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The Struggle for Acceptance: Continued Resistance to  
Female Ministers in Rural Holston Conference

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies  
East Tennessee State University

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In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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by  
Thelma J. Neal  
May 2007

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Dr. Marie Tedesco, Chair  
Dr. Joseph Corso  
Dr. Richard Blaustein

Key Words: Methodism, Ordained, Receptivity, Religion, Resistance, Women

## ABSTRACT

### The Struggle for Acceptance: Continued Resistance to Female Ministers in Rural Holston Conference

by

Thelma J. Neal

This study was conducted to determine if ordained women clergy experience resistance or lack of receptivity to their appointments. If so, does the resistance more readily occur with churches in a rural area? The focus of the study was women clergy of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church. My study reveals there are Methodist women clergy who continue to have churches outright refuse their projected appointments. My study also reveals that this problem is more often found with churches in rural areas where the culture is connected to long-standing scriptural interpretations and traditions that do not theologically and practically view woman as legitimate church leaders. Qualitative research methods were used in conducting this research. Six ordained women clergy women from the Holston Conference were interviewed. Statistical information was obtained from the *2005 Journal of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church*. I also researched past germane studies.

## DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this Master's thesis in honor of my mother, Catherine Neal. Born and raised in Southwest Virginia in the midst of the southern Appalachian mountains, the one-room school my mother attended ended with the third grade. But my mother is intelligent and she was blessed with the gift of wisdom. She stressed to her children the importance of obtaining an education. I am proud that I am a first-generation college graduate, and I give all recognition to my mother who encouraged me. Thanks Mom!

Second, I wish to dedicate this Master's thesis to my husband, Lloyd, and my daughter, Caitlin. They were my strength and the "rocks on which I stood." Their love, support, and encouragement never wavered through the past four past years—*anxiety and all!* I cannot thank my wonderful family enough. I am proud of you, too!

Third, I have met many wonderful people through the MALS program. I will remember them all with fondness. For her collegial support, friendship, and spiritual guidance when I needed it I want to thank my friend, Patti Marlow. Thanks for being there to support and encourage me, Patti.

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My studies in the Masters of Liberal Arts (MALS) program have allowed me to explore and experience Appalachia from many standpoints. It has been a four-year journey and understanding of the many complicated and fascinating facets of Appalachia. I will never be able to personally thank all of the professors enough who have enriched my life throughout this program. I especially want to acknowledge and thank Dr. Marie Tedesco for serving as Chair of my Thesis Committee. I also want to acknowledge and thank Dr. Joseph Corso and Dr. Richard Blaustein for their willingness to also serve as members of my committee.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Christianity was not exempt from the changes that occurred in the social system in America as a result of industrialization. As women began to enter into the ministry, they encountered resistance. Socially, advancement for women clergy was limited by lack of acceptance not only by male congregants, but often female congregants as well. Women faced a male-dominated religious system reluctant to empower women and accept women as leaders of the church. Culturally, rural areas resisted changing their perception of woman as helpmate to man to that of leader. This perception interfered with the development of women's leadership potential within the church. For the purpose of this thesis, the study focuses upon ordained women clergy of the United Methodist Church, and more specifically the Holston Conference. Although women served in pulpits as lay ministers, led congregations, and conducted revivals long before the late-1920s, they were not allowed to hold membership in the governing body of the Methodist denomination.<sup>1</sup>

As someone who has lived and been a member of churches in both rural and urban areas, I am acutely aware of the resistance some congregants have toward women in the pulpit. I have heard the comments against women preachers many times. For instance, not too many years ago, a female friend told me that she did not think that women should be allowed to be preachers. She said she preferred a male preacher, but she could not give a specific reason why she felt that way. I am reminded of another example that occurred around six years ago. While I was a member of a small Methodist church situated in one of the rural communities of the Holston Conference, a

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 351.

female member informed me one day that if the preacher were to ask a woman preacher to substitute for him that he would certainly be looking for another job. It was her contention that some of the older folks would never accept a woman preacher.

I could not understand the resistance that I know exists when it comes to the appointing of female pastors to certain churches. I wanted to understand better why churches would be resistant to having a woman in the pulpit. I also wanted to determine if this resistance had a specific connection to the rural environment.

The hypothesis of the study is that ordained women clergy in the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church have difficulty being appointed to some of the churches of the conference because congregants prefer a male pastor in the leadership position within the church. Small churches located within rural areas served by the conference are most resistant. This resistance appears to be attributed, at least in part, to long-standing traditional interpretations and teaching of scripture entrenched in the culture of the area. Historically, these interpretations identified the woman's role as that of housewife, mother, helpmate, and subservient to man, and not as leader of the church. These biases continue to exist because rural areas are more prone to resisting change and outside influences.

Resources used to research the subject included the following: published material including studies, histories, articles; the *2005 Journal of the Holston Conference*; and, formal interviews. These sources provided valuable historical as well as current information. Information obtained ranged from that on the roots of Methodism in England to the establishment and growth of Methodism and ordination of women in America, to the history of the Holston Conference and ordination of women clergy there. Most important to this research was the interviewing of six ordained women clergy of the Holston Conference. Interviews were

conducted to obtain personal and current information regarding the appointment system, as well as their experiences as ministers.

Chapter Two provides the reader a historical overview of Methodism and the Holston Conference. This chapter includes a brief history of the roots of Methodism in England and the founding of the Holston Conference. The overview of Holston Conference also reveals a connection to the rural environment of the Southern Appalachian region of the country. Chapter Three contains information on the history of women preachers in the colonies. It also contains a brief overview of the process of ordination today and the impact the feminist movement had on women becoming ministers. Chapter Four covers the various problems that ordained women clergy encountered throughout American Methodist history. Chapter Five provides the results of the interviews conducted with the Holston Conference female clerics. Chapter Six contains the conclusions drawn from this research study.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF METHODISM AND HOLSTON CONFERENCE: 1725:2007

#### Synopsis of Methodism in the Colonies: 1725-1783

The roots of Methodism can be traced to the eighteenth century in Great Britain and its founder Reverend John Wesley (1703-91). Wesley was an Anglican clergyman and Christian theologian. His heritage was of the Oxford, England, elite that naturally placed him in a high class of distinction. In 1725, when Wesley was only twenty-three years of age, he began to experience a conversion to evangelistic faith in Christ that would eventually set into motion the theological foundation of what would become known as the Wesleyan Movement. Wesley became an ordained deacon in the Church of England, and in 1726 he accepted a fellowship at Lincoln College.<sup>1</sup>

Methodism became defined when Wesley's brother, Charles, and some of his colleagues formed a Bible Study group. Albert Outler remarks that the group considered nicknames and among these was, "The Holy Club, The Reforming Club, Bible Moths, Methodists, Supererogation Men, Enthusiasts. Methodists was the name that stuck fastest."<sup>2</sup> John Wesley became the leader of this study group and did not particularly like the label of Methodist; however, he agreed to the name. Wesley then defined "Methodist" as one who believed and lived the principles associated with Christianity—that is salvation, faith, and good works.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley: A Representative Collection of His Writings*, Library of Protestant Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 7- 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 7- 8, 27.

In 1735, John Wesley was invited by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) to transfer the “Holy Club” to the Georgia colony. The intention of this invite was so they could become missionaries to the Indians and colonists. Only four out of the group accepted the invitation. Consequently, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Benjamin Ingham, and Charles Delamotte traveled to America. With high expectations, they arrived in Savannah, Georgia, in February, 1736. Outler explains, however, Wesley considered the mission a failure. The colonists perceived the Methodists to be inadequate in their functions and John Wesley to be a tactless pastor. John and Charles Wesley left Georgia arriving back in England in February, 1738. Apparently, though, John Wesley had personal reasons for his quick departure. Because of a failed love affair, Wesley returned to England a man who was hurt, embarrassed, and full of despair. This was a difficult position for someone who had for most of his life worked towards perfection.<sup>4</sup>

John Norwood explains that “early Methodist immigrants appeared in America between 1763 and 1776,”<sup>5</sup> and Methodist Societies initially rooted in the vicinity of Maryland and New York City. Many immigrants, mostly of lower economic status, migrated farther inland to inhabit the wilderness. The Methodists were willing make the sacrifices necessary to follow the frontier expansion, and as Webb Garrison noted, “Wherever the settler went with his ax and plow, the circuit rider followed with his Bible.”<sup>6</sup> By the time of the War of Independence, Methodist churches had been established in five of the southern colonies, as well as New York City and its

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Webb Garrison, "A New Church in a New Nation," in vol. 1, *The History of American Methodism*, ed. Emory Stevens Bucke (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 238.

surrounding area.<sup>7</sup> Garrison indicates that, “at least three factors, then, combined to give Methodism a superior thrust toward the interior of the continent: doctrines congenial to emerging optimism and nationalism, extreme mobility, and abundant man power.”<sup>8</sup>

The beginnings of American Methodism depended upon laymen. Methodist preachers were not required to have formal education. However, according to Donald Mathews “if the candidate demonstrated clearly to the annual conference of ministers that he had a talent for preaching and governing, reasonable intelligence, ambition, and a call to preach, he was accepted as a candidate and sent through the various stages of Methodist leadership. . . . In the final stage of training, the young man was apprenticed to an elder on a circuit and learned from him.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1769, two appointed missionary preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore, arrived from England. In 1771, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright arrived in America. Francis Asbury was destined to become the leader of the American Methodists and to become known as the father of American Methodism.<sup>10</sup>

#### Synopsis of the Development of American Methodism: 1783-1968

A peace treaty that ended the War of Independence was signed on September of 1783. Up until then, “the Methodist societies in America had depended upon English Methodism for leadership and upon the colonial clergy of the Church of England for the sacraments.”<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 237-238.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>9</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 85.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 70, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Spellman, “The Formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” 185.

American colonists, from the poorest classes to the elite classes, welcomed new leadership and the opportunity to organize their own churches. Hence, the era leading to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church had arrived.<sup>12</sup> The church's formal independence from England and the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church officially transpired during the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland (December 24, 1784- January 2, 1785). John Wesley deployed the first ordained and commissioned general superintendent, Thomas Coke, to America to assist with the newly-created Methodist church. Wesley instructed Coke to ordain Francis Asbury as general superintendent. Asbury would then become general superintendent. It was Wesley's intention to have both Coke and Asbury serve as joint superintendents. Both would remain under the leadership of the Church of England. Asbury, however, agreed to become a general superintendent only if the preachers in America were allowed to elect him. He knew the American clergy would not recognize his appointment by a cleric from England. Being elected by the American Methodist preachers meant he would be independent from the leadership of Wesley and the Church of England. With reluctance, Wesley agreed to this arrangement. In 1788, Asbury personally had the title of general superintendent changed in the Methodist Disciple to "bishop."<sup>13</sup> At the recommendation of John Wesley, the Episcopal mode of church government was recommended and adopted.<sup>14</sup>

Brewer reveals that early "Methodism concentrated along the eastern seaboard. Its congregations were relatively isolated from the rest of society. Its membership was drawn

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<sup>12</sup> Spellman, "The Formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church," 185, 205.

<sup>13</sup> Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 98-100.

<sup>14</sup> Philip J. Allen, "Growth and Strata in Early Organizational Development," *The American Journal of Sociology* 68, no. 1 (July 1962): 43.

predominantly from the lower classes of early American society.”<sup>15</sup> Richard Carwardine claims, though, that “with its emphasis on the ability of all men to search for and find salvation—and from its readiness to appeal to the poorer classes in American society, the Methodist Episcopal Church grew rapidly. Reaching the figure of 250,000 members in 1820, by 1830 the church had nearly doubled in size.”<sup>16</sup>

During the colonial period slavery was an accepted institution of American life. There were slaveholders in both the northern and southern parts of the country. Industrialization had begun to redefine the North and dependency upon slavery had become less and less of a necessity.<sup>17</sup> Planters in the South, however, became more dependent upon slave labor, especially to run the farms and plantations. And, as Deborah Vansau McCauley comments, “the Episcopal Church had been historically the church of the slave owners, by the 1840s most slave owners were Methodists. . . .”<sup>18</sup> As of the Methodist General Conference of 1840, there was only a small northern anti-slavery group within the conference and it had little desire to make slavery a major issue for its southern counterpart. The General Conference purposely elected men to the high offices who were not slave owners in order to help avoid problems associated with slavery. But, within four years the attitude on the part of the northern delegates had shifted.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Earl D. C. Brewer, “Sect and Church in Methodism,” *Social Forces* 30, no. 4 (April 1952): 404.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Carwardine, “The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the ‘New Measures,’” *The Journal of American History* 59 (Sept. 1972): 330.

<sup>17</sup> Naphatali Luccock, Charles X. Hutchinson, and Robert W. Goodloe, *The Story of Methodism* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 483-84

<sup>18</sup> Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 117.

<sup>19</sup> Luccock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe. *The Story of Methodism*, 336-37.

At the General Conference of 1844, a clash of the pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions ensued because one of the five bishops, James O. Andrew from Georgia, had acquired slaves through marriage. The General Conference voted to suspend Bishop Andrew. When this happened, the southern delegates filed a Plan of Separation. This plan called for the separation of the annual conferences in slaveholding states from the Methodist Episcopal Church. This action resulted in the formation of a separate ecclesiastical structure. Thus, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was created.<sup>20</sup> As Luccock et al. comment, the technical possession of slaves by Bishop Andrew “became the rock on which the church split.”<sup>21</sup> McCauley makes note of the tremendous growth of Methodism and states that, “by 1850, the Methodists would be the largest Protestant denomination in the nation, and in the South second only to the Southern Baptists.”<sup>22</sup>

After the Civil War ending in 1865, healing began taking place in the nation. Conditions for reuniting the two Methodist churches appear more favorable. The northern General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North adopts a resolution to convey fraternal greetings to the brethren in the Southern church.<sup>23</sup> Up until then, reunion between the northern and southern conferences was unlikely. However, in 1894 the southern General Conference submits a proposal to establish the Commission on Federation. This commission was established to deal with the adjustment of overlapping territory within the northern and southern conferences. The general conference of the Northern Church agreed to the establishment of the Commission in 1896. This Commission on Federation resulted in creating an agreeable

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<sup>20</sup> Harriet Jane Olson, ed. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Luccock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe, *The Story of Methodism*, 337.

<sup>22</sup> McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Luccock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe, *The Story of Methodism*, 486-89.

atmosphere between the two conferences. Consequently, in 1910 representatives from both churches were appointed by the Commission to study the viability of a plan of union. This commission signaled the onset of a unification movement. The commission also developed a tentative plan of reorganization.<sup>24</sup> In 1916, the Joint Commission on Federation was replaced by the Commission on Unification. The general conferences of both churches met in 1924, at which time a plan of unification was strongly approved. Discussions and negotiations continued until 1939.<sup>25</sup>

After nearly one hundred years of separation The Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.) and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E.S.) embarked upon formal reconciliation and reunion. Also included in this union was the Methodist Protestant Church.<sup>26</sup> On April 26, 1939, the Uniting Conference was held in Kansas City, Missouri. As outlined in the “Plan of Union” the new name of the church became The Methodist Church.<sup>27</sup> With this union of the three major protestant denominations, The Methodist Church statistically became the largest Protestant church in the nation with a membership of over eight million.<sup>28</sup>

According to research by James Smylie, “The United Methodist Church was formed out of two unions, one in 1939 which involved the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, the

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<sup>24</sup> John M. Moore, “The Story of Unification,” in *Methodism*, ed. William K. Anderson (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1955), 267.

<sup>25</sup> Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 360-61.

<sup>26</sup> Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 406-09.

<sup>27</sup> Luccock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe, *Story of Methodism*, 494.

<sup>28</sup> Weigle, “The Challenge of the Future,” 294.

Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, and another in 1969 which brought together the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.<sup>29</sup> Although the Evangelical United Brethren<sup>30</sup> had been in discussion with different denominations, its Wesleyan influence, similarities of the doctrines, liturgical ritual, and politics, provided a positive ecumenical foundation for these churches on which to build a stronger denomination if union occurred.<sup>31</sup> Formal negotiation between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church began in 1956; however, it was not until March 1958 that a joint commission first met in Cincinnati, Ohio. The merger meetings continued through the 1960s. Twelve years after the inception of the idea of union, merger became a reality at the constituting general conference in Dallas, Texas, April 1968.<sup>32</sup> This union made the United Methodist Church one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world with approximately 11 million members.<sup>33</sup>

#### Chronicle of Holston Conference: 1783-2007

The American Methodist preachers who functioned under an itinerant system traveled the south and west by way of horseback. The itinerant system was well-suited to the frontier as it allowed the preacher to be mobile and to follow the westward movement. The route of the

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<sup>29</sup> James H. Smylie, "The Witness and Experience of Other Churches," in *The Ordination of Women: Pro and Con*, eds. Michael P. Hamilton and Nancy S. Montgomery (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1975), 86.

<sup>30</sup> Specific churches will not be discussed within the historical overview of Methodism. The black Methodist churches will not be discussed and the United Brethren Church becomes important only after 1968 when merger occurs .

<sup>31</sup> Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 425.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 426-29.

<sup>33</sup> Olson, *The Book of Discipline*, 19.

preacher was known as a “circuit.” The circuit was then made up of “appointments” or “preaching places” as societies were quickly established in the various communities.<sup>34</sup> Because Francis Asbury knew that success for Methodism in America resided in movement west he encouraged the Methodists towards movement.<sup>35</sup>

As Methodism penetrated the Appalachian Mountains, Holston country became only one of the first circuits created.<sup>36</sup> The minutes of the 1783 General Conference mentions Holston for the very first time, and Richard Cameron states that Holston “became the name of the oldest circuit west of the mountains.”<sup>37</sup> Circuits were often named according to streams or nearby rivers. Lawrence Sherwood states that “Holston refers to the region of southwestern Virginia and eastern Tennessee.”<sup>38</sup> Jacob Payton also discloses that, “between the conferences of 1773 and 1784 the number of circuits increased from 6 to 46; the number of preachers from 10 to 83; and the membership from 1,160 to 14,988. Methodists in six colonies had, by 1784, lengthened across nine states. . . advancing the outposts of Methodism to the Holston Country in Tennessee.”<sup>39</sup> The quick membership growth of Methodism in these areas was primarily attributed to the religious revivals that were so popular at this time<sup>40</sup>

Holston country played an important role in the expansion of Methodism in the west. Initially, Holston country included only one circuit, which was called the Holston Circuit. This

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, “The Itinerant Ministry,” 167.

<sup>35</sup> Sherwood, "Growth and Spread," 360-61, 376.

<sup>36</sup> Cameron, "The New Church Takes Root," 289.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>38</sup> Sherwood, 368.

<sup>39</sup> Payton, "Methodism's Spread in America," 67-68.

<sup>40</sup> Sherwood, "Growth and Spread," 364.

circuit was located on the New River and upper waters of the Holston River. Because of the stronghold Methodism gained in Holston country, the Holston Circuit divided in 1787 to create an additional circuit located on the lower waters of the Holston and Nolichucky River. The new circuit was named the Nolichucky Circuit. By the end of the 1787-88 conference years, the conference created another circuit within Holston, the New River Circuit.<sup>41</sup>

According to Isaac Martin, by 1802 Holston Circuit encompassed what are now the counties of Sullivan, Hawkins, and Grainger, in Tennessee. At that time, the Holston Circuit was under the jurisdiction of the Western Conference. In 1812, the Western Conference divided, at which time the Tennessee Conference was established. Holston Circuit then came under the jurisdiction of the Tennessee Annual Conference.<sup>42</sup>

The Tennessee Conference experienced tremendous growth especially in Holston country. A division occurred and with this division Holston Conference was officially established at the general conference of 1824. As Martin indicated, with the division the Holston Conference now included “that part of the Tennessee Conference lying east of the Cumberland Mountains, covering all of East Tennessee, and all of Virginia west of New River and reaching out into North Carolina to Black Mountain and Asheville.”<sup>43</sup> The newly-established Holston Conference proceeded to revamp its jurisdictions. And, in 1824 the Abingdon, Knoxville, and French Broad districts were created. By including French Broad, which had been dropped from

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 360-61, 376-77.

<sup>42</sup> Martin, *History of Methodism*, 21-22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 34.

the conference a year earlier, Holston Conference expanded its jurisdiction into North Carolina.<sup>44</sup>

Rooted in the Southern Appalachian region, the Holston Conference was not exempt from the upheavals being experienced in society at that time, especially because of the Civil War. The Holston Conference did not split in 1844 when the Methodist Episcopal Church itself divided. This division of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as explained earlier, essentially resulted in the creation of two churches--the Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.) that incorporated those churches located in the northern part of the country, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E.S) that incorporated those churches that were located in the southern part of the country.<sup>45</sup>

In 1865, the inevitable split of the Holston Conference occurred. The division of the Holston Conference resulted in the formation of the two separate and individual Holston Conferences—the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.) and the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E.S.) Because of this division, Patton explains, “there were, now, two Holston Conferences; one of these lying largely in East Tennessee, the other also lying in East Tennessee, but spreading out into Western North Carolina, Southwest Virginia, and the southern end of West Virginia.”<sup>46</sup>

By 1870, the line of division was completely defined. Now there were two separate Methodist churches functioning within the same area. Regarding this situation Martin remarks, “thus, it came to pass that to nearly every charge in East Tennessee two preachers were sent. One

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 98.

of these was sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church; and one was sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South”<sup>47</sup> The dual appointments certainly exasperated the already unhealthy situation between the northern and southern churches. There are historical accounts of physical attacks on preachers. There are recorded instances of preachers who were whipped and beaten ruthlessly and left in the woods. Often mobs of dissenters were waiting for preachers when they showed up to the church.<sup>48</sup>

The industrial development in the area covered by Holston Conference had not greatly changed the economic and social condition of the area in general. East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia comprised a rural region. The great majority of the people lived in the country, and they were essentially a rural people. In 1900, with 606 southern Methodist churches in Holston Conference; approximately four-fifths of these churches were small one-room buildings that were classified as rural churches.<sup>49</sup>

Martin also notes that the division did not appear to hinder the good work of the Methodist churches. During the twenty years that followed, membership, circuits, and supply preachers increased in Holston Conference. Also, the establishment of colleges and schools occurred.<sup>50</sup> With the creation of the Methodist Church in 1939, the two Holston conferences united and became one conference again under the newly-organized church.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 121-23, 145

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>51</sup> Robert L. Hilten, *Pillar of Fire: The Drama of Holston United Methodism In A Changing World* (Johnson City: Commission on Archives and History, Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church, 1994), 115.

According to information obtained from the conference *2005 Journal*, Holston Conference currently resides under the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. Geographically it includes east and northeastern Tennessee and southwest Virginia. It is divided into the districts of Abingdon, Big Stone Gap, Tazewell, and Wytheville in Virginia, and the districts of Chattanooga, Cleveland, Johnson City, Kingsport, Knoxville, Maryville, Morristown, and Oak Ridge in Tennessee. Although there is one church located in Georgia, the conference *2005 Journal* does not reflect it; therefore, for the purpose of this research, statistics involving Georgia have not been included.<sup>52</sup>

Residing primarily within the southern Appalachian region, a majority of the Holston churches are located within remote areas.<sup>53</sup> There is not a distinct and concise description of rural; however, rural areas are those areas the Bureau of the Census does not classify as urban. Before the census of 2000, the U. S. Census defined urban area as, “places of 2,500 or more persons incorporated as cities, villages, boroughs.”<sup>54</sup> Areas with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants are thus rural areas. Information obtained from the Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, reveals that with the Census of 2000, the bureau revised rural and urban classifications. Even though the definition changed, “the basic concept remains intact, namely that rural includes open country and small settlements of less than 2,500 persons.”<sup>55</sup> As of the Census 2000, classification of urban is, “all territory, population, and housing units located

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<sup>52</sup> “Business of the Annual Conference,” in *The 2005 Journal of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church*: Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Session Held in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina 12-15 June 2005, ed. Grady C. Winegar (Knoxville: Holston Conference Media Distribution Center, 2006), 141, 148, 242-43.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “Urban and Rural Definitions,” *U. S. Census Bureau* [database online]; available from <http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urdef.txt>; Internet; accessed 7 September 2004.

<sup>55</sup> “Measuring Rurality: New Definitions in 2003,” *Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture* [database online]; available from [www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/NewDefinitions/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/NewDefinitions/); Internet; accessed 7 September 2004.

within an urbanized area (UA) or an urban cluster (UC). It delineates UA and UC boundaries to encompass densely settled territory.”<sup>56</sup> Rural is associated with agriculture, open countryside, and undeveloped landscapes. According to Beaulieu et al., the socioeconomics of rural areas have a tendency towards low incomes, production jobs, inadequate educational and health care systems, a high percentage of persons receiving welfare payments, and lack of economic development.<sup>57</sup> The farmlands, small communities, small towns, and countryside are sparsely populated and “as the population becomes sparse there is not only a higher ratio of churches to population (and consequently smaller churches), but also a lower ratio of churches.”<sup>58</sup>

Because of the remoteness associated with rural areas, the church’s existence is important. Laverne Burchfield acknowledged the influence of the church on the vitality of rural community life in providing “spiritual, social, and recreational satisfactions.”<sup>59</sup> Rural communities have retained certain traditional views relating to woman’s role in society and “individuals living in the South and living in more rural areas are significantly less likely to endorse principles of gender equality. These differences stem from long-standing, social differences and attitudes toward gender equality.”<sup>60</sup> Women clergy would have more challenges in rural churches because as Mark Chaves reveals, “individuals living in rural areas are less

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<sup>56</sup> “Census 2000 Urban and Rural Classification,” *U. S. Census Bureau* [database online]; available from [http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/ua\\_2k.html](http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/ua_2k.html); Internet; accessed 12 March 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Lionel J. Beaulieu, Glenn D. Israel, and Ronald C. Wimberley, "Promoting Educational Achievement: A Partnership of Families, Schools, and Communities," in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. David L. Brown and Louis E. Swanson (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 282, 284, 291.

<sup>58</sup> Horace C. Hamilton, “Some Factors Affecting the Size of Rural Groups in Virginia,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 36 (1930): 426.

<sup>59</sup> Laverne Burchfield, *Our Rural Communities* (Chicago, The University of Chicago, 1947), 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 847

supportive of gender equality as a goal; as a result, rural denominations might be expected to be more resistant to ordaining women."<sup>61</sup>

### Conclusion

Methodism was initially established in the America colonies through the inspiration of John Wesley of the Church of England or Anglican church. The Methodist circuit rider followed the frontier expansion in America. He took the Bible to the frontier immigrants settling the remote areas of the country. The first Methodist church in America, the Methodist Episcopal Church, was established after the War of Independence in 1784.

From 1784 onward, the Methodist denomination experienced many changes. These changes included a complete split, a reunion, reorganization, and merger. In 1968, the final to date change occurred with a merger that resulted in the creation of the United Methodist Church.

Methodism moved westward into the remote areas of the Appalachian region. The Holston Country was one of the first circuits established along the New River and Holston River in southwest Virginia and eastern Tennessee. The Holston Country was under the jurisdiction of the Tennessee Conference. Methodism flourished in the Tennessee Conference and a split of the conference occurred in 1824. With this split, the Holston Conference of The Methodist church was then created. Today, the Holston Conference serves churches located predominantly within southwest Virginia and northeastern Tennessee. Holston Conference is under the jurisdiction of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the General Conference and has 914 churches located throughout the predominantly rural areas of the middle and southern Appalachian region.

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<sup>61</sup> Mark Chaves, "Ordaining Women: The Diffusion of An Organizational Innovation," *The American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 848.

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN PREACHERS: THE COLONIES AND THE STATES: 1712-2007

#### Women and Early Methodism: 1712-1840

The public ministry and private witness of Susannah Wesley influenced John Wesley and his perception of the role of women in religion. Susannah Wesley used sermons her husband Samuel had written and delivered them to her children. Others outside the family heard of her teachings and began joining her and her children. These small gatherings grew in numbers. In a letter to her husband in 1712, Susannah spoke of there being as many as 200 attendees, with many being turned because of lack of room.<sup>1</sup>

As the Wesleyan movement and the Methodist church developed, John Wesley was well aware that the majority of congregants were women. He was also aware that it was the women who evangelized, conducted meetings, and taught Sunday school. Wesley, however, set limitations for women. He prohibited women from preaching, quoting text, or speaking continually without a four or five-minute break.<sup>2</sup> During Wesley's time it was unacceptable for women to speak in public. These women came under great scrutiny, especially by the men. Earl Kent Brown also refers to women using "exhortation." In other words, women strongly advised or encouraged repentance and being saved.<sup>3</sup> Lynn Lyerly speaks of women having "voice and

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemary S. Keller, "Women and the Nature of Ministry in the United Methodist Tradition," *Methodist History* 22, no. 2 (1984): 101-102.

<sup>2</sup> Carl J. Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 5, 20-21, 23.

influence, usually without official office, always without universal approval, and persistently with determination and courage.”<sup>4</sup>

Opportunities for involvement of women in Methodism developed as a result of John Wesley’s method of organizing local societies or religious groups. He then divided these groups into smaller local bands and classes. Opportunities to speak occurred especially during the absence of resident clergy. Women were allowed to participate in casual conversation and to speak before small groups regarding religious matters. They also conducted band meetings, class meetings, and Sunday school class discussions. As Vicki Collins exclaims, “Methodist communities evolved where women spoke publicly in a number of roles.”<sup>5</sup>

There were many women pioneers of early Methodism in England and, as Barbara Troxell informs us, “Most of these Wesleyan women functioned as preachers, pastors, and evangelists without the benefit of ordination.”<sup>6</sup> Sarah Crosby was probably the most renowned of these. Even though she conducted class meetings and spoke before groups of hundreds of persons. Wesley did not acknowledge her as a preacher until a turning point came in June of 1771. Wesley received a letter of criticism endorsed by Sarah Crosby, Mary Bosanquet, and Sarah Ryan. Upon reading this letter Wesley reconsidered his view on women as preachers. For the first time, he was willing to acknowledge that there could be those gifted women who were “called” to be in the ministry. Wesley then officially endorsed Sarah Crosby as well as Mary Bosanquet, as lay preachers. The women lay preachers of early Methodism made it known that

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<sup>4</sup> Lynn Lyerly, “Women and Southern Religion,” in *Religion in the American South*, eds. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 251.

<sup>5</sup> Vicki Tolar Collins, “Walking in Light, Walking in Darkness: The Story of Women’s Changing Space in Early Methodism,” *Rhetoric Review* 14 (Spring 1996): 338.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara B. Troxell, “Ordination of Women in the United Methodist Tradition,” *Methodist History* 37, no. 2 (January 1999): 122.

they, too, along with the Methodist men, experienced a compelling and intense attraction or “call” to the ministry that they could not ignore. Furthermore, Vicki conveys that a few women actually participated in true preaching and “often professed having experienced *vox dei*, the voice of God, which compelled them to act.”<sup>7</sup>

Of importance to the status and role of women in the church were larger religious movements. In the colonies the First Great Awakening occurred (1739-50). This religious-social movement ushered in an era of enthusiastic, zealous, and emotionally charged revivals. Revivals became vehicles for social connections, especially for the women who until then were predominantly linked to the household. Therefore, these revivals attracted more women than men. The increase in participation by women also resulted in an increase in the number of women lay preachers and exhorters. Carl and Dorothy Schneider reveal that, “awakenings are periods of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place. Awakenings alter the world view of a whole people or culture.”<sup>8</sup>

Women of many denominations were lay preachers during the Colonial period and the Revolutionary period in America; however, the Methodist denomination had the largest number of women preachers.<sup>9</sup> The Methodists, with their itinerant system and evangelical preaching style, perplexed some of the more conservative denominations. In his article, Richard Carwardine remarks, “women praying in mixed or promiscuous assemblies, direct, pointed, and often colloquial preaching, and sustained sessions of private and public prayer were scarcely innovations in that denomination, and Methodist spokesmen found it amusing that such issues

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<sup>7</sup> Collins, “Walking in Light,” 338, 342.

<sup>8</sup> Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right*, 11, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

should perplex”<sup>10</sup> those of other denominations. Women were more involved in testimonials than were men and Ann Braude comments those women, “outnumbered men in Protestant churches among whites and blacks, in the North and the South, and across denominations.”<sup>11</sup>

Clergy began to rely more heavily upon the laity to help run the activities of the church. Since the majority of congregations were comprised of women, male clergy turned to women for support. Male clergy found themselves in a position of having to persuade, rather than forbid or denounce. As a result, from 1781 to 1791 the number of Methodist women lay preachers from different socioeconomic backgrounds increased. Not only did they increase in numbers, but also in status.<sup>12</sup>

The Second Great Awakening (1820-1840) occurred in America and with it a rise in religious evangelism. According to Richard Carwardine, “Methodism was wholeheartedly a revival movement,”<sup>13</sup> This movement resulted in massive growth for the Methodist Episcopal Church and reached out to the poorer classes in American society. It was during this time also that major changes in the role of women in society began. Schneider reveals that industrialization was launched that shifted “middle-class women’s roles from producers to consumers and dispensers of charity.”<sup>14</sup> Also, transpiring was a shift in denominations to an institutionalized hierarchy that philosophically reverted from a system that embraced political and social parity or equality (egalitarian), at least in theory, to a system controlled by one sector (patriarchal). Men

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<sup>10</sup> Carwardine, “The Second Great Awakening,” 334.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Braude, “Women’s History Is American Religious History,” in *Retelling U. S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (California: University of California Press, 1997), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right*, 11-14, 31-32.

<sup>13</sup> Carwardine, “The Second Great Awakening,” 330.

<sup>14</sup> Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right*, 23.

controlled leadership of the churches and the role of women became less important. The males were the controlling influence within the hierarchy. As a result, in the 1800s women lost ground and were disallowed to become preachers. Women were officially barred from preaching from the pulpit.<sup>15</sup> The attempt of a male society to initiate rules that barred women from the pulpits did not stop them from evangelizing and conducting missionary work in their own communities.<sup>16</sup> And, according to Mark Chaves, women continued to find a way to preach.<sup>17</sup>

### Women's Pathway to Ordination in Methodism: 1861-2007

The path to ordination for women in Methodism was complex and complicated. It is undeniable that the church encountered problems with the influx of women into a male-dominated profession. It is also undeniable that conflicts occurred within just about every denomination in the United States at some point in time.<sup>18</sup> The rights that women in the Wesleyan tradition began to pursue were those same rights that men had long enjoyed. These rights included the opportunity to pursue ordination, to secure voting rights as laity at conference, and to be accepted and acknowledged in their ministries. As expected, women met great resistance from men of the Wesleyan tradition,<sup>19</sup> and as Mountford comments, "extending

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 23-25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Chaves. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Chaves, and James Cavendish. "Recent Changes in Women's Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement of Intraorganizational Controversy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (Dec. 1997): 574.

<sup>19</sup> Luccock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe, *The Story of Methodism*, 373-74.

ordination to women meant admitting them to the company of clergymen and providing them with leadership of churches, sometimes many clergymen fought bitterly.”<sup>20</sup>

It appeared to be a positive step for women within the Methodist denomination when in 1861 a proposal that would allow women to be admitted as lay delegates to the General Conference came up for discussion.<sup>21</sup> But, allowing women to participate at General Conference as lay delegates met with strong opposition and resistance. For example, in 1888 during the annual General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.), Frances E. Willard and four other women represented their churches as lay delegates. The chief legislative body refused to acknowledge these women. Justification for such rejections centered on the claim that “laity” or “laymen” referred to “male.” This was not a valid excuse, however, because the General Conference of 1872 duly stipulated that the word “laymen” included all members of the church who were not already members of the Annual Conference.<sup>22</sup>

Women did not expect the General Conference in 1880 to change a ruling that denied a preacher’s license to any woman.<sup>23</sup> The conference also at this time rescinded those licenses that previously had been issued to women.<sup>24</sup> This rebuking was evidently associated with the fact that two licensed preachers, Abby Oliver and Anna Howard Shaw, had petitioned for ordination. Both were graduates of the Boston University School of Theology and met the qualifications for

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<sup>20</sup> Roxanne Mountford. *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 351-52.

<sup>22</sup> Luccock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe, “*The Story of Methodism*,” 373-74.

<sup>23</sup> Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 351-52.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia J. Thompson, *Courageous Past Bold Future: The Journey Toward Full Clergy Rights for Women* (Nashville: The United Methodist Church General Board of Education and Ministry, 2006), 23.

ordination.<sup>25</sup> Because of the ruling Anna Howard Shaw left the Methodist Episcopal Church and joined the Methodist Protestant Church. Although she encountered embittered resistance by men, the New York Conference ordained Shaw in 1880.<sup>26</sup>

Women continued to pursue laity and rights to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1896, four women were admitted to the General Conference of the M.E. Church as lay delegates. It was not until 1900 that a new constitution established full laity rights for women.<sup>27</sup> In 1919, The Methodist Church agreed to grant local preacher's licenses to women. At this time provisions were made for impending ordination that would occur in 1924. With this license, however, there were no job placement guarantee for women. Elsie Gibson remarks that, "The Methodist Church, however, could not take a chance of giving women the same status as men because of popular resistance to their role as ministers."<sup>28</sup> In 1922, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E.S.) granted full laity rights to women but continued to adamantly oppose the granting of a license to women or to support the ordination of women.<sup>29</sup> In 1924, The Methodist Episcopal Church granted limited clergy rights to women. Under limited clergy rights women were allowed to be ordained as local deacons or local elders. They still were not allowed membership to the annual conference.<sup>30</sup> Under these limitations women had no guaranteed appointment, no pension, and no voting rights at annual conference.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Troxell, "Ordination of Women," 122.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>27</sup> Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 351.

<sup>28</sup> Elsie Gibson, *When the Minister Is A Woman* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 21.

<sup>29</sup> Hilten, *Pillar of Fire*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Troxell, "Ordination of Women," 123-24; Norwood, *The Story of Methodism*, 351.

<sup>31</sup> Chaves and Cavendish, *Recent Changes in Women's Ordination*, 578.

In 1956, the General Conference voted to amend the Discipline. Through this amendment women were granted full clergy rights in the conference. Robert Hilten explains that for the first time in the history of The Methodist Church women now had “the final right to serve as ordained ministers in the traveling connection.”<sup>32</sup> Barbara Troxell also concedes that women had acquired full access to the itinerant ministry. This meant conference membership and guaranteed appointments and, “now women could be appointed to churches, have full votes in annual conferences, and be eligible for clergy pensions, as were men.”<sup>33</sup> After this declaration by the General Conference, a number of women were received as probationary members or “on trial” basis.<sup>34</sup>

Because of the consequence of developments and changes since 1968, “an increasing number of women have been admitted to the ordained ministry, appointed to the district superintendency, elected to positions of denominational leadership, and consecrated as bishops.”<sup>35</sup> Because of the influx of women into seminaries in the 1970s, and the increase of the number of women seeking ordination, filling clergy positions with women became more of an issue for Protestant churches.<sup>36</sup> The number of women in mainline Protestant seminaries began to equal the number of men.<sup>37</sup> Mark Chaves comments that, “before 1970, then, women did not pursue the professional degree for clergy in significant numbers whether or not their

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<sup>32</sup> Hilten, *Pillar of Fire*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> Troxell, “Ordination of Women,” 125.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

<sup>35</sup> Olson, *The Book of Discipline*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Hargrove, Jean Miller Schmidt, and Sheila Greeve Davaney, “Religion and the Changing Role of Women,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 480 (Jul. 1985): 124.

<sup>37</sup> Hargrove, Schmidt, and Davaney, “Religion and the Changing Role,” 124.

denomination formally granted it to them; after 1970, women did pursue the degree whether or not their denomination formally granted it.”<sup>38</sup> According to Lehman, the denomination whose seminaries had the highest number of females enrolled in the master’s of divinity (M.Div.) programs in the 1970s was the United Methodist Church.<sup>39</sup> Positions for women vary with different denominations, and the Methodist is among those denominations where women are less likely to obtain a sole pastor position.<sup>40</sup>

In 1976, within the Holston Annual Conference, Reverend Brenda Carroll and Reverend Mary Taylor were the first female clergy to become full connection ordained elders. Reverend Carroll continues to serve in the Holston Conference, and her appointments include tenure as District Superintendent in the Abingdon District. Reverend Taylor has since left the Holston Conference after being asked to serve as Resident Bishop in the South Carolina Conference.<sup>41</sup>

By 1977, there were 319 clergy women reported in the United Methodist Churches in the United States.<sup>42</sup> In 1986, less than ten years later, the number of women preachers increased to 1,891. By 1994, the United Methodist Church reflects a total of 3,003 women preachers. This number increased to 4,370 by 2000. Out of these numbers I could not determine how many were ordained.<sup>43</sup> The increase in numbers was primarily because of the influx of women into seminary

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*,: Culture and Conflict, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Edward C. Lehman, Jr., *Women Clergy: Breaking Through Gender Barriers* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), 7-13.

<sup>40</sup> Jackson W. Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair T. Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1983), 125.

<sup>41</sup> Thompson, *Courageous Past*, 104.

<sup>42</sup> Laura R. Olson, Sue E. S. Crawford, and Melissa M. Deckman, *Women With A Mission: Religion, Gender, and the Politics of Women Clergy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 7-8.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

institutions as determined by research conducted by Zikmund in 1990. This research also revealed the number of women entering theological seminaries in 1988 comprised twenty-two percent of the seminary totals, as opposed to the less than five percent in 1972.<sup>44</sup> Although a majority of the mainstream religious denominations in the United States, in general, slowly adjusted and reevaluated old customs, beliefs, and traditions that opposed women as leaders, not all denominations immediately changed.<sup>45</sup>

### Impact of Feminist Movement on Women Becoming Ministers

No study would be complete that is pertinent to females in the work force without giving credit to the influence of the feminist movement that occurred in America. The women's movement predates the twentieth century; however, the influence of such movements became more significant in the twentieth century, especially as it pertained to women in the workplace. The traditional role of woman was being redefined, changing, and advancing. In past history, the primary role of women was associated with the upbringing of the children and taking care of the home, and as Glock reiterates, "there was a grudging growing acceptance of women's participation in the workplace."<sup>46</sup> The acceptance of women in a society that had been male-dominated for decades was not without resistance. But, by the 1950s women were experiencing major changes as the number of women working outside of the home increased.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Chaves and Cavendish, "Recent Changes in Women's Ordination," 576.

<sup>45</sup> Olson, Crawford, and Deckman, *Women With A Mission*, 7-8.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Y. Glock, "The Churches and Social Change in Twentieth-Century America," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527 (May 1993): 70.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 70-75.

Religion was cast into a unique position as more and more women entered the work force. This was primarily because many mainstream denominations used scriptural interpretations to justify subordination and oppression of women. Denominations reacted differently in dealing with the challenge to scriptural interpretations and the role of women in church and society. The most marked change was allowing women access to ecclesiastical power or the ability to become ordained ministers. This change resulted, Glock says, “in large part, after the rise of the women’s liberation and feminist movements of the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>48</sup>

The strong influence of the women’s movement in the mid-1960s influenced the number of women who began to enter seminaries and divinity schools.<sup>49</sup> Many traditionally male occupations opened up to women. Lehman contends this was because feminist organizations lobbied vigorously for the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>50</sup>

#### Overview of the Process of Licensing or Ordination in 2007

An overview of the process for obtaining a license or ordination is obtained from *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. For both women and men the process is the same and usually begins with the “inquiring candidate.” The inquiring candidate must first contact his or her local pastor, elder, or deacon within the church to discuss his or her interest in becoming a preacher. The local church must then be willing to provide a recommendation for this member to his or her district superintendent. Upon recommendation from the local church, the individual becomes what is known as an “exploring candidate” and one who is seriously

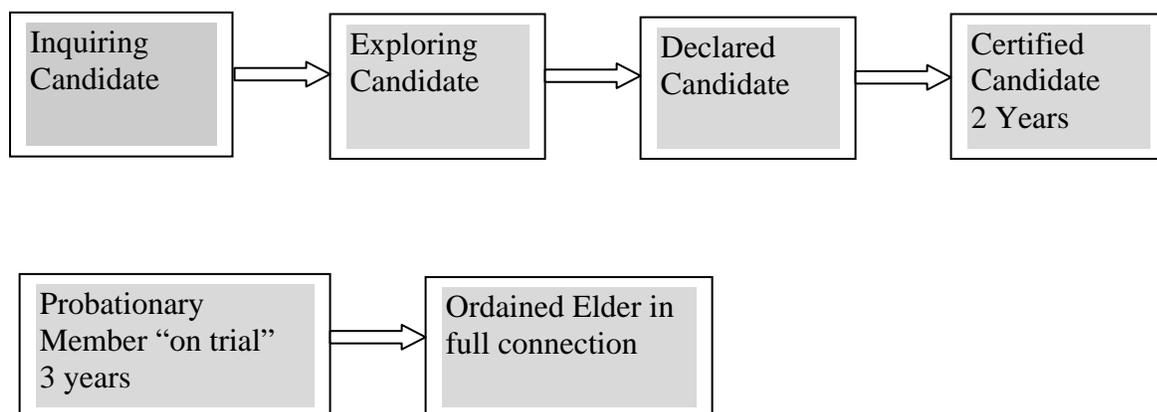
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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>49</sup> Chaves and Cavendish, “Recent Changes in Women’s Ordination,” 575.

<sup>50</sup> Lehman, *Women Clergy: Breaking Through*, 7, 9.

interested in obtaining licensing or ordination. The individual then becomes a “declared candidate.” This means the individual has completed the exploratory process. Upon recommendation and approval at the charge conference she/he now becomes a “certified candidate.” The credentials of the certified candidate are examined by the district committee on ordained ministry for ordination, a psychological evaluation is conducted, and the candidate is required to provide a written explanation of his/her beliefs, understanding, and role in ministry. A certified candidate receives appointment as a local pastor upon completion of License for Pastoral Ministry if an appointment is available. Licensing is reviewed and renewed on an annual basis. The certified candidate is eligible to become a Probationary Member if she/he has at least two years of service and a four-year bachelor’s degree, or other equivalent education. Probationary members serve a minimum of three years. The annual conference considers probationary members “on trial” in preparation for full connection as deacon or elder. Probationary members in good standing with the conference, and who have met the designated disciplinary provisions as set forth in the discipline, are eligible to become a candidate for ordained elder in full connection. This basic process is depicted in the following flow chart.<sup>51</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Olson, *The Book of Discipline*, 186-187, 193..

## Conclusion

The road to ordination for women was a long and difficult road. Even though women evangelized and preached in England, they were not allowed to preach in an official capacity. Women were known for their exhortation and came under great scrutiny from men. Reverend John Wesley of the Church of England made a profound decision when in 1771 he gave his endorsement to two women as lay preachers.

Women in Colonial America also followed their “call” to preach. Religious and social movements impacted women in society. Revivals in America associated with the The First Great Awakening (1739-1750) and Second Great Awakening (1820-40) spurred a form of evangelism to which women were attracted. The influx of women into Methodism was the greatest contributor to a profound membership growth for the Methodist denomination.

Women finally gained lay rights within Methodism when the General Conference of the Methodist Church began to accept women as lay delegates in 1861. Eventually, The Methodist Church began to issue preachers license to women in 1919. By 1924 women began to enjoy clergy rights; however, these rights were limited and did not include membership or voting rights at conference. By 1956, the General Conference amended the Discipline that allowed for full clergy rights for women. In 2006, the United Methodist Church celebrated fifty years of full ordination rights for women.

## CHAPTER 4

### ORDINATION: PROBLEMS ORDAINED WOMEN CLERGY ENCOUNTERED: 1956-2007

Women were not enthusiastically welcomed into the vocation of ministry. As women pursued a career in the ministry, they dealt with resistance that was associated with the social, political, and cultural facets of American society. Women clergy faced struggles, trials, and tribulations that influenced their appointments. Certain issues not only influenced the appointment of women, particularly in rural churches, but also impacted the retention of women ministers. Some of the issues related to the following: traditional interpretation of religious scripture doctrine, lack of role modeling for women, political and hierarchal indifference within the church structure, and regional/culture dynamics.

#### Traditional Interpretation of Religious Scripture and Doctrine

Those interested in Biblical doctrinal studies recognize that there remains a great deal of long-entrenched thinking in Christian churches. And, as Rebecca Groothuis observes, “a restrictive, stereotypical view of womanhood remains entrenched in the evangelical church because it is believed to be backed up by Biblical proof of texts. Therefore, we need to examine the alleged basis for such thinking in Scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the foremost issues that infringed upon the increased role of women clergy as leaders in the church came from the literal interpretations of Biblical scripture. The traditional doctrine of the Judaeo-Christian tradition taught social values, outlined gender roles, and guided daily existence. Churches in remote rural communities in particular did not necessarily have

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 12.

the benefit of scholarly expertise. As noted earlier, in the early beginnings of Methodism often those men who became preachers had little education and no formal education relating to the Bible. Within rural communities these teachings became traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation. Many denominations, including the Methodist, looked to the Pauline directives in weighing the roles of woman in the pulpit. Permitting women to become ordained clergy would contradict preset gender roles established for women through long-standing scriptural interpretations by males in church leadership.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible has been the chief source for reaching most decisions in the church. The following passages are three examples of the more commonly used passages from the New Testament and are taken from the King James version of the Bible.

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<sup>2</sup> Glock, "The Churches and Social Change," 74-75.

Titus 2:1-5

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children.

5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Source: *The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version.*

Timothy 2:9-12

9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

10 But (which becometh women profession godliness) with good works.

11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Source: *The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version.*

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

35 And if they learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in church.

Source: *The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version.*

Scriptural commentators understand the impact of certain verses on the church and its structure. For example, Fred D. Gealy and Morgan P. Noyes in Vol. II of the *Interpreter's Bible* state:

This epistle [1 Timothy 2:9-14] is explicit, however, in forbidding women to speak in the churches, and in subordinating them to the authority of men. No doubt its position was influenced by the customs of the day, in the light of which Christian women had they

been conspicuous in public . . . . In actual practice, while the churches have for the most part declined to ordain women as ministers, the great gifts of women have been employed as teachers, missionaries, and in a multitude of ways.<sup>3</sup>

As I discovered through personal communication with a local Christian Church preacher and Baptist preacher, some other mainline denominations also agree that there are no clear statements in the New Testament of any female clergy in the first century church. In addition, churches with no formal governing body, among them the Christian and Baptist denominations, appear to have no formal or written rules against women clergy. There is an informal understanding and agreement that women cannot be preachers among local congregations. And even though women can be gifted and called to ministry, the scripture prohibits women from holding the office of pastor. Less than twenty years ago Richard Melick, a Baptist theologian, produced an article that analyzes the issue regarding whether a woman should be permitted to be a pastor. Parts of his analysis are as follows:

Southern Baptists have claimed that their doctrinal positions were either taught in the Bible or were at the least, not contrary to the explicit teachings of Scripture . . . . While the Bible does not support the practice of women serving as pastors, numerous passages speak clearly and forcibly to the inherent worth and value of women . . . . The question at hand is not whether women are of equal value to men, nor is it whether they can minister effectively. More specifically is it permissible for a woman to serve as senior pastor? . . . Paul does not expect that women will not or can not learn or teach . . . . He states that they cannot teach or have authority over men. Thus, they cannot have a pastoral position, or perform the pastoral function, for that puts them in authority over men . . . . While Paul clearly affirms the equality of men and women in salvation, he equally and just as clearly affirms the priority of men in church leadership . . . . We have seen that the explicit texts of Scripture forbid women to serve as pastors . . . . There is no compelling reason to encourage woman as pastors, and there are many reasons not to do so.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Fred A. Gealy and Morgan P. Noyes, “The First and Second Epistles to Timothy” and “The Epistle to Titus,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 405-406.

<sup>4</sup> Melick, Richard R., Jr., Ph.D., “Women Pastors: What Does the Bible Teach?” *SBC Online (May 1998)*, available from <http://www.sbclife.net>; Internet; accessed 6 March 2007. SBC is the official website of the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Melick is a professor of New Testament and provost of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

Therefore, the traditional view of women as set forth in scripture has not been one of leadership. Women were expected to work in children's programs and Christian education and to be good church women.<sup>5</sup> Wilbur Bock remarks that having a female in leadership was met with conflict and "opposition both within and without the professional bodies of clergy."<sup>6</sup>

### Political and Hierarchal Indifference

Lack of support from the denominational hierarchy in the Methodist Church influenced the inability of women clergy to effectively handle problems arising from the congregation. When women clergy encountered pressure from unreasonable expectations and excessive demands from the local church, they lacked support from the hierarchy. The absence of an organized and collegial support system for clergy furthered the strain, dissatisfaction, and discontentment women clergy experienced.<sup>7</sup> Lack of a support system on the part of the district superintendents and bishop left some women clergy with a sense of being alone. Response to a retention study conducted by the Anna Howard Shaw Center in Boston revealed that, "the rejection some of these women experience when they are placed in isolated communities and churches that have never had a woman pastor contributes(d) to these women leaving the local

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<sup>5</sup> Norma Ramsey Jones, "Women in the Ministry," in *Women's Liberation and the Church: The New Demand for Freedom in the Life of the Christian Church*, ed. Sarah Bentley Doely (New York: Association Press: 1970), 61-63.

<sup>6</sup> E. Wilbur Bock, "The Female Clergy: A Case of Professional Marginality," *The American Journal of Sociology* 72, no. 5 (1967): 532.

<sup>7</sup> *United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*, The Anna Howard Shaw Center, Boston University School of Theology. Boston, Massachusetts, 2001. On-line. Available from <http://www.bu.edu/sth/shaw/retention>; Internet; accessed 18 January 2007.

church.” They also cited lack of integrity within the Church, negative issues within the church, and personal reasons for leaving the ministry.<sup>8</sup>

Lack of education for laity on issues such as gender equality has not been a top priority of the United Methodist denomination. Most often when women were placed in small, rural or “country” churches, the decision makers did not take them seriously. Moreover, they did not receive support from fellow clergy in the hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, women clerics perceived lack of interest by the hierarchy in providing doctrinal and gender equality education to churches. Women clergy believed that by educating congregations it would help with how women are perceived as well as how they are received. Women clergy cited an evident lack of interest in and support of the district superintendents in finding solutions.<sup>10</sup> Mountford’s research reveals that although in general women clerics appear to enjoy their vocation some leave the pulpit ministry, or pursue other areas of ministry, because of the lack of support shown by the hierarchy. This decrease in qualified ministers has resulted in some of pulpits, especially those of small, rural churches, remaining empty and without pastoral leadership.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Crabtree, *Women’s Liberation and the Church*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> *United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*.

<sup>11</sup> Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit*, 149.

### Lack of Role Models in Church Leadership

For years the senior pastor of the local church has been male. Therefore, young men had someone of the same sex they could emulate. But women did not. Not having role models created a distinct disadvantage for women. In regard to the influence of role models, Roxanne Mountford comments, “women preachers in most Protestant denominations have few models of successful clergy women to emulate. But, in addition, the wider culture in America has not built a system of support for females that is equivalent to that offered to boys to take their place in national life. America has not invested in the idea that civilization can be built around women leaders.”<sup>12</sup>

Women clergy expressed the importance of having role models in helping to shape their attitudes, goals, and aims. Barbara Finlay contends that successful mentors can be great motivators. In a survey she conducted of seminary students, Finlay discovered eighty-five percent of the women agreed that their attendance was influenced by a female role model. The survey also revealed it must be noted that some women credit male pastors with being influential role models. The women still stressed, however, that it was crucial to have female role models.<sup>13</sup> Not having role models inhibited women. As one United Presbyterian female preacher who was ordained in 1960 noted, it was rare to meet other ordained women, “When I set out for the theological seminary I had never laid eyes on a woman minister.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Finlay, *Facing the Stained Glass Ceiling: Gender in a Protestant Seminary* (New York: University Press of America, 2003), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *Women in the Ministry*, 64.

## Cultural Influences of Rural Communities

Geographic location of small churches in rural areas has been associated with lack of receptivity to the appointment of women clerics. C. Horace Hamilton remarks that the attitude of the population is one factor in the "life history of the community."<sup>15</sup> Because small churches are often located in rural areas that offer fewer social opportunities, the church's presence is important to the vitality of life within the rural community.<sup>16</sup>

What has hindered women in small rural churches is that rural communities have retained certain traditional views relating to woman's role in society and the church. As Laverne Burchfield reveals, "individuals living in the South and living in more rural areas are significantly less likely to endorse principles of gender equality. These differences stemmed from long-standing social differences and attitudes toward gender equality."<sup>17</sup> Women clergy face more challenges in rural churches than they do in urban churches. As Mark Chaves exclaims, "individuals living in rural areas are less supportive of gender equality as a goal; as a result, rural denominations might be expected to be more resistant to ordaining women."<sup>18</sup> Edward Lehman's study conducted only twenty years ago revealed that congregations admit that even though they are open and receptive to women clergy, they prefer to remain traditional and conventional.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> C. Horace Hamilton, "Some Factors Affecting the Size of Rural Groups in Virginia," *The American Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 3 (1930): 425.

<sup>16</sup> Laverne Burchfield, *Our Rural Communities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1947), 49.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 847

<sup>18</sup> Mark Chaves, "Ordaining Women: The Difference of An Organizational Innovation," *The American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 4 (1996): 848.

<sup>19</sup> Edward C. Lehman, Jr. , "Research on Lay Church Members Attitudes Toward Women Clergy: An Assessment," *Review of Religious Research* 28, no. 4 (June 1987): 326.

Rural congregations are usually not financially able to support a full-time minister. But, women clergy will more likely than not be stationed in rural congregations mainly because men will not accept a part-time position.<sup>20</sup> To begin with, women are often given interim appointments in hopes that once she is there that congregation will learn to accept her leadership. This strategy has also been necessary because many parishes are normally willing to accept a female on an interim basis but not for long-term appointments.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

Women encountered lack of receptivity as they pursued the vocation of minister—A profession that had been male-dominated. The chief areas that posed difficulty for women ministers came from interpretation of religious scripture, cultural aspects of rural communities, lack of support from the political hierarchy, and lack of female role models in ministry that they could emulate.

Hindrance to acceptance and receptivity in their chosen vocation as minister was mainly associated with long-standing scriptural interpretations that reflected woman in a subservient role. The role of woman did not include being in a leadership position, especially within the church setting. These beliefs became embedded in the communities. Rural communities tend to be less accepting of change and with a tendency to retain old traditions. Smaller churches in the more remote rural communities are traditional in their beliefs which results in less receptivity of female pastors.

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<sup>20</sup> Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 848.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Pappas, *Money Motivation and Mission in the Small Church* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1989), 81.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTERVIEWS WITH ORDAINED WOMEN PASTORS IN HOLSTON CONFERENCE

In 2006, the United Methodist Church celebrated fifty years of full clergy rights for women. The opening of the doors by some denominations, Mark Chaves contends, was more likely due to interactions with their environments than to anything else. Chaves also contends those denominations that were willing to ordain women were partially influenced by “the presence of an active women’s movement, and network ties to other denominations that already ordain women, a more recent organizational founding date, being nonsouthern, and embeddedness in noninerrantist or nonsacramental institutional environments.”<sup>1</sup> As Mountford observed through her research and research by investigators such as Mark Chaves, ordination of women by Protestant denominations initially was the result of the cultural environment, rather than any appreciation of women clergy and their general value to the organization.<sup>2</sup>

As previously noted, research conducted in the last ten to twenty years regarding women ministers reveals that as women pursued careers in a profession that had been male-dominated, strong and wide-spread resistance from congregations occurred. In order to obtain more current information regarding the status of ordained women clergy, I decided to conduct interviews with clergy women of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church. I wanted to determine how the women clerics themselves view the appointment system. The purpose of my conducting interviews was to determine if women clergy encountered any form of resistance, or lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Chaves, “The Symbolic Significance of Women’s Ordination,” *The Journal of Religion* 77 (January 1997): 112.

<sup>2</sup> Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit*, 13.

receptivity, to their appointments. If so, was resistance associated more with church congregations located in rural areas rather than with those churches located in urban areas.

### Methodology

I conducted interviews with women within the Holston Conference. I randomly selected six ordained women pastors for interviewing from among the twelve districts that comprises the Holston Conference. I obtained names from the *2005 Journal of the Holston Annual Conference of the The United Methodist Church*. The general purpose for conducting the interviews was to learn about their perceptions, knowledge, views, and personal experiences as ministers. These first-hand experiences and information were necessary in order to add depth and validity to my study.

Initial contact was made by telephone call. I explained the purpose for the contact and briefly described my research project to them. If the proposed interviewee was receptive to being interviewed, I then scheduled an appointment to meet. During the selection process, I made several attempts to contact at least three other individuals. I did not receive a response from them; therefore, I did not pursue their interviews further. I conducted the interviews at the residence of the pastor, and three at the office of the pastor. The interviews were qualitative in nature and were loosely structured but focused upon the appointment process and their perceived attitude of the congregants to their appointment. The interviews were face-to-face and conversational. I had a prepared list of questions that I used to help guide and keep the session focused.<sup>3</sup> The list of questions I used in this process is included as Appendix. The interviews took from one to two hours and were recorded on an audiotape recorder. Later, I transcribed the interviews.

The information revealed during the interviews was, for the most part, from the women's own personal experience. They often shared stories about themselves and other women clergy with stifled tears and cracking voices. I am privileged these women were willing to share their thoughts and feelings with me.

Additional information and statistics relative to the Holston Conference were obtained through use of the *2005 Journal*. Other resources include the official web site of the United Methodist Church and the Holston Conference, which were researched for applicable and reliable information.

Although I selected my interviewees randomly, I discovered commonalities among the participants. All of the interviewees had at least ten years of experience in the ministry, obtained their masters in divinity degree (M.Div.) at a Methodist-supported seminary school, and were ordained elders for more than ten years. All of the interviewees had served in churches located in both rural and urban areas. For some of the interviewees ordained ministry was a second career for them.

All of the women were very amenable to the interview process. In general, the attitude and approach of the participants was friendly and sincere, yet professional and direct at the same time. All the participants impressed me as being very committed to their chosen vocation as pastor or minister. They candidly expressed their views and opinions regarding some of the situations and issues they must deal with in their vocation. Of those interviewed, fifty percent had been refused, at least once, by the church they were projected to serve. Three of the women who had been rejected by a church indicated that it involved a rural area. At least one of the women experienced problems with more than one church not accepting her projected

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 62.

appointment. While all of the interviewees had served in churches located in both rural and urban locations, all rejections were associated with churches located in rural areas.

### Statistics Regarding Holston Conference

Information regarding Holston Conference has been extracted from statistical information contained in the *2005 Journal* that contains the business proceedings of the Holston Annual Conference. As of July 1, 2005, Holston Conference served 914 local churches with a total of 587 pastoral charges. Charge means the churches that the pastor serves. There were a total of 983 clergy men and women. This total includes all full and part-time pastors and those with full connection, as well as those not in full connections. The total also includes all of those on extended ministries, and leave of absence. Of the 983 clergy, there were 136 females. Thus, females represent approximately fourteen percent of the total number of clerics of Holston Conference. Of the 136 females, sixty-six or forty-nine percent are listed as being Elders in Full Connection.<sup>4</sup>

The service area of the Holston Conference has a strong connection to the rural areas of middle and southern Appalachia, with the highest concentration in eastern Tennessee and southwest Virginia. Holston Conference is divided into the geographical and administrative districts of Abingdon, Big Stone Gap, Tazewell, and Wytheville in Virginia and Chattanooga, Cleveland, Johnson City, Kingsport, Knoxville, Maryville, Morristown, and Oak Ridge in Northeast Tennessee. The racial and ethnic identification for clergy of the Holston Conference reveal that out of 983 clerics, 945 or ninety-six percent, are white. There are thirty-two African

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<sup>4</sup> "Business of the Annual Conference," 139-141.

American/black clergy, or three percent. There is a very small percent identified as Asian, Hispanic, or multi-racial.<sup>5</sup>

Table 1 reflects that the two districts of the conference that serve the largest rural areas are Big Stone Gap and Tazewell, both of which are located in rural areas of Virginia. There appear to be no full connectional ordained women ministers (FE) assigned to churches in these two districts. The largest concentration of fully ordained female clerics can be found within the Abingdon district located in Virginia (and a small part of Northeast Tennessee) with a total of ten. The Chattanooga district, located in Southeast Tennessee, has the second highest number of fully ordained women pastors which is eight. The third district with the highest concentration of fully ordained women is Oak Ridge, Tennessee, with a total of five.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Table 1. Full Connection Elder Female Clergy (FE's) Appointed to Churches or Charges in Holston Conference

District	No. Charges	No. Churches	Total Male Clergy*	Total Female Clergy*	Female Clergy (FE)*	Female Clergy (FE) in Rural Areas*	Female Clergy (FE) in Urban Areas*
Abingdon	55	94	42	16	10	3	7
Big Stone Gap	37	67	35	3	0	0	0
Chattanooga	58	63	63	13	8	0	8
Cleveland	49	71	47	8	1	0	1
Johnson City	49	66	44	10	4	2	2
Kingsport	41	57	40	7	2	1	1
Knoxville	48	55	53	10	3	1	2
Maryville	47	62	49	9	2	1	1
Morristown	65	110	56	13	4	2	2
Oak Ridge	43	67	47	9	5	1	4
Tazewell	39	84	33	6	0	0	0
Wytheville	56	118	41	17	4	2	2
TOTAL	587	914	550	121	43	13	30
						30%	70%
<p>*Note: These figures do not include those female FE's serving in extended ministry, serving as part of the cabinet, or on leave of absence.</p> <p>Source: "Section V. Ministerial Appointments," in <i>2005 Journal of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church: Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Session Held in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina 12-15 June 2005</i>, ed. Grady C. Winegar (Knoxville: Holston Conference Media Distribution Center, 2006), 148-79.</p>							

Also according to Table 1, currently there are forty-three women FE's under appointment in the conference. These figures do not include those female FE's serving in extended ministry, serving as part of the cabinet, or on leave of absence. Out of these appointments, thirty percent are concentrated in churches located in rural areas of the conference, with seventy percent being appointed to churches in urban areas. These figures are significant when one considers that there are 914 churches in Holston Conference, with a majority of them being situated in rural locations

within the Southern Appalachian region. The female FE's appointed in Holston Conference, then, appear more likely to receive appointments to churches within urban locations and less likely to be appointed to churches within rural locations.

### Existing Issues Relating to Appointments

*Evidence is quite strong that male/female inequality among the clergy is a result of embedded cultural values which have not shown much change over time.*<sup>1</sup>

Ordained women clergy in the Holston Conference must learn to deal with the fact that their projected appointment *may* result in the following response, " *We would rather die as a church than have a woman come and be our pastor.*"<sup>2</sup> As revealed to me during one interview, Connie informs me the above is a response that came from a church pastor parish committee (P.P.R.) when the district superintendent (D.S) informed the committee it would be getting a woman pastor. The D.S. in this particular instance decided against placing the woman in that church. Connie further remarks, "I think he was trying to protect her and did not send a woman. And, that church will probably never have a woman."<sup>3</sup>

She also recalled another story that pertained to a friend whose very first appointment upon graduating from seminary was disastrous. The friend was assigned to a local church in a rural community. Even though the church had indicated its resistance to the appointment, the D.S. appointed her to the church. In retaliation to her appointment, a third of the membership refused to attend church the entire year. She had to contend with the negativity and resistant attitude by some members of the congregation; they even refused to request her involvement in

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Sullins, "The Stained Glass Ceiling: Career Attainment for Women Clergy," *Sociology of Religion* 61 (Fall 2000): 259.

<sup>2</sup> Reverend Connie Cox [pseud], interview by author, 12 October 2006, Ely, TN, audiotape and tape transcript in possession of author, Johnson City, TN.

the services of death and resurrection for the entire year. Connie reiterates that the rejection and out casting of this minister by the congregation was such a bad experience that she left that church after serving only one year, and she almost left the ministry entirely.<sup>4</sup>

As previously noted, three out of the six participants had experienced resistance to their appointment at one time or another. One woman interviewee indicated that when the one church she was projected to serve resisted her appointment, the district superintendent (D.S.) had to find another church for her and that one worked out very well for her.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

I gleaned the following from the interview sessions that I conducted with the women clerics and will be expounded upon within this chapter.

1. Women Clergy perceive that external influences from pastors and members of other non-Methodist denominations in the community that do not ordain women tend to undermine the credibility of Methodist women pastors.
2. The regional culture associated with long-standing traditions associated with scriptural interpretations does not view the woman's role in the church as that of leader.
3. Methodist women clergy suffer extra pressure to excel and to prove to the congregations their capability to lead the church.
4. The Methodist women clergy of Holston Conference expect full support of the denominational hierarchy.

Table 2 below reflects one of the main issues Methodist women clergy encounter in their appointments as determined through my interviews. The table also indicates the number of women clergy who indicated they encountered the particular obstacle. From information revealed through the interviews, external influences associated with other denominations and regional traditions associated with scriptural interpretations pose the most concern and frustration for female clerics. Other concerns related to pressure to excel and prove oneself and the sustainability of hierarchical support.

Table 2. Clergy Responses to Most Prominent Issues

Issue	Abby	Polly	Connie	Maggie	Bonnie	Tessa
Women Clergy perceive that external influences from pastors and members of other non-Methodist denominations in the community that do not ordain women tend to undermine the credibility of Methodist women pastors.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The regional culture associated with long-standing traditions associated with scriptural interpretations does not view the woman's role in the church as that of leader.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Methodist women clergy suffer extra pressure to excel and to prove to the congregations their capability to lead the church.	Yes		Yes	Yes		
The Methodist women clergy of Holston Conference expect full support of the denominational hierarchy.		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes

External Pressure by Other Congregations

*There are a number of factors which militate against acceptance of a woman pastor by their male colleagues. The first is the distrust which far too many clergy have for one another. I have been at meetings of ministerial alliances in which we sniffed out one another's strengths and weaknesses with all the wary acuity of a pack of starving huskies before a fight. The loneliness of ministers and the lack of fellowship among them is one of the real tragedies of the clergy today.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Norma Ramsey Jones, "Women's Liberation and the Church," in *Women's Liberation and the Church: The New Demand for Freedom in the Life of the Christian Church*, ed. Sarah Bentley Doely (New York: Associated Press, 1970), 65-66.

It was interesting and very enlightening to discover one of the main impediments Methodist women clerics encounter is associated with community relations. Foremost, Methodist women clergy must contend with negative influence from other congregations. Female clerics perceive these influences as affecting their credibility, especially within the community at large.

I learned, to my surprise, that different denominations within the community are not as supportive or accepting of each other as one might believe. According to the interviewees, congregants associated with churches of other denominations exercise more influence on the attitude of other congregations that one might assume. Those Methodist women clergy who serve churches in rural areas perceive that their members are definitely influenced through this external network. In rural areas, the United Methodist Church is most likely the only church that has a female pastor. As one female pastor pointed out, if the United Methodist churches in the rural areas were not on the call system, women would have a difficult time serving in rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

Connie has experience serving churches in different rural and urban communities. It is her opinion that rural communities can be different and unique in their perception of the role of woman in the church. She understands that the theology of other non-Methodist denominations does not approve of women serving in leadership roles within the church. She explained to me that ministers of other denominations for the most part do not accept women pastors. To illustrate, she gave me the following example:

Rural communities often have a ministerial association. It's very difficult as a woman to be accepted as a full colleague in a ministerial association. One female colleague I know in a small rural area she served, the ministerial association disbanded after she became pastor in that area. The men who were a part of that association formed the Christian Men's Breakfast Club so that they could exclude her.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cox, Interview.

Reflecting upon the interactions with the faith community Connie further contends, “When we do community services like the Community Thanksgiving Service, when it is their turn to host, a woman will never preach from their pulpit.”<sup>4</sup>

Tessa is a soft-spoken person who appeared to have a contemplative personality. She ponders her views before commenting on how important it is for the congregation to be supportive of its minister. She feels fortunate that she has been well-received among the congregations that she has served. This has been true for the congregations she has served in both rural and urban communities. It is her judgment that the problems she has encountered have been associated with the attitude of the community at large and living in the “bible belt.” She states the following:

It’s been the lifestyle and the thinking and the attitude of the people in the other congregations and their practices and traditions that possibly go against what we as pastors preach. They have a tendency to talk to your members and try to influence them. And, you have to have a congregation that will learn to accept you and will stand up for you. That’s very important.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, nurturing relations and working ecumenically with other denominations within the community poses an obvious and genuine challenge for the female pastors. More than one of the interviewees noted that community ecumenical gatherings can be uncomfortable or non-existent. Bonnie remarked that she believed she has been well-accepted within her own congregations, but her experience is that it is difficult to work ecumenically within the community, “working with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Reverend Tessa King [pseud], interview by author, 12 October 2006, Campton, TN., audiotape and tape transcript in possession of author, Johnson City, TN.

ecumenical groups, with other pastors from other denominations, I struggle to be accepted or to be treated equally on some levels.”<sup>6</sup>

Even though Bonnie also contends that, for the most part, her appointments to churches in rural areas have been good experiences, she is aware of other women clergy who have had very uncomfortable experiences. As an example she shared the following:

The whole community Thanksgiving church celebration was cancelled because it was her turn to preach and certain denominations did not feel comfortable with that. And so, they cancelled the whole event rather than invite her to participate. So, you know, that’s a recent thing.<sup>7</sup>

As previously noted, the Methodist woman minister is often the only female pastor in the community. Polly remarks that being the only woman minister in the community is much more comfortable to her now than when she first started. Even though she believes women preachers have definitely seen progression with acceptance she contends, “I think we still face some biases and sometimes the community biases come from different denominations.”<sup>8</sup>

Maggie also voiced her discontent with the external influences that perpetuate the attitude that male pastors are more acceptable as leaders of the church. She believes it is associated with the customs and traditions of the area, and she comments that “there is a tremendous influence from folk of other denominations that don’t accept the ordination of women and the full ordination rights of women. And, so a lot people are influenced by other friends, or both from other denominations, that reject the validity of women serving as pastors.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Reverend Bonnie Blue [pseud], interview by author, 10 October 2006, Appstate, VA, audiotape and tape transcript in possession of author, Johnson City, TN.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Reverend Polly Crane [pseud], interview by author, 12 October 2006, Kane, TN, audiotape and tape transcript in possession of author, Johnson City, TN.

<sup>9</sup> Reverend Maggie Pyer [pseud], interview by author, 27 September 2006, Jacobs, VA, audiotape and tape transcript in possession of author, Johnson City, TN.

Maggie has been with the conference for a number of years and speaks from her experience:

You do find in many places in our conference pretty substantial resistance to the appointment of women. Some have been willing to work through that. I think that maybe there tends to be in very rural communities perhaps more influence from other denominations where the acceptance of women is much less widespread.

Although Maggie personally has not experienced many problems, she is acutely aware of some other women pastors who have experienced problems in their church appointment. Both men and women congregants of the church can be critical; however, the tendency of women to be more critical and less receptive of female ministers seems to be commonplace. She also acknowledges that although female clergy have gained acceptance, she agrees that some Methodist churches have lagged behind and remarks that, “many churches still do not recognize the validity of a woman’s authority as pastor.”<sup>10</sup>

#### Regional Culture Influenced by Scriptural Interpretation

*Traditional involvements engender or reinforce preferences for traditional patterns of male leadership.*<sup>11</sup>

Women ministers perceive the culture of the rural Appalachian area as being the most influential factor in lack of receptivity. This is because it has been the tradition in most rural communities to have males as leaders of the church. Because rural communities cling to traditions, this impedes women’s acceptance. The Methodist women ministers interviewed

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Edward C. Lehman, Jr., *Women Clergy Breaking Through Gender Barriers* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), 94.

perceive they are not accepted nor respected by the pastors of other denominations. Members of the congregations within rural communities, both internal and external, continue to support long-standing regional, cultural traditions about women's place. This lack of support from congregants obstructs the ability of female Methodist ministers to gain equality within the entire community. More importantly, though, they feel as if it hinders their acceptability among their own church members. Connie speaks expressively as she describes her experience of growing up in a rural church environment. She loves the rural church where one can know everyone, but she also loves working in an urban environment where resources allow greater ministry. Larger churches can have outreach programs to the community and a greater amount of activity. She is also sure that location influences the Church and pastor appointment and comments:

Most likely, the only female pastor in the rural area is in the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist don't call their own pastors and that's why women get sent to the rural areas. If the United Methodist churches were on a call system women would have a real difficult time. A lot of times you think of rural areas as having those sorts of caches of conservative theological beliefs. And I think that really does influence even the United Methodist Church where we openly appoint women pastors, who live in a very rural area where most of the churches are of another denomination. It makes a huge difference. In an urban area you have a greater spectrum of theology in other churches (and) you may have other women ministers in other denominations.<sup>12</sup>

Abby also expresses mixed opinion and emotion as it relates to whether the location of the church influenced her receptivity as a woman minister. Growing up in a rural area she admits that she probably prefers the rural area. Abby has noticed, however, that the old traditions relating to biblical interpretations (from the writers of the Pauline scriptures as referenced earlier in this thesis) are still very much embedded in the rural communities she has served and she comments:

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<sup>12</sup> Cox, Interview.

I have been in rural settings and I've had some very welcoming churches where I've been, you know, not the first women there. And then, I've also been places where it has been more difficult. . . .So, I don't think it has to do with rural or urban settings. There are still churches that because of where they are, because of their traditions, they are still holding on to those. . . .scriptural lessons and scriptural passages. There are a lot of churches in our area and they are Baptist even if it says Methodist or Presbyterian or whatever over the door. Most of us grew up in a fairly Baptist theology because that's just where we lived and that's what we've all been taught.<sup>13</sup>

Tessa believes that lack of acceptance is associated with the fact that the small churches in rural areas have been used to having a male pastor. This tradition of male leadership stems in part, from the strong tendency toward acceptance of a patriarchal interpretation of scripture relating to church leadership. For churches that have never had a female pastor, the adjustment to the leadership style may be a difficult adjustment especially at the beginning. Tessa comments that, "I think it's because they have not had a female pastor. They really don't know what it's like and they just think a male pastor can do better."<sup>14</sup>

Without reserve, Connie is sure that tradition of rural communities that has been connected with scriptural interpretation has played the most important role in the perception of women in leadership positions within the church. She comments that, "I think people who are, you know how they interpret scripture, and they interpret scripture to say that women have no leadership by God's divine decree, has no right to hold a leadership position in the church. The church unfortunately rather than being one to lead society. . . .has always followed society."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Reverend Abby Bell [pseud], interview by author, 18 September 2006, Jasmine, TN, audiotape and tape transcript in possession of author, Johnson City, TN.

<sup>14</sup> King, Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Cox, Interview.

Maggie responds that, “certainly,” she believes that congregations prefer a male preacher over a female preacher.<sup>16</sup> Further, she contends that it is related to scriptural interpretations:

I think it’s just what they’ve gotten accustomed to. And, I think there are some very strong feelings in terms of interpretation of scripture, and how you look at scripture. Because certainly if you take scripture literally you can find reasons in scripture that you can say this should not be allowed. If you look at Paul’s practice, and what he did, you find that he very much depended upon women as leaders and they had very important roles to play. So you have to look at what was being said in context. And, I think a lot of folk just are not really willing to do that.<sup>17</sup>

The ideal vision of a pastor is still as one who is a young male, remarks Bonnie. She also comments that it is an unrealistic vision and that the cabinet that oversees the appointments has made it clear that inclusive language is not an option, that a church cannot specify that it prefers a male or female.<sup>18</sup>

As already noted, it has been tradition for males to be leaders of the churches. From Abby’s viewpoint, having a female in the leadership position can be a difficult adjustment for some people because it has been tradition for males to be leaders of the churches.

I do believe some churches prefer a male preacher. I think there are a couple of reasons. One is very literal interpretations of scripture. They pull those verses out of Paul’s writings that women are supposed to be quiet in church. I also think that one reason that some churches and some people have problems with a female pastor is just because they have always had a male pastor and they’re just not used to having a female in that role in their lives.<sup>19</sup>

The study conducted by The Anna Howard Shaw Center at the Boston University School of Theology Center more than ten years ago revealed that ordained Methodist women did not view the hierarchy as providing adequate support. Women clerics viewed the system as

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<sup>16</sup> Pyer, Interview.

<sup>17</sup> Pyer, Interview.

<sup>18</sup> Blue, Interview.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

ineffective because it allowed churches the power to reject appointments. In the opinion of those women involved in the study, the hierarchy did not want to deal with any form of hostility from the churches. The study reveals that "insight from pastor-parish relations committees, pastor, and parishioners who have successfully helped congregations make the transition to having a female pastor would be advantageous as training programs for district superintendents and bishops."<sup>20</sup>

### Extra Pressure to Excel and Prove Oneself

*Despite formal acceptance, women clergy have faced subordination in practice in many Protestant denominations. Previous theory has located this disparity in a distinction between the bureaucratic or "tightly coupled" elements of denominational organization and those that are cultural or "loosely coupled," predicting that, as the innovations of ordained women becomes routinized over time, gender disparities among the clergy will diminish.<sup>21</sup>*

Three out of the six women interviewed revealed they experienced immense pressure to excel. Because these women are still blazing the trail, so to speak, in a male-dominated hierarchy, they feel they cannot be viewed as failures. The personal perception is that if they fail, they fail all women preachers. Failure, they believe, would create a direct negative reflection upon all women preachers in the conference. They do not perceive males as having this extra burden so much because male leadership has already been established within the vocation.<sup>22</sup>

When Abby contemplated the unique challenges that women face, she emphasized that even though she has not been in the position of being the first woman appointed to a rural church, it is a real challenge to be that first woman pastor of a congregation. It is an enormous responsibility because that pastor is the groundbreaker for the next woman who might follow.

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<sup>20</sup> *United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study.*

<sup>21</sup> Paul Sullins, "The Stained Glass Ceiling," *Sociology of Religion* 61 (Fall 2000): 243.

Abby reveals, “You have to break that ground. I think there’s extra pressure to prove yourself and to prove that you can lead, that you lead just as well as a man. Maybe not just as well as a man, but to show that you have same leadership skills that someone else might have.”<sup>23</sup>

Maggie stated that she definitely feels extra pressure in her job to prove that women have leadership skills and are capable of being the authority figures in the church. She does not want to leave a bad impression with the church. She does not want a congregation to reject another female pastor:

I long for the day when a woman can have a struggle at a church and that not reflect on every other woman. I think we are still at the point that if a church has a woman as a pastor and for whatever reason it doesn’t go well, and there could be lots of reasons why it doesn’t go well, then they will say we had a woman once and that didn’t work, so we don’t want to do that again. However, there may very often be men who were appointed to a church and it doesn’t go well, but they’re not apt to say well we can’t have another man because we did that once and it didn’t work. So, I think we are still at a place where women do not have permission to not be extraordinary.<sup>24</sup>

Connie also remarks that she feels under pressure to prove her worth as spiritual leader in the eyes of the congregation. She feels that many congregants still do not perceive a woman as being the spiritual leader. Both men and women congregants challenge her; however, she contends that males in particular do not accept her as their spiritual leader:

It’s a challenge for a female to be taken seriously by some of the male parishioners of the church. It’s an authority issue. I think that sometimes there are men in our churches that are not openly accepting of a female pastor, really never see her as their spiritual leader, and treat her differently than they would treat a male pastor who would come in. So, I think there is an issue of respect. The difficulty I have faced in church as far as overt hostility, not hostility, but overt negativism, has come from the female powers of the church. The women who have run the church since the day they came and

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<sup>22</sup> Pyer, Interview.

<sup>23</sup> Blue, Interview.

<sup>24</sup> Pyer, Interview.

they have never had any one to contest that or threaten that. Here comes a woman pastor. In my first appointment the first person that came through my door, the first day I'm on the job, was the woman who was the female power of the church. She did not like me being there because I threatened her power.<sup>25</sup>

Polly revealed how difficult a disgruntled rural congregation can become and how uncomfortable and challenging it can be for the female pastor. Polly recalled one of her first appointments was to a small church. It seemed like a perfect match, theologically. When she first got there, she noticed that there were two families that she had not seen even though they were on the membership role. When she inquired about the two families, she was told, "they left before you came because of having a woman pastor."<sup>26</sup> She did not know that this issue would create serious problems for her later. By her second year in the appointment there was a letter-writing campaign to the D.S. against her that insinuated the church had lost half its members. The only membership loss had been the two families that had left before her appearance. The P.P.R. Committee began focusing upon other issues to create dissent. For instance, Polly explained that it not only accused her of not visiting, but not visiting enough, and specifically not visiting the big donors of the church. Needless to say, she left the appointment after being there only two years.<sup>27</sup> Polly also comments with a sense of sadness and remorse, "When I came out of seminary, I thought that when I went to churches and they saw that I'm not liberal, and I'm not a feminist, and I'm married and have children, and I'm evangelical, that it would be okay that I was a woman. But, I was wrong about that. . . .and I have to say that in every one of my moves, being a woman has been a factor. Not for everybody but definitely for some."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cox, Interview.

<sup>26</sup> Crane, Interview.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Tessa explains that there are always a few men in the church who do not believe that a woman should be there. They will be very aloof and not speak, “but you’ve got to let them know that you’re not there to prove a point but you are there to love and serve them. . . .those are the ones that you have to gain their approval.”<sup>29</sup>

As pointed out by more than one pastor, when the church is willing to give a female pastor a chance, it can be very rewarding for both the pastor and the church. Bonnie agrees that churches tend to prefer a male pastor, but voices that her experience with appointments to rural churches has been good. She comments that, “my experience has been once folks have a female pastor they are very open to having another one. In fact, I’m the second pastor sent here that’s been a female and there are some now that they say please don’t send us a male.”<sup>30</sup>

### Sustainability of Hierarchy Support

*Even those denominations which ordain women still do not consider them for higher positions. One major reason is that these women are located for the most part in small country churches which are not taken seriously by those in power.*<sup>31</sup>

Within the context of the retention study of Methodist women ministers conducted by the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University, the lack of hierarchical support emerged as an issue that troubled women ministers within the Methodist denomination.<sup>32</sup> Lack of advancement opportunities for women, particularly to positions as senior pastor in larger churches, is still prevalent for ordained women in the Methodist church. Through my interviews it was revealed

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<sup>29</sup> King, Interview.

<sup>30</sup> Blue, Interview.

<sup>31</sup> Doely, *Women’s Liberation and the Church*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> *United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*.

that lack of advancement opportunities, particularly to positions as senior pastor in larger churches, still remains an issue for women clerics.

When clergy become an ordained elder they are eligible for guaranteed appointment status. Through this system, appointment of clergy to churches is determined by the bishop and cabinet. The cabinet is comprised of the districts within the conference that decides which pastor will be appointed to the various churches in the conference. With the open itinerancy system, the cabinet endeavors to appoint the person who has the gifts and graces to be able to serve in a particular capacity. Churches cannot officially designate they want a male or female minister.

The interviewees believed that, in theory, the conference does strive for equal opportunity, but the appointment process is not flawless. As in most institutions, inequality does exist to some degree. In its original design, the appointment process was set up to match as closely as possible the needs and requests of the church with the skills, strengths, and gifts of the pastors. For instance, a church may designate that it prefers a pastor who can build a youth program, strengthen the community outreach or visitation programs, or increase the attendance base. Thus, the bishop and district superintendents endeavor to slot a pastor who can compliment those needs of the church. It was Bonnie's observation that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in the way that pastors are appointed, "women have not traditionally been in the high steeple to get pastor roles, so it's going to take some time to break through that."<sup>33</sup>

Tessa's positive opinion was that the conference has become more willing to appoint women. She has been with the conference for more than a decade. Even though she has been pleased with her appointments thus far, she comments that her progression has not been what she had anticipated. On a positive note she comments, "They have not given us the opportunity to the

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<sup>33</sup> Blue, Interview.

bigger churches until recently except for a select few. Coming into the ministry at my age is also sort of handicap because we are needing the younger ministers to be in the larger churches to be out there pulling in the younger people.<sup>34</sup>

The appointment system is not very systematic according to Connie. This is very frustrating to her. To further add to her frustration, she does not foresee the system changing any time in the near future.<sup>35</sup> Polly, who had difficulty after an appointment was made, commented that the district superintendent was very supportive of her situation and worked with the church to try and resolve any issues and problems.<sup>36</sup> Almost all of the interviewees mentioned that support from the hierarchy definitely had changed for the better over the past few years. More than one interviewee told me that the bishop had made it clear that gender will not be an issue when it comes to appointments.

An address by a female district superintendent a few years ago at the Annual Holston Conference resonated concern that there remain those churches in the Holston Conference that refuse to accept a woman pastor. Too often, still, district superintendents are placed in the position of dealing with churches that reject the projected appointment of a female pastor. There remains concern among the women ministers in the Holston Conference that rejection is connected to gender, race, and age. Lack of receptivity of women clergy prevents some churches from experiencing high-quality leadership that can be provided by females. Lack of opportunities for women can also hinder the capability of women from fulfilling their full potential as fully ordained clergy. A church will sometimes straight-forwardly tell the District Superintendent that

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<sup>34</sup> King, Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Cox, Interview.

<sup>36</sup> Crane, Interview.

appointing a woman pastor literally would, “shut the doors of the church.” This address to the Conference called for seeking ways to generate better communications, education, and training as it relates to helping to change the gender-related attitudes toward women clergy. Lack of appointment opportunities frequently results in the appointment of women into associate pastor roles within larger churches. Another alternative is that they may be appointed as local pastors to small or medium size churches. These appointments prohibit probationary elders on track to becoming full elders.<sup>37</sup>

As ascertained from the above, the results of the interviews reveal that women preachers are still contending with some of the same issues referenced in the Anna Howard Shaw retention study conducted ten years ago. That study noted that clergy women would prefer conference officials to help pastors and parishioners deal with the issues that may occur as they relate to their appointment, “Insight from pastor-parish relations committees, pastor, and parishioners who have successfully helped congregations make the transition to having a female pastor would be advantageous as training programs for district superintendents and bishops.”<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

The interviews with six ordained clergy women of the Holston Conference reveal that fifty percent, or three out of the six interviewees, personally had been refused an appointment at some time during their career in the ministry. The lack of receptivity to their appointment occurred more often with smaller churches located in the more rural locations of the conference. All of the interviewees were also acutely aware of other Methodist female clergy in the conference who

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<sup>37</sup> Personal Communication with Reverend Joan Masta, District Superintendent, Timberland, Virginia, 09 December 2005.

<sup>38</sup> *United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study.*

had either been refused an appointment or had problems with a church once the appointment was made. There remain those churches in the Holston Conference that absolutely refuse to have a female pastor.

There are reasons that female clergy have problems with receptivity. The main reason appears to be associated with the culture of the area or region. Embedded in small communities are traditions. The traditions that relate to the church come from the scriptural interpretations based upon early Calvinistic teachings. These teachings viewed women as subservient to man and dictated that woman would not have authority over man. Therefore, women would not be viewed as being capable of being leader, much less head of the church.

Methodist female clergy encounter lack of acceptance by peers of other congregations. An inability of different denominations to achieve ecumenical partnership within the community exists and Methodist female clergy view it as being related to their gender. There is added pressure on Methodist women clergy to constantly prove their capabilities and leadership skills to the congregants. They feel they must succeed in order to create a positive reflection upon clergy women within the conference. As one female clergy mentioned, she did not want to leave a church and have that church say they never want another female pastor.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The road to ordination for women has been long and arduous. Beginning with the women exhorters and preachers in England, it was not acceptable for women to hold a position that had been male-dominated. Women were preachers in an unofficial capacity, and restrictions were placed upon their capabilities to speak especially within the church. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, finally gave recognition to two women preachers in 1771. This act by Wesley helped to open the doors that would eventually allow women to become pulpit preachers.

In the American colonies, women continued to preach in an unofficial capacity. Historically, leadership of the church has been predominantly male. Wanting the same rights that males enjoyed, those women who felt a “calling” into ministry fought for acceptance and to become licensed preachers. Eventually, the Methodist denomination began issuing licenses to women. An historical event occurred in 1956 when the United Methodist Church changed its Discipline to dictate that women would have full clergy rights. In 2006, the Methodist denomination celebrated fifty years of full clergy rights for women.

Even though women gained full clergy rights in 1956, women clergy continue to encounter lack of receptivity by congregations. This study was conducted to determine if ordained women clergy in the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church have difficulty with acceptance and with being appointed to some of the churches of the conference. Small churches located within rural areas served by the conference are most resistant. This resistance appears to be attributed, at least in part, to long-standing traditional interpretations and teaching of scripture entrenched in the culture of the area. Historically, these interpretations

identified the woman's role as that of housewife, mother, helpmate, and subservient to man, and not as leader of the church. These biases continue to exist because rural areas are more prone to resisting change and outside influences.

Research that would reveal if Holston Conference has or has not developed any short-or long-range plans to address the issue of traditionalism and resistance to women clergy would be worthwhile. I think that this research could lead to the development of training and educational tools for congregations and other ministers that would help in dealing with gender-related issues.

The personal interviews I conducted with six of the ordained women clergy in the Holston Conference linked me with some of the trailblazers of tomorrow's Methodist women clergy. The women pastors of today continue to forge forward and overcome issues that will help pave an easier way for the women clergy of tomorrow. And, as Maggie remarks," the face of the church is changing and it's changing very rapidly, and I think churches that refuse to welcome and embrace that change are just hurting themselves. And closing their minds, and hearts, and doors to what could be some very gifted women to come in their midst is disastrous."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pyer, Interview.

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APPENDIX  
Questionnaire for Oral Interview

- 1 How long have you been in the full-time ministry, and how long have you been an ordained elder?
- 2 Are you a seminary graduate? From where did you graduate?
- 3 From birth to age 18, did you live a majority of your life in what would be described as an urban area or rural area?
- 4 Were you born and/or raised within the present confines of the Holston Conference? If not, where?
- 5 How many Holston Conference appointments have you had as a probationary elder and elder in full connection? How many would you say were in an urban setting? A rural setting?
- 6 Would you prefer to serve a congregation in a rural area, or does it matter to you? Why?
- 7 Do you believe that some churches prefer a male preacher over a female preacher? If so, do you have an opinion as to why they would prefer one over the other if both candidates are equally qualified?
- 8 Have you ever been refused from a proposed appointment by a Church because of being a woman minister? If so, what were the underlying circumstances for such refusal? How did the Conference handle it?
- 9 Do you know a female colleague who has been refused? Was it from a church in an urban or rural setting?
- 10 Do you find that smaller churches that are located in rural environments are more likely or less likely to resist the appointment of a woman minister to the church. If so, why?
- 11 (If applicable) As someone who is involved in the decision making process and appointment process, have there been times that you have encountered a situation whereby a church will designate a preference for a specific person or gender? If so, how is that handled?
- 12 Is it your opinion that churches in rural setting are more likely to request a male vs female preacher? If so, what would be the reason for this distinction?
- 13 In your opinion, how does the location of a church impact the appointment of either male or female clergy?
- 14 What are some of the unique challenges that a female clergy faces if appointed to a small, local church or charge in a rural setting?

15 Explain any unique struggles, issues, and problems that you feel women clergy in general have faced or continue to encounter.

16 Do you feel that the presence of women clergy has become more accepted in the UMC specifically and society in general or do women still face biases?

17 Do you consider the United Methodist Church and Holston Conference an equal opportunity employer in practice?

18 How, in your opinion, does the United Methodist Church and Holston Conference ensure equal opportunities specifically for minority women?

VITA

THELMA J. NEAL

Personal Data:                   Date of Birth: June 11, 1949  
  
  Place of Birth: Washington County, Virginia  
  
  Marital Status: Married

Education:                        Abingdon High School, Abingdon, Virginia  
  
  Tusculum College, Greeneville, Tennessee,  
  
  B.A. Business Administration, 1987  
  
  East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee  
  
  M.A. Liberal Studies, 2007

Professional Experience:        East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee  
  
  1992-Present  
  
  Current Position: Executive Aide/Office Coordinator