

Ministers Council Task Force on Women in Ministry
Report to Ministers Council Senate
August 2011

Women in Ministry: Where are We Now?

BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Ministers Council Senate appointed a Task Force on Women in Ministry with the following aims:

- To develop a better understanding of the current realities ABC women in ministry face;
- To reassemble and lift up the biblical and theological work supporting women in ministry; and
- To develop strategies for advocacy in the Ministers Council, particularly with constituent councils.

The Task Force members were asked to commit to serving for a period of two years, after which the Task Force itself would be re-evaluated. Since the fall of 2009, the Task Force has met monthly by conference call. Members of the Task Force are:

Holly Vincent Bean, Convener
Alice Greene
Douglas Harris
Joe Kutter
Jane Moschenrose
Jamie Washam
Betty Wright-Riggins
Mary Young

This report offers the Task Force's findings, especially in relation to the first and third aims. We quickly realized that, since so much has been published on the subject of women in ministry, the second aim was a vast undertaking and not appropriate to our resources. Our report reviews the data we were able to find on American Baptist women in ministry, summarizes the more anecdotal information from conversation and comments with regional executives and provides a short conclusion. We have attached three appendices with more detail.

DATA ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN THE ABC

Working with the American Baptist Churches Information System (ABCIS) and Maureen Morrissey, the ABCIS Coordinator in the Office of the General Secretary, we have reviewed what the ABCIS shows. We confined our view to data on pastors rather than the full range of ministerial roles. We looked for not only the number of women serving as pastors, but also the percentage of women relative to men.

The data from a search in August 2010 shows that, for all ABC regions combined, women represent 9.8% of all pastors, including bi-vocational, interim and co-pastors. When associate or assistant pastors are added to the total, the percentage of women increases to 12.1%. The data shows that the ABC regions have 5,134 pastors, 501 of them women. The total of all pastors, including associates and assistants, is 5,768 and 699 of them are women.

Great variation exists throughout ABC regions. While there are women serving as pastors in every American Baptist region, the percentage of women pastors varies from a low of 1% in West Virginia to a high of 28.6% in Puerto Rico. Massachusetts has 43 women pastors, the highest number, and Oregon and Alaska have one woman pastor each, the lowest number. On average, the ABC has 14 women pastors per region. (See the Appendix for detailed charts of the numbers and percentages.)

To try to understand why the disparity between American Baptist women and men in ministry is so great, the task force sought more information about women of color in ABC ministry, women seminarians, women in the American Baptist Personnel Services (ABPS) system, and women in the ordination process.

ABCIS has some information on the ethnicity of its churches and pastors, but not on all. The available data shows that of all American Baptist women pastors, 47.7% are Euro American, 17.4% are African American, 10.4% are Hispanic, 2.2% are Asian Pacific, .4% are American Native, .2% are Haitian and 1.8% identified as “other.” At the same time, 20% of the total has no data about ethnic identity. When compared with the same data for American Baptist male pastors, the percentages are similar. For more details, see the charts in the Appendix.

The task force attempted to gather data on women in seminary, as well. We wanted to learn more about what happens when American Baptist women graduate from seminary and enter the ministerial “labor market.” Communication between Task Force member Mary Young and Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, PhD (Director, Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation, The Association of Theological Schools) revealed that from 2007 to 2009 the total female graduations in ABC schools were as follows:

2007 – 128

2008 – 124

2009 – 141

The ATS database identifies the following as ABC schools: American Baptist Seminary of the West, Andover Newton, Central Baptist, Colgate Rochester, Northern Baptist, Palmer and Shaw. ATS could not provide school-specific data, however. There is more to learn in this area. We are aware that there are American Baptist female seminarians in other schools, and, that the ATS schools named may have some female graduates who are not American Baptist. Furthermore, not all female graduates from American Baptist seminaries intend to serve in pastoral ministry.

Another avenue the task force followed was with the number of women in ABPS. We wanted to learn whether women were using that system to support their searches for

pastoral work. With the aid of Dwight Lundgren and his staff, we were able to compile the following:

ABPS Statistics

This data is from those in the system that are updated and up to 6 years out of date. Not included are people that have not updated over six years or those people who have retired and stated that they did not want to update (listed in the ABPS system as "INACTIVE.").

Total women in ABPS	591 (27%)
Total men in ABPS	1583 (73%)
Women listed as "Open to Move"	160 (27%)
Men listed as "Open to Move"	443 (28%)
Women listed as "Might Consider"	106 (18%)
Men listed as "Might Consider"	233 (15%)
Percent women seeking a call:	(45%)
Percent men seeking a call:	(43%)

"Open to Move" category only used for the statistics below.

Women seeking a call/currently employed	123 (77%)
Men seeking a call/currently employed	356 (80%)
Women seeking a call/unemployed	37 (23%)
Men seeking a call/unemployed	87 (20%)

An initial review of these numbers leads us to believe that, proportionately, women are using ABPS more than their male counterparts. There is more to learn in this area, as well.

In one final area, the task force looked for information from the regions regarding their experience with the ordination of women. We were curious about the relationship between ordination in a given region and the success women in ministry had finding a pastorate. A letter was sent to all regions requesting data from 2006 to 2010 on ordinations for both women and men. Only 6 regions sent us data on women and men seeking ordination, women and men being ordained and women and men finding pastorates in which to serve. The very limited data we received suggests that the number of women and men being ordained in a given region does not correlate closely to the proportion of women and men being called to pastorates in that same region. This is an area where more learning is needed.

ANECDOTAL INFORMATION FROM ABC REGIONS

Knowing that the data from ABCIS represented only a part of the story, we contacted a number of executive ministers in the ABC regions. In all, ten executive ministers from

regions across the country talked with members of our task force. We asked them to reflect on the status of women in ministry in their region. Their responses have been grouped to reflect the themes that consistently emerged.

- **The region's executive minister's role.** Search and call procedures may require that churches consider women's resumes.
 - For the past 20 years in Nebraska there has been a strong staff advocacy for women in ministry; women's profiles are always presented to search committees.
 - In Wisconsin, every search committee is encouraged from the beginning to be open to women in ministry. They are told they will receive profiles of both women and men and are strongly urged to consider the gifts of each potential candidate irrespective of gender.
 - In Great Rivers Region, the region staff insists that search committees receive profiles from women. Factors that work for or against considering a woman include: churches' looking for health insurance coverage from a working spouse, reluctance to accept arguments favoring women in ministry even with female church member, some women clergy's reluctance to consider the small, rural churches, and geographic limitations of the candidates' searches.
 - In Michigan, the region search coordinator always gives the search committee the brochure about women in ministry and encourages churches to call women by including women's profiles in every stack.
 - In Evergreen Baptist Association, the executive says, "Don't tell me not to bring women's names to you. Do I look like I'm not going to do that?" For non-Euro churches, she says, "Don't expect me not to bring women's names." But the resistance there is even greater than in Euro churches. The exec sees a slight increase in the willingness to look at women among Euro churches. With recent search committees, it has not been a big issue. In one church, the woman minister they had did not work out, but the church gave her a good severance, and (to their surprise) they called another woman who happened to be African American. They were happy with her when she left for her own reasons. In another instance, a strong male pastor brought a woman on staff and the church complained. When he retired, they hired a male minister after a 2-year search. This minister did not do a good job; he left after 4 years, saying the church should sell and close down. (Even his supporters thought he should go.) They resisted considering a woman at that point, but when the exec pushed them toward a particular woman candidate, the church agreed and has been very happy with her ministry. It's getting better for women but not without some work. If committees were to go with their natural instincts, they would revert to a habit of mind, which favors males.
 - In the Central region, the executive and region staff makes it a practice to offer the profiles of women to every congregation that is searching for pastoral leadership but he has watched frequently as the profiles of women have been systematically sorted from the pool. He expressed some frustration about the same factors as mentioned in Michigan.

- **The region's executive minister sets policy that can make an important difference.**
 - In Nebraska, the past 10 years has seen the excellent example of the competency and potential for exemplary leadership on the part of the recently retired Executive Minister Susan Gillies.
 - Great Rivers Region features women in the pulpit and as teachers for regional events.
 - In Indianapolis, the new Executive Minister is a woman.
 - In Maine, a task force of men and women was developed to encourage churches to call women as pastors. Their goal was to have 21 ABCOM churches call women as pastors by the year 2010. It was surpassed with 23 calls to women. At first, only women with seminary degrees were being called as pastors, but as more churches could only afford lay-trained pastors serving part-time, more women graduates of the ABCOM Institute for Ministry were called to serve as pastors of small churches. Support of the Regional executive Minister for advocacy efforts is very important. When he affirmed the work of the WIM advocate, complainers listened.
 - In Rochester Genesee, the executive has been able to keep the issue of WIM front and center in part due to his insistence that churches who desire the region's resources and help when calling pastors or other church staff must interview women. He does follow-up to maintain this stance.

- **Regional advocacy efforts can make a difference.**
 - In 2000, Maine hired a woman to serve part time on the region staff as an advocate for women in ministry in the region while she was serving in interim work. During that time, there was a task force that established an entity called AdWIM—Advocates for Women in Ministry—comprised of women and men who were willing to advocate for women serving as pastors. Her consulting position ended in 2008, but she continues on a volunteer basis to keep track of the numbers and changes and post the statistics on women in ministry at each ABCOM Annual Meeting. She maintains an email list of women in ministry and sends out pertinent information and invitations. She no longer produces a newsletter, but women still turn to her for encouragement and advocacy; she is able to speak for them and be heard at the regional level. Having a task force of women and men to set a goal, provide education, encouragement and advocacy does bear fruit. Having an infrastructure is critical. Without a regionally recognized position allowing a woman to fill the advocacy role, people won't listen. They don't much care about women gathering for mutual support either. Advocacy has to build bridges, not sequester the odd ones (women in ministry). What is needed is a coming together of women and men to move the whole system forward. An intentional group for mentoring women through the ordination process and into ministry does bear fruit; it was critical for providing support for those women whose sense of call was not being encouraged by the churches or the culture, and mentoring is a good way to help them prepare for ministry, with a special focus on the unique challenges women face.

- The Rochester Genesee Board of Directors has a rotation policy to include laywomen and every four years; the president of the Board is a clergywoman. When asked to preach in local churches the executive minister suggests he not and recommends a woman clergy person. At annual meetings and conferences sponsored by the region, women clergy are on the program in significant roles. A core of retired women pastors are active in the region and are often interacting with the churches of the region. Rochester ordains women clergy without a call; that was a Board policy change.
 - From the executive minister of Evergreen Baptist Association: In general, the men cannot remain silent or only go through the motions. The clergy network is just as important as anything the regional leaders do to make this change happen. We need male advocates to speak up on behalf of women in ministry.
 - In New Jersey, a part time position was created for an Associate Regional Pastor for Women in Ministry. The woman who serves in this capacity maintains some records about women in ministry in the region, sponsors an annual prayer breakfast and conducts workshops for and about women in ministry. She gives the New Jersey women clergy a person to call with ideas and issues. By maintaining this position, the region continues to lift up the concerns of WIM.
- **The effect of an interim minister who is a woman.**
 - Once churches have been led well by a woman minister, an important barrier may be broken. Personal experience of a particular woman minister can be mind changing. This has been strongly corroborated by the executive ministers of Great Rivers Region, Indianapolis, Maine, Rochester Genesee and Michigan.
 - It is wise to put more experienced women clergy in interim positions. The advocacy work in Maine supports this. The women in ministry advocate came into her interim work with 23 years of pastoral experience. She was able to create an effective advocacy network around the region only because she had a pretty clear sense of who she was as a pastor. There were two other women serving in special interims in Maine at the same time: they were just beginning in ministry and still trying to establish their own pastoral identities. If women in interim work will also further the cause of women in ministry, one may question whether or not inexperienced women are the best candidates for intentional interim work.
- **Geography and culture.** Differences in regional and ethnic cultures will affect openness to women clergy.
 - Nebraska is considered a conservative state both politically and theologically. Many Nebraskans listen exclusively to Christian radio, which is usually unfriendly to the idea of women in ministry. Many Nebraska churches are small, offer limited compensation, and are located in communities with limited job opportunities for clergy spouses. In the early days of the modern emphasis on women in ministry (late 1970s and early 1980s) there was for lack of better words a “militant feminism” that was attached to women in ministry for whatever reason. Lay people that were

exposed to that emphasis sometimes still remember the angry women of the time and are less apt to consider women in ministry because of it.

- The 2005 Wisconsin region meeting was a celebration of 100 years of women serving as pastors in ABC/WI congregations.
- Indianapolis, which just hired a woman executive minister, has seven conservative leaning churches that recently hired men, but several had female staff members. This year could prove to be interesting as four churches in the region will be in the search process.
- The executive minister in New Jersey reports that the more liberal churches are calling women as pastors, sometimes more than men. The more conservative churches are not. A couple of very strong African American churches are strongly staffed by women at every level other than senior pastor. One issue is that there are a variety of ordination processes within a variety of our cultural communities. For instance, in one African American church, a group of several seminary-educated women served on staff for several years without ordination until the senior pastor became familiar with the ABC process and then all entered the process at the same time.
- In Rochester Genesee, a primarily African American church has recently ordained two women who are visible in their congregation and are serving as models for other National Baptist churches in the area.
- The executive minister of Evergreen Baptist Association (EBA) reports that, in general, the Euro churches are pretty open to women. For example, 2 women's names were recently given as potential interims to a church with a bad experience with a woman minister and the church never objected. They have not asked for more names and could call another woman to be their minister. Resistance comes as some churches have ordained women deacons and have other avenues for women to be in leadership but would not seriously consider a woman for clergy positions. Women may be in the pulpits, may be unpaid associates; they may get ordained. However, the churches don't call them as pastors. Sometimes if a woman plants a church or gets the mantle from her father, they are accepted to serve as clergy. There are too many male pastors to select from
- Also from EBA: One way that things are changing is that earlier the executive minister (a woman) was rarely invited into pulpit. With the old guard leaving, that has changed radically, so that she is now regularly expected in the pulpit. She cannot predict what will ultimately break the barrier, except that if the male pastors start advocating in their preaching, it will open doors. There are some Asian churches coming open this fall and she is guessing there will be openness to calling a woman, as they are not an automatic "no" in those churches. They will probably look for men first, but then the preference is for the ethnic group over a male.
- The executive minister of the Central region reports that the primary obstacle seems to be the enormous power and inertia of tradition and practice. Though resistance is often couched in biblical or theological language, the primary realist seems to be the longstanding habits and practices of churches in the region. A key frustration is grounded in his perception that young women and men, who find it quite natural to encounter women in medicine

or women in the law or women executives will listen to a conservative religious “guru” and refuse to accept women in ministry.

- The presence and concentration of seminaries in a region may affect openness. Wisconsin’s executive minister reports that the region’s Central Baptist Theological Seminary/Wisconsin has proactively brought fully accredited theological education to Wisconsin, which has been a service to women and men. □
- **There is disparity between women being ordained and women being called to solo or senior pastorates.**
- **Resources and education:**
 - The women in ministry advocate in Maine wrote *JUNIA: A Storytelling and Bible Study Resource* in 2001-2002 and pilot-tested it in three churches before Interim Ministries-ABC published it. The goal was to help churches discover that the Biblical reasons for keeping women out of ministry were not the only way to read those passages and that the Bible actually supports God’s call for women and men to serve in ministry. Reaching out to women’s groups in churches with a *Junia* presentation did help a little to counter the resistance laywomen sometimes have toward having a woman pastor. Women need to be educated to provide a Biblical defense of the women-in-ministry question, because they will be asked, and usually in a confrontational tone of voice. Often women are naïve and don’t seem to realize that this call will always be an uphill climb. No, it’s not fair, but it’s the reality in evangelical circles.
 - Also in Maine, men were asked to serve in each association (except for two, where no men would do so) as advocates; they were supplied with copies of David Scholer’s pamphlet from ABWIM about women and men as equal partners. Most of these advocates are still in place in their associations and their Area Resource Ministers are able to call on them to converse with search committees about the Biblical issues concerning women as pastors. We still have a long way to go. There are clearly pockets, geographically, in Maine where the traditional evangelical interpretations hold sway. Even in churches where women have served successfully in the past, all it takes is one male pastor to come along and preach the literal interpretation of I Timothy 2:12, and all of a sudden, even people’s personal history with a woman pastor is wiped out for “what the Bible says.” Or a search committee will not consider a woman because one person in the church is opposed and nobody wants to upset that person. Sometimes the search committee did what they felt the Lord was leading them to do and that “one person opposed” left the church. Calling a woman as pastor does have repercussions within the church or in the community. We are still swimming against the tide and it is still easier to just call a man instead.
- **Interesting to note**
 - Women in one cultural group who find a call in churches of a different culture have enhanced the cross-cultural experience.

- We are in churches that are declining; if we continue to be behind the times culturally by not respecting and encouraging the leadership of women 30 years from now, the young people will not be with us.
- From Maine: Remember those little WIM pins? They seem silly, and yet, they were given to every woman who got licensed, commissioned, ordained or called to a pastorate. It was a nice way to affirm and celebrate. They were also given to every man who agreed to advocate for women in ministry. They would wear them at Regional meetings. Sometimes, that pin would start a conversation. At the very least, it sent a message that still needs to be sent. Otherwise, the news that God calls women, too, is quickly swallowed up by other clamors for men-only-in-ministry. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr., we will be judged not only for what we say, but also for our silence.

Conclusion

The Women in Ministry Task Force of the Ministers Council will officially disband with this report, but not without stating emphatically that intentional advocacy for women in ministry is still greatly needed. Our experience shows that there are many ways to support, educate and advocate for women in ministry among ABC churches and regions. We hope that each region will take actions that are most significant for them and we strongly urge all regions to do so. Not to act is to deny ABC churches the God-given fullness of leadership.

Appendix A

A list of the executive ministers interviewed and some data from their regions.

Appendix B

Data from the American Baptist Churches Information Services (ABCIS) on pastoral leaders by region and gender from August 2010.

Appendix C

Data in pie charts from the American Baptist Churches Information Services (ABCIS) on pastoral leaders by ethnicity and gender from August 2010.