

Hating Girls

An Intersectional Survey of Misogyny

Edited by

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Black Christian Methodist Episcopal Church Clergywoman at the Crossroads in Ministry

Stephanie A. Welsh

She was about eight years old when God called her to preach. In those days, at that small Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, the only service females rendered to the Lord was singing, shining church pews, cooking, or decorating the sanctuary for various religious holidays. A woman could clean the podium, but she could not read Scripture from it. She could polish the pulpit, but she could not pontificate God's word from the "sacred desk" because, according to Martin Luther, "the Holy Spirit excepted women"¹ from the call to preach. Luther, as do some members of clergy and laity, used Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth to justify his reasoning, "*women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law says*" (1 Corinthians 14:34 *NRSV*). Based on Luther's fifth mark of the church's seven external marks, seeds of inferiority planted in schoolgirls in their formative years are foundational in the Lutheran Church's identity.

Being unaware of Luther's teaching, the eight-year-old girl wondered why her male counterparts played a superordinate role in worship. Simultaneously, she and her female classmates sat on the sidelines watching the boys serve as acolytes. What was unique about the boys? Why were they allowed to walk down the church aisle with the pastor carrying the long-handled taper candle snuffer to light the candelabra? Why were girls restricted from participating in worship in a meaningful way? She and the other girls were just as capable of lighting the candelabra on the altar as the boys.

Instead of complaining, she took action. She did the only thing she could think to do. She pleaded her case to the pastor, advocating for not only her rights, but the rights of the girls who, in secret, sounded their discontent about being denied equal opportunity in service to God. Although she did not realize it back then, she was becoming an activist for the 'other'—those whose humanity was considered inferior. It was her willingness to speak out against

1 Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church*, https://wolfigmueller.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Work-on-Councils_100618.pdf (accessed September 27, 2020).

the injustice that sparked change. She and her friends became part of the weekly worship acolyte rotation. The girls of that Lutheran church functioned as acolytes until the church closed in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Sadly, radical reform still has not come to the pulpit of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church. Women cannot teach in the sanctuary or serve in pastoral ministry. They remain silent in the church.

The eight-year-old girl in this story is me. It is the story of my formative years of activism. My early years of getting in “good trouble.”² Today, I continue “to get in good trouble, necessary trouble”³ as I embark upon a research study about the experiences of clergywomen in the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church.

Four foundational questions guided this study: 1) what is the vocational status of black clergywomen; 2) what are the ministerial experiences of black clergywomen; 3) what type of support do black clergywomen receive from CME Church leadership, and what is their perception of the support; and 4) what barriers do clergywomen face that impact their decision to leave or consider leaving? For those who leave, where do they go?

In the pages to follow, I will share the purpose and importance of this project. A brief overview of the Methodist church’s tradition regarding women in ministry is provided, followed by the historical view and treatment of women in the CME Church. The early qualitative findings are presented through the stories of the lived ministerial experiences of three clergywomen—Miriam, Martha, and Deborah. The chapter concludes with a proposed intervention to balance the scales of justice for clergywomen in the CME Church.

1 The Purpose

This project explores and interprets the responses of African American clergywomen to patriarchy and sexism in the CME Church. The study aims to gain insight as to why some clergywomen thrive in their ministerial vocation despite injustices and barriers that impede mobility upward in ministry and pastoral leadership in the CME Church, while others leave or consider leaving the church.

2 Representative John Lewis, quoted in Joshua Bote, “‘Get in good trouble, necessary trouble’: Rep John Lewis in his own words” *USA Today*, July 18, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/18/rep-john-lewis-most-memorable-quotes-get-good-trouble/5464148002/> (accessed September 27, 2020).

3 Ibid.

2 The Problem

Since its inception, the church has played an instrumental role in institutions, communities, families, and individuals; this is undoubtedly the case in the African American community. Historically, the Black Church has been pivotal in the lives of Black people. It has served as a place of refuge for the rejected, healing for the hurt, and hope for people tattered by a history of maltreatment, injustice, traumatization, and violence. Traditionally, the Black Church affirmed the humanity of African Americans in a world that treated them as less than human: those dehumanized and dejected by society. The Black Church contributed significantly to the cause of liberation and Civil Rights: offering the sanctuary as a gathering place for solidarity in the fight against social injustice.

Inasmuch as the Black Church has fought against discrimination and inequality, it has played a paradoxical role of purveyor of sexism in women's oppression, particularly Black clergywomen, while espousing freedom, liberty, and justice of Christ. This practice of prejudice is systemic. Despite Black women's educational achievements and professional advancements, Black clergywomen continue to face obstacles and barriers in attaining leadership roles in the church. "Organizational hurdles have placed a stained-glass ceiling"⁴ in the way of clergywomen as these ordained elders are routinely denied significant appointments to serve larger, financially stable, congregations as lead pastor in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Black male clergy continue to monopolize superordinate church positions while subjugating women to inferior roles that limit their authority, prevent ministerial fulfillment, and inhibit their decision-making power as well as their voice. Mary Daly asserts that inequality "prevents (women) from genuine self-fulfillment and from active, adult-size participation in society"⁵ as well as the church. Such injustice is a sin. Just as racism is sinful and viewed by both men and women as an injustice worth fighting, "sexism is a sin against creation"⁶ and a "manifestation of evil."⁷ Therefore, the CME Church has a responsibility to confess this sin of injustice and right the wrong of inequality against

4 TeResa Green, "A Gendered Spirit: Race, Class, and Sex in the African American Church," *Race, Gender & Class* 10, no. 1 (2003). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675063> (accessed July 31, 2020).

5 Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 53.

6 J. Deotis Roberts, *The Prophethood of Black Believers: An African American Political Theology for Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 79.

7 *Ibid.*, 79.

women. This requires transformational thinking about clergywomen, “decisive action,”⁸ and a commitment to positive proactive change.

3 Significance of the Study

By listening to and lifting up the voices and experiences of clergywomen in the Black Church, specifically the CME Church, this project situates their experiences as authoritative and as evidence of the limits of the leadership model that prioritizes men, while Black clergywomen provide pastoral care within an oppressive system. The findings of this study illuminate the impact sexism has on the ministerial advancement of Black clergywomen in the CME Church. As such, this study advances the knowledge of leadership issues within the Black Church in general and the CME Church in particular. This research is a contribution to CME Church history, Black Church studies, Africology, and womanist studies. This study fills the void of the silenced voices of Black women clergy who lead within degraded conditions of inequality and subordination.

4 Hypothesis

Black clergywomen who stay and thrive in the CME Church are well connected and willing to tolerate high levels of patriarchy. In contrast, those who stay but do not thrive are not well connected and suffer the consequences of ministering in a system of oppression. Clergywomen who leave or consider leaving the CME Church are not well connected, refuse to tolerate the injustice of being denied the opportunity for advancement and find other religious institutions that provide opportunities to thrive.

5 Methodist Church Tradition Regarding Women in Ministry

An assessment of church tradition, particularly the Methodist tradition, is fundamental in understanding the history of the vocational status of women in the Methodist Church. This historical evaluation sheds light on the modern-day vocational status of women in the Methodist Church. An appraisal of Methodism, its beginnings and its leader, specifically John Wesley, along with

⁸ Ibid.

an assessment of the traditional tenets of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church concerning the role of women in ministry is of paramount importance.

In his book, Paul W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, describes women's roles in the promulgation of Methodism in its foundational years. Many women and widows not only opened their homes to Methodist preachers, but "some took the initiative in the actual formation of societies with no other authority than their own determination and sense of divine calling."⁹ While women significantly impacted the growth and development of Methodism, their roles continued to be subordinate to that of men in the church in formal leadership and preaching.

John Wesley, an Anglican priest, maintained the restrictive rules of the Anglican Church, which limited the activities of women.¹⁰ When accused of allowing women and laymen to preach, John Wesley referred to the letter Paul had written to the Church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:34–35) in his retort regarding women. Women were to remain silent and were not to take the lead in public teaching.¹¹ John Wesley's views and practices regarding women preachers changed near the end of his life. By this point, women were preaching, though unofficially recognized as preachers, and sinners were accepting Christ following the proclamation of these women. As a result, "the English Methodist Conference was eventually led to officially recognize a number of these exceptional women."¹² When John Wesley was asked why he changed his mind about women preachers, he replied, "Because God owns them in the conversion of sinners, and who am I that I should withstand God."¹³

The death of John Wesley brought about significant changes to Methodist rules regarding the ordination of women; "the question of women's preaching became a point of bitter controversy."¹⁴ Despite the prophetic gift and success of anointed women preachers, staunch criticism and wanton disapproval abounded. "Hostility to female preaching had become so strong that the Irish clergy took extreme and immediate action to suppress their activities."¹⁵ The climate of patriarchal thinking increased significantly after the death of John Wesley, and the repression of women became so severe that "increasing

9 Paul W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The American Theological Library Association and The Scarecrow Press: 1991), 50.

10 Ibid., 56.

11 Ibid., 57.

12 Ibid., 182.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 222.

15 Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers*, 232.

numbers of aspiring women preachers found it necessary to sever their ties with the parent body of Methodism.”¹⁶

6 The CME Church's View of Women in Ministry

The CME Church is a historic Black Church with a reported membership of more than 500,000¹⁷ according to the “The Quadrennial Reports of the Bishops of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church” presented to the 38th Quadrennial Session and 39th General Conference held in Birmingham, Alabama in June of 2018. The history of the CME Church commences with its birth on December 16, 1870, in Jackson, Tennessee, at the 1870 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church, South,¹⁸ seven years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, granting freedom to the enslaved. Although emancipated, blacks continued to face subjugation by white Methodist preachers. Due to the suppression, injustice, and repression faced by these liberated blacks, at the hands of white Methodist preachers, forty-one Black Methodists organized a separate Methodist branch: The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.

The decision to organize a separate and independent church was due to the change in southern negroes' status and a question posed at the 1866 General Conference of the ME Church, South, about how to proceed with its negro church members. The enslaved, who, although members of the ME Church, South, had no rights or privileges in the church.¹⁹ That is, “the social and political conditions of the plantations did not permit slaves to participate in the life of the church in any meaningful way other than attending worship.”²⁰ In the southern ME Church, nearly thirty-nine percent of its membership according to records of the 1860 General Conference were enslaved people.²¹ This southern Methodist church body not only approved of slavery, but also advocated for its continuation. The conclusion of the Civil War brought about significant changes. The ME Church, South, was ill-prepared to deal with the aftermath of

16 Ibid., 236.

17 The 500,000 members represent both clergy and laity in the United States, Jamaica, Haiti, and Africa: Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Lagos, Liberia, and Nigeria.

18 Othal Hawthorne Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, rev. ed. (Memphis: The CME Publishing House, 1996), 24.

19 Ibid., 106.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 107.

the South losing a war that ultimately granted freedom to the enslaved population. Liberation afforded choice in terms of the freed persons livelihood and their place of worship.²² Although approximately twenty percent of the emancipated population stayed in the ME Church, South,²³ the ethos that permeated the church during slavery remained part of the fabric of the church after the emancipation: the freed Negro had no rights in the church and policies to address the issue of injustice did not exist.²⁴

The church could not, or at least did not, make changes that were essential in dealing with the changing circumstances of its Black members. Though Negroes were being set free, their status as preachers remained unchanged and the right to be pastors, presiding elders, and to full ordination was not granted. Black preachers who wanted to associate with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, could not exercise full ministry.²⁵

The ME Church, South “would no longer care for her colored members.”²⁶ Since there was no interest in allowing them full participation in the life of the church, the only plausible action for the newly emancipated negroes, who felt the call of God upon their lives to preach God’s Word, was to leave the ME Church, South.²⁷ These individuals not only recognized their divine call, God-given gifts, graces and talents, they took decisive action by creating their own institution to carry out the mission and ministry of Jesus. Forty-one emancipated negroes, upon the encouragement of white ME Church, South pastors and being granted the authority of white bishops, determined it to be in the best interest of the remaining Negro members of the ME Church, South to form their own branch of Methodism. Thus, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was established and two of their own preachers were elected to serve as bishops of the CME Church: William H. Miles and Richard H. Vanderhorst.²⁸

22 Ibid., 108.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 110.

25 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 110–111.

26 Ibid., 111.

27 The freedom of negroes resulted in competition between independent Black Methodist churches (African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion) in the North as well as the northern White Methodist church (Methodist Episcopal Church) for church membership amongst this population. The fierce competition and the confusion created amongst these Methodist churches, ultimately led the freed Negro members of the ME Church, South to establish their own separate and independent Colored Methodist Church (116–117).

28 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 44.

Where were the women? What role, if any, did women play in the life of this newly formed Methodist religious institution? How would emancipated women express God's call to ministry? When could women expect to exercise their prophetic voice as the prophet Joel uttered, "your sons and daughters shall prophesy" and Luke, the gospel writer and physician, thought necessary to proclaim in the Acts of the Apostles? This new institution established by men²⁹ out of a desire to fully utilize the gifts bestowed upon them by God, gave no consideration to the voice or struggle of the women who labored with them as enslaved laborers and would continue to toil alongside them in the fight for justice and equality through the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras. According to Bishop Othal Lakey, the history of the role of women in the CME Church was absent. Just as emancipated men had no rights to full participation in the ME Church, South, women in the CME Church "were denied leadership and had no role to play. They were merely members of the church ... (who) sang, prayed, shouted, and raised money. Leadership in the Church was for men."³⁰ The very injustices bestowed upon Black men in the ME Church, South that the freed men sought to escape befell Black women in the Black church.

Women securing official roles in the church, even at the local level, were met with resistance. Black women who had experienced the oppression of White men and women were now suffering subjugation by their Black brothers in Christ's Church. Although "the Black preacher sought by the word of God to bring healing and liberation to the broken personhood of Black men and women whose lives had been disrupted and degraded by slavery,"³¹ Black women continued to suffer the evil of gender discrimination as they were denied preaching and leadership opportunities in the CME Church. Ministerial ordination was reserved for men. Black clergymen sought passages of Scripture to validate the suppression of women. They used God's Word "to deny women their rightful place in ministry."³² Whether clergy or laity, women were not allowed to serve as delegates to the General or Annual conferences in the CME Church.³³ As a result, women had no voice, no voting rights, and no power. Just as emancipated men faced the oppressive force of racism in the ME Church, South; Black women faced the pang of patriarchy, sexism, and gender discrimination in this 'tender plant' rooted in the Methodist tradition.

29 Information about the role of emancipated women in the formation of the CME Church does not appear to exist. If women participated, their stories have been excluded.

30 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 270.

31 Ibid., 287.

32 Roberts, *The Prophethood of Black Believers*, 77.

33 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 404.

There were, however, women who refused to allow the sexism and patriarchy that prevailed within the CME Church to intimidate or discourage them from engaging in ministry. One such woman was Mrs. Caroline W. Poe.³⁴ Mrs. Poe, in her resolute determination, advocated for the recognition of women in service to the church. Twelve years after 'God's tender plant' had taken root, she visited the General Conference of 1882 hoping to persuade members of the General Conference to welcome the Women's Missionary Society into the convention.³⁵ Although her request at the 1882 General Conference was denied, the 1886 General Conference proved to be moderately successful for the Women's Missionary Society. The General Conference approved the "organization of a General Woman's Missionary Society throughout the denomination" at the local and annual conference levels.³⁶ While approval to organize at the annual conference level was granted, the women of this Society were not in control. Men were the recipients of privilege and legatees of power. The men led while women played a subservient role in the very organization they formed. Though the Woman's Missionary Society was now official, at the local and annual conference levels, the role women were to assume in its leadership was not. When the Constitution and By-Laws of the Women's Missionary Society was approved in 1890, it specified, "The officers of the Board shall be: 1st, a Male Corresponding Secretary."³⁷ Further, the Women's Missionary Society was to be governed by the General Missionary Board, which was led by men.³⁸

Although black women could work in the church—raise funds, go on missions, and teach children—they were not permitted to serve as members of clergy. Church law proscribed the ordination of women, thereby eviscerating the promise of God's prophetic gifting upon all flesh and the liberating power of Jesus in relation to women. This was the case with many denominations, particularly Black denominations—and specifically, the CME Church. The ministerial work of women was not a priority for male leadership within the church. It wasn't until 1966, nearly 100 years after the founding of the CME Church, that women, who acknowledged the call to preach, were ordained.³⁹

34 Mrs. Caroline W. Poe was President of the Women's Missionary Society of the East Texas Conference. The history of the formation of that particular Women's Missionary Society is not provided in *The History of the CME Church*. I have not been able to locate historical documents, to date, about the Women's Missionary Society of the CME Church.

35 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 270.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17.

Two decades later, in 1987, a woman, Rev. Versie P. Easter, was appointed presiding elder. Rev. Easter was the first woman to serve in the capacity of presiding elder; an appointment made by Bishop William H. Graves.⁴⁰

Despite the commendable achievements of the Women's Missionary Society as well as those who have garnered admirable feats within the CME Church, Bishop Lakey recognized that the church had not evolved in relation to the status of women. "Careful analysis suggests that on the whole women in Christian Methodism have not made the progress in attaining positions of authority, recognition, and influence in the decision-making of their church their history [*sic*] and numbers would seem to warrant. Though the occasional appointment of women to major churches is commendable, such appointments are in actuality quite rare."⁴¹ Bishop Lakey's statement, appearing in the 1996 revised edition of *The History of the CME Church*, continues to resonate today. The first and only woman elected bishop, Rev. Dr. Teresa Snorton, in the history of the CME Church happened within months of its one hundred fortieth year of existence on June 30, 2010.

While women of color, according to the 2018, "State of Clergywomen in the US," are outpacing White women as well as Black and White men in seminary, Black clergywomen continue to be underrepresented in leadership at the general connectional and annual conference levels of the CME Church. According to the 2014 edition of *The Book of Discipline of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*, Black clergywomen represent less than twenty percent of key general connectional leadership roles within the church.⁴² There is an even more startling statistic at the annual conference level. In reviewing the websites of the seven US CME episcopal districts reporting presiding elder data, Black clergywomen comprise only nine of forty-eight presiding elders' roles in 2020. Episcopal leaders continue to overlook women to serve in this key paid leadership position. The CME Church continues to fall short concerning the advancement of clergywomen in leadership. The scant number of clergywomen in the appointed role of presiding elder bears that out.

40 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 661.

41 Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 662–63.

42 There are four clergy members who serve on the judicial council; however, no clergywomen were appointed to serve on this committee. Clergywomen made up one of three alternate judicial council positions. Of the five CME Church-related educational institutions, men are the only persons to serve as president of the institutions. There are ten elected general officer positions; only three were filled by women in 2014. Of the eighty-two general connectional board members, represented by members of clergy, clergywomen represent only seventeen percent of the board members.

Stories of experienced, gifted, and educated women who have been discouraged from looking beyond their current status in the church, yet often overlooked because of their gender, permeate the church. Clergywomen continue to be “asked to be quiet and deferential and to yield leadership to men.”⁴³ I personally can attest to having my hopes thwarted, dreams of advancement dismissed, and being passed over for leadership opportunities not because I lacked experience or education, but because of my physiology.

7 The Importance of This Study

I am an African-American woman ordained elder in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church with full rights and privileges. I have two master's degrees: Master of Business Administration and a Master of Divinity. Prior to fully embracing my call to pastoral ministry in the CME Church, I had a successful career in corporate America. I served in pastoral ministry from July of 2010 until December of 2018, when I decided to take a sabbatical for my own physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. I, like a number of clergywomen with whom I have spoken, had high hopes and aspirations when commencing the process of ordination and entering the pastorate. Sadly, my optimism quickly faded as I came face-to-face with sexism, sexual harassment, discrimination, and oppression in a system that not only embraces, but champions patriarchy. I am intimately familiar with injustice. I encountered sexism, oppression, and racism throughout my professional secular career. While I expected to experience oppression in corporate America, I did not imagine it in the twenty-first century Christian Church. More specifically, it is counter-intuitive that a church whose vision is “to be a transforming church for Jesus the Christ within a changing world”⁴⁴ would continue to engage in the systematic repression of clergywomen.

Like many other Black CME Church clergywomen, I love God, Methodism, and the Black Church. I have preached through the pain of being ignored and denied opportunities for advancement. I have employed the proverbial Pauline text, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 *NRSV*). I have worn a smile in the face of disappointment, while crying a pool of tears upon

43 Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 260.

44 “CME Mission & Beliefs,” The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, accessed May 9, 2019, <http://www.thecmechurch.org/our-mission-beliefs.html>.

my pillow. I have been at the crossroads of leaving the CME Church for as long as I have served in pastoral ministry. I have listened attentively to the stories of other women clergy who have left as well as those who are considering a departure from the CME Church. I have encouraged my clerical sisters to fast and pray before making an emotional decision. My personal lived experience of injustice invoked not only the necessity to share the stories of the ministerial experiences of other clergywomen, but to serve as a clarion call to episcopal leadership of the need for change.

8 Methodology

I am a fifty-two-year-old African-American female elder, with full rights and privileges, in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. I served in pastoral ministry from July 2010 to December 2018 before taking an extended sabbatical for my own physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. My personal experience of oppression as a clergywoman was the desideratum for pursuing this study.

I am a womanist theologian approaching this body of research through a social constructivist framework as I seek to gain clarity about the experiences and perceptions of leadership support of clergywomen in the CME Church. The ultimate goal of the researcher is to present the findings to the episcopacy as well as the committee on women in ministry and develop a leadership training program for clergywomen that aid the CME Church in living out its vision of becoming a transforming church.

I have used both quantitative and qualitative research methods in this study. The descriptive-survey research method, specifically questionnaires,⁴⁵ was used to gather data about and assess the vocational status and ministerial experiences of forty-one African-American CME clergywomen, respondents, across five of the eleven episcopal districts comprising the CME Church. The case study method, “a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context,”⁴⁶ was employed. Nine clergywomen were interviewed to capture and compare their ministerial experiences: three who have thrived, three who left, and three who

45 Questionnaires were sent to one hundred twenty-five clergywomen across five episcopal districts.

46 Sarah Crowe *et al.* “The Case Study Approach,” *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11, no. 100 (2011). <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2288/11/100> (accessed August 25, 2020).

were considering a departure from the CME Church at the time of the study. This chapter provides a glimpse of the experiences of three clergywomen: one who thrived (referred to as Miriam), one who stayed (referred to as Martha), and one who left (referred to as Deborah).

I conducted an initial analysis of the lived experiences of three of the nine African-American clergywomen who shared the triumphs and disappointments of their ministerial journey in the CME Church. Although a pre-scripted interview guide was used, participants were allowed to freely share their narrative, oftentimes providing responses to the predetermined interview questions.

The voice of one clergywoman who thrived in the CME Church is presented first, followed by the story of one clergywoman who stayed but did not thrive, and finally the voice of a clergywoman who, finding another religious institution to serve, left the CME Church. The data from each clergywoman provides insight on their vocational status in the church, their ministerial experience, the support they received from leadership, and the barriers they faced.

9 Participants

The participants for the qualitative portion of this research consisted of nine African-American clergywomen, all elders, in full connection in the CME Church. Their ages ranged from late thirty to the early seventy. All but two of the participants were born into the CME Church. Four grew up in the parsonage. Three had fathers who were pastors and one, formerly of another denomination, had a mother who served in pastoral ministry.

The nine clergywomen interviewed by the researcher hold bachelor's degrees. Most have a Master of Divinity degree; while three of the nine participants have Doctor of Ministry degrees. Two of the three participants who thrived, left professional careers to focus on ministry full-time, while the other clergywoman who thrived was appointed to serve as pastor in her early twenties. She did not have a professional career outside of pastoral ministry. Of the six clergywomen who considered leaving or left the church, all but two were bi-vocational. Two of the three clergywomen who considered leaving at one point, but remained with the CME Church, no longer pastor: one by choice. The location of their ministries included rural communities, small towns, and major cities. The congregational size of the churches led by the participants ranged from twenty-five to one hundred seventy-five. The ages of the clergywomen who thrived ranged from fifty to just over seventy. The age range of those clergywomen who have stayed, but did not thrive in ministry, is between

forty to early seventies. The three clergywomen who left, although one who left around 1995 is now in her seventies, are in the late thirties to late fifties.

The participants easily engaged in dialogue with the researcher; demonstrating their willingness to share their stories and have their voices heard. Participants were given pseudonyms, names of women in the Bible, to protect their identity. The following vignettes represents the narratives of the ministerial experiences of three clergywomen in the CME Church: one who thrived, one who stayed despite her lack of success, and one who left.

10 Miriam's Story

Miriam is in her fifties and has served in ministry in the CME Church over thirty years. She grew up in a patriarchal household. She was trained by her family to place the needs and desires of men above her own because "men mattered more than women." For Miriam, serving in a patriarchal system was normal; she had been imbued socially to believe that women were inferior. Miriam's familial and social formation was instrumental in her ability to navigate, or perhaps live into, a system that devalued women. She thrived in ministry, receiving her first pastoral appointment in her early twenties as a lay minister. Miriam did not go through the standard process of standing before the quarterly conference to be approved to receive a local preachers' license: a license all preachers were to have at least a year before commencing the process of ordination. Instead, she was thrust into the ordination process at the first annual conference she attended after serving as an unlicensed lay pastor less than a year. She received both her deacon's and elder's orders at that same annual conference at the age of twenty-one. It is important to note that at that time in the CME Church bachelor's or master's degrees were not required for pastoral leadership. Her experience was unprecedented, particularly for a woman.

While Miriam's ministerial experience, being fast-tracked in pastoral ministry and the accelerated ordination process, was unique for women in ministry, her experience of sexism and sexual harassment was typical. Miriam spoke of not only her own story, but the countless stories of women who experienced sexual harassment or made sexual compromises to move up in ministry. She spoke of how she always thought it was the clergywoman's fault when they had been silenced, sidelined, or erased from the church. Miriam confessed that it wasn't until it happened to her that she realized it was not the woman's fault. She then shared her experience of serving faithfully in the church

nearly twenty years before being removed from her pastoral post and exiled after refusing the sexual advances of a bishop. The bishop used his coercive power to silence Miriam by threatening to demote any pastor or leader who gave her any opportunity to preach God's Word from a CME pulpit. The bishop upheld his promise. Miriam recalled how the bishop demoted a male presiding elder, relieving him of his leadership duties, and removed another male pastor, from a prominent church to serve a smaller congregation, who allowed her to preach.

Miriam was displaced eighteen months before receiving a call from a more senior bishop who learned of her plight. She said, "He found me. He called me and asked if I would do him a favor." The favor placed her back into pastoral ministry in the CME Church. It was the support of another episcopal leader with the ability to use legitimate power to give her another opportunity to use the gifts and graces bestowed upon her by God to preach God's Word and lead God's people. Upon her return to the CME Church at the behest of this more senior bishop, she was given opportunities to teach and preach at national CME Church conferences. The exposure catapulted her into key leadership roles within the church. She continues to receive support from key leaders in the CME Church today.

Miriam experienced both highs and lows in ministry. She attests to having considered a departure from the CME Church because of its inflexibility and resistance to clergywomen in leadership. She then expressed this reality, "The more ecumenical I've become, the more I realize women are treated the same everywhere." She expressed the need for the CME Church to be intentional about changing their views and treatment of clergywomen.

11 Martha's Story

Martha, a clergywoman in her early seventies, describes herself as being born into the CME Church. Her grandparents, who raised her, were leaders in the local church. Her grandfather was a steward, while her grandmother served as a stewardess, one of few leadership roles women were allowed to serve in those days. Martha accepted her call to preach in 1996. She was in her mid-forties. While most individuals who acknowledged their call to preach would go before the quarterly conference of their local church to be examined for a local preacher's license, she, like some other women pursuing their call to ministry, received an exhorter's license. This license delayed the ordination process two years.

Although Martha maintained her professional career, her desideratum was pastoral ministry. While her desire to provide pastoral care was met, she expressed her discontent in being sent to serve churches in need of major financial support. Martha spoke of the heartbreak she experienced after getting one church she pastored on solid footing only to be appointed to another church in financial disarray and in need of major repairs. She recalls, “The church they sent me to was basically falling apart. It was one of our larger buildings, but it needed a lot of repairs. The church had no heat and I found out the electricity had been jimmy-rigged.” Martha periodically received money for fuel from the congregation, but she never received a salary; nor did she receive any financial support from the episcopacy to help support the church. She lamented as she shared her harrowing story of receiving a call, during her hospitalization, from the presiding elder—a woman—seeking registration funds for the annual pastors’ conference, but never a call or visit to check on her physical well-being. She spoke of the lack of care and concern leadership has for the people of the church as well as the pastors.

Ministry in the CME Church did not meet Martha’s expectations. As she reflected on her ministry experience, she remarked, “I just don’t think they would do a man the way they do women.” She also spoke of the issue of ageism as she voiced her concern for the lack of opportunity granted to preachers over the age of forty. In this instance, Martha revealed that the gender of those over forty did not matter because the church is focused on promoting younger, less experienced, men to lead the church.

Martha did have mentors during her formative years in the church. Those mentors, primarily missionaries, focused on grooming Martha and other female gendered individuals on being “proper ladies” in the church and society. Those persons who provided her support and guidance, as she accepted her call to preach and served in pastoral ministry, were primarily from other denominations: Baptist and Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Although she talked about having one mentor who was a well-known CME pastor, his support did not garner her visibility, exposure or backing from key leaders in the CME Church. While mentors matter in the CME Church, the position and level of respect of one’s mentor in ministry plays a significant role in one’s upward mobility.

Martha is embittered by her experience; but because of the relationships she has formed as well as her family’s historical connection to the CME Church, she never considered leaving. She did speak of retiring early. She said, “I will remain a CME, but I’m not opposed to going somewhere else.” She reflected on the fact that individuals who are part of the “in crowd” are elevated in ministry. Those persons are typically men.

12 Deborah's Story

Deborah is in her late fifties. She is a daughter of the parsonage. Her father served as a CME pastor until his retirement; as such she was intimately familiar with the Methodist doctrine, the expectations of pastoral ministry, and the ethos of the church when she accepted her call to ministry in her late twenties.

Although Deborah's father was a CME pastor, she left the CME Church because she experienced the church in those days as being very traditional and lackluster in its worship. Since she grew up in an area where the Baptist church held services the first and third Sunday of the month and the Methodist church held service the second and fourth Sunday, she found a greater sense of connectedness with the Baptist church. She recalled, "The Methodist church was dead. I was the youth department. There were no other youth in the church."

While she received her salvation in the Baptist church, her heart for and desire to do ministry was in the CME Church. In her late twenties she returned to the CME Church and accepted her call to ministry. She expressed reticence in speaking with her pastor about her call, because the focus was on encouraging young men to accept God's call to preach and subsequently moving those young men through the ordination process. Once she spoke with her pastor about her call to ministry, her ordination process was accelerated. Her pastor used his influence with the bishop to ensure she received full orders immediately. The support she received from her pastor positioned her vocationally to serve in numerous leadership capacities: preacher-in-charge, the joint board of finance—a role generally reserved for "first church" pastors—young adult counselor, district finance committee, and the administrative assistant to the bishop.

Inasmuch as Deborah shattered glass ceilings in ministry advancement, she expressed displeasure with the way clergywomen treated each other in the CME Church. She described the actions and mentality of clergywomen as "crab in the barrel." Most clergywomen were not supportive of Deborah's accelerated path to ministry and accused her of participating in immoral activities with men in leadership. While she expected to receive pushback from male clergy, she was dismayed as she received admonishment rather than support from clergywoman.

Deborah spoke of her disdain for the lack of accountability within the CME Church as she shared her experience of being sent to pastor a church with an average Sunday worship attendance of thirty congregational members, a parsonage that was uninhabitable, and an annual apportionment⁴⁷ of

47 Apportionments in the CME Church are referred to as conference claims: fees that are assessed to the local church to support the expenses of the general church (general claims)

thirty-thousand dollars. Deborah, along with family and friends, remodeled the parsonage and led the church in achieving financial solvency. Shortly after redeeming the church, she was moved to a church with only eighty-four cents in its treasury and another parsonage in need of restoration. Deborah shared her frustration of being used to stabilize churches only to be moved to another financially failing church, while the bishop sent a male pastor to reap the harvest of her hard work. She spoke of a male pastor who had been moved to another church after he fathered a child, outside of his marriage, with a congregational member. She expressed the harsh reality of knowing that if a clergywoman were impregnated outside of her marriage or as a single woman, "She would have been sanctioned. She would have been sat down."

As the conversation with Deborah came to a close, Deborah spoke of her disappointment in being passed over for a presiding elder's role that was given to a male counterpart with fewer years of pastoral ministry experience. Deborah made it clear that she did not think she was passed over because of her gender, but because of her integrity and willingness to speak truth to power. She said, "I'm not the yes person. I'm not the person that will allow you to make an arbitrary decision and say nothing about it." Deborah reflected on the difference in treatment of clergy men and women and she could not foresee any significant change in the CME Church in the near future.

Deborah's decision to leave the CME Church was a difficult decision to make. She loves the church but could not remain in a system where leadership lacked integrity and accountability. Her call to ministry was a call to be Christ-centered, soul-minded, and community-focused, just as her male and female CME pastoral mentors instilled in her. Although Deborah left the CME Church, she did not join another religious institution. Instead, she created her own ministry with a focus on leading people to Christ.

13 Proposed Intervention

As with many churches and institutions, the CME Church has work to do in its treatment and elevation of clergywomen into superordinate leadership roles.

as well as episcopal districts (annual conference claims). A portion of the claims are distributed to the general church to support the general functioning of the CME Church, the salaries and retirement funds of general officers and bishops, and to financially support CME Church colleges and the seminary. Conference claims assessed to support episcopal districts are collected to pay the salaries, housing, the retirement fund of presiding elders, the upkeep of and expenses related to the episcopal residence, the expansion of churches, and stipends paid to annual conference officers.

In order to balance the scales of leadership equality for clergywomen in the CME Church, the development and implementation of a leadership training program designed specifically for women is proposed. The program would be designed to:

- identify and invest in burgeoning high-potential clergywomen by giving them exposure at key leadership conferences;
- accelerate the development of clergywomen by providing opportunities to foster and strengthen their skills and confidence;
- increase the effectiveness of current clergywomen leaders through continued educational enrichment;
- build a gender-balanced leadership structure to support the continued growth of the CME Church; and
- create a mentorship program that aims to retain and promote clergywomen.

14 Conclusion

Decades have passed since the eight-year-old Lutheran schoolgirl charted her course of advocacy. Today, she continues to shed light on the unjust treatment of women, particularly the prejudices faced by clergywomen while engaging in their call to ministry. The voices of the three clergywomen presented here not only illuminate the pervasiveness of patriarchy within the CME Church, but confirms that the misuse of power by men in leadership continues to be commonplace. There is an opportunity within the CME Church to make profound changes that will uplift the status and increase the retention of gifted clergywomen. Change requires the collective work and determination of both clergy men and women. Women clergy can no longer simply complain about the injustices or sit on the sidelines waiting for change to come. Clergywomen must be willing to stay the course, take decisive action, and raise their voices against sexism and oppression. Male clergy must be willing to envision, embrace, and cultivate the Spirit that has been poured into their sister clerics, just as the same Spirit has been poured into them.

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