time when Gail was experiencing difficulty with a colleague she described receiving counsel from another pastor on the same staff on how best to address the



situation. She remembers him this way. "He was such a calm, wise counselor, that I've always respected him and appreciated the way he does ministry. I've been fortunate to be around many pastors like that." After a time when Gail had been falsely accused by a pastoral colleague of abusing her leadership role in their congregation, she spoke of the support from other pastors in the area in which she served. She could not believe the flood of pastors that came up to her with words of encouragement when she attended a conference pastor's retreat. Gail counts herself fortunate to serve in a multi-staff church where this support is available regularly. She realizes that not all women have that opportunity.

Gail's friend, Jackie, shared with Gail the need she feels to proceed with caution when looking for support. She recently struck up a connection with another pastor. However, she has been very careful to select someone who seems trustworthy and was very hesitant in initially taking that step. In part, that stems from a time in which Jackie felt betrayed by a pastoral colleague. She now believes there are some colleagues who are wonderful and others that she absolutely knows she could not share anything with.

Gail and Jackie provide mutual support for each other. But they see each other only twice a year or less. They enjoy this support and state that it is women in ministry or women who are sensitive to the issues of women in ministry who are most understanding and supportive.

On one occasion Helen experienced what she called "a little issue in our local church." The senior pastor with whom she worked never had the reputation of being a wimp and he stepped out in support of her. When she moved to serve in a new congregation she described the support she received from the new senior pastor. "There

were two or three people who wanted to make an issue of having a woman pastor. But he didn't allow for that to be an issue." Even though she does not meet with them often Helen also described other women clergy as supports for her. She knows she has them and that if she needed them they would be there; to her that is a big wall of support.

While strong support from male colleagues was not universal, women in other studies also found a degree of support from their male colleagues and church leaders (Arnold, 2001; Bennett, 1993; Carroll et al., 1983; Hamilton Chandler Communications, 1992; Kleingartner, 1999; Wallace, 1992). Support from other women in ministry was especially helpful for some (Kleingartner, 1999; Lawless, 1993; Wallace, 1992). Women in Wallace (1992) who attended a 2-week conference each summer for 3 years reported that "if this program provided nothing more than the acquaintance of other women pastors, it was well worth their time and effort" (p. 124). This seems to reflect the sentiments of the women in this study as well.

#### Colleagues as Advocates

There were times when the support Gail described moved beyond support by their male colleagues into advocacy with church members or denominational leaders. With tears in her eyes she spoke of a senior pastor who supported her through a difficult pastoral transition. "He was so supportive of having a female on staff. The lack of difficulty I have experienced as a woman related to how he handled it and how he prepared the church for that." He is for her a can-do person who not only talks about his support of women in ministry, but puts that support into action whenever he can.

Helen stated similar sentiments to those of Gail. She said, "I'm thankful there are others who will advocate for women. They don't have anything to lose. I think as a pastor you have everything to lose if you become defensive or preach anything but the gospel."

Advocacy needs are not unique to Adventist women and are in fact important for women's entry into and continuing in ministry, especially in the face of inequality (Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999; Lehman, 1985). Craley (1990) speaks of the importance of both male and female colleagues as essential for women clergy. She identifies them as important in assisting women in keeping a healthy perspective and for clarifying common issues for men and women. They also serve as a source for reaffirming a woman's call and mission.

#### Church Members

Gail spoke enthusiastically about support coming from the members of the congregations she served. Early in her ministry church members encouraged and supported her to more fully realize the role of a pastor. She described her congregations in this way, "It's been a place where I felt the church was very, very open to having a female pastor."

When Gail and her family were moving to a new pastorate she was overwhelmed by the support from church members from two pastorates back who helped her family pack and load the truck. "God put these people there" is how she viewed their support. Over time in her ministry Gail has found church members who intentionally want to make sure all goes well. When she has talked with other women in ministry Gail has heard similar words of appreciation about church members' support. She remembers these comments from Marion and Jackie. "God put these incredible people in my life." "I

have been deeply appreciative of the congregation for being a community that supported me during my early ministry.”

During a difficult time with her senior pastor, Helen shared, “I found out later that the board defended me against his false accusations. That was a huge support.” At a different time Helen’s husband faced a life-threatening health issue. She most clearly remembers getting tons of food. It was just unbelievable to her. In addition, a lot of the church members work at the local hospital, so there were people all over the hospital stopping by. It was a horrible time personally and she describes the people as “unbelievable in their support.”

Support for women among church members was also found in other studies (Carroll et al., 1983; Hamilton Chandler Communications, 1992; Kleingartner, 1999; Kolton, 1999). However, in Arnold (2001) the women generally did not view their congregation as an avenue for support. One commented, “It’s just too hard for a congregation to take care of the caretaker. . . . Ministers need to find support outside of their own church” (p. 115).

### Friends

Some women found support from friends who are frequently members in their church. Gail found this particularly helpful when her children were small. She found mutual support from a friend who went through issues with her kids while she was going through things with hers. She admits to having a variety of friends who operate like ingredients in a pie. So no one person supports her in every area. She finds that having close friends in her church has been a God-send. Even though there is another woman

pastor a 5-hour drive away, it is too far for regular support in the issues of ministry she faces.

Helen, too, has a couple of friends in the church. One she describes as “not super involved.” She finds it nice to have someone who is not in the main stream of everything. The other friend is very involved in the church. She expands on these relationships. “When I’m in a ministry mood I talk with her because she understands everything that goes on and has the same passions. I talk with my other friend for the more everyday things of life.” She also maintains friends from college whom she goes to for support. Through these varied friendships Helen finds the support she needs in most circumstances.

#### Organizations

Both Gail and Helen mentioned organizations and groups that function as a part of their support system. They specifically mentioned Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry (TEAM), the Association of Adventist Women (AAW), the Women’s Resource Center (WRC), and the Adventist Theological Society (ATS). Gail said, “I have always felt a lot of support from these groups.” She expressed appreciation for these women and men who have been willing to be on the front lines fighting for women in ministry. “I personally don’t like to be part of that. But I’m grateful that others are doing it.”

#### Support Outside the Adventist Church

I was surprised at the number of women who specifically mentioned the importance of support outside the Adventist Church. They seem to want some distance from church members and administrators when processing issues of importance. They do

not always feel “safe” in sharing concerns with people within the church. For some the outside support they sought was from professional counselors or small therapy groups. For others it was classes. These women seemed to find safety in anonymity and freedom in receiving support in places that have no link to their employment.

At one point in her ministry Gail felt she needed some spiritual renewal. She went out of the Adventist Church for that and joined a women’s Bible study group. She was accountable to a small group where nobody knew her. She states, “They didn’t even know I was a pastor. Then some Adventists started joining so I dropped out. I wanted to be very anonymous.” During about half her ministry Gail was going to a Presbyterian pastoral counselor. She found it more freeing to go to someone outside the church hierarchy, knowing there would not be any possibility of it coming back to bite her. She later attended a support group with clergy of different faiths—Catholics, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, and Episcopalians—and found that extremely useful.

As we talked about this issue I asked Gail, “You’re saying it was helpful for you to go outside the Adventist system particularly while you were working for the Adventist church. Am I putting words in your mouth to say you were looking for a safe place?” She responded, “No. You’re not putting words in my mouth. I wanted a safe place and this was it.”

Helen remembers the woman pastor in the church right across the street. She describes her as “really a neat lady.” When she had her first child she met with her because of feeling so overwhelmed about being a parent and a pastor. She longingly admits that it would be great if they met regularly. When experiencing some relationship challenges, Helen met a good counselor who was not a member of the Adventist Church.

She felt a little betrayed by the Adventist Church and wanted to work out the issues in a setting outside the church. She states firmly, "I think God sent me to her."

Since Gail's friend, Marion, was unable to move her family to attend the Theological Seminary at Andrews University, she attended a seminary near her home. She found that experience to be very helpful. She saw it to be a safe place to explore theological issues. There were some non-Adventist women who were in the same situation she was and that was helpful to her.

The women in this study find support in a variety of settings. Sometimes the motivation is because of ministry challenges; other times family challenges precipitate a need for support. Support for these women comes overwhelmingly from people with whom they feel a deep level of trust and safety. Arnold (2001) and Kleingartner (1999) found women clergy in their studies who found support through therapy, counseling, and spiritual direction.

It is not surprising that the women in my study see their relationships with people as a crucial part of their support system. The works of Miller (1976), Gilligan (1982), Chodorow (1978), Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey (1991), Belenky et al. (1986), and Josselson (1987, 1996) establish that, for women, connection and relationships are an integral part of who they are and what is of importance in their lives. In addition, women have "a greater recognition of the essential cooperative nature of human existence" (Miller, 1976, p. 41). With this in mind, it is not difficult to see why the supports the women in this study receive from family, church members and leaders, and groups are so crucial to them.

### Minimizing Gender Issues

Gail personally refuses to be part of pushing women's issues in the church, although she is grateful that others are doing it. She does not have an agenda specifically about ordination for women nor does she even expect to be treated equally. She has been asked to become involved in equality issues, but she chooses not to be. In part she is not involved because she just does not have time. She shares her perspective: "I'm not in there to prove that you must ordain women. I am simply there to say God has given me gifts and I want to use them for the church."

Although this is not a perspective she shares, her friend Jackie does not want people to keep calling her a woman pastor. She pleads, "Why can't they just call me a pastor? When introducing our senior pastor people don't say, 'Oh, yes. This is our man pastor.'" She enters her work as work, as her ministry. She sees herself as a pastor who just happens to be a woman.

Helen did not want to get on the political track of it all and be the voice for women's issues. Instead, she felt her role needed to be a model of how women function as pastors. "I want to be the woman that those who support us can point to and say, 'Yes, women can effectively serve as pastors.'" While she does not see herself to be radical as far as pushing women's issues, she says, "I do take a stand for important things."

Overwhelmingly the women in this study chose to ignore or minimize issues and challenges specific to women in ministry, including ordination. Their comments reflect the fact that these women identify issues being present; they have simply chosen not to engage in the discussion or "pushing" of these topics. This appears to be a significant contribution toward their ability to continue in ministry over time.



### Self-Care

The area of self-care, especially as it relates to boundaries around time and family, is significant for these women. There is always more to do and always being “on-call.” Personal time and family needs can easily be pushed aside to attend to the never-ending needs of the congregation. One area that contributes to the staying power of these women is in the area of self-care. The women’s answers indicated a desire to strengthen this area of their lives. However, as we talked, even those women who stated they needed to do more did share ways in which they take care of themselves in the midst of their ministry. They seem to reflect Bateson’s (1989) statement, “Today, those who begrudge themselves care, feeling that their role in life is to care for others, can be persuaded to think about issues of health and stress reduction” (p. 145).

### Solitude, Retreats, Quiet Time

Gail likes time apart through solitude, retreats, or reading. She wants to take care of her inner person. She finds her personal time with God in the morning to be foundational. This is a time with no phones, no TV, no radio, nothing. There is no noise. This time is important enough to her that she does not care what others think. She states, “I refuse to go to the church and everybody gives me a bad time about sleeping in. I let them think what they want.” She opens up opportunities for herself to just simply sit and enjoy the quiet. She continues, “I do a lot of reading for myself; devotional and contemplative books among others.” When she gets really stressed she takes some time apart, even disappearing for a period of time to go on a retreat or somewhere silent to build up herself. Another form of solitude she values is being out in nature. She enjoys hiking, walking on the beach, or just walking in the park.

Helen acknowledged she gets replenished with solitude; however, with her small children she finds it is not always easy to make that time. She states, "I'm really learning the importance of this." When those times come she enjoys reading and quiet prayer time. Other women clergy identified their need for quiet time to aid in their personal restoration (Ice, 1987; Kleingartner, 1999).

### Setting Boundaries

The women in this study, especially those with small children, work at setting appropriate boundaries. These boundaries reflect their recognition that the nature of ministry will become all-consuming unless they are willing to set limits of various types. The discussion above of time apart for solitude and quiet is a form of boundary setting. In addition to this, the women discussed days off, either an entire day or portions of each work day.

Gail identified time off as important. She described a plan suggested to her by an early mentor in ministry. "There are three parts to the day. I try to take one portion of the day off. If I attend a committee meeting in the evening, I'll try to take time off earlier in the day. I either come in late or take time off in the afternoon so that there's balance in the day." Helen confesses this is an area with which she struggles, although she sees herself doing better than she used to. She does try to take at least 1 day off during the week.

Jackie admitted that she does not set boundaries and private time very well. She bluntly stated, "Church is my life. I'm sure 85 professional people would say that's not healthy, and ask me 'How are you taking care of yourself?' I don't do it well. I eat, sleep,

live, adore, love God, his church, and pastors. How I take care of myself is I love what I do, and I carefully chose the people I do it with so that it is a pleasure to do it.”

Carroll et al. (1983) acknowledge that the needed separation between the clergy person’s private and professional life may be more difficult for women. Zikmund et al. (1998) confirm the importance of boundaries in the life of clergy. “Clergy often have a more difficult time than people in other occupations claiming private space for themselves away from the demands of the church job. This is because, for many people, ‘being in the ministry’ is a way of life, not just a job” (p. 23). This need for balance between conflicting demands and need for appropriate boundaries to enable that to happen in also affirmed by Frame and Shehan (2004).

The importance of this is established in Zikmund et al. (1998) which concludes, “We discover, not surprisingly, that clergy who are consistently better able to establish clear boundaries between their church work and personal lives are more likely to be healthy—enjoying spiritual, mental, social, and physical well-being” (p. 47). In other studies, women clergy also acknowledged the need to maintain personal boundaries (Holzgang, 2000; Kolton, 1999; Purvis, 1995).

### **Realistic Expectations**

Gail identified the need to be realistic about accepting unrealistic expectations from church members. There was a time in her early ministry when if somebody suggested something she felt she had to do it. Otherwise she worried, “What are they going to think?” She does not think like that any more, and with conviction in her voice says, “I’m much better at being able to say no.” Her ability to set appropriate limits increased over time. She remembers when a church member unfavorably compared her to

a previous pastor, saying she did not work hard enough. She responded, "Well, that was great. Wonderful. But this is me." She also resisted the pressure of a congregant who expected her son to invite her son to a birthday party because the pastor's son should include everyone. She stated, "I felt that was putting pressure on my son that I didn't think as a pastor I should. So I refused."

### **Boundaries With the Demands of Small Children**

Setting appropriate boundaries while her children were small emerged as quite important for Helen. She does try to set time boundaries because she is a mom as well as a pastor. Helen knew her life was somewhat out of balance during her daughter's early years, but confessed that she did not know how else to do it. She sees this to be a learning process. "I really learned to draw boundaries, very strong boundaries around what I would and wouldn't do because I felt very strongly about raising my children. When I was single I had no particular boundaries. My time was anybody's time. Now I'm much more careful as to what appointments I'll take and making sure there's a night set aside that belongs to us, protecting my family time a little bit more." She takes the time she needs for her children. Helen went on to express appreciation that her congregation and pastoral colleagues helped in her need to set boundaries because of her small children.

With mixed emotions Helen anticipates a few years down the road and the difference it will make. "I love being a mom. However, when my children are in school that will be nice. I'm not rushing it, but it will be nice when I'm not paying for baby sitting. Now, I've got to make the most of every minute, because if I don't get things done in the morning it's more in the afternoon when they're taking a nap."

Gail, whose children are grown, found it easier to care for their needs when they grew older. "My children got to the age where I didn't feel responsible to plan everything for them. I could leave them for a few hours by themselves. When that time came, I began to take better care of myself."

Jackie described herself as doing this work of self-care poorly. "I don't do enough for myself right now because I'm trying to do two full-time jobs, mom and pastor. And there's not enough time." However, even though she doesn't see herself as the best example, she honestly believes she's doing much better than she used to.

This crucial nature of time for family also emerged in other studies of women clergy. Ice (1987) states it well, "For those with husbands and/or children in their households, family time tends to be zealously guarded as precious and restorative" (p. 58). The women in Kleingartner (1999) are similar to the women in this study in finding balance between their job and their family needs. They find time for relaxation, family time, and friendships.

Almost one-third of the women in Zikmund et al. (1998) found it difficult to balance full-time ministry when their children were young. They found, as did the women in my study, that the stress eased as their children grew older. This area is one in which female mentors could make it easier for clergywomen to create ways to find better balance.

### Physical Health

Issues relating to physical health were important to Helen. She commented on her loss of weight that was accomplished through a change in her diet. With pride in her voice she said, "That's the best thing I've done in years." Now that her daughter is older

she is committed to eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner, something she was not good at doing when her daughter was younger. She tried to pack as much ministry as possible into the hours her daughter was in school in order to have time with her when she was home. This would often take the form of skipped meals. She summarizes by saying, “I take very good care of myself and in caring for my body. I am particularly careful about that.” She attends to that through exercise and diet.

### Sense of Humor

At many points throughout the interview Gail punctuated her narrative with laughter. She could look back in retrospect at difficult situations with good humor. Craley (1990) speaks of humor as a tool for survival in ministry. “Humor with its capacity to enhance well-being and perspective on life offers both an antidote to anger and a vehicle for esteem. . . . The use of humor is generally a survival tactic for women in ministry. It may be the tool of choice for dealing with anger” (p. 96).

### Self-Care in Other Clergywomen Studies

Ice (1987) comments that caring for people requires appropriate self-care. In this regard, the women in this study generally do well. Kleingartner’s (1999) comment may provide insight into why the women in this study put a high priority on self-care. In speaking of the significant conflicts they have experienced she observes,

When the women became reflective, and somewhat philosophical, regarding their ‘dark night of the soul,’ they could identify the new learnings that they garnered from these experiences. The crises demanded that each woman reevaluate her priorities in life. This resulted in a stronger focus on self and self-care, more time with family and friends, and the establishment of clearer boundaries around the amount of time spent working. They developed a stronger sense of self worth that was not tied to their job performance. Each of them recommitted themselves to ordained ministry knowing more clearly the realities of call (p. 83).

Frame and Shehan (2004) studied 190 United Methodist clergywomen on the special challenges they faced and discussed issues of care for these caregivers. At the conclusion of their study they recommended the following coping mechanisms: time for self, support groups, counseling and spiritual direction, and strong friendship networks. The women in my study acknowledge their need for personal time and exhibit various degrees of success in finding that time. Those with the greatest difficulty are the women with young children. Yet, they realize the need and do what they can to make time for their needs. They utilize the support of friends and colleagues, as well as professional counseling to aid in sorting out difficult issues.

A final study of interest, and a fitting conclusion to the topic of self-care, is the work of Taylor et al. (2000) who studied the human stress response in women. The usual response to stress is characterized as “fight-or-flight.” However, their study of women shows they exhibit a pattern of “tend-and-befriend” when they experience stress. Women involve themselves in nurturing activities to protect themselves and their children. In addition, women form and maintain social networks that may aid this process. My study establishes the importance of nurturing and relationships in the lives of these clergywomen. Taylor et al. would likely suggest that it may well be a part of their mechanism to cope with the stresses of pastoral ministry.

Zikmund et al. (1998) summarize well the findings of my study: “It turns out that clergy with good overall health and a strong professional self-concept can sustain their commitment to a ministerial vocation even when faced with very difficult church situations, a lack of money, or minimal support from significant others who influence their careers” (p. 122).

### Resolving the Dilemmas

With their acceptance of the role of female pastor, the contradictions began and dilemmas resulted (Hughes, 1945). When they reach this crossroad, these women must determine their response. How these women have chosen to resolve these dilemmas is key to their ability to stay in ministry.

Without question the strongest factor in their staying in ministry is their conviction they are called by God to serve as pastors. Whatever other roles they may carry in their lives, their commitment to God and fulfillment of their calling through service as a pastor take precedence. They nurture that relationship with God through prayer, meditation, and times of spiritual retreat.

Following this commitment is the fruit they see resulting from the fulfillment of their call. People's lives are changed as a result of their ministry. The greatest change they desire is that lives are changed for eternity. They also hope to make an impact in the church. They see themselves best able to do that by their ability to function effectively. When they do, attitudes about female clergy are changed. Some who were once opposed are now supporters. It brings a ray of hope that they are making a difference. They acknowledge this is done in the midst of challenges, especially when they have small children. However, they find ways to make it work.

They also downplay gender as a factor in their ministry, yet they also acknowledge ways in which they bring a feminine touch to ministry. Is this a contradiction? I see this instead as their desire to have their role as pastor primary and their role as woman and mother secondary. This fits with their clear conviction that their call by God has first place in their lives.



They also accept reality. It is not always easy to be in a position of breaking down barriers, especially when that is not what you believe you are called to do. However, they accept this role as necessary, and persevere through difficult circumstances. Setting appropriate boundaries aids in their ability to stay. They realize that they cannot, nor do they wish to, do it all.

Another vital factor is the support they receive from family, colleagues, friends, and church members. And when situations are particularly difficult and they need an outside perspective, they are not afraid to engage in counseling or other support systems to get them through. They also care for their physical needs and maintain a sense of humor.

Most of the women work in settings where they are part of a staff. While this might be viewed as lack of opportunity to serve as sole or senior pastors, an alternative view would see this as a matter of choice (Finlay, 1996) possibly related to care of themselves. When you know some settings will be filled with challenges related to your gender, why not choose the environment in which you can function with minimal gender-related bias?

### **Supports Needed**

As mentioned in the section on support earlier in this chapter, the 11 women in this study find many and varied sources for support. Later in the interview, I specifically asked them what additional support they needed from any level of the church structure. Most women could not identify anything additional that could be done by their local congregations to provide more support. They feel highly supported in that setting. They did, however, address what they need from their local conferences up to the General

Conference level of the Adventist denominational hierarchy. Receiving these needed supports can make a difference in their staying in ministry.

### Gail's Needs

The strongest need Gail expressed was a desire for greater trustworthiness on the part of church leadership and for them to stand unwaveringly for women clergy. In speaking of an action taken by a church leader that had a negative impact upon her ministry, Gail said, "After a union committee had reached consensus on an important decision about my ministry functions, my conference president expressed concern about the possibility of another member of the committee circumventing the decision. And sure enough, he did the very things that people had distrusted him for." Gail went on to express her difficulty with the contradictory statements and actions by church leaders who, though well meaning, say one thing privately and then act out something else when they are in committees and public meetings. Gail believes people always seem to be considering their jobs, and are not as careful in listening to and looking out for women as they might be. "That has been a great disappointment to me. So I am not very trusting of leaders as a result of years of seeing this happen." If they would really act out what they say to her privately, she would consider that a great support.

Sara once said to Gail, "The General Conference and the North American Division leaders say we are called to ministry and should be pastors. I would say to them, 'Show us that you mean that.' They have done nothing to affirm and show equality for us." Sara continued, "They could become trustworthy people." In response to this comment Gail asked, "How would you know they are trustworthy?" Sara responded, "By their behavior. By doing what they say. By my not seeing them say one thing and do

another, not to see them politically driven. For me to know by their actions and by their words that their hearts and souls were that they would die for this church. That it wasn't about their position or their power. You earn trust. And I don't think they can do that."

This comment by Sellers (1997) speaks to the concerns of the women in my study. "These clergywomen also have found it difficult to share with denominational officials . . . and with colleagues because of experiences of betrayal and ensuing lack of trust" (p. 74).

Gail brought up the issue of equality in ministry and the ordination of women, as we discussed what support the church could show to women. I have addressed the subject of ordination in chapter 3. However, some comments on ordination are tied to the larger issue of equality in ministry. Here are Gail's views on how the church hierarchy could support her in this area: "The Adventist Church could show the same recognition to us that they show to our male colleagues by ordaining us. If they can't ordain us, they could have a credential that is equal. Then wherever we go we're recognized as called by God to pastoral ministry. And we can baptize and do all the other functions. That's what would help me." Gail went on to express appreciation for the ministry functions open to women and hopes the positive attitude continues toward what women can do. Since women are not fully recognized yet, she still sees them at times fighting battles as to whether they should even be pastors.

Gail also raised the question of when the church is going to allow women to speak for women. She has seen no women in administration in the conferences in which she has served. She stated with passion, "So women don't have a voice. We have men telling us

what we think and what we need. How do they get their ideas of what women need? I don't know where they come up with their ideas. They don't ask us."

Gail submitted one last need. She would like to see conferences become more assertive in their efforts to place women in local churches. When they attempt to do so and meet resistance they seem unwilling to advocate for change. She believes they could educate local church leadership and provide more opportunities for women to preach and minister more publicly in order to break down resistance.

#### Helen's Needs

Helen's suggestions were similar to Gail's in seeing a need on the conference and union levels for more people to stand up and start making decisions that move in the direction of affirming women. She wants to see more efforts in actively supporting them.

She also expressed frustration that church leaders do not take public stands that match what they say privately as related to the ministry of women. At the division level she would like to see more respect. She does not like the two-facedness. If they are going to say they are doing something, then she wants them to do it sincerely. In addition, too often she sees women making a stand and then being belittled because people do not like their attitude. "Well," she says emphatically, "I don't know that any changes ever occurred without a little attitude."

Helen has women friends in ministry with whom she has discussed this topic. During the course of those discussions one need expressed was greater recognition of women in ministry. These women sensed that the accomplishments of women in ministry get "lost in the shuffle." Her friends mentioned the noteworthy deeds of other women, not their own, so these did not seem to be self-serving comments. There was also a sense that

in many areas the church needs to recognize clergywomen even exist. Helen would love to see Adventist media become really supportive of women in leadership, that somehow they have to get the message out. She commented, “There are plenty of women who have worked hard and suffered a lot. I don’t know that they’ve ever been publicly recognized as ministers of the church, as contributing to the history of what has become our church.”

Helen thinks conference leaders should make more effort to befriend and try to get to know them. It is impossible for them to know what women need unless this conversation happens. Finally, as a pastor who has worked with two different senior pastors, Helen thinks senior pastors need to be more educated about women in ministry.

#### Common Concerns for Gail and Helen

Gail and Helen were united in seeing a need for greater connections for women clergy with each other, through such avenues as retreats and mentoring. While they acknowledge occasional gatherings, they expressed a desire for more such opportunities. Gail said, “I think the General Conference, the North American Division, and local conferences should encourage their women to get together with the women from across the United States because we don’t know each other. The reason for that is because we have worker’s meetings, but how many women are in each conference? The men get tighter and they have this camaraderie. It’s just not the same for me.” Helen added, “I treasure what the NAD does when they have gatherings of women in ministry. I simply wish there could be a greater vision on the part of the conference to fund these as routinely as they fund men going to meetings. These are the pastors’ meetings that feed my soul.” They believe their friend, Marion, sums it up well. “Getting together with my

male colleagues is fine, but there is something absolutely, stunningly different about gathering with my women colleagues. I hunger to do more of it.”

This desire is affirmed by the findings in Carroll et al. (1983) in which “slightly over half of the women are members of colleague, professional, or interest groups composed predominantly or only of women” (p. 182). The clergywomen in this study also believe (by 61 % agreement) that these groups are beneficial to women pastors “for personal support and sharing of professional concerns” (p. 182) and that women should join such groups. Yet while they desire greater interaction with their female colleagues, not one woman in this study described herself as being a part of a group of this sort.

Some issues were raised that they identified as equally important for men. They see all pastors needing time for spiritual retreats and sabbaticals. They were quick to add that this then must be communicated by the conference to the congregation to support the notion that pastors need time off. Coupled with this is a need for encouragement of a strong ethic for relaxation and family time.

This statement by Gail sums up the topic of equal and fair treatment for women.

I want to be treated fairly, not just equally. There is a huge difference to me. The system and the people in this church will not allow you to treat me equally, so be fair with me. And sometimes that may mean that the church hierarchy will have to do things for me that you would not do for my male colleagues in order to try to level the playing field. That may mean they have to revisit policy in ways that will say we are important to the church. I get tired of administrators saying they need to be unbiased and neutral. My plea to them is, ‘Be fair with us, which may mean in a meeting you have to tell people you believe in equality.’ I want them to show some leadership for us that says, ‘I value you as a woman in ministry.’

The Hamilton Chandler Communications survey of Adventist women in ministry (1992) asked what could be done to keep them in ministry. They found that 20% called for greater advocacy and support on placement and employment issues. Others asked for

equal recognition and professional treatment for women, improved support systems, and efforts to educate church leaders and members about women in ministry.

Frame and Shehan (2004) summarized the needs of female pastors as expressed by the women they studied. These needs include “the balance of work and family, having more free time, cultivating more support, and having an opportunity to develop their spiritual lives more fully” (p. 377). In large part these parallel the needs expressed by the women in this study. However, they would also include greater support of the ministry of women by church leadership and evidence of their trustworthiness in speaking on behalf of women.

In her study of clergy dropout, Lummis (1995, cited in Sellers, 1997) found that those clergy who consider leaving ministry would stay if they received some affirmation by denominational leaders. While the women in this study did not go this far, those in Lummis’s study stated they did not get even minimal support. This finding would indicate the importance of Adventist denominational leaders showing increased support for women clergy if they wish them to stay in ministry.

### **Metaphors, Stories, Symbols**

In concluding the interviews I asked the women: “Describe your experience as a woman pastor using a metaphor, story or symbol.” I asked this question because I wanted them to think in a new way about their experience and perhaps through this process express themes in their experiences that might not have emerged in answer to direct questions.

The use of metaphors in direct analogy is validated by Joyce and Weil (1996) where they affirm the use of the creative process in “connecting the familiar with the

unfamiliar or creating a new idea from familiar ideas” (p. 241). The function of direct analogy is the “simple comparison of two objects or concepts” (p. 241), in this case a metaphor, symbol, or story that reflects their experience in pastoral ministry.

Several asked me to stop the tape while they thought about their answer. Two women were unable to identify an image for comparison. Here, in their words, are the results—varied, creative, and as individual as the women themselves. Yet as you will see, common themes emerge.

### Images From Nature

“My ministry has been like a cloud. It’s been moving. It takes on different shapes and forms like a cloud does. Sometimes it’s dark, like when there is a rain storm. Those are rough spots and even hail at times comes out of it. But it’s gorgeous when the sun shines through just a piece of it. It can take different shapes and forms, but it’s still a cloud. Overall it is just beautiful.”

“I see a tree that starts out so small and grows. It offers shade and support and feels solid, like what I’m able to offer. And I feel like I’ve grown into that, as I had no experience before coming here. I can picture this tree that I hope continues to grow and get stronger and be more dependable and more far reaching. I’ve thought it would be fun to take what I’ve learned with 10 years of experience and go somewhere else and have people know me from this point and as I continue to grow.”

“I’d probably say the process of metamorphous, transforming into a butterfly. This is a time of transition in my life, a time of self-growth and self-realization. It is great to have had the opportunity to be so challenged during my 20s, and really through this whole experience.”



### Images of Travel

“It’s a journey. I’ve had to take side roads to get to places, but it’s always been something that prepares me for the next turn. The negative experiences I’ve had have been part of the journey to get me to a better place. I’ve had to take detours to learn. Where my ultimate destination is on this earth, I don’t know, but in heaven I will find out exactly. I think I’m waiting to see how God used me to help people. I’ve had to be repaired and restored at times, but it’s a journey that I know will never cease to help me learn and grow.”

“It could be a ride at Disneyland, because it’s had the same ups and the downs. The down times have been a time to get ready for the next exhilaration that God’s going to give. In fact, pastoral ministry and winning someone to Christ is better than anything that Disneyland can offer. It’s better than any ride at Disneyland. And so my whole life has been seeking after what’s the next hill. So it is my continuous search for adventure that keeps me going. What’s around the next bend? What does that new day hold? Or how can I make a difference in that person’s life? So it’s a journey. Really my theme song is the song, ‘I’m bound for the Promised Land. Oh, who will come and go with me? I’m bound for the Promised Land.’ That sets the course and direction of where I want to go. But I’m not making that journey by myself. My whole life is to invite other people to make that journey with me.”

### Other Images

“My metaphor would be a score of music. There are fast parts. There are ups and downs. There are rests. There are places of silence. There are places of lots going on. That’s my metaphor of ministry.”

“One story that’s been meaningful to me is the story of the resurrection of Lazarus and Jesus’ instructions to the people around to unbind him and let him go. It’s a metaphor for my ministry because of this unbinding process. When I am bound—head, face, and hands—with grave clothes, I can’t unbind myself. I need the people around me. I feel fortunate that God has placed me in a setting in which that is true of the community I serve.”

“The metaphor of my ministry is of being a mother who loves, who reaches out, who teaches, who comforts, who listens. I deliberately chose mother instead of shepherd. My pastoring is to care, to direct, to support, and to encourage whoever is present. Whoever God leads to me I will not turn away. John 6:37.”

“The movie *Seabiscuit* is a great metaphor for my life and ministry. You get knocked down and you get back up. You get knocked back down and you get back up. And you just don’t stop. You just don’t stop. I’m blessed though. I’m very lucky, very lucky. God happened to choose me. And then God gave me this amazing opportunity. And then God put these incredible people in my life. And then he put me in this conference that lets women and men pastors be innovative. And I’m an incredibly lucky person. I think I’m one of the luckiest people around.”

Throughout these metaphors is a theme of transformation, movement, and change. Many include elements of darkness and challenge, but also times of resolution and growth. Several include connections with other people and making a difference in their lives.

The themes are not new. They reflect the growing and changing of their view of themselves as they have journeyed through life and ministry. Josselson (1987, 1996)

found this true of the women in her studies and summarizes this experience. "Like slowly turning kaleidoscopes, the shifts in a woman's identity involve rearrangement of pieces, now accenting one aspect and muting another, now altering the arrangement once more. This flexibility and capacity to improvise are a source of both strength and surprise in the way in which women construct themselves" (Josselson, 1996, p. 243).

The themes of connections with others and making a difference in their lives are not surprising, as studies of women's development have found this to be true (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Miller, 1976). As I read these metaphors, they seem a fitting summary of the ministry of these women.

### Summary

By their longevity in ministry the women in this study have demonstrated that it is possible for women to successfully fulfill their call to ministry. The primary reason they stay committed to pastoral ministry is their conviction that God has called them to this work. They find evidence of their calling in the lives that are changed as a result of their ministry. Support for their ministry comes from pastoral colleagues and church administrators, church members, friends, organizations, and various supports outside the Adventist Church. Longevity in ministry also comes as a result of their minimizing gender issues, caring for themselves.

The greatest need identified by the women in this study is leaders whom they view as trustworthy, especially as it relates to their support and assertiveness with others on behalf of women in ministry. They also appeal for equality in function, if equality of credential will not be granted by the world church.

Finally, the metaphors, symbols, and stories by which they described their experience in ministry capture the major themes in the lives of these women, confirming the importance of relationships with God and people, growing through challenges, and showing flexibility as changes come to their lives.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter includes the problem and purpose of this study, a conceptual framework that aided analysis, study methodology, and findings of the study. It concludes with a discussion of the findings and recommendations.

#### **Problem and Purpose**

Women pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist Church function under limitations not imposed upon their male colleagues. One of these limitations is that women can be commissioned, but are not ordained. This means their credential allows them to serve in their local church, but not globally, as male clergy do. In addition, their lack of ordination prohibits them from serving as a conference/mission president, which often functions as the entry point for other leadership positions.

Given the difficult circumstances in which women clergy work, the question arises, What contributes to longevity in ministry for women who choose to stay in pastoral ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? This study explored the pastoral experiences of 11 Adventist women clergy serving in the United States and what contributes to their longevity as pastors.

### Review of the Literature

While a more comprehensive review of the literature can be found in chapter 1, the following studies of women clergy were of particular importance to my study. They provided background and both similar and divergent findings.

Bock's (1967) study of U. S. Bureau of the Census data suggested professional marginality of women clergy who were entering the "sacredly" masculine career of pastoral ministry. The studies of Carroll et al. (1983) and Zikmund et al. (1998) provide a comprehensive view of women clergy in mainline Protestant denominations, with the added benefit of noting how the situation for women clergy has changed over time. These studies include historical background, seminary experiences, calling to ministry, job placement issues, relationships with colleagues and family, the complexities of their jobs in a local parish, and clergy leadership.

A number of qualitative studies provided a basis for comparing the experiences of Adventist women clergy with women of other denominations. Several studies included women from multiple denominations (Arnold, 2001; Bingham, 1992; Ice, 1987; Lawless, 1993; Rhodes, 1987; Schmidt, 1996). Other studies are confined to women clergy in a single Protestant denomination and include Pentecostal churches (Lawless, 1988), the United Methodist Church (Bennett, 1993; Gorham & Waitschies, 1998), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Kleingartner, 1999), and the Episcopal Church (Holzgang, 2000). A study of women rabbis (Kolton, 1999) provided an interesting comparison of their experience to that of Protestant women clergy. Wallace (1992) studied lay women and nuns in "priestless parishes" in the Roman Catholic Church. In light of the focus of my study, Seller's study (1997) of nine clergywomen who thought seriously of leaving parish ministry provided an important framework.

Studies specific to Adventist women clergy include Dudley's (1987a; 1987b; 1996) studies of how women pastors are viewed by other pastors, college and university religion teachers and seminary faculty, and lay members in the churches they serve. In her more general book on women in the Adventist Church, Vance (1999) included a chapter on the ministry experiences of Adventist women pastors. A 1992 survey by Hamilton Chandler Communications explored the attitudes toward ministry after the vote to deny ordination to Adventist women at the General Conference Session in 1990.

### **Conceptual Framework**

I utilized Hughes's (1945) framework, *Dilemmas and Contradictions of Status*, to gain an increased understanding of the experience of the women in this study. As women enter the "'sacredly' masculine" (Bock, 1967, p. 531) profession of ministry, they encounter expectations based on determining characteristics, those necessary for inclusion in the profession. Additional expectations come from auxiliary characteristics, those "which come to be expected" (Hughes, 1945, p. 353), but are not essential to the profession. Of importance to this study is when a contradiction arises because individuals see "male" as a defining, not an auxiliary, characteristic for the clergy profession.

The contradiction of a woman serving as a pastor results in dilemmas for the woman pastor, her colleagues, her parishioners, and church leaders. A dilemma for the woman pastor is how to work effectively in the midst of the disapproval that comes from those who believe she should not be a pastor. Those individuals, either church members or pastoral colleagues, who believe it is necessary for a pastor to be a male, experience the dilemma of whether or not they wish to accept her as a pastor. Church administrators

need to wrestle with the problem of how to apply policies that were established with only male clergy in mind.

Hughes (1945), and Charlton (1997) suggest possible ways of dealing with these dilemmas. The goal of redefining the status of clergy to include women can in part be accomplished when women identify with women's issues and groups. Or they can minimize gender differences in their clergy roles, which can lessen or even eliminate the contradiction. Other strategies for women to utilize include adding feminine characteristics to the role definition of clergy; moving to a church or denomination which does not expect clergy to be male; or leaving pastoral ministry altogether, thus removing the contradiction from their lives.

Individuals or the institution for which the women work can also utilize strategies to deal with dilemmas that result from the contradiction of combining "women" and "clergy": excluding or isolating women from positions which contain a contradiction; or redefining the clergy status to include both men and women. Another alternative is limiting the ways in which women can function in roles previously defined as male.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study followed a narrative design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The purposive sample (Merriam, 1998) included 11 women currently serving as pastors in Adventist churches in the United States. Other criteria used for the purposive sample included women who had a degree in religion or theology, who had worked at least 5 years in pastoral ministry, and who had received a salary for this work.

I obtained data through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Transcriptions of the audio- and videotapes provided the basis for coding of



the data into emergent themes through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following methods were utilized to enhance internal validity: triangulation; member checks; clarifying researcher bias; rich/thick description; including negative or discrepant information; and peer debriefing. The ability to create an image of what a female pastor with longevity in ministry looks like can be formed by the reader. This image provides the reader the ability to assess for themselves whether the results of this analysis fit a particular situation (Eisner, 1998), thus providing external validity, or generalizability.

### **Findings**

The major findings of this study are summarized below. The study research questions provide the outline for the presentation of the findings.

#### **How Do Adventist Women Come to Pastoral Ministry?**

The women in this study, who represent a total of 150 years in pastoral ministry, show they are responding to the call of God in their lives. For many of them, their early involvements in spiritual activities culminated in their recognition of God's call to enter pastoral ministry. Some, however, had never seen as female pastor, and only after some time did they realize God's call was to serve as a pastor.

They found their call encouraged by some family, professors, and friends; however, they also experienced discouraging attitudes from some family, professors, and friends. At times, they doubted or even denied their call to ministry.

Several began working initially as a Bible instructor, church volunteer, chaplain, or part-time pastor. And many entered pastoral ministry after a second or even third

career. For a few this was because God's call did not come until later in life; for others, it was because they did not find an openness to women serving as pastors. Their previous professions include management, teaching, nursing, and government service. The women found that these previous careers, their life experiences, and formal education prepared them in various ways for ministry.

For many of these women, their entry into ministry involved challenges, including difficulties because of their gender. Some were discouraged from entering ministry by professors or conference officials. Others were flatly told they would not be considered for a pastoral position because women were not hired as pastors. Some, however, felt welcomed by conference leaders as well as church members. Yet all these women are now recognized as pastors in a local church. Chapter 3 expands the findings of how these women came to ministry.

#### How Do They Experience Ministry?

This second research question unfolded a mixture of experiences. Challenges attributed to their gender included pay inequities, uncertainty about their role, and being caught in political situations. Yet they also find attitudes of members and church leaders changing. They miss having female role models and mentors, and have filled that void with books, seminars, and tape and film presenters.

Their greatest joys in ministry revolve around connections with people and making a difference in the lives of individuals. The women share their excitement about studying the Bible with someone whom they later baptize, officiating at a wedding, and finding the positive impact their ministry makes for women in ministry.

They find themselves treated different from their male colleagues, feeling at times that the expectations for them are higher. They miss the collegiality they see among their male peers, which results in feelings of exclusion. These women also perceive differences in the way they relate to parishioners, in their sermon content and delivery, and how they fulfill their role. The most notable difference is their lack of ordination, which at times results in their being in the midst of controversy they would prefer to avoid.

The husbands of these women were generally supportive and involved in their ministry. The women juggle multiple roles, most notably that of pastor and mother of small children. At times they wonder if they can effectively manage; yet they find ways to make it work.

In light of Hughes's (1945) conceptual framework, although women serving as pastors creates a contradiction for some church members and administrators, these women find no contradiction. God's call to them to serve as pastors provides a solid foundation upon which they build their identity as a pastor. They acknowledge their call as not just an event at the beginning of their pastoral ministry, but an on-going commitment to God's plan for their lives. Over time, they have become fully identified with the role of pastor. They do not just work as pastors; they *are* pastors.

However, dilemmas do result. Some individuals do not know whether to treat them as a woman or a pastor. Confusion comes in knowing where to house a woman at a pastors'-only retreat where she is the only woman. And they are faced at times with knowing how to respond when church members expect them to be at home with their children instead of chairing a church board meeting. They find resolution in creative ways, at times by down playing gender differences. More often, they remember that God

has called them to this role and provides support through family and friends. For some dilemmas, however, there is no apparent solution, including those related to the ways they are treated different from their male colleagues. Chapter 3 further discusses their ministry experiences.

### What Challenges Do They Face as Pastors?

Before they enter ministry and while they serve as pastors, disapproval and doubt about their call to pastoral ministry come from family members, college and seminary professors, conference officials, and church members. Some individuals overtly challenge their right to serve as pastors. At times their pastoral colleagues are not supportive, even at times exhibiting controlling and hurtful behavior.

While the women in this study find some church members supportive of their ministry, some members make clear they disapprove of their ministry. What makes this attitude even more difficult is the covert nature of the opposition.

Other challenges include feeling invisible and excluded. For example, this occurs when they attend meetings for pastors and the speaker refers to the group as “guys,” “men,” or “brethren,” acting as if they are not even present. They also experience the stresses of ministry that are typical of men as well, including, the never-ending workload. Many women told stories of significant disapproval of their ministry, often simply because of their gender. The challenge of sexual harassment emerged in only two stories.

Most of the women in this study on at least one occasion experienced a significant challenge to her ability to function as a pastor. Generally this resulted from an individual’s disapproval of her serving as a pastor. Both male and female clergy may experience disapproval, for example, an unpopular decision, a theological difference, or

personality clash. However, only women experience disapproval simply because of their gender. The magnitude of this disapproval and resulting dilemma was such that, for some women, their ability to fulfill their pastoral role was challenged, even in areas specifically approved by the church.

Although they seek to distance themselves from the controversy surrounding the ordination of women in the Adventist Church, they recognize the dilemma for the world church. Women are called by God to pastoral ministry, and are serving effectively. Yet they are not accorded full recognition of this call through ordination. Further discussion of the challenges these women face can be found in chapter 4.

#### How Do These Difficult Experiences Affect Their Desire to Stay?

The answer to this research question raised the seemingly tenuous nature of the women's desire to stay. While they are committed to pastoral ministry, at times they have had serious thoughts of leaving. Over time, as the disapproval they experienced continued, they wondered if women pastors would ever be fully accepted by the church. Their thoughts of leaving resulted from weighing their deep sense of being called to ministry and their identity as a pastor with the injustices and significant challenges that came. However, most of these women differentiated their call to ministry from employment by the institutional church.

According to Sellers (1997), women thinking seriously about leaving church-related ministry results in their feeling (a) that one's well-being is threatened, (b) that this is part of a deeply spiritual process, (c) profound ambivalence, and (d) stuck and seeing few appealing alternatives. Her study is informative, as in varying degrees, all of these

themes were represented in the experiences of the women in my study. A more in-depth response to this research question can be found in chapter 4.

### Why Do These Women Choose to Stay in Pastoral Ministry?

Ultimately, deep commitment to their pastoral calling overrides thoughts of leaving pastoral ministry. Most of the women in this study have thought about leaving at some point—some seriously. However, all remain serving as pastors. In addition, many make a distinction between their call to ministry and employment by the Adventist Church. They believe they can still fulfill their call to ministry even if serving in other ministries, such as teaching or chaplaincy. However, even as they spoke of other employment options, they did not doubt their call to ministry. Although significant challenges have faced them during their tenure as pastors, the depth of their call to ministry keeps them staying. Some even acknowledge their call will continue with them past retirement. As one woman stated, “It will be here until the day I die.”

In addition, with the strong value they place on connections with people, seeing individual lives changed as a result of their work as pastors further solidifies their decision to stay. One of their greatest desires is to make a difference in people’s lives. In addition, when the challenges come, it is people who make a difference for them. The support received from pastoral colleagues and church administrators, church members, friends, and organizations contributes to their ability to stay in ministry. While some individuals encourage them to be active in women’s issues in the church, they generally step away from that role. There seems to be recognition that such involvements might divert them from their call, which is to serve those people God brings into their lives.

An additional factor that contributes to their staying is the intentionality they show in caring for themselves. They take time apart from ministry, set boundaries around their time, and attend to their physical health. As they looked ahead, they spoke of supports that would provide a climate that would encourage their continuation in ministry. They expressed a desire for greater trustworthiness in church leaders, and appealed for equality in function, if not equality through ordination. They also wish for female mentors and greater connections with other women in ministry. Chapter 5 further elaborates the findings of why these women stay in pastoral ministry.

### **Discussion**

The women in this study most impressed me with the depth of conviction about their calling. They are not merely doing the work of ministry; they are fulfilling the direction given them by God. The strength of this commitment to pastoring and the passion with which they fulfill this call are important. The inner strength and resolve evident in their lives seem vital if they are to stay committed in the midst of difficult and biased circumstances. In addition, the way in which God continues to affirm their call through events and people adds to their inner conviction.

All the while, they keep people close to their hearts. Husbands, children, colleagues, and church members all receive care and attentiveness. Making a difference in the lives of people is a focal point of their ministry. With rare exception, they do not identify themselves as “preacher.” Their identity as pastors is relational and focused on their families and the people to whom they minister. When describing women clergy, Nuechterlein and Hahn (1990) state, “She often tells who she is by telling about her connections with others” (p. 7). This is true of the women in this study.

They go about this task of ministry with hearts full of compassion toward people and ready to move in whatever direction God may lead. Just as the women in Josselson (1987, 1996) adapted to changing life circumstances, so these women show their ability to adapt by adjusting and revising to meet whatever life offers. Major changes come in their circumstances when they marry, when children are born, when their children leave home, and when they change churches. This ability to adapt was true of the women in Carruthers's (2003) study whose "identities are constantly being reshaped as the circumstances in their lives change" (p. 103).

Their ministry brings challenges and joys. Many of the difficulties are related to the disapproval of others and the dilemmas that result (Hughes, 1945) when others believe they should not be pastors. Some difficulties are of a magnitude that they think of leaving ministry. However, to do so would mean giving up pastoring, which is a central part of who they are. Palmer (2000) says it well, "Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we *ought* to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path of authentic service in the world" (p. 16, emphasis in original). Pastoral ministry is a coming together of their call from God and their commitment to serve in whatever way God directs.

Some of the challenges that are a part of the ministries of these women are equally true for their male colleagues. However, it is important to remember that for these women there is the added factor of their gender. The contradiction of the status "woman" being joined with "pastor" creates dilemmas that can be difficult to resolve (Hughes, 1945). Men are not faced with a conference president refusing to interview them because



they are male. Men may face criticism because of their theology or an unpopular decision. However, they have likely never had someone walk out of their church before they ever preached their first sermon because they are male. The complexity of the challenges for these women is greater than their male colleagues simply because they are women.

It can be difficult to follow your calling, your passion, when the church or individuals you feel called to serve say you cannot or should not. When the challenges come, these women may talk about leaving; however, they have not. They have adapted and found a variety of ways of dealing with the challenges and dilemmas that come to them. They find resolution to these dilemmas by remembering their call is from God. They find support from people who are close to them and believe in their ministry, and observe the lives and attitudes that are changed as a result of their ministry. Self-care is important; they do this in part by taking time alone with God, setting boundaries, and attending to their physical health.

In addition, they see their ministry making a difference when people's attitudes toward clergywomen are changed. However, they also accept the reality that they will not always be understood or accepted in their role as pastors. And finally, while they also downplay gender as a factor in their ministry, they also bring a feminine touch to ministry.

It may be tempting for some to say that these women are passive, compliant, and afraid to rock the boat. However, I do not believe that is why they stay. When challenges come to them from church members or leaders in positions of authority, they remember that the authority by which they live their lives exceeds the authority of any earthly

power. They are doing what *God* called them to do. And until God makes clear to them that they should change course, they will remain pastors.

Bateson's (1989) comment seems an appropriate summary of the lives of these women.

Women today, trying to compose lives that will honor all their commitments and still express all their potentials with a certain unitary grace, do not have an easy task. It is important, however, to see that, in finding a personal path among the discontinuities and moral ambiguities they face, they are performing a creative synthesis with a value that goes beyond the merely personal. . . . Individual improvisations can sometimes be shared as models of possibility for men and women in the future. (p. 232)

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to specific groups: women in pastoral ministry, women preparing for pastoral ministry, pastoral colleagues, church administrators, and future researchers.

#### Women in Ministry

All women in ministry, whether employed full-time, part-time, or on a stipend basis, should remember and nurture their call to ministry, remembering that its source is God. The strength of that call is pivotal to longevity in ministry.

Being a pioneer is easier than being a scout. A scout "goes forward alone, without a map, faces danger, charts the territory, reports back." It is difficult enough to be a "pioneer"; they "at least have a map, if rudimentary, and they have some company" (Charlton, 1997, p. 605). The women in this study have shown that an important reason they stay is the support they get from others. In addition, studies of women show that relationships are an important part of women's lives (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Miller, 1976). Taking the time to

cultivate supportive relationships is one factor that will contribute to longevity in ministry.

Finally, the findings of this study also demonstrate the importance of self-care to “staying” power. The ways to do so are varied, and all the women in this study are unique in their approach; however, all of them care for themselves in some way. Women pastors would be well served to find ways to care for themselves.

### Women Preparing for Pastoral Ministry

The varied experiences of the women in this study can serve as a guide for those preparing for pastoral ministry. This study attempts “the creation of an image” (Eisner, 1998, p. 199) of what a female pastor with longevity in ministry looks like. Prospective women pastors can take the portions of this image that fit their personalities and circumstances and utilize them during preparation for ministry. By recognizing the supports that many women pastors discovered later in their ministries, student pastors can use the insight and learning of these women as tools to utilize early in their career.

The women in this study have often found themselves geographically distant from other women in ministry, and thus unable to have regular contact and support from other women. Periodically the North American Division sponsors retreats for women in ministry and those preparing for ministry. Connecting with women at these retreats will help to build a network with other clergywomen. In addition, the Association of Adventist Women sponsors a yearly conference that frequently has women pastors in attendance. Another valuable resource is the Women’s Resource Center at LaSierra University, which, among other activities, provides resources and support for women in ministry. By utilizing these networks and resources, when questions or challenges arise,

women pastors will have the acquaintance with other women in ministry and other supporters who can provide encouragement and information.

Serving as a pastor while raising children poses special problems. While without dissent the women in this study have found themselves challenged at times in juggling these roles, most have found satisfactory ways to cope. They even find some advantages to combining motherhood and pastoral ministry. Finding a female clergy mentor who has pastored while raising children can help in navigating this challenge.

The commitment to ministry and enthusiasm for helping people exhibited by female student pastors may be challenged when they leave the college setting. The same level of support and encouragement may not be evident. A substantial level of resistance to women in ministry is yet present within the church. Careful preparation is vital for facing the challenging situations that will arise because of gender. Preparation will not necessarily prevent the sting of those encounters; however, it can ensure not being caught off guard when those occasions arise.

Finally, the women in this study are convinced that their ministry differs from that of their male colleagues in areas such as the way they preach, the way they relate to people, how they are treated, and how they manage their multiple roles. While some people discount those differences, the wise pastoral student will at least explore the topic of gender differences to assess whether the insights of others about differences in ministry style are applicable.

#### Male Pastoral Colleagues

The women in this study generally value their relationships with their male pastoral colleagues, and find their support invaluable. Yet there are some who believe

male colleagues “just don’t get it.” When their male colleagues use their own experience as a reference point for the experience of women, they miss the unique challenges and dilemmas women in ministry face. Male pastors have not had someone question their ability to minister simply because they are male. But several women have had that experience. While not every challenge women face is about gender, some are. Male colleagues must recognize this.

Continued support of and advocacy for women colleagues is essential to their success. Male colleagues must advocate on behalf of their women colleagues to help create an environment open to their ministry.

#### Denominational Leaders and Administrators

This study reveals that denominational leaders have significant impact on the employment of female pastors. And the women’s experiences with these leaders are the most troublesome. Some leaders express their support in private, but are less forthcoming with their support when in public settings. The 1992 survey of Adventist women in ministry (Hamilton Chandler Communications) found: “The more distant the level of denominational leadership named, the more likely that women pastors would perceive it as lacking in recognition and support for their ministry” (p. 14).

Church leaders must get acquainted with their women pastors, asking about their call to ministry and their ministry experiences, and asking them directly what they most need. Given the distrust many have of leadership, candor may be difficult, but opening a dialogue will be beneficial.

Denominational leaders must let their support of women in ministry be known, not just to them, but publicly. One way to do that is in the placement process, both for

women just entering pastoral ministry and for those looking at a change in location. The experiences of the women in this study demonstrate that it is difficult for them to be hired as pastors. In this regard Carroll's (1983, p. 122) assertion is vital, "For women to be placed [in pastoral positions] it is necessary for judicatory officials of all denominations to be more than pleasant but inactive in support of women clergy; rather, they need to be active advocates if women are to find jobs." They need more than benign neglect; they need assertive action on the part of church leaders. In addition, if the positions of women are eliminated because of budget cuts, as has been the case for some, they may need special advocacy. While it can be difficult for any pastor who loses a job to find another one, for women there is the added complication of those who will refuse to consider her simply because of her gender. She may need active advocacy at this point in her ministry.

Also, open discussions with a student pastor about her future may reveal that she is willing to take risks. Hiring a woman and sending her to seminary, but not promising her a church when she completes her education, may still be a viable option for her. Deciding what is best for her without her counsel may serve to close opportunities prematurely.

In addition, positive attitudes toward women pastors are increased when people have contact with them (Dudley, 1996; Lehman, 1985). Providing opportunities for them to publicly function in pastoral roles, such as preaching and leading worship (e.g., speaking at camp meeting or other conference-wide convocations), can help promote their acceptance. Confining invitations to women's groups or speaking about women's issues does not allow others to see their capabilities in functioning equally with their male colleagues. Church leaders must think creatively about involving clergywomen.

Funding must be provided for woman-to-woman mentoring and for yearly clergy conferences for women. These are the connections that the women have found to be beneficial. As young pastors, they missed having female mentors. While women pastors are few, and many at a geographical distance from others, these opportunities can be very beneficial in ways that gatherings with their male colleagues simply are not.

Finally, while the women in this study do not actively involve themselves in the debate on the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, it is an issue in which they acknowledge inequality. A strong statement of support to women in ministry is an acknowledgment of the equality of their work as pastors and support for equal recognition. If this will not be done through ordination, then a credential that is equal to that of their male colleagues would speak to the value placed on their service.

#### Researchers

While this concludes the writing of the findings from this study, many questions remain unanswered. Why do women pastors leave the ministry? Are their reasons different from those of male pastors who leave? Studying these questions would provide opportunity to confirm which reasons might be common to both men and women and which might be unique to women.

It was beyond the scope of this study to explore the added contradiction and resulting dilemmas (Hughes, 1945) for women of color. While there are comparatively few women in Adventist pastoral ministry, there are even fewer women of color. It would provide additional insights into the experiences of women clergy in the Adventist Church if this topic were studied.

Another small subgroup of women in ministry is those whose husbands are also pastors. Research in this area would further increase our understanding of the experiences and needs of these women in ministry.

An additional group deserving added study is young women who are thinking of pastoral ministry as a career, who are responding to God's call, and who may be pursuing the requisite education. A study of their experiences, hopes, and challenges should be revealing.

A final group of women to study are those who know God is calling them to ministry, who complete their ministerial training, and are not hired as pastors. Some may enter ministry through another route, such as chaplaincy or teaching. Others may receive a stipend for their work in a local church, and yet others might be among those who find other employment and minister as volunteers in their local church.

A topic with a diversity of views is that of gender differences between male and female clergy. Are there differences in the leadership style of men and women? Are there functional differences in the ways that men and women fulfill their role as pastors? Additional study of this subject, especially from the perspective of church members, would likely be of interest.

One additional question of interest is whether the general attitudes in the Adventist Church toward women in ministry have changed since Dudley's studies (1987a, 1987b, 1996). Further research is needed of the current attitudes toward women clergy among pastors, religion teachers, church members, and church administrators.



Finally, a study of Adventist women with longevity in a variety of professions commonly held by men would be informative. The professions studied could include law, medicine, government service, and church administration.

Many stories remain to be heard. This is just a beginning.

**APPENDIX A**  
**LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE**

July 8, 2003

Dear colleague in ministry,

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Program in the School of Education at Andrews University and am beginning my dissertation. My study will focus on the stories of Seventh-day Adventist women in pastoral ministry, especially why these women remain in ministry.

I understand you are a SDA woman in pastoral ministry. I would appreciate your completing the enclosed short questionnaire and returning it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope within one week of your receipt of this letter. If you wish to contact me you may do so at the numbers or address listed below. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Shirley Freed, at 269-472-6163 or e-mail at [freed@andrews.edu](mailto:freed@andrews.edu).

Please prayerfully consider your willingness to participate by completing the enclosed questionnaire.

Blessings,

Pastor Leslie Bumgardner  
Walla Walla College SDA Church  
P.O. Box 5  
College Place, WA 99324

Email: [leslieb@bmi.net](mailto:leslieb@bmi.net)  
Home phone: 509-527-0123  
Office phone: 509-527-2837

SDA Women in Ministry Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Home, work or cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Education – please list all post-high school degrees:

<u>Degree</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Institution</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Please provide the following information on each ministry position you have held:

<u>Position/title</u>	<u>Number of years</u>	<u>Full or part time</u>	<u>Salary or stipend</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Describe your call to ministry:

Share the highlights of your educational and ministry experiences:

If you have been a pastor for at least five years, would you be willing to continue to participate in my study if asked, including a face-to-face interview?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Calling/Preparation:**

Describe your calling to ministry.

Describe any occasions when someone either encouraged or discouraged you to enter or stay in pastoral ministry?

What experiences (educational, personal, interpersonal, or a combination) best prepared you for ministry in a local church?

#### **Ministry Experiences:**

In which ministry positions have you been the first woman at the church in which you served?

How were you received by the congregations in which you have served?

Describe some joys and challenges you have experienced in your ministry.

Have you experienced challenges that you attribute specifically to being a woman in ministry? If so, describe.

How does your family situation (being single/married, with or without children, with other family, etc.) make a difference in your ability to carry out your ministry?

#### **Supports:**

To whom do you go to process issues of ministry and yourself in ministry? How did you find them?

Tell me about your mentors in ministry. Who are they? How did the relationship develop?

How do you take care of yourself as a person in a pastoral position?

What support have you experienced in ministry? (i.e. groups, colleagues, family, friends; have you wanted more or less support than you have received)

In what ways could the church (i.e. GC, NAD, local conference or local church) provide greater support to you?

#### **Staying in/Leaving Ministry:**

How firmly committed are you to pastoral ministry in the SDA church?

Can you envision a situation that might "tip the scales" and cause you to leave pastoral ministry? What might that situation be?

When you consider why you have stayed in ministry, what internal and/or external influences, ideas or people have contributed to your staying?

Describe any occasions when you have considered leaving pastoral ministry. Why did you choose to stay?

If she has left and then returned: Why did you leave and then return to local church ministry?

#### **General:**

Are there particular joys or challenges in ministry that you have not yet had a chance to mention?

Is there a question that I haven't asked that you would like to answer?

How would you respond to a young woman coming to you to inquire about a career in pastoral ministry?

Describe your experience as a woman pastor using a metaphor, symbol or story.

Interview questions based on the United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study (Wiborg & Collier, 2001).

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Andrews University  
School of Education  
Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: Staying in Ministry: A Qualitative Study of Seventh-day Adventist Women Pastors

PURPOSE:

This study will explore with women who have chosen to stay in pastoral ministry in the SDA Church for a significant period of time, why they have done so.

PROCEDURE:

I understand that I will be interviewed. This interview will use open-ended questions dealing with my call to ministry and my experiences as a pastor. The interview will take between one and two hours. This interview will be recorded and transcribed. I also understand that no one but the interviewer and her advisor will know my identity. In all other instances a pseudonym will be used.

RISKS:

There are no known risks for participating in this study.

BENEFITS/RESULTS:

I understand that I will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study. I understand that the results may help church officials, other women in ministry and female theology students understand what aids the retention of SDA women clergy in pastoral ministry. I understand that the material collected will be a part of a dissertation.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I may discontinue at any time without penalty or prejudice. I also understand that there is no compensation in return for my participation. If I have any questions about this study I can contact the researcher, Leslie Bumgardner, at 509-527-0123 or e-mail her at [leslieb@bmi.net](mailto:leslieb@bmi.net). I have also been told that if I wish to contact the researcher's advisor I may contact Dr. Shirley Freed at 269-472-6163 or e-mail at [freed@andrews.edu](mailto:freed@andrews.edu).

Participants Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Witness \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Witness \_\_\_\_\_  
At: \_\_\_\_\_

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