

# Tool 9: Women in church leadership: co-option or transformation?<sup>41</sup>

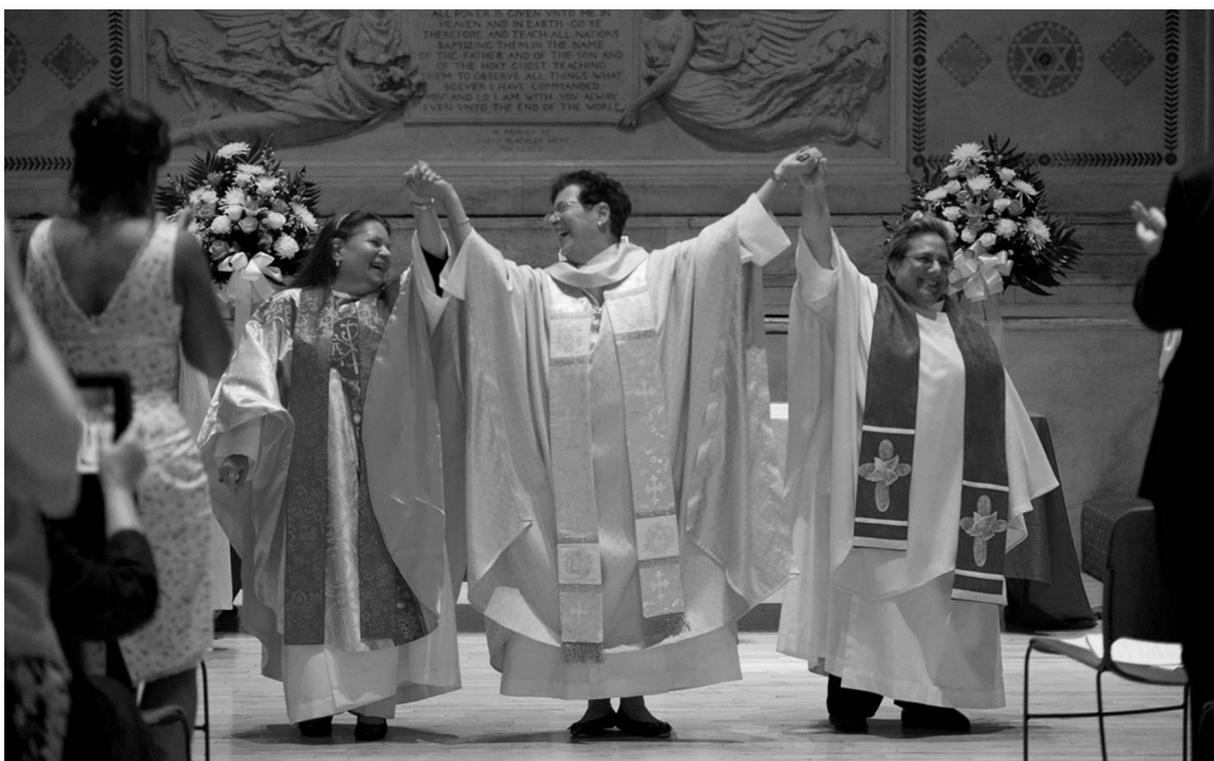


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***“Jesus said to her, Mary: ‘Go to my brothers and say to them I am ascending to my father and your father, my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”***

John 20:16-18

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<sup>41</sup> This title was adopted from an article by Bishop Purity Malinga in *Women in God's Image Journal*, No 8, April 2002. PACSA Pietermaritzburg.

## Tool 9 contents

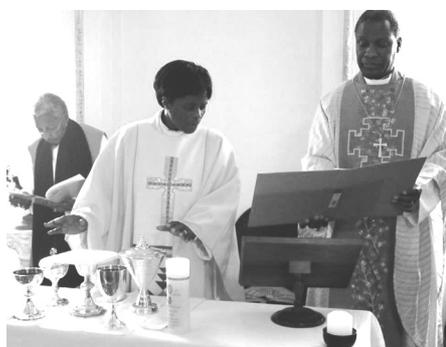
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## Reflection

*"I grew up in the church from childhood and my experience has been that fathers and young men have an upper seat in the church. Men were handling the affairs of the church. They were the ones taking decisions on everything taking place, on behalf of everybody. This was like a norm for the church; no one would dare to question anything. They would preach, collect offerings, read announcements and give directions to people where to sit. I used to wish I was one of them. Women sat on one side and men on the other side. All this made me feel like the pulpit was for men only. I could not bear it any longer. I decided to leave that church as I felt there was no space for women. Now I am in a different church. I see many women in leadership positions. I feel like I have arrived where I longed to be and I feel counted in God's kingdom."* Thandi

- How does this story make you feel?
- Who handles the affairs and makes the decisions in your church?
- What would make you feel “counted in God’s kingdom”?
- Did the writer make the right decision to leave her church? What could she have done instead?

## Introduction



Bishop of Swaziland, Ellinah Wamukoya, is one of two women bishops in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. Here she is administering sacraments with Archbishop Thabo Makgoba at a Women's Day service, 2013. *Source: PACSA*

As one looks back over the years since the 1970s in South Africa, and more recently in other countries in Africa, it would seem that the Holy Spirit has been moving within the church for some time, opening up conversations about women in leadership and laying a call upon the hearts of many women to take up the challenge of ordination.

These findings came out of the 2013 follow-up study by NCA of the 2007-8 churches' gender audits conducted in Malawi, Zambia and South Africa and subsequent similar audits in 2011-2012 carried out in Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Similar results came out of the *Pilot Study Report of Women in positions of Leadership* (2012) commissioned by NCA Pretoria. The study examined the number of women appointed to positions of power and decision making in churches and church councils. It was only a small pilot study and its findings cannot be generalised, but the trend was the same as the audits and the follow up study. It showed that women to positions of power and decision making, but the change is happening at a painstakingly slow pace. It is still mostly men who are in the positions of power and decision making at most levels.

However, there is hope. There is evidence of resistance against patriarchy and there are signs that gender consciousness is taking root within the churches that participated in the study, although this differs between churches and countries.

The vision of increasing women's leadership in churches is not just an idea of women in churches. The SADC Gender Protocol, signed by SADC country governments, set the target to achieve 50/50 women and men in all decision making processes in Government, by 2015. It is a justice and human rights issue that cuts across all religious and other institutions in any country.

So the fact that the Church also has begun to review its own leadership policies and patterns and work towards achieving equity echoes what is happening in wider society.<sup>42</sup>

This tool tries to portray, through the words of women themselves, something of the challenges and complexities of the debates around women in ordained and lay leadership, and opens spaces for deeper conversation on this issue.



## Time to talk

The testimonies of many women in lay or ordained leadership confirm the findings of the abovementioned studies: the journey is far from over.

Read the following two stories, and use the questions below to talk about them.

*"When it became apparent that I was not a temporary appointment, one of our church wardens moved to another parish. He did not feel it right that a woman should be in authority. I understood his feelings and we departed friends." Rev Nancy Charton<sup>43</sup>*

*"My story is that of an ordained female minister who finds herself working among male leaders and lay female Christians. It all started when I returned from further studies abroad. Rumours started circulating... that I [thought I] was the most educated clergywoman who did not support the male clergy. In an instant, the women stopped inviting me to their meetings; the male clergy also stopped encouraging or visiting me. Some of their comments were demeaning to all women; for instance, that men were the only ones who had the spirit, vision and peace! The congregation ... preferred a male minister ... I experienced isolation..."*

*The Bishop was advised to transfer me so that I do not destroy their church. ... Later, when the Council Meeting ended, I was found with no case to answer. .... I thank God for sending the Bishop to guide the lay leaders....*

<sup>42</sup> A theoretical basis for 50/50:

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development signed by SADC Heads of State (Presidents) set a target of 50/50 representation of women in all decision making processes by 2015. (In 2015 new milestones will be set when the time frame expires). This is in line with the African Protocol on Women's Rights target and provides a framework for developing indicators against which progress can be measured. These and other regional and international agreements and Protocols also provide an aspiration, which churches, church councils and the rest of society can work towards in promoting an equal and equitable society. Refer to Tool 5 for more information.

<sup>43</sup> *Women in God's Image Journal* (WIGI), No 8, April 2002. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.

*And now, living in peace, I have forgiven everyone and continue to work and visit my fellow clergy when need arises. Indeed, as single female minister, I faced so many challenges but God has always been on my side, faithful to me as a woman and sent other loved ones to console me. I love my church because I love my God whom I will continue to serve. I am a servant of everyone, rich, poor, sane, insane, and even the male clergy who usually do not support me as a co-worker.” Rev Jane Kaluba<sup>44</sup>*

- What are some of the problems these two women clergy experienced? Where did the resistance come from?
- The second story took place 10 years after the first. What has changed in that time, and what has not?
- In the second story, what do you think of the way the Bishop responded? What does it say about the role of senior leadership?
- Comment on the ways the two women responded.

## Women's ordination

This tool raises different questions about lay and ordained women and leadership in the church. It includes additional stories of women leaders, to help open up further conversations about this question that is vital for the continued life and ministry of the church in Southern Africa today.

*“Interpretation of the Bible and discernment of its application in our lives is a work of the Holy Spirit. Prejudging the outcomes of reading, assuming we know what is there, refusing to allow our eyes and hearts to be opened, is a refusal of God's Spirit.”*  
Rev Janet Trisk<sup>45</sup>



### Time to talk

Although more women have been ordained in a number of churches in various countries in Southern Africa, the situation may look better than it actually is for the women involved. Read the stories below, and talk about your own views.

<sup>44</sup> *Testimonies of the women theologian*. The Council of Churches in Zambia, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> *Men and Masculinities in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, PACSA, 2013

*"I looked at the paper and saw a picture of myself and in bold print was a title 'A Godless Nation'. It was a copy of the Daily News. I was taken aback and thought, "Godless Nation and me? What have I done?" ... The article was a response by a reader, Mr Worthington, to the news of my induction as Bishop in December 1999. Mr Worthington said, "Can somebody explain how this great deviation from God's Word is demonstrated in this way?" He went on to quote what the apostle Paul says about women and the church and concluded that the deviation from God's Word "started with the Anglican Church about six or seven years ago when they ordained their first woman priest and now the Methodists have gone one step further and elected a woman Bishop".*

*He went further, arguing, "If the church cannot obey God's law, then who can? Is it because the people of South Africa adopted a Godless Constitution that we have now become a Godless nation? It is now becoming clear for all to see what is happening in South Africa". I cannot describe how I felt. There were many feelings within me and there were many feelings amongst the Methodist people who read the article. Some said, "We have been saying this, it shouldn't have happened". Others said, "We need to challenge this". While some said, "You, Purity, need to challenge this". I did not, was not prepared to do so, and never have." Bishop Purity Malinga<sup>46</sup>*

*"... [H]e casually asked me what I was doing at a theological college. I explained that I had been called to ministry. "Oh, that is all right." He said. "You are not aiming for the priesthood then." I was astonished, and said, "Why should I not?" He replied: "Because the priest is the icon of Christ. A woman cannot be Christ's icon." I had no words for my feelings of rejection and dismay. It seemed that as a woman I could have no part in Christ." Rev Nancy Charton<sup>47</sup>*

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- Do you think it's OK for women to be ordained to church ministry?
  - Do you think it's OK for them to become bishops?

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<sup>46</sup>(PACSA Presentation, Pietermaritzburg, August 2001)

<sup>47</sup>Women in God's Image Journal, No. 8, April 2002 - PACSA

## Theological arguments

The Bible has been used since time immemorial to justify just about any point of view, because it is really a set of many books, written at different times over the past 3 000 years, by men of different cultures and upbringings; and translated many times into different languages, again by men from different cultures and backgrounds.

This section offers a few different theological perspectives on women's ordination.



The Bible has been used in life-giving as well as oppressive ways throughout the history of the church. Source: [www.wheatridge.org](http://www.wheatridge.org)

Read through all the extracts, and then answer the questions that follow:

*"I rushed back to my room, seized my Bible in a frenzy of anxiety and turned to Genesis 1:27: "Male and female made He them, together in the image of God." I was comforted. I turned to Galatians 3:28 and was doubly reassured. I had begun to theologise for myself about the road ahead. The priesthood was not the immediate objective. But I could not and would not exclude it. I have often been grateful to my Anglo Catholic acquaintance. He had made the penny drop at last simply by stating clearly the "phallic heresy" as I came to call it." Rev Nancy Charton<sup>48</sup>*

*"Priests act in persona Christi Capitis, in the person of Christ, the Head of His Body, the Church. ...Christ, of course, was a man; but some who argue for the ordination of women insist that His sex is irrelevant, that a woman can act in the person of Christ as well as a man can. This is a misunderstanding of Catholic teaching on the differences between men and women, which the Church insists are irreducible; men and women, by their natures, are suited to different, yet complementary, roles and functions.*

*The Lord Jesus chose men (viri) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ's return. The [Catholic] Church recognises herself to be bound by this choice made by*

<sup>48</sup> *Women in God's Image Journal*, No. 8, April 2002

*the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible.”*  
Scott P. Richert<sup>49</sup>

*“I thank God for allowing the society to have accepted me as a [minister] despite my sex as a woman, a woman created in the image of God. For my desire was and is to reveal the beauty of God regardless of the challenges. I have realised that God has commissioned me to perform this great task.”* Rev Leenorah Ng'andu<sup>50</sup>



## Time to talk

Rev Ng'andu believes that God has commissioned her to “reveal the beauty of God”.

The Anglo-Catholic priest in Nancy Charton's story and the anti-ordination lobbyist claim that a woman cannot be ordained because “the priest is the icon of Christ [and] a woman cannot be Christ's icon”.

- What do you think? Can a woman be called to represent Christ, as is one of the roles of an ordained minister?
- What would you say qualifies a person to serve Christ in the ordained ministry?<sup>51</sup>

### Women leaders in the Bible:

Read through the following biblical examples of women leaders in the Bible<sup>52</sup>. Many of them operated in cultural contexts very similar to ours, and yet they were able to achieve much in their ministries for God.

- Talk about what strikes you about their leadership, in relation to modern lay and ordained ministries.

<sup>49</sup>About.com Guide

<sup>50</sup>*Testimonies of the women theologian*. The Council of Churches in Zambia, 2011, pg11.

<sup>51</sup>The following Scriptures may be helpful: 1 Peter 2:4-5; Revelation 1: 2-6; Rev 20: 6; Romans 12: 7-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 8-10; Ephesians 4: 11-13.

<sup>52</sup>Taken from: *Gender Training Manual for the Clergy*. 2010. Zambian Churches Mother Bodies – ZEC, CCZ and EFZ.

**Deborah** (Judges 4: 4-24). Before the Israelites had kings to rule them, they were governed by Judges who served as legal and administrative officers and military commanders. Deborah served her community as both Judge and Prophet, in a patriarchal society where women were often confined to the home, Deborah's role was all the more amazing. She served her community with great wisdom, courage and distinction. Deborah was surely a charismatic leader, one who was influential in the community, attracting many followers by her strong personality and example.

**Mirriam** (Exodus 2:4,7-8). She is the elder sister of Moses, standing guard over her baby brother on the shores of the river. She comes from an outstanding family of leaders. Mirriam might be called the leader of a woman's group, as we see her in Exodus 15: 19-21 leading a group of Israelite women in victory, song and dance after crossing the Red Sea. She is a gifted woman, a poet and musician as well as a women's leader. In the Toolkit of Numbers 12: 2,6, we further discover that she, like her two brothers, was also a prophet, a messenger of God's Word.

**Junia** (Romans 16:7). St Paul himself identified both Junia and her husband as prominent among the apostles.

**Priscilla and Aquilas** (1 Corinthians 16:19). They served as leaders of the congregation together and Priscilla is mentioned first, which means that she is viewed as the most powerful of them.

**Phoebe** (Roman 16: 1, 27). Paul sent Phoebe to minister to the Corinthian church, and so she was essentially the first deaconess.



**Mary, Mother of Jesus** – her lifestyle provided spiritual leadership of faith.

**Mary Magdalene** - She was one of Jesus' closest friends, and the first person to be called by Jesus Christ to share the Good News of Jesus Resurrection.

## Change is challenging

The pilot study mentioned earlier conducted in 2012 on numbers of women in positions of lay and ordained leadership across seven Southern African countries<sup>53</sup> concludes that, while there is evidence of an increase in numbers of women lay and ordained leaders, men continue to occupy positions of strategic importance while women continue to work in supportive roles.

This means that most churches are still missing out on the many different gifts that women can offer into their leadership.

It is worth exploring together, wherever we may find ourselves, why churches are finding it difficult to make the changes.

Could it be because women are just not capable of meeting the challenges that leadership demands of them? Could the answer lie in exposing more women to training and support to lead more effectively? Or is it just not biblically correct for women to lead? Why do many men resist? Could it be that men in the churches are afraid or unwilling to share power? And why do some women not support other women's leadership? Are they jealous, or do they not trust them to do a good job?

What do you suggest needs to be done?

The rest of this tool offers stories about different kinds of women in leadership in churches to help church leaders and groups grapple with these issues and come up with their own questions and solutions that can strengthen their churches' response to the movements of the Holy Spirit.



Rev Phumzile Mabizela, Ordained minister and Director of the International Network of Religious Leaders Affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+) visiting the Evangelical Church of Geneva. Source: [www.cabsa.org.za](http://www.cabsa.org.za)



### Time to talk

Read the following extracts, and use the questions that follow to guide your conversation:

<sup>53</sup>Norwegian Church Aid. Report – *Pilot Study on Numbers of Women in Positions of Leadership*. November 2012

## Personal challenges of women ordained ministers

### Woman Theological Students

*"I took a course in Homiletics at third year level, which required that students practice Homiletic through preaching in the College Chapel. I was among three females in the class. The Chapel schedule left out the female members from the preaching aspect, but included them on the worship list! When I saw this, I protested and insisted that I needed to practice what I had learnt from Homiletic class by being given an opportunity to preach. The brothers protested and were outraged by this idea. The insurrection was understandable because most of them came from a background that held this view. However, I felt angry that I could be discriminated against based on my gender and not on my ability or inability to preach the good news. In my insistence, one of the brothers showed open contempt: 'I will not come to the Chapel to listen to a woman preach, if she wants to champion women's rights let her go to the Women's Lobby Group'. It hurt, but I also continued to insist that I be given the opportunity to preach in the Chapel. In [the end], I was given that opportunity." Mary Zulu (Testimonies of Zambian Women Theologians, 2011)*

#### Reflections of a woman theology student

*Who am I -  
The un-ordained  
therefore read lessons at Communal services  
The un-married  
therefore be nice to all, one of them might marry you  
The un-respecting woman  
therefore bring out the culture card  
The un-evangelical  
therefore should be prayed for  
The un-quiet  
therefore should be reminded that salvation for her is only by child-birth.  
On better days I was called.  
Rev Bellina Mangena (Later ordained, then a Canon in the Anglican Church)*

- Does your church encourage women to study theology?
- Do you know any women who have entered what were previously men-only theological institutions? How have their experiences compared to the student this story?
- What changes need to be made in theological training to enable women's full participation?

## Social and cultural rejection of ordained women

*"Mariam was ordained in 2006, She is a leader in a church in one of the villages in Lesotho. Since she began her work there as a minister she has endured pain and bitterness due to the community and the congregation not supporting her. Both women and men in her church undermined her authority and worst of all they always questioned her teachings. In funerals when she offered the service at the burial, the community elders and chiefs did not accept her. She tried to ask for some intervention from her church leadership but all was in vain.*

*She was approached by other concerned women from her congregation who advised her to step down as a pastor and give her position to one man who was authoritative in the church. Mariam refused and that also had consequences as even those women became her worst enemies. Their monthly offerings just stopped, and when Mariam asked about them these women began to spread rumours about her integrity.*

*When Mariam saw that all hell was breaking loose, she began to be assertive in church, calling the powerful group of men and women to order. She began to dialogue with the church elders after church services, reminding them that she was leading the church, and laying down her rules in the church. Her changed attitude and character surprised not only the church elders but also the congregants. They began to comply with her rules and regulations and Mariam now enjoys the fruit of her hard work as she is respected in the church." Lebohang Matale, Lesotho*

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- How does this story make you feel?
- What do you think influenced the congregants and community elders to have such negative attitudes to Mariam's leadership?
- Why do you think the two women advised Mariam to step down and give over to a man who was 'authoritative'? Was this helpful? What does this say about the attitudes of women in the church towards women leaders?
- What can you say about the way Mariam acted to change her situation? Should women have to radically change their character in order to get respect?
- Although people began to accept Mariam's leadership, do you think their attitudes to women's leadership had actually changed?
- What other things could Mariam have done to change people's attitudes to her ministry as a woman? Was this her only choice?
- Re-tell the story, to give it an ending that shows real gender transformation.

## Single women clergy

*"It was clear to them I was a young female, unmarried and inexperienced to handle congregational matters. It was clear they wanted a male who could handle and manage a big congregation. Despite all these setbacks, on 8 January 2005, I was licensed to perform my ministry duties in that congregation under a supervisor who was a Minister." Rev Patricia Phiri (Stories of Women Theologians, Zambia)*

*"Clergy are not perceived as ordinary people and men might fear that clergy women might not perform the wifely duties as expected of them by culture and communities due to the unique and sometimes unpredictable activities that they perform on a daily*



*basis, i.e. burying the dead, visiting the sick etc. The fear is that they might not have time for their homes. It is also perceived that a husband of a clergy woman might also be expected to uphold the very high moral standards required of them by virtue of the positions of their wives. Finally, it may be that some men already do not want to be a 'step' behind the clergy wife in terms of status in the community." Suzanne Matala, CEO Christian Council in Zambia*

- Do you think that it is right for young women to become ordained as clergy? Why, or why not?
- Do you think that it is better for women clergy to remain unmarried, or not?
- What are some of the underlying attitudes to women clergy that come out of Suzanne Matala's explanation above? What do you propose as solutions?

## Women clergy married to clergy

*"As a married minister, it was hard to look after my family because at times, I could knock off from ministerial work very late in the night. I could report late at work due to pressure of work at home and in my husband's congregation. It has been a challenge for me to work in my congregation as a minister in charge and a minister's*

wife in the congregation of my husband. That meant at times, on Mondays, I would follow up cases where congregants did not report on Sunday. Tuesday would be a day when I would join the women for visitations." Rev Thandiwe Chipeta (Zambian Women Theologians Stories)

- How could Rev Chipeta's ministry be strengthened?

## Widows

*"I was ordained in 1991. A year after my ordination my husband passed on, leaving me with 3 children, the youngest of which was 1 ½ years old. During the whole period of his sickness, the congregation was very supportive, and some of the women even helped with the household chores. I felt I had a caring family given to me by God himself. After his death, his company gave me 3 months to find alternative accommodation. I approached the congregation leadership to search for a new home for me and my children. I was assured that they had already taken care of that issue. Yet after the 3 months, I still had no alternative, and so made another urgent request to them.*

*"The word of God is from God. If you hear a call from God, answer the call. Churches need women leadership."*  
Rev Victory Mbanjwa

*The church leaders put me in a one-roomed house without water. When I objected, I was told not to expect to be treated by them the way my husband treated me. They were not going to receive orders from a woman who was supposed to submit to her superiors. In fact, they went on to make it clear that they would not accord me the same respect as when my husband was alive, because I was now a widow.*

*I was very hurt, and went on leave to give me time to think. While I was away, the Women's Fellowship set about raising funds to pay rent on a decent house for me. I was really grateful, and yet, I doubted whether I should stay on under the kind of senior church leadership that neither respected nor supported me. After much prayer, I had the sense that God wanted me to be strong and continue in the same place.*

*I was in that congregation up to 2002. During my stay, we managed to build a four bed roomed house for the minister. But a number of people were against the plan saying*

*that we do not have to build such a big house in that area. The reasons were that that type of house is supposed to be in suburban areas and not a compound like this area. Little did people know that in a few years the President would empower sitting tenants in the council houses to buy and extend their small houses. Today when you go to that area there are very big and beautiful houses. I also helped the congregation build some classrooms and a wall boundary around the church.*

*After the completion of the house, the whole thing started again. Even though most of the funds for the house were raised by the Women's Fellowship and me personally, the elders decided that I should move out of the house because it was too big for a single woman and that they want to let it out. They would find a smaller one for me and my children. I was very disappointed with the congregation but I stood my ground not to go anywhere and asked the congregation to build another house if they want to engage in real estate business. They knew that the Presbytery would not allow them to push me around. They just started making my work difficult by not meeting deadlines, not attending meetings and that sort of thing.*

*I felt that I had done my part and had to move out of Matero. I knew that I was leaving the congregation and the community better than I had found it."*

Rev Jane M Nyirongo (Part 1)

- What social assumptions and cultural beliefs underpinned the ways the church leadership behaved? How might these be challenged in a way that is not divisive, but could turn this situation into a win-win for everyone?
- Do you know any women in Rev Nyirongo's situation? How have their experiences compared to hers?

## Women resisting women ministers

*"It is very difficult for people to accept a female minister. People look at you with different views and questions. The male congregants fail to understand and accept to be led by a woman. As if that is not enough, the woman's [organisation] Executive faces many misinterpretations from the wives of male ministers. In my case I ended up being lonely without any one to talk to, until they proved that whatever was being talked about me was a lie."* Rev Thandiwe Chipeta (*Testimonies of Zambian Women Theologians*, pg 7)

- In this story, other women contributed to Rev Chipeta's unhappiness. Why do you think they did this?
- How do women in your church relate to women clergy and other lay leaders? How might women be more supportive of other women, and what would be the outcomes?

## Lay leadership



### Time to talk

It is interesting that Pope Francis II, the new Pope in the Catholic Church, which is known as the most conservative on the ordination of women, has recognised the importance of lay women leadership. Although he has not changed his views about the ordination of women or allowing male priests to marry, he has said that more women should be represented in lay leadership roles in the Catholic Church. According to Father Thoman Risica – spokesman for the Vatican:

*“Pope Francis is extremely sensitive to the fact that, in making major decisions that affect people's lives -how can we do this without consulting half the human race? And most of the people who are in our churches and playing very leading roles as mothers, catechists, teachers, as those transmitting the faith, is the women in the church.”*

- Why do you think he is able to say this about lay leadership, but not ordained leadership? What is the basic difference, and what do you think it means in practice?

It does seem that many churches now allow women to become lay leaders. But stories told by some women show that there is still resistance from both men and women. It is important to talk about how this problem can be addressed.

## Clergy wives: the unsung ministry of service



### Time to talk

Read the following story, and talk about it. Use the reflection questions if you find them helpful.

*"I married my husband, who was already ordained, at 23 and have been married for 16 years. I feel the pressure very acutely because I live in the church ground at the Cathedral and it is always busy. Also the congregants live far away so one is not really part of a neighbourhood. You have to forget about yourself and your own needs. My children feel the pressure too.*

*There is no training/preparation for priests' wives and it would have been more difficult had I not grown up as an Anglican. It has been easier for me to adjust than it is for some other clergy wives. My husband does not help with domestic chores, so I work in the house and in the church.*

*... The expectations of the members of the congregations are very high – we are expected to attend all meetings. If we don't attend, people ask why we are not there – do we not support what they are doing? A Priest's work is full time, but I also work as a teacher, and raise the family at the same time. And of course, there are many visitors to host as well.*

*... I live in a house, but would lose it if my husband died, and I don't know where I would live. But I definitely don't want to be a priest. One priest in the family is enough!" Mrs Ruth Nwaou*

- How many jobs does Mrs Nwaou do?
- What could her husband do to take off some of the pressure?
- What could church structures do to be more supportive of the ministries offered by clergy wives?

## Positive examples of journeys of change

Although the picture is not all rosy, as seen in the stories above, it is not all darkness either. Many churches have taken on the challenge to change fixed attitudes and to open up spaces for women to be ordained and even move into the highest decision making positions. Two examples follow here.



### Time to talk

Read through the stories that follow and talk about what strikes you about the journeys that each church has taken.

- What do you think have been some important factors in the growth to openness?
- What are some of the differences in how the women writers understand ministry in relation to a more traditional patriarchal view of ministry related to authority and status?

## Change in the Reformed Church in Zambia (UCZ)

*"I remember many small things in this maze of struggle and uncertainties. Being a veteran in the work, I appreciate the little gains, in the Church at a political level. Some have opened up to women's ordination, to involving women in decision-making in the church. Let me take the Reformed Church as an example. In the beginning they said no women - that was what the Bible said. I remember in 2002, I was asked by our General Secretary to go and address a Synod meeting about CCZ's gender programme and the need for the emancipation of women in the church. The men were inside, and the women were in the kitchen, cooking for the meeting. They allowed me to deliver my message, but when it was discussed, and I raised my hand to participate or engage with their questions, I was repeatedly bypassed. When I expressed my frustration, a neighbouring male delegate informed me that women are not permitted to speak at Synod.*

*From about 2003, the church began to change, little by little. First they allowed women to speak in Synod; then they began to encourage women to attend the seminaries and become theologians, and now they even ordain women into the ministry. I want to congratulate the Reformed Church in Zambia. This would have been unthinkable 20 years ago. In the church you just have to obey. I stood up to my*

*own church and challenged them on accountability and transparency, and was given the boot! I was sacked for standing up to leadership, because you don't do that. We have a long way to go and progress is slow, but we must lift up these wonderful examples. There is a growing number of women ministers. It is not enough, but there are many more in many churches, and they are rising up in the midst of all the resistance to women's emancipation. The younger ministers are more forthcoming. We have a lot of young gender sensitive ministers now, both male and female, and that gives us hope."* Rev Suzanne Matala, General Secretary, CCZ. The First Woman Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Zambia (PCZ): *A New Approach to Ministry*.

*"In 2004 I decided to go and work in Wales as a Mission Adviser, where I stayed for 3 years.*

*When I returned to Zambia in 2008, I was sent to a new local Church. I was received with mixed feelings because the congregation felt that they would not be able to keep me, as they thought my standards might be too high for them having just come from outside the country. But from the time that I came to this congregation to this day we have had a very good relationship.*

*Together we have challenged ourselves to be an outward looking congregation relevant to the community in which we stay. So we have strengthened the community school which was started in 2005. I just encouraged the congregation to aim at giving out the best. The mentality in this area was that a community school is for vulnerable children and because they are vulnerable they should get whatever is offered to them. The common saying is that a beggar is not a chooser, but I told them that this school will be different; that we would offer the best services in a very clean and conducive environment. Our children would be helped to have self-esteem and they would be proud to be in our school. I have been in this congregation for 5 years and people who were here in 2007 can hardly recognise the place because we have turned it to be what God intended it to be. It has not been easy, but we can say the Lord has brought us thus far.*

we had been silent for so long

speaking a language of half truths

that told us who we were and who we could become

the icons became idols ....

we are now reading the Scriptures for ourselves

sounding out the dark hollow words that rebirth us

renaming ourselves

and renaming GOD

in the stained glass we see the blood and water

we are speechless with a new silence

can we not trust Christ in faith to be faithful...?

Devarakshanam Betty Govinden, in *Women in God's Image*, Nr 8, 2002

*We have also built very strong ties with other denominations like the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, United Church of Zambia, the Reformed Church in Zambia, Church of Christ and a number of Pentecostal Churches. I always tell my congregation that we are here not to compete with one another but complement one another. We need to encourage one another and help to bring out the best in everyone because every child of God has something special to offer to the world.*

*I was elected Moderator of Synod for our church in 2012. From the beginning, I prayed that God use me to build an inclusive community through leadership that is willing to be transformed if it is to be transforming. We are slowly getting there because we are empowering the youth and women to take up leadership roles.*

*The attitude towards me as a woman is slowly changing because trust has been built through these many years. But maybe the other reason why they are more receptive is because they can see some grey hair coming out! I am grateful to my God that He made me strong in my journey so that I could pave the way for other female leaders in our church.*

*Before my ordination, I am told that people betted on whether I would stay for more than 6 months in the church. Apparently they did not want to refuse to ordain me because it would just be a matter of time before I quit. But my Lord has always been, and continues to be, faithful." Rev Jane Nyirongo, Moderator, Presbyterian Church in Zambia.*

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You might have noticed that this is the happy ending to Rev Nyirongo's story on page 140-141. It shows that, while acceptance of women in ministry is not easy, if they persevere, some women clergy can really be the witness needed to change conservative mindsets.

## **Advocating for change: the need for inspiration**

For women who have been waiting for a long time for their church to change, so that they can begin to fulfil what they believe to be God's call on their lives, the struggle can seem endless.

The following story offers some inspiration:



## Women's Ordination in The Anglican Church of Southern Africa: a long hard journey of discernment and change

*"In 1979, at the Provincial Synod of the then Church of the [then] Province of Southern Africa, a resolution on women's ordination was taken off the agenda without debate by the [then] Bishop Desmond Tutu.*

*In 1985 the Provincial Synod requested the Archbishop to set up a commission to deal with the ordination of women to the priesthood. When Desmond Tutu was elected Archbishop in 1986 the ordination of women priests was on his list of priorities.*

*A motion was brought Provincial Synod in June 1989. Declared a controversial motion, it needed a 2/3 majority to pass. It failed by 13 votes. There was pain on both sides of the debate. Archbishop Tutu, in pain, said, 'I am deeply convinced of the rightness of the ordination of women, especially in view of my own ministry in seeking to work for justice.'*

*The 1989 Synod asked the bishops to keep the issue under review in 'the most sensitive way'. For the next three years, the CPSA engaged in a time of study, reflection and debate. The issue gained visibility and exposure beyond the church leadership into the pews. It emerged as a major focus. This all took place in the context of the tumultuous ending months of apartheid in South Africa.*

*At the 1992 Provincial Synod, after over four hours of debate, the meeting voted 79.2% in favour of the ordination of women. The pastoral letter of the bishops put it well:*

*'Provincial Synod was soaked with the prayers of many, and all who were present were aware of this. The debate was deeply moving and free of any acrimony or scoring of points. There was an overriding sense that we were trying to listen to God through those who were speaking to Synod. There was a desire to hold on to one another in disagreement, and this was achieved by God's grace.'*" Rev Nancy Charton

In 2013, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa has 347 women priests, two of whom are Bishops. There are still some injustices in implementation, and it has taken 44 years to achieve this, but it offers an inspirational example of the Holy Spirit at work.

All the Provinces in the Anglican Church in Africa now ordain women, except for the Anglican Church in Central Africa, which Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana fall under. But the struggle continues, as told by Canon Christopher Mwawa of the Anglican Council in Malawi:



Source: flickr-photo sharing!\_files

*“The women themselves are divided on the ordination of women. Some are for it while others are not. However, during their Synod meetings in the three of the four Anglican dioceses held this year, the ordination of women was discussed and members agreed that the issue be given another thought and to that effect, at the next CPCA Synod meeting to be held in Lusaka Zambia, an agenda item on ‘ordination of women’ will be discussed.*”

*A number of young women are doing theology and possibly just waiting for the day when the Church of the Province of Central Africa will say ‘yes’ to the ordination of women.”*

Unfortunately, the motion was defeated once again in 2013, with the House of Clergy (only men) voting for and the House of Laity (including women and men) voting against the ordination of women. It is encouraging that the male clergy want to welcome women priests, but clearly, there is still work to be done amongst women, and those who feel they are called will have to wait another few years to be able to fulfil their calling.

## **Women leading the way in building balanced and transformative leadership**

Just having women in leadership positions does not mean it brings about any real change from the traditional top-down structures and unapproachability of some male leaders. The church has often been criticised for what has been called its ‘clericalism’, or the centralising of power with ordained leadership in churches, and that often male clergy are not easily approached by their members.

Bishop Purity challenges us in her article below, to consciously think through how women might offer different kinds of leadership that can help to transform the ministry of the Church into something more like the servant leadership that Jesus modelled in His earthly ministry.



## Time to talk

Read the extract from her article below, and talk about her ideas for women to take the lead in changing leadership in the churches. (You may also wish also to read the attachments: Women Theologians in Zambia: Living Letter to the Churches, 2011, and Joint Statement by Women Clergy to the Provincial Standing Committee of the Anglican Church of the Province of Southern Africa.)

There are some questions in between her paragraphs, to help you think through what she is saying.

There are other questions at the end of the article.

- While you are reading, recall some of the stories you read above of women's struggles as leaders.
- Talk about what positive things these women did to bring about change, and what else they might have done or could still do.

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### “What are the things that women leaders should address in an endeavour to transform their churches and society?”

*“Firstly, I believe that women leaders need to be purposeful in **studying and doing liberating theologies** because it is from these theologies that you as a woman come to terms with who you are as a child of God. Only after coming to terms with who you are, will you be able to help other women and other people to understand who they are. Women's experiences and understandings of God have been ignored down the ages but they need to be taken seriously. Women need to do theology and **teach theology** for this to happen. We know the theologies of our churches are patriarchal and are dehumanising to women, and it is therefore important that those who are in the leadership of the church take seriously the task of doing theology.*”

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- What theological teachings exist in your church, which make it hard for women to become leaders and be taken seriously?
- See the Resources list in the last tool, to find readings that open up alternative approaches to theology.

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*Secondly, it is important for women leaders to be purposeful in **influencing the structures of their church** and insisting on representation by women. When people begin to see women in decision making structures where they are normally excluded, they begin to realise that something has been wrong in the past. We need to make women leaders visible so that questions may be raised and these issues talked about.*

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- Are there any women in the senior structures of your church?
- Do they have any impact? Since they have been in leadership, have you noticed any changes in decision making processes or the nature of decisions that are made? If yes, explain.
- If not, what would the need to do to make more of an impact?

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*Thirdly, in order to bring about transformation, women leaders need to **insist on being themselves**. Women leaders do not need to imitate male leadership. I believe women have been given many gifts by God that can transform the church if they are used and put on the table. Women bring themselves and their gentleness which we sometimes lack in our churches. Sometimes gentleness is seen as weakness but in the church we have people who need to be treated gently and cared for. Women bring with them the gift of caring, the gift of loving, the gift of embracing, and many others. If we insist on being ourselves as women leaders, transformation will come about in the churches in which we work.*

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- Do you know any women in leadership?
- How do they lead? Do they use the same top-down approaches that most of our churches traditionally have, or do they live out their leadership in a more service-oriented way?



- Bishop Purity says that if women are themselves as leaders, they will transform the very nature of ministry.
  - What do you think women clergy and leaders can bring into church leadership that can transform church leadership to become less hierarchical and more inclusive?
  - What might be some traps that women could fall into when taking up lay or ordained leadership positions, and what might prevent this?
- What can you do to support women leaders in your church?

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*Fourthly, it is important for women leaders in the church to **continue speaking out**. I attend a number of circles and meetings where at times I am the only woman and I am often surprised at how insensitive church men are. I am surprised by how being sexist comes so naturally to so many people that I meet. It is as if they just cannot be anything else. So as a woman among them I need to keep talking and saying, 'You are being sexist', 'You are excluding me', 'I don't feel comfortable with the joke you are making'. Many men are not aware that their behaviour is offensive and if you feel that you are tired of speaking out, you are not helping the struggle for transformation. This is not a generalisation. Men hear me well- I am not saying all men are like that. But I am saying that many men are like this and will never change unless women keep saying, 'I feel excluded', 'I don't like that', 'You can do it differently'. **There are men who are prepared to listen**. We don't need to get tired of talking, of challenging sexist attitudes, jokes and traditions that are being continued in our midst, in our churches and in our church meetings.*

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- Do you think the opinions of the women leaders are taken seriously in the church? Why?
- What do you think women leaders could do to be heard more effectively in their church?
- Should women speak out every time a sexist or patriarchal thing happens? Some people say it is wise to 'choose your battles'. What do you think are the most important things that women should speak out about, and what are other things that are less crucial? (Perhaps it might help to consider what one is wanting to achieve in the long term, to help answer this question.)

*Finally and **most importantly**, women church leaders need to insist on **educating our young people and children about sexist attitudes**. As they grow up in this environment that at least recognises the rights of women, we have a chance of changing the attitudes of children and young people in our churches. From our pulpits, wherever we do Christian education, wherever we teach in our churches, we need to focus on a **theology of equality between the sexes and on the respect for all the people of God**.” Bishop Purity Malinga (2001, PACSA Presentation, published in *Women in God's Image Journal*, No 8, April 2002).*

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- Do you think sermons are the right place to challenge sexist assumptions?
- What other teaching opportunities could women leaders use to educate children, youth and adults about sexist attitudes?”

Discuss further:

- What do you think of the suggestions offered? How do you think they might make a difference, in practice?
- Lastly, you might want to talk about what churches need to do to make women's leadership a norm – for women's leadership styles to become acceptable, and for men to be happy to submit women's authority.



Virginia women ordained catholic priest. Source: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

## Attachment: Women theologians in Zambia -living letter to the Church (2011)

### Preamble

**Theme: “May they be one” (John 17: 21)**

We, the women theologians in Zambia meeting Lusaka under the auspices of the Council of Churches in Zambia from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2011 to deeply reflect on our ministry in the body of Christ under the theme. May They Be One.

We shared our challenges as women in the ministry, our fears, and our inspirations for a brighter future of women ministry in Zambia and beyond. We also reflected and prayed for enhancement and effective participation of women in the total life of the body of Christ.

We affirmed the Theological Guidelines framed by the women theologians in November 2007, which we offered to the churches then for their consideration and action.

We thanked God for the space that has been created for women in the ordained ministry in some of our churches. We are glad that the space is slowly expanding and more women are joining the ministry.

We appreciated and recognised the encouragement and support we have received from our women pioneers in the ministry and a few male ministers who encouraged us and continue to encourage and support women in the ministry.

We reflected deeply on our own personal stories on our work in the church. We shared our many struggles that we face in our walk with the Lord. We recognised that it has not been an easy road for anyone of us; it is a walk that has been interspaced with numerous challenges:

- The high mountains we had to climb
- The deep valleys we had and continue to walk
- The wide and deep waters we had to swim against the tide

We agreed that in spite of all these challenges, the Lord had held our hands and led us this far and also agreed to stand firm and to stand together in believing together like James said in Chapter 1 that *The joy of the Lord is our strength.*

We drew strength from Elijah's story in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19:1-18. Even though there were times when we were afraid like Elijah was of Jezebel, just like he wanted to give up and pleaded with the Lord to take his life because he has had enough, we share with Elijah the gentle whisper of God just like the gentle voice comforted Elijah, gave him a new commission and strengthened him for his task and gave him peace.

### **Our concerns**

We are, however, concerned that

- Some of our churches in Zambia are still not open to women ordination
- The number of women ministers is still far from satisfactory, the number still remains very low
- There still are no affirmative actions enshrined in church policies to promote women's participation in decision making.
- Unfavourable structures which usually works against women ministers
- Discrimination and injustices, though subtle, continue unabated in many churches.

### **Our aspirations and desires**

- We call and urge the church in Zambia
- To continue to open doors to women theological training in order to increase the number of ordained women
- To formulate gender policies in their churches which enhance and promote women's participation in the total life of the church
- To make deliberate efforts to enhance partnership between female and male ministers in the churches
- All male ministers to partner with us in promoting development and bringing the gender equality agenda to the fore
- To pay special attention to the subtle discrimination and injustices towards female theologians
- To review structures to bring them in line with the demands of modern management or institutions which will take into account the special talents and gifting of women.

### **Our pledge to ourselves**

We, pledge

- To continue support and encourage each other and be there for each other
- To be role models to the upcoming young women theologians
- To participate in programmes which enhance positive change for the betterment of our communities
- In the era of poverty and dependency on outside donors, we pledge to work towards self-sustainability in our churches and communities
- To reinterpret and identify wealth within our own communities.

## Conclusion

We would like to conclude our living letter by appreciating the male clergy who helped to facilitate our consultation and without bias listened to our stories and encourage us all the way. With male ministers like them, we have hope.

## Attachment: Joint statement by women clergy to the Provincial Standing Committee of the Anglican Church of the Province of Southern Africa

Presented by Rev Cheryl Bird on their behalf

We  
as women  
are standing up  
we have arrived  
we have come of age  
we are fully human  
fully committed  
to living out that call  
to serving together  
with all who serve.

And we call on the Church  
to recognise this  
to be open to receiving  
all that we bring  
that only we can bring  
we call on the Church  
to meet us  
on the way  
to meet our needs for training and equipping  
for full acceptance  
for affirmation and support  
for opportunities to lead.

We call on the Church  
 to elect more women bishops  
 to champion women's ordination  
 in all diocese  
 all provinces  
 to appoint more women rectors  
 to provide teaching resources for parishes  
 helpful theology to smooth the way  
 for women priests.

We call on the Church  
 to take up the challenge  
 of interrogating and resisting  
 all oppressive and abusive practices  
 in the name of culture and tradition  
 to stand with us  
 to speak out  
 and keep speaking out  
 against violence in all its forms.

We as women  
 are standing up  
 together  
 we have arrived  
 we have come of age  
 we are fully human  
 fully called  
 fully committed to living out that call  
 to serving together with all who serve  
 to bring in the reign of God.

## Notes

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*Please send your feedback for this tool to  
 gendersa@nca.no or consultancy@pacsa.org.za*

