

**FROM RIB TO ROBE:
WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

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On May 4, 1956, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Methodist Church's General Conference voted to grant women full clergy rights. Though Methodist women were already serving as local pastors and assigned supply, this legislation granted women the rite of ordination, a guaranteed appointment, and a pension plan. To many it seemed a radical move and the Methodist Church, the predecessor to The United Methodist Church, seemed to be putting itself at the forefront of promoting ecclesiastical gender equality. The day after the decisive vote, *New York Times* correspondent George Dugan wrote that during the debates, "several made it crystal clear that practical or not, women's rights were at stake."¹ Women's rights *were* at stake, and while it initially appeared that the 1956 delegates to the Methodist Church's General Conference had taken a progressive and enlightened step toward equality, a nuanced examination of past and current conditions reveals a denomination still struggling with various aspects of the role of women as ordained clergy.

Because of the centuries of tradition that it overturned, the strong opposition it faced, and the increasing numbers of female pastors and bishops, the Methodist Church's 1956 decision to grant women the rite of ordination may appear radical, but, in truth, it did not radically transform the church's understanding of gender or gender roles. This lack of transformation will be revealed through an examination of how Methodist women had served the church as leaders since its earliest stages and how arguments used in 1956 indicate that Methodists were responding to external pressures and never intended the official inclusion of clergywomen to make a large impact on the church. Furthermore, scientific studies of masculinity and femininity from this time indicated that pastoring could be considered inherently feminine according to modern conceptions of femininity. Surprisingly, particularly due to pastoring's nurturing character, female pastors are still expected to lead more like men. Recent statistics on clergywomen's salaries, appointments, and leadership styles prove that the quest for gender equality is far from attained in The United Methodist Church. Even though The United Methodist Church may intentionally seek diversity, it often succumbs to bias, conscious or not, that women are inferior to men at vocations that re-

¹ George Dugan, "Methodists Accept Women in Clergy," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1956.

quire management and administration.

The decision to include women as ordained clergy appears revolutionary in part because it seemingly reversed over eighteen hundred years of tradition. Women like Mary Magdalene may have accompanied Jesus during his ministry, but church tradition suggests that Jesus chose twelve men, not women, to be his disciples. While many women contributed in some fashion to the early church and the spread of Christianity, the church's founders and Apostolic Fathers are often assumed to be entirely composed of men. This legacy of men in positions of authority continued into the modern era as men have dominated the ranks of clergy and official church leaders. This would-be reversal could be particularly critical to Methodist theology as tradition is a key element of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.²

Many opponents of women's ordination based their arguments on both scripture and tradition. One passage used to support their argument is 1 Timothy 2:12-14: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."³ Most opponents of ordination interpret this scripture passage as a literal command that women should never have authority over men, and, therefore, that a woman should never be in a position of power, such as pastor of a church. They do not believe they are suppressing women; rather, they believe that general society's tendency to blur gender roles is fraught. However, it should be noted that in 1956 *The Hartford Courant* wrote: "Biblical quotations are cited by both opponents and proponents of a larger leadership status for women. But theologians are saying there is no Scriptural basis for limiting women's work in the church to menial and unofficial tasks."⁴ Nonetheless, opponents of women's ordination held firm to their stance of biblical literalism.

Though it was instrumental in gaining women the right to vote, an emphasis on women's role as mothers became a powerful tool for opponents of women's ordination. Practically sacrosanct, motherhood was considered to be the bedrock of both church and society. As early as 1924, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church approved women's ordination as local pastors, but *The Atlanta Constitution* reported the Conference "almost unanimously defeat[ed] a motion providing for admission of women to full privileges as itinerant ministers." The arguments made for not giving women all the privileges of men "stressed marriage and motherhood as bars to women's itinerant and conference membership." One gentleman even asked, "If the mother of John Wesley had entered itinerancy, where would

² The "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" is a term coined by historian Albert C. Outler in his 1964 biography of Wesley.

³ 1 Tim. 2:12-14, New Revised Standard Version.

⁴ "Women Gain Clergy Status Slowly; Idea Still Opposed by Many Groups," *The Hartford Courant*, August 18, 1956.

the great Wesley have been?”⁵ Methodist opponents of women’s ordination continued to use motherhood as justification for denying women full clergy rights. At the 1956 General Conference, some persons such as Dewey Muir of Illinois encouraged the conference to restrict membership “to unmarried women and widows . . . [and] upon marriage, Conference Membership of a traveling woman shall be discontinued.”⁶ As evidenced by this argument, many people believed that a woman could not fulfill both the duties of motherhood and the duties of an itinerant pastor.

With tradition, scripture, and motherhood seemingly in their hand, conservative Methodists strongly opposed women’s ordination in the Methodist Church in 1956. Ralph Taylor Alton, a delegate and future Bishop from the Wisconsin Annual Conference, even quipped that if women’s application process to be candidates for ordination was identical to that of a man’s, then the church had enacted “discriminatory legislation in favor of women.”⁷ Even some female lay delegates to the conference opposed giving women full clergy rights. Casting her lot with the losing side in the 1956 debates, Mrs. Henry Ebner of Atlantic City, a lay preacher herself, posed a key question to the conference: “how would you like a woman Bishop?”⁸ Ebner attempted to employ fear of slippery-slope consequences in order to encourage her fellow delegates to oppose the measure. Despite the significant opposition, however, the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church bucked these arguments and approved women’s ordination.

It was not by luck that the majority of delegates disagreed with Ebner and other opponents of women’s rights. Though the 1956 discussion was only three hours long, the debate for women’s ordination had carried on for many years. Some Methodist women pushed for ordination throughout the nineteenth century.⁹ In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church merged to form the Methodist Church, and every subsequent General Conference debated whether the church should admit conference membership to women. In 1952, woman’s societies from local churches around the country flooded the conference with requests.¹⁰ Even with these grassroots efforts, the General Conference continued to deny women full clergy rights. Consequently, the

⁵ “Methodist Women Gain Ordination as Local Pastors,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 10, 1924.

⁶ Lud H. Estes, ed., *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Church, held at Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 25-May 7, 1956* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1956), 688.

⁷ Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1956 General Conference*, 718.

⁸ Dugan, “Methodists Accept Women.”

⁹ See Phoebe Palmer, “Phoebe Palmer Asserts Biblical and Historical Support for Women’s Right to Preach, 1859,” in *The Methodist Experience in America, Volume 2: Sourcebook*, ed. Russell Richey, Kenneth Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 314-317. See Francis Willard, “Woman in the Pulpit” in *The Defense of Women’s Rights to Ordination in the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ed. Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), 17-172. Originally published by Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1889.

¹⁰ Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *History of American Methodism: Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964) 525.

Women's Society of Christian Service of the Methodist Board of Missions "authorized a year-long information campaign to be conducted on the local level to acquaint women with the problem."¹¹ After years of planning, swaying, and failure, proponents of women's ordination, women and men, finally triumphed in 1956.

The 1956 vote to allow women to be ordained opened a door that women have continued to walk through. According to statistics published by The United Methodist Church's General Board of Higher Education, "the number of clergywomen who serve the church has seen a dramatic increase."¹² This statistic includes clergywomen serving as pastors in local churches, but it also includes a few women in positions of leadership. For example, the number of female bishops has grown steadily since the first woman was elected in 1980. Currently, there are 15 female bishops in The United Methodist Church, which accounts for just under a third of the total.¹³ Consequently, the percentage of female bishops is approximately six percent higher than clergywomen in general, suggesting that The United Methodist Church has embraced women in positions of leadership.¹⁴

Itinerancy and guaranteed appointments have inspired women from Methodist and non-Methodist backgrounds to pursue ordained ministry within The United Methodist Church. The authors of *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* argue that the United Methodist Church has historically attracted women because full-status ordination "carries with it assurances of lifetime employment" and "the itinerancy system promotes mobility, making the 'ghettoization' of women in dead-end jobs difficult."¹⁵ Even if a woman does have to serve in a "dead-end" church, she will be moved and have a fresh start in a few years, though not necessarily at a healthier congregation.

These women play seemingly important roles in shaping the church's relationship to gender. Sociologist C. J. Pascoe writes that "individuals who deliberately engage in gender practices . . . that are at odds with their apparent sex category, challenge the naturalness and inevitability of a rigid gender order."¹⁶ According to this theory, because of the legislative action taken in 1956 that enabled women to serve as ordained clergy persons, all clergywomen challenge society's rigid gender order simply by serving in a vocation that men have historically dominated.

And yet, Methodism's long tradition of female leaders indicates that the

¹¹ George Dugan, "Methodist Women Ask Clergy Rights," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1955.

¹² "Numbers of Women Clergy Increasing Dramatically," General Board of Higher Education & Ministry, the United Methodist Church, accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.gbhem.org/networking/clergywoman-profile>.

¹³ "Frequently Asked Questions about the Council of Bishops," *The United Methodist Church*, accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.4572065/#Women>.

¹⁴ "Numbers of Women Clergy Increasing Dramatically," *United Methodist Church: GBHEM*.

¹⁵ Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M. Y. Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 81.

¹⁶ C. J. Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2007), 15.

1956 legislation may not have significantly altered the church's understanding of gender. Even though Methodist founder John Wesley did not condone the formal ordination of women, he asked many to serve as evangelists, lay preachers, and class leaders—a radical move for the eighteenth century. Wesley's opinion of women preaching evolved over time until he ultimately approved of it out of necessity and its benefits.¹⁷ Some scholars attribute Wesley's progressive stance toward women as a natural outgrowth of his relationship with his mother, Susanna.¹⁸ Methodist women continued to serve as leaders in the church during the nineteenth century. Helenor M. Davison was ordained a deacon by the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1866, and thirty years later, the Western Michigan Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church voted unanimously to grant women the rites of ordination.¹⁹ A unanimous decision makes a strong statement, begging the question: if an annual conference voted unanimously to give women full clergy rights sixty years earlier, was 1956 even radical at all?²⁰ Though it would be an overstatement to describe women's ordination as inevitable—it relied on many individuals' witness and work—Methodism's decision to ordain women should be understood in the context of its extensive historical roots regarding women in leadership.

Another historical argument that qualifies the radical nature of the 1956 vote was that Methodists were experiencing external pressure from the rest of society. Sociologists Mark Chaves and James Cavendish argue that “women's ordination conflicts are very responsive to cultural and social developments outside denominations.”²¹ The United States had already experienced first-wave feminism and a rise of women's involvement in the public sphere during World War II. Additionally, some denominations, including Congregational Christian Churches—the predecessor of the United Church of Christ—and the Disciples of Christ, had already decided to ordain women.²² Mrs. Edwin Anderson of the New England Annual Conference

¹⁷ Gwang Seok Oh, *John Wesley's Ecclesiology: A Study in Its Sources and Development* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 212.

¹⁸ Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 28.

¹⁹ “Rites of Ordination: Methodists unanimous in giving them to women,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 24, 1896; “Clergywomen: History,” General Board for Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, accessed December 29, 2014, www.gbhem.org/clergy/clergywomen/history

²⁰ It should be noted that the views on women's ordination of the Western Michigan Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church were not universally shared by all Methodists. The Methodist Protestant Church, one of the branches of the pre-1939 Methodist Church, was more progressive in regards to women in ordained ministry than the Methodist Episcopal Church and certainly than the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Indeed, one of the stipulations for the Methodists' union in 1939 was that “MPC clergywomen . . . yield their full clergy rights” (Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012], 184).

²¹ Mark Chaves and James Cavendish, “Recent Changes in Women's Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement on Intraorganizational Controversy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36.4 (December, 1997): 574.

²² Dugan, “Methodists Accept Women.”

argued in 1956, the "Methodist Church has always been able to adapt itself to change and should set an example in granting equal rights and opportunities of service to all its members regardless of sex. There is a definite trend toward giving Full Clergy Rights to qualified women, and I believe that Methodism should join that trend."²³ Even though her desire to "set an example" indicates that the Methodist Church appeared to be at the forefront of mainline denominations granting women equal rights, Anderson's insistence that they "join that trend" illustrates that Methodists were indeed aware of and responding to external pressures.

The 1956 General Conference did not transform the church's understanding of gender in part because that was never the intention of those advocating for change. The legislation regarding ordination was designed to allow a few select women who felt called to be clergy to pursue that course, but it was not assumed that there would ever be an equal number of male and female pastors. Lou Barnwell of the New York Annual Conference argued that "this privilege should evoke no fear that there will be a great group of these women making application."²⁴ In essence, Barnwell advocated for women's ordination in the Methodist Church under the premise that the legislation would *not* revolutionize the church: few women would choose to pursue the ordination track. Perhaps Barnwell's comments should be understood as merely strategic; by downplaying the effects of this legislation, it would seem less traumatic to those who opposed it and maybe garner a few extra votes. Regardless, Barnwell's comments reveal her belief that this change would not dramatically alter the makeup of Methodist clergy in the near future.

Recent scientific research on pastors' masculinity and femininity indicates that granting women the rite of ordination may not have been a large gap to bridge in regards to modern conceptions of gender. According to research on the dimensional model of personality by psychologists Hans Jürgen Eysenck and his wife Sybil Eysenck, men generally record higher scores than women on Eysenck's psychoticism scales, with psychoticism described as "uncaring and lacking in empathy."²⁵ Meanwhile, women generally score higher on Eysenck's neuroticism scales, with neuroticism described as "anxious, worriers, moody, and . . . emotional."²⁶ Further studies on British Methodist clergy indicate that male ministers "differ from men in general in terms of recording significantly lower psychoticism scores," indicating that "ministry may appeal particularly to men who value and display the tender-minded personality characteristics associated with femininity."²⁷ If the nurturing aspects of pastoral ministry are inherently feminine and attract male pastors

²³ *Journal of the General Conference 1956*, 707-708.

²⁴ *Journal of the General Conference 1956*, 708.

²⁵ Robbins, Mandy, and Leslie J. Francis, John M. Haley, and William K. Kay, "The Personality Characteristics of Methodist Ministers: Feminine Men and Masculine Women?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40,1 (March, 2001), 123-124.

²⁶ Robbins, et al., "Personality Characteristics of Methodist Ministers," 123-124.

²⁷ Robbins, et al., 126.

that display some degree of femininity, then it seems reasonable, perhaps even logical, that women are also allowed to serve as pastors.

According to the study's findings, the ministry may attract men and women who do not fit the normal confines of gender roles. Female Methodist ministers differ from women in general by recording significantly lower neuroticism scores, indicating that "ministry may appeal to women who value and display stable personality characteristics associated with masculinity."²⁸ Simply put, ordination may appeal to masculine women. The study notes an alternate interpretation by asserting the possibility that women who "wish to break into ordained ministry must themselves espouse certain masculine personality characteristics."²⁹ Ordination may either attract masculine women or encourage women to take on more masculine traits in order to succeed; regardless of the causal relationship, however, the correlation is clear.

The marital status of United Methodist clergymen and clergywomen support these findings. According to the 2009 "Lead Women Pastors Project Survey," only sixty-nine percent of women leading congregations with more than a thousand members were married compared to ninety-nine percent of men leading similarly-sized congregations.³⁰ For a male to be successful in a large church, it is almost a requirement to have a familial support base. Though likely not a primary explanation, one often overlooked reason could be the perception that families provide proof of a pastor's sexuality despite a potential tendency to display feminine characteristics.

Even though the 1956 General Conference voted down the limitation that only unmarried women could serve as pastors, it seems those ideas have prevailed. Some conservatives would argue that women serving in demanding, full-time jobs may be less able to fulfill a wife or mother's traditional duties, and that these factors limit potential mates and make a woman more likely to get divorced. Sociologist Beverly June French seems to agree that clergywomen's marriage partners may be affected by their vocation. French argues that "women ministers tend to be more androgynous and men who are married to women in the ministry are also more androgynous than is the norm."³¹ In other words, because clergywomen are often more masculine, they are more likely to develop romantic relationships with men who do not value traditional gender roles and norms, possibly due to their own feminine characteristics. The discrepancy between married female pastors versus married male pastors should also be attributed to misconceptions about motherhood and family life. Society's expectations that professional women maintain their child rearing role might lead some to believe that professional women have less time and energy for their vocation, although others would

²⁸ Robbins, et al., 126.

²⁹ Robbins, et al., 124.

³⁰ HiRho Park and Susan Willhauck, "Lead Women Pastors Project Survey Summary," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2009: 2, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/CW_LWPP2009essay.pdf.

³¹ Beverly June French, "The Impact of the Ordination of Women and Androgyny on Marital Adjustment" (M.S. thesis, University of North Texas, 1993), 70.

disagree with this perception.³²

Gender equality within the church has slowly progressed, but it still has not been reached. Though the number and percentage of clergywomen has increased in the last half-century, the figure is still well below half; as of December 2006, only 27 percent of active clergy women are female.³³ It is difficult to argue that the 1956 legislation secured gender equality within the church when today's clergymen outnumber clergy women by 46 percent of the total. A woman's decision to follow her call to ordained ministry despite knowing that she will be significantly outnumbered by her male colleagues is not the only hurdle that clergywomen have to face. Itinerancy may seem beneficial to women due to its guaranteed appointment and decreased likelihood that a woman will be subjected to only the most difficult churches, but, despite the benefits of an itinerant system, women are still generally paid less than men. According to 1998 statistics, the mean salary for United Methodist clergywomen was \$38,016, while the mean salary for clergymen was \$45,536. The General Board for Higher Education writes that even though the gender gap in terms of salary exists throughout the entire church, it "is generally larger in Southern conferences," and increases even more for racial and ethnic clergywomen.³⁴

One factor contributing to women's lower salaries is that women are underrepresented in large churches as senior pastors. A significantly higher percentage of women, 39 percent, serve as associate or co-pastors than does the percentage of male pastors, 13 percent.³⁵ In fact, while 81 of the denomination's largest congregations are led by women pastors, 1,055 are led by male pastors.³⁶ In other words, even though women make up almost 30 percent of total clergy, they only compose 14 percent of the lead pastors for the largest churches. This percentage continues to dwindle as the size of the church increases. For example, as of 2009 statistics, there was only one woman serving as the senior pastor of one of the hundred largest United Methodist churches.³⁷ Because the \$7,520 difference between salaries was calculated according to salary means and not medians, it could be that wage discrimination is an issue more for large churches than it is for pastors serving medium-sized churches; the median female may make the same amount as the median male while the predominantly male highest paid pastors pull

³² Hester Vair, "Work and Motherhood: Challenging or Reinforcing Gendered Dualisms?" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Brunswick, 2009), 9.

³³ Michelle Fugate, "Active Clergywomen in Local Church: 2006," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, (2006), 1, accessed November 12, 2013, http://www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/CW_ACTIVECLERGYWOMENLOCAL-CHURCH2006.PDF.

³⁴ Eric B. Johnson, "Salaries for United Methodist Clergy in the U.S. Context- Quantitative Analysis," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church (2010), 2, accessed November 17, 2013, http://www.bu.edu/shaw/files/2011/02/GBHEM_SalaryStudy.pdf.

³⁵ Zikmund, et al., *Uphill Calling*, 61.

³⁶ John Dart, "Breaking Glass Ceilings at Large Churches," *Christian Century* 126.13 (June, 2009): 14.

³⁷ "Lead Women Pastors Project," 6.

the average salary up.

Women have to overcome gender prejudice from members of their congregation as well as from a bishop's cabinet during the appointment process. As *Christian Century* article "Steps Forward and Back" notes, "once women are ordained, they may still face resistance in many big congregations."³⁸ Some of this resistance can be attributed to different leadership styles. Most women, almost 70 percent in one survey, believe that women share power more; however, only 16% of male pastors agreed with that statement.³⁹ Clearly, there's a difference in perception. Do these women actually share power more or are women's claims merely a reflection of society's expectations for women in general? Additionally, The United Methodist Church's "Lead Women Pastors Project Survey" says that most women claimed to "have to work harder for acceptance and leadership."⁴⁰ Whether women actually lead differently, perhaps more democratically, or simply that congregations are resistant to following women based on stereotypes, it is evident that women's leadership styles affect their ability to lead large churches.⁴¹

Scientific research on men and women's personalities indicates another reason why women may face more bias when serving a large church. As noted by a scientific study about British Methodist clergy, Hans Eysenck's psychoticism scales might lead one to believe that "male ministers would be better equipped for undertaking those aspects of ministry which require tough-mindedness, like chairing meetings and dealing with management issues . . . [while] female ministers would be better equipped for undertaking those aspects of ministry which require great emotional sensitivity, empathy, and warmth."⁴² Even though the Methodist study proved that this theory is false because Methodist clergymen exhibited fewer traditional masculine traits and Methodist clergywomen exhibited fewer feminine traits, the stereotypes about men and women in general still abound. Women are still often thought to be naturally inferior administrators or managers.

An aspect of this bias can be attributed to the perception that large churches are more complex and require more management. As United Methodist pastor Patricia Farris notes in journalist John Dart's article, "Breaking Glass Ceilings at Large Churches," "Staff dynamics, finances, complexity of committee structures and accountability, visibility in the community—all these

³⁸ "Women Clergy: Steps Forward and Back," *Christian Century* 123.22 (October, 2006).

³⁹ Zikmund, et al., *Uphill Calling*, 146.

⁴⁰ "Lead Women Pastors Project," 5.

⁴¹ The 1956 legislation did incur some unintentional effects on the church, particularly in terms of women's leadership. For example, the legislation, along with several other factors, may have accidentally devalued lay ministry. Methodist women drove the church's lay ministry throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Now, many women leaders—though certainly not all—serve the church as clergy, rather than as active lay members. Additionally, large numbers of women have moved into the secular work force. Consequently, the traditional volunteer base has decreased significantly in size. Thus, churches have become more staff dependent. Rather than being pushed from behind by the laity, churches are now often being led by the pastor.

⁴² Robbins, et al., "Personality Characteristics of Methodist Ministers," 126.

factors are exponentially more complex and challenging.⁴³ A pastor of a large church has to function as an administrator, coordinating the many facets of the church. According to the “Lead Women Pastors Project Survey,” there were only eight clergy persons who became lead pastors in their first appointment; of these eight, seven of them were men.⁴⁴ One factor could be related to networking—women may have fewer connections or relations with those making appointments. However, these results may also demonstrate that even when men and women have limited experience, women might be perceived as less capable of managing the financial and staff complexities of serving a large church. This stereotype has permeated much of general society as well; in the business world, only 1.2 percent of CEO’s of Fortune 500 companies are women.⁴⁵

However, despite the disparities in both the church and society, The United Methodist Church seems to be making conscious efforts to perfect itself in terms of social equality. In 2008, The United Methodist Church started the “Lead Women Pastors Project” and initiated several salary studies which have illuminated the discrepancies between men and women’s salaries and appointments. Approximately 90 percent of women who currently serve as pastors of a large congregation note that they were the first to serve that congregation, signifying that more clergywomen are being appointed to large churches than ever before.⁴⁶ This may prompt some to believe that the church does not need to proactively pursue clergywomen’s equality because it should occur naturally over time. For others, with almost seventy years of perspective, this change is not occurring fast enough. The Lead Women Pastors Project has also started a coaching plan to mentor and train potential female lead pastor candidates because many clergywomen indicated they felt as if they had no support structure. This could have contributed to the fact that a significantly higher percentage of women than of men have considered leaving the ministry.⁴⁷

Though women are still underrepresented as senior pastors in large churches, lead women pastors are still significantly more likely than lead men pastors to be offered up as a candidate for the episcopacy.⁴⁸ This statistic is certainly influenced by the fact that there are fewer lead women pastors, but it is also a reflection of the church’s desire for a diversified episcopacy. Because diversity is more visible in the selection of bishops, it may be easier at leadership conferences to embrace a sense of justice and inclusion as a result of both internal and external pressures. The vast majority of delegates to these conferences accept female leadership as a norm, whereas open prej-

⁴³ Dart, “Breaking Glass Ceilings,” 15.

⁴⁴ “Lead Women Pastors Project,” 2.

⁴⁵ Michael Robert Denis and Adrienne Dennis Kunkel, “Perceptions of Men, Women, and CEOs: The Effects of Gender Identity,” *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal* 32.2 (2004).

⁴⁶ “Lead Women Pastors Project,” 6.

⁴⁷ Zikmund, et al., *Uphill Calling*, 162.

⁴⁸ “Lead Women Pastors Project,” 2.

udice may be more prevalent in a local church unaccustomed to seeing a female pastor, let alone a female bishop. The United Methodist Church's desire for equality seems to be waging an endless battle against a subconscious bias that women are less capable of management.

An examination of granting women the rite of ordination also sheds light on the contemporary debate over homosexuality. Albeit it is quite unlikely to occur, if the 2016 General Conference were to grant homosexuals full clergy rights, it would be safe to assume that many advocates of social and ecclesiastical equality would celebrate this legislative change as a monumental occasion. Certainly, many pre-1956 women's rights advocates such as Francis Willard thought the same thing about women's ordination. However, similarly to how 1960s civil rights legislation does not mean that the United States is currently experiencing post-racial harmony, the experience of women's ordination suggests that the road to equality is long and difficult. Ordination is an important benchmark but not an end in the quest for equality. Whether in secular politics or holy conferencing, legislative change can enable equality, but it does not guarantee it.

Regardless of strong opposition based on tradition, biblical literalism, and motherhood, the 1956 delegates to the Methodist Church's General Conference valiantly took a progressive step toward women's rights when they convened on that Friday afternoon in May. Though delegates at the conference accurately predicted that this legislation would not open the floodgates for women serving as pastors, it did enable women who felt called to the pastoral ministry to fulfill their calling in The United Methodist Church. Women have continued, in increasing numbers, to answer the call to ministry. Their presence and their witness have slowly pushed the church in the direction of gender equality; by their service, many clergywomen have broken down their church members' prejudices and stereotypes about women in leadership. The 1956 legislative action cannot claim that it radically transformed the church's understanding of gender or gender roles as exhibited by both the historical context and modern research, but it is important because it may have opened the door for potential continual transformation. As demonstrated by women's ordination and other justice issues of inclusion and equality, social transformation often includes legislative change, but does not end with it—social transformation requires an ongoing process of intentionally striving to have the change embraced by people on an emotional and intellectual level.