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**UNDER THE STAINED-GLASS CEILING:  
THE AMBIGUOUS POSITION OF ORDAINED WOMEN IN PROTESTANT  
AMERICA**

**A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors**

**by**

Jesse Klitzke

**December 2019**

**Thesis Written By**

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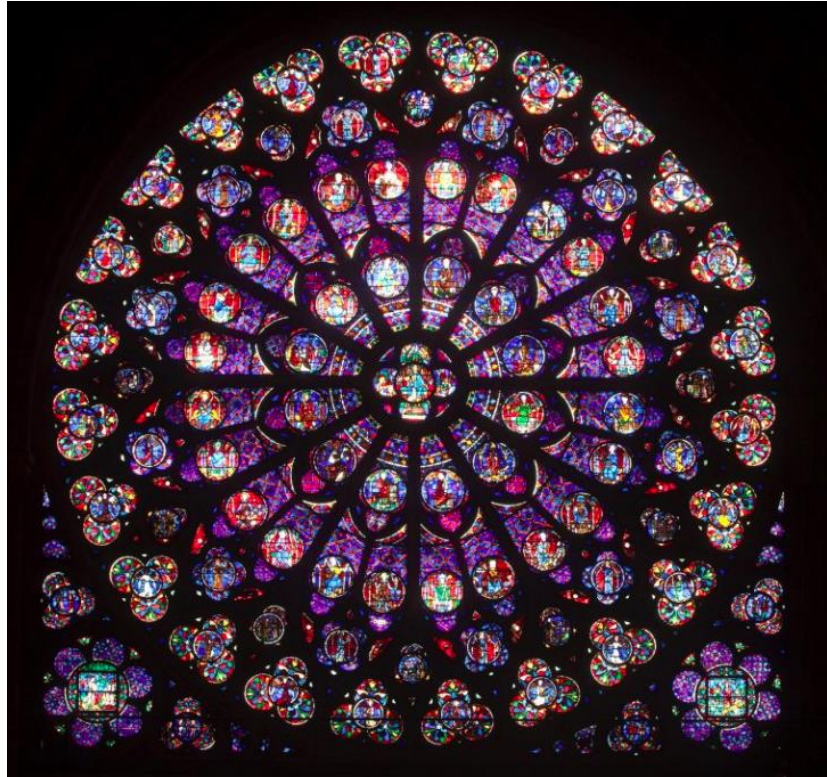
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## Introduction



*The Rose Sud, Notre Dame*

*Paris, France*

The term “stained-glass ceiling” refers to the sociological phenomenon of how difficult it is for women who are seeking out roles of church leadership to actually attain them. This thesis centers on this issue in the context of American Protestant theology, as well as the complex study of the ordination and pastorship of women in Protestant America. This thesis will not engage in theological debate. Rather, its focus will be on the discrepancy between the apparent acceptance and support of female ordination and



pastorship that many Protestant denominations advertise, compared to what actually comes to fruition for women who are ordained within these denominations.

This thesis will also not analyze or juxtapose data on female pastors with regards to race or sexual orientation. All of the data discussed in this thesis is analyzed on the basis of gender only, and the rationale for this condition is multifaceted. If I were to include any specific information on female pastors of color, though highly relevant and significant, I would also need to discuss the vast history of racial injustice in the United States, specifically towards women of color. Furthermore, if I were to include specific information on LGBTQ+ pastors in this thesis, I would also need to discuss the history of the clash between Protestantism and the LGBTQ+ community. Both of these topics could be their own theses and are each incredibly significant and impactful to this country. Thus, rather than briefly mention statistics on pastors within these demographics and overlook the tremendous amount of history that is woven within them, I felt it was best to analyze ordained women/female pastors on the basis of gender alone out of respect for those female pastors of color and/or of the LGBTQ+ community and their own multidimensional realities.

By synthesizing different theological perspectives, remarking on America's sexually objectifying culture, dissecting three statistical analyses on the state of female pastors in the U.S, and reporting on interviews I conducted with female pastors, this thesis will assess the reality of being an ordained Protestant woman in America and explain how the

many unfortunate realities for these women ultimately impact all Americans in their everyday lives, no matter their belief system.

## **Part One: The Fall**

As of 2015, approximately 46.6% of the United States' population identifies as Protestant Christian ("Religion in America..."). Protestant denominations of Christianity differ from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions of Christianity in a multitude of ways, one of which is Protestant denomination's varied stances on women's involvement and authority in the church. In Protestant traditions of Christianity, being ordained carries multitudes of significance that differ among denominations; throughout the majority of Protestant denominations, the position of pastor is the highest position of leadership within a church.

It is a universal principle that in order to be a pastor of a church within a Protestant denomination, one must be ordained as well as suit the denomination's and/or church's specific theological criteria of pastorship. Most Protestant denominations permit women to be ordained, and some Protestant denominations in the United States allow women to be pastors. They include, but are not limited to, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. However, in some Protestant denominations in the United States, a woman can be ordained and serve in a multitude of roles for a church, but not as a pastor. A woman's ordination and/or pastorship is not guaranteed to be respected or accepted by other Protestant denominations outside of her own, nor are ordained women consistently perceived and treated in the same way as ordained men within their own denomination.

The reason there are so many different Protestant denominations within Christianity is because many Protestant groups have their own interpretations of the Bible and church hierarchies. Thus, they diverge in opinion when it comes to how Christianity should be implemented, how we ought to live, who can participate, who can wield authority, etc. Along with this freedom for theological interpretation, the United States' constitutional separation of church and state means that "...in most workplaces the law mandates that employers cannot discriminate based on sex, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or ability. No such law exists for churches" (Sentilles 7). This means that if a woman is qualified to be ordained and would like to apply for a position at a church, the church may refuse her simply because she is female and therefore unqualified to be on staff based on that church's theological interpretation of scripture.

Nearly every woman in pursuit of Protestant ministry faces this type of discrimination at some point in her career, and the reasons why women may or may not be permitted to be pastors within each Protestant denomination are incredibly complex. For the purpose of this thesis, we will focus on two aspects that frequently emerge within the conversation of women's authority and place in Protestant ministry: biblical interpretation and sexually objectifying culture. Though a plethora of factors influence the topic of this thesis, biblical interpretation and sexually objectifying culture are the aspects most frequently discussed and debated; subsequently, they provide the foundation for the hardships that many women face while in pursuit of ordination and pastorship within Protestant ministry

## **1.1: Biblical Interpretation**

A handful of bible verses talk about women's abilities and their place in the world. The following are some of the most famous verses used to discuss the subject of a woman's authority in a Protestant context:

### **1 Corinthians 14:34-36 (NIV)**

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

### **Ephesians 5:22-23 (NIV)**

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

These verses are often used to teach not only that wives should submit to their husbands, but also that women should not be ordained or become pastors. If a woman is pastoring a church or has any kind of leadership role as an ordained clergywoman, she has authority over men. Many Protestant denominations and churches believe that, based

on the above scriptures, women having ordained authority in a church or denomination violates proper theology.

### **1 Timothy 2:11-15 (NIV)**

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This verse is used in the same way as 1 Corinthians 14:34-36; however, its main argument for a woman's submission rests in the creation story of Genesis. Specifically, this verse is often dovetailed with the argument on the consequences of the reversal of gender roles, i.e., Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When Eve was tempted by the serpent/Satan to eat the apple and then told Adam to eat the apple, the argument goes that “this role reversal between men and women is rooted in the deeper role reversal with God. Eve's interaction with Satan shows that she had begun to distrust the goodness of God and His design for life” (Piper). Thus by the logic of this theology, it was this role reversal that brought sin into the world, and Adam and Eve are the prime example for why men should be the absolute leaders of a household, community, and especially of a church as God ‘originally intended’ in Genesis.

## 1.2: Sexually Objectifying Culture

In American culture, women are frequently portrayed in an over-sexualized fashion. Simultaneously, women are expected to uphold an image of purity and chastity. It is extremely oxymoronic, and this mentality is far from absent within Protestant denominations in the United States. Sarah Sentilles, an acclaimed author and scholar of religion from Harvard Divinity School, writes about the conflict of being a clergywoman in her book, *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit*, in which she expounds on the conflicting standards that ordained women are expected to accept and adhere to in the U.S:

An ordained woman reveals both our expectations about *ministers* and our expectations about *women*, and she often conforms to neither. When ‘woman’ and ‘minister’ collide, it is a kind of explosion, and, as in any explosion, the person standing closest gets most of the shrapnel lodged in her body... We are a Puritan culture obsessed with pornography; we constantly display women’s bodies as sex objects but insist women cover up so they don’t distract us; we are sexual beings but are ashamed of our sexual needs; we need our bodies to live but deny we have them... We don’t know what to do with women’s bodies in the pulpit, and that is largely because we don’t know what to do with bodies in most forms of Christianity. The body-- and in particular, the female body-- has been denigrated, feared, understood as sinful, shameful, something to be covered up, tamed, and mastered. There is something ferocious about the fear of [women’s] bodies in

churches. And yet, at the heart of Christianity are stories about incarnation, about a God that dwells in a human body, a God that makes bodies and breathes life into them (Sentilles 125-127).

Though standing behind a pulpit or wearing a robe may provide women with the opportunity to keep themselves semi-androgynous, hidden and not objectified, congregants and fellow staff have still devised many ways to criticize ordained women, especially female pastors. Laurie Lyter Bright, a feminist theologian and pastor for the Presbyterian Church (USA), has personally experienced and witnessed the ways in which women are “encouraged to lower their voices in pitch, to claim and fill more space, while simultaneously being silenced in denominational gatherings, critiqued for clothing or hairstyle or jewelry, height or weight, maternal or marital status, in ways that their male counterparts rarely if ever experience” (Bright 107). Both Bright and Sentilles draw attention to this contradictory reality: ordained Protestant women are repeatedly tugged on by their vocations, biblical commandments, societal stereotypes and sexually objectifying culture, all of which come together to form an identity that is as confusing and conflicting to church congregants as it is to ordained women themselves.

The biblical interpretations and sexually objectifying culture surrounding ordained women’s identities and authority can be oppressive, as well as permissive of male biased Protestantism. Furthermore, these differences in the experiences of ordained men and ordained women in American Protestant denominations are not simply theological; they have been quantitatively observed. For the next portion of this thesis, we will analyze



three of the most recent, comprehensive published studies done on pastors and/or clergywomen in the United States within the last twenty years. These studies will help us begin to understand the impacts that biblical interpretations and sexually objectifying cultures have likely had on Protestant churches, denominations, communities, and most pressing to this thesis, ordained women.

### **1.3: The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders Are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity**

#### **The Barna Group**

This report was conducted and published by the Barna Group in 2017 in partnership with Pepperdine University. Drawing on interviews conducted with more than 14,000 pastors, this study examines three dimensions of church leaders' lives: self-leadership, congregational leadership, and cultural leadership. "Barna's goal for 'state of' research is to be as comprehensive as possible. That means, for one thing, capturing a random, representative sample of Protestant pastors across the nation. This group represents approximately 320,000 church leaders" (Barna 8). The role of 'senior pastor' is significant in this report as it is regarded as the benchmark for the most valued, high ranking individual within Protestant denominations of Christianity. This report includes data on all denominations of Christianity, whether they permit the ordination and pastorship of women or not.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will be citing and analyzing only the data from this report that pertains to female pastors. The results will provide us with an interesting juxtaposition between its own findings and the findings of the two studies that will be analyzed and discussed later.

### **1.3.1: General Statistics**

According to Barna's report, "Women now represent 9% of senior pastors--triple the percentage of 25 years ago--but they frequently lead smaller churches and feel greater scrutiny" (Barna 61). Barna also found that 11% of male and 23% of female pastors feel inadequate for ministry and/or their calling, 12% of male and 31% of female pastors feel lonely and/or isolated, and 20% of male and 38% of female pastors feel emotionally or mentally exhausted (Barna 16). It is clear from this study that double the percent of women, or nearly so, report these sentiments more so than men. Furthermore, the difference in responses to these categories between male and female pastors brings attention to the emotional, mental and spiritual hardships that many female pastors may face more so than their male colleagues, and the reason why may be correlated to church size. "A smaller church means a smaller staff, and three quarters of female senior pastors either work alone (38%) or with just one other paid ministry staff member (36%)" (Barna 83). Since the majority of senior female pastors work in smaller churches, this may be the cause for the difference in the responses between the male and female pastors interviewed for this study.

### 1.3.2: Ministry Roles Women are Permitted to Hold

The Barna Group also collected data on the ministry roles that women are permitted to hold and split the data into “Non-Mainline” and “Mainline” categories. See Table 1 below (Barna 83):

**Table 1: Ministry Roles Women are Permitted to Hold**

MINISTRY ROLES WOMEN ARE PERMITTED TO HOLD		
<i>% "yes" among U.S. Protestant pastors</i>		
Ministry Role	% Non-Mainline	% Mainline
Children's pastor / ministry leader	88	99
Women's pastor / ministry leader	85	99
Youth leader	84	99
Adult Bible teacher	83	99
Worship leader / music minister	79	99
Small group pastor / ministry leader	74	99
Deacon / deaconess	64	98
Elder / board member	44	99
Associate pastor	44	98
Teaching / preaching pastor	39	97
Senior / executive pastor	35	99

The gradient of women permitted to hold positions of leadership ranging from children’s pastor to senior pastor is uniform across Mainline<sup>1</sup> denominations of Protestantism. Mainline denominations are often known for their acceptance and

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<sup>1</sup> Protestant denominations that are evangelical, fundamentalist, and/or charismatic.

affirmation of female pastors and leaders. However, this is not the case in Non-Mainline denominations, especially once positions of crucial leadership such as Elder and Senior Pastor are included. Between 64-88% of positions within Non-Mainline denominations are allowed to be held by women, except for the positions of Elder (44%), Associate Pastor (44%), Teaching/Preaching Pastor (39%), and Senior/Executive Pastor (35%).

Barna also found that women are somewhat less likely than men to say they are ‘better off’ compared to other pastors when it comes to salary and benefits, but the disparity between women and men on the question of work-life balance is even more notable. “A plurality of men (42%) says they are better off than other U.S. pastors in this regard, but only one-quarter of women pastors believe the same (24%)” (Barna 84-5).

Based on this data that Barna has collected and published on female pastors in the United States, it would appear that there are many differences not only in experience, but as well as in mental and emotional health, employment opportunities, and benefits between ordained men and women in this country. This study’s scope is vast, and though it includes data on female pastors, this demographic is not the sole focus of the study. Now, we will analyze a study that does focus solely on female pastors.

#### **1.4: State of Clergwomen In the U.S: A Statistical Update** **Eileen Campbell-Reed, October 2018**

This report is one of the most recent, extensive assessments of the state of clergwomen spanning multiple Protestant denominations of Christianity in the United States. For this report, the designation ‘clergy’ represents “those professional men and women with ordination or official church sanction for their roles as representatives of their traditions. They may serve in a variety of roles and embody pastoral service as church staff, non-profit agency employees, chaplains (hospital, military, etc.), professors, and of course pastors” (Campbell-Reed 1). The role of pastor is significant in this report as it is regarded as one of the most influential roles of leadership an individual can attain within Protestant denominations of Christianity in the United States.

This report does not account for all Protestant denominations of Christianity. Rather, the report is focused on denominations that do allow women to be ordained in the United States and the statistics on clergwomen provided by these denominations. Since the separation of church and state allows Protestant denominations to have full discretion with their information, not all denominations are willing to disclose their data on the subject of female pastors. Thus, this study is somewhat limited, as it is based solely on data that each denomination was willing to share with the public.

This report also included data on the Unitarian Universalist congregation, which is not a strictly Christian organization. The Unitarian Universalist webpage states that “our beliefs are diverse and inclusive. We have no shared creed. Our shared covenant supports

‘the free and responsible search for truth and meaning.’ Though Unitarianism and Universalism were both liberal Christian traditions, this responsible search has led us to embrace diverse teachings from Eastern and Western religions and philosophies” (“Beliefs and Principles”).

Thus, the Unitarian Universalist data cannot be included in this analysis, as this thesis is solely focused on Protestant denominations of Christianity. I have recalculated the portions of data that included statistics on the Unitarian Universalist denomination so that only data on Christian denominations will be discussed and analyzed. Differences between the data published in this study, data published by different studies that contributed to Campbell-Reed’s research, and my own statistics are noted.

### 1.4.1: Statistics on Current State of Clergymen in the United States

The American Baptist Church, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church are some of the most prominent Protestant denominations of Christianity in the United States. From 1994 to 2017, the percent of total clergymen in these denominations jumped from 15.5% to 32%, a more than two-fold increase in the proportion of men to women in the clergy over 23 years (Campbell-Reed 6). This rise in clergymen in these prominent denominations is momentous, yet simultaneously, an unequal proportion of men to women pursue ordination in the United States. See Table 2 below (Campbell-Reed 5).

**Table 2: Clergy in Protestant Denominations: 1977-2017**

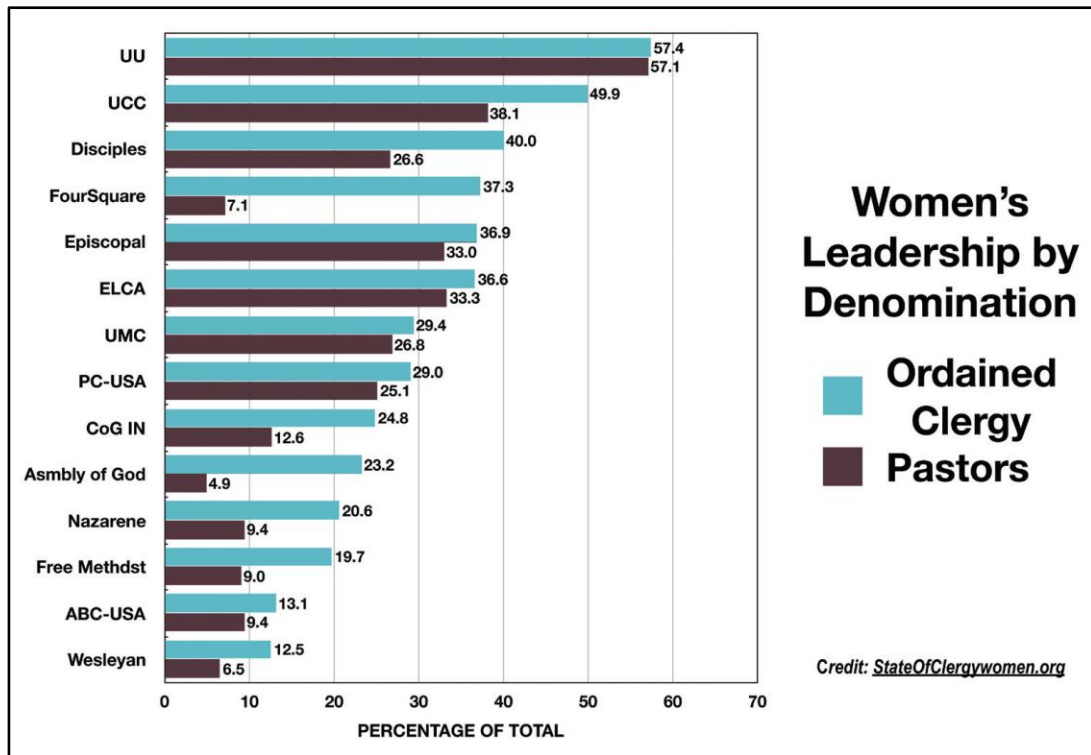
From the <i>Uphill Study</i>	1977 Women	1977 Men	%	1986 Women	1986 Men	%	1994 Women	1994 Men	%	2015-17 Women	2015-17 Men	%
American Baptist Churches	157	5163	3	429	3676	10.5	712	5046	12	707	4,690	13.1 <sup>b</sup>
Assemblies of God	1572	12356	11	1588	15667	9	1574	16996	8	7,303	24,149	23.2 <sup>c</sup>
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	388	3712	9.5	743	3328	18	988	4481	18	1,724	2,588	40 <sup>d</sup>
Church of God (Anderson IN)	272	**		275	**		296	2659	10	819	2,481	24.8 <sup>e</sup>
Church of the Brethren	27	797	<1	120	1988	5.7	142	1021	12	301	873	25.6 <sup>f</sup>
Church of the Nazarene	426	**		355			377	3036	11	2,269	8,728	20.6 <sup>g</sup>
Episcopal Church	94	12099	<1	796	13009	5.8	1394	9920	12	1,850	3,163	36.9 <sup>h</sup>
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	73	**		790	**		1519	11706	11	2,830	4,907	36.6 <sup>i</sup>
Free Methodist Church	11	**		69	**		24	1854	1	584	2,384	19.7 <sup>j</sup>
Presbyterian Church (USA) <sup>k</sup>	350	13555	2.5	1524	18084	7.8	2705	11873	19	5,816	14,261	29 <sup>l</sup>
Southern Baptist Convention	**	**		18 <sup>m</sup>	**		1130 <sup>n</sup>	34,000	.03	**	**	<.01 <sup>o</sup>
Unitarian-Universalist Association	39	571	6	81	723	10	376	860	30	611	453	57.4 <sup>p</sup>
United Church of Christ	400	4746	8	1460	3649	28.6	1843	5454	25	2,988	3,012	49.8 <sup>q</sup>
United Methodist Church	319	19916	1.6	1891	18991	9	3003	17614	15	5,027	12,067	29.4 <sup>r</sup>
Wesleyan Church	384	**		255	**		238	1952	11	513	3,579	12.5 <sup>s</sup>



Table 2 represents multiple forms of data. The data from 1977 through 1994 was obtained from a separate study called *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Loomis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang. Until Campbell-Reed's work, this was the most recent body of data available on clergywomen in the United States. The data in this table that covers 2015-2017 was gathered by Campbell-Reed and her research team. Campbell-Reed examined the statistics available on the number of female ordained clergywomen and pastors from the same denominations that were analyzed in the *Uphill* study (Campbell-Reed 5).

As stated earlier, the issue with this study is that it is not comprehensive since it is based solely on data from Protestant denominations that were willing to disclose information on their female pastors. After excluding Unitarian Universalist data (as referenced earlier) and using the data available from Table 2, by my calculations women account for an average of 25.8% of clergy in Protestant denominations that allow women to be ordained. Now, we will analyze Campbell-Reed's findings on the percentage of total positions of leadership held by women, specified by denomination. See Table 3 below (Campbell-Reed 7).

**Table 3: Women’s Leadership by Denomination**



Campbell-Reed also made a juxtaposition between the statistics found from her study and the Barna study that was discussed in section 1.3 of this thesis. “In 2017 the combined average percentage of female pastors in the Mainline churches stands at 27%, based on our calculations of denominational reporting. This data provides a contrast to Barna’s 2017 State of Pastors report that estimates about 9% of the pastors in the U.S. are women. The Barna study looked at all Protestant pastors, and many Evangelical and Baptist groups still do not admit women to the pastorate in large numbers, if at all” (Campbell-Reed 6). Though the Barna study paints a much more realistic picture of the current state of clergywoman in the U.S, Campbell-Reed’s study provides us with

valuable data and insight pertaining to the specific reality of being a female pastor in the United States.

Excluding the data of the Unitarian Universalists, I have recalculated the data provided on the other 13 denominations from Table 3, and by my calculations it appears that women only account for an average of only 18.6% of pastors in Protestant denominations that do permit the ordination of women.

The calculations I performed with the data from Table 2 and Table 3 were completed by:

1. Calculating the sum of percentages of clergy (Table 2) or pastors (Table 3) for the given denominations--excluding the Unitarian Universalists.
2. Dividing this sum by 14 for Table 2 and 13 for Table 3, the total number of denominations in each data set after excluding the Unitarian Universalists.

### **1.4.2: Mainline, Evangelical Seminary Enrollment in the United States**

Seminary is a specialized institution designed to train and educate men and women for ministry, and going to seminary is one route an individual can take in order to become a pastor. Campbell-Reed analyzed the statistics on women attending seminary in the U.S in this study and disclosed the correlations she and her team found between female seminary enrollment and female pastor employment. “By 1998, 30 of every 100 MDiv students in the U.S. and Canada, and 33 out of 100 students in all seminary programs (masters and doctoral level) were women. The story of the past twenty years, however, appears to be one of stagnation. In 2017, women are actually a smaller number and a lower percentage of MDiv (Masters of Divinity) Students in all ATS<sup>2</sup> schools than they were in 1998” (Campbell-Reed 10).

According to Campbell-Reed’s study, Mainline<sup>3</sup> seminaries have kept a steady female student population of around 44-49% since 1998 (Campbell-Reed 11). Similarly, around half or even more than half of Mainline MDiv programs have retained a female student population that ranges between 46-52% of the overall student population since 1998 (Campbell-Reed 11). As previously calculated, women make up an average 25.8% of Protestant clergy and 18.6% of Protestant pastors across the United States. How can Mainline seminary and MDiv female enrollment be near or over 50% and such a large gap for clerical employment of women enrolled in these programs persist?

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<sup>2</sup> *Association of Theological Schools*

<sup>3</sup> *Protestant seminaries that are evangelical, fundamentalist or charismatic.*

To further this conversation surrounding the education to employment gap for Protestant ordained women, Campbell-Reed found that “In 2016 ATS reported that male MDiv graduates remain more likely than female graduates to receive a job offer by the time of degree completion. Forty-two percent of women and 32% of men were still without a job offer at graduation” (Campbell-Reed 12). Additionally, Campbell-Reed quotes Jo Ann Deasy, ATS Director of Institutional Initiatives and Student Research, who states “Female MDiv graduates (38%) are more likely than male MDiv graduates (22%) to pursue ministry outside of a congregational setting” (Campbell-Reed 12). From the perspective of Deasy and Campbell-Reed, it would seem as if the gap between enrollment to graduation to employment for women in seminary or MDiv programs is multi-faceted.

Clearly there are many complex factors at work within this data. There are correlations with regards to female employment rates and apparent female interests post-seminary based on Campbell-Reed and Deasy’s observations, so it is possible that female students have less interest than male students in congregational/pastoral work post-graduation. However, the biblical interpretations and sexually objectifying culture discussed in sections 1.1 and 1.2 may have also influenced women’s stagnant seminary enrollment rates over the last 20 years and overall rejection as congregational leaders.

Nonetheless, if women are biblically and culturally gated from pursuing careers in ministry post-education in any form, it could very well lead to the low clergywomen and female pastor rates we are witnessing in American Protestant denominations that permit the ordination of women today.

## **1.5: The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women (2015)**

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

This report conducted by the ELCA is a uniquely designed study that is published every 10 years. The “Ordination of Women Report” is sent out as a survey that is available both online and via post mail to all ordained and lay person staff of the ELCA and its predecessor church bodies. The survey poses questions about women’s leadership, women’s role in the church, etc. Once the surveys are completed, the ELCA gathers all responses and formats them into the “Ordination of Women” report. The ELCA categorizes data into multiple demographics such as gender, race, age, and sexual orientation. For this thesis, only data focused on gender will be analyzed and discussed.

Multiple sub-reports and questionnaires were conducted for this 45th anniversary report, which was published in 2015. Only two reports and their subcategories will be discussed for this thesis--the gender-specific data for the Full Participation of Women: Research and Evaluation report, and the gender-specific data from the Executive Summary. Of the statistics, not all were grouped solely by gender identifiers; even the total number of participants was not clearly stated. Some statistics were divided between white males and females, as well as ‘ethnic’ males and females. For the purpose of this thesis, I have recalculated some statistics for total participation, as well as condensed the ethnic and gender-specific data into solely gender-specific data. Instances in which my calculations are used have been noted.

### **1.5.1: Full Participation of Women: Research and Evaluation**

This report asked the question, “To what extent do you believe the full participation of women in the life of the church has been achieved?” The participants were asked to respond on a scale of one to five, one being “to a small extent” and five being “to a large extent” (Hessian). With regards to the ordained staff, there were a total of 1,213 responses, where 618 were women and 410 were men. Of each of these groups, 56.4% of the women and 68.9% of the men responded with a four or a five. With regards to lay person staff, there were a total of 401 responses, where 325 were women and 76 were men. Of each of these groups, 61.2% of women and 77.6% of men responded with a four or five (Hessian).

There is no clear indication by the ELCA on how many individuals were provided the option of participating in this specific report; only the number of responses grouped by gender were made available in this report. The lack of information on the possible extent of participation is unfortunate, as it harms the credibility and validity of the statistics provided. Regardless, the proportion of male to female responses and their sentiments on the posed questions are still of value to this thesis. Since statistical information on the ordination of women in American Protestant denominations is not plentiful, the little data that can be collected, analyzed and discussed with respect to this topic nevertheless provides us with valuable information and insights to the realities of Protestant ordained women in this country.

### **1.5.2: Executive Summary – Clergy Questionnaire Report**

A total of 2,066 ELCA rostered leaders were given the opportunity through post mail and the internet to participate in this study for the 45th anniversary report (Hessian, et.al 1). Within this group, 956 were women and 1,110 were men. The report states that 630 women and 613 men responded to the questionnaire, meaning that only 60.2% of qualified individuals participated (Hessian, et.al 1). As stated by the authors, “The central hypothesis of this study was that there are differences in ministerial experiences, and that gender is the primary factor related to these differences” (Hessian, et.al 1). This summary focused on compensation, occupational roles, retention rates, wait times for calls, and attributes and experiences. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on the gender-specific attributes and experiences of the ELCA rostered leaders, as per the questionnaire.



### **1.5.2.a: Experiences by Gender**

This portion of data from the Executive Summary presents responses from male and female ELCA rostered leaders on many topics, such as appropriateness of attire, representation, how gender may affect others' perceptions of them, if they have experienced gender-based discrimination, and whether they had experienced sexual harassment while working with the ELCA.

With regards to comments, 24.5% of women and 13.5% of men reported that they had received comments about the appropriateness of their attire during an internship at an ELCA church, while 36.2% of women and 19.9% of men stated they received comments on this topic in the congregation or ministry setting (Hessian, et.al. 8).

When asked whether they felt they represent their gender in what they say or do, female and male ELCA rostered leaders reported very differently. Amongst ELCA rostered leaders, women reported at much higher rates than men that they feel they represent their gender in nearly every ELCA setting. See table below (Hessian, et.al. 8):

**Table 6: I have felt as if I represent my gender in what I say or do.**

	At Seminary	During Internship	In the Congregation or Ministry Setting	With ELCA Rostered Leaders	During the Call Process	With Ecumenical Colleagues	By Synod and/or Churchwide Staff
Females (N=630)	51.6%	58.9%	73.8%	52.9%	55.6%	57.9%	37.6%
Males (N=613)	23.0%	21.4%	37.1%	22.3%	18.3%	19.6%	16.2%
Difference	28.6%	37.5%	36.7%	30.6%	37.3%	38.3%	21.4%

When asked how gender may affect others' perceptions of them, 87.1% of participating female ELCA rostered leaders reported that in the congregational setting, they think about how their gender affects others' perception of them, compared to only 55.7% of men responding in the same way to the same question within the congregational setting. See table below (Hessian, et.al. 9):

**Table 7: I have thought about how my gender affects how people perceive me.**

	At Seminary	During Internship	In the Congregation or Ministry Setting	With ELCA Rostered Leaders	During the Call Process	With Ecumenical Colleagues	By Synod and/or Churchwide Staff
Females (N=630)	57.0%	69.2%	87.1%	57.0%	66.1%	61.0%	47.3%
Males (N=613)	29.5%	28.4%	55.7%	30.0%	27.1%	24.3%	20.4%
Difference	27.5%	40.8%	31.4%	27.0%	39.0%	36.7%	26.9%

When the ELCA rostered leaders were asked whether they have experienced gender-based discrimination, 56.7% of the women who participated in this study reported that in the congregation or ministry setting, they have experienced such gender-based discrimination, whereas only 11.6% of men reported that they had been discriminated against in the same way. See table below (Hessian, et.al. 9):

**Table 8: I have experienced gender-based discrimination**

	At Seminary	During Internship	In the Congregation or Ministry Setting	With ELCA Rostered Leaders	During the Call Process	With Ecumenical Colleagues	By Synod and/or Churchwide Staff
Females (N=630)	22.2%	29.7%	56.7%	29.2%	31.6%	35.7%	20.5%
Males (N=613)	11.4%	5.1%	11.6%	10.8%	7.2%	5.5%	10.3%
<b>Difference</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>45.1%</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

Lastly, ELCA male and female rostered leaders were asked to report whether they had experienced sexual harassment while working with the ELCA. In the congregation or ministry setting, both men and women reported the highest rates of sexual harassment taking place in these environments. However, these rates were not similar, with 6.5% of men and 32.2% of women reporting they had experienced sexual harassment in these settings. See table below (Hessian, et.al. 10):

**Table 9: I have experienced sexual harassment.**

	At Seminary	During Internship	In the Congregation or Ministry Setting	With ELCA Rostered Leaders	During the Call Process	With Ecumenical Colleagues	By Synod and/or Churchwide Staff
Females (N=630)	13.2%	14.8%	32.2%	11.4%	3.3%	5.4%	2.5%
Males (N=613)	2.1%	1.1%	6.5%	1.0%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%
<b>Difference</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>13.7%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>

## **Conclusion**

Based on these multiple data tables from the ELCA Executive Summary of the 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women report, we can see that female ELCA rostered leaders were more likely than their male counterparts to indicate they have “thought about, or received comments about the appropriateness of their attire, felt as if they represent their gender in what they say or do, thought about how their gender affects how people perceive them, experienced gender-based discrimination, and experienced sexual harassment” (Hessian, et.al. 10). The most common setting for these experiences was reported to be in the congregation or ministry setting as compared to seminary, internship, ecumenical college, synod/church-wide staff and ELCA rostered leader settings. On the other hand, only 60.2% of qualified individuals responded to this study, and the study was entirely subjective. Thus, this data cannot be used as credible research to draw definitive conclusions about women’s experience in the ELCA. Though these responses do not account for the entirety of the ELCA staff and each of their individual experiences, they still offer valuable insights into the realities of many female ELCA rostered leaders and their experiences throughout their careers.

The vast differences in experience between this pool of male and female ELCA rostered leaders point to a much larger phenomenon. Though women may be welcome to serve and be ordained in certain Protestant denominations, is it possible that they are not treated the same as their male colleagues? The ELCA’s 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women report, Campbell-Reed’s study, and the Barna Group’s study all

direct us to inquire into the topic of women not being viewed or respected in the same way as their male colleagues of similar and/or identical stature in Protestant denominations that permit the ordination of both sexes. What does this mean for the future of Protestantism in the United States? Is there hope for an egalitarian shift towards a more accepting, less objectifying environment for Protestant ordained women?

## **Part Two: Perspective**

By embarking on a thesis that delves into the personal and often controversial matter of women pursuing Protestant ministry in the United States, I knew that it would be necessary to explore both academic material as well as personal perspectives surrounding this topic. It is one thing to write about the statistics and articles that detail the disconnect between American Protestantism and equal employment opportunities for ordained women, but it is quite another to discover and listen to the real-world experiences of the women who are the central focus of this conversation. Thus, this portion of the thesis is designed to provide a present take on the experiences of women pursuing Protestant ministry in the United States via interviews, all conducted with women who currently work as pastors or in pastoral roles in Protestant ministry. Not only do these interviews connect us to the reality at hand, they may also help us get a glimpse at how, or if, the data presented in part one of this thesis reveals itself in the everyday lives of these women.

I set out to use the Denver-Metro area as a case study for these interviews and attempted to contact as many female pastors and clergywomen in this area as possible. Unfortunately, I received little to no response from the majority of prospective interviewees. In total, five women currently working in Protestant ministry in the Denver-Metro area responded to my request to be interviewed. Four of them are ordained, and

most come from a non-denominational background. Thus, this collection of interviews does not come from a very diverse pool. However, considering how few women are pastors in the United States (let alone in the Denver-Metro area), and how few prospective interview candidates responded to my efforts to get in contact with them, I felt that any input on the topic of this thesis from relevant candidates would be better than having none at all.

Each woman was asked the following questions:

1. Does your denomination ordain women?
2. What has been your experience as an ordained (or not) woman in ministry?
3. What role does seeing women in leadership positions in the church have in women pursuing ministry? Pursuing ordination? How important is this role?
4. Are there enough women in leadership positions to make this impact?
5. Would you like to see the proportion of women in leadership positions at the church grow?
6. What do you see as your role in partnership with churches to expand the places for women's leadership?
7. Does your church want to hire women as clergy?
8. What are the gifts and graces you have experienced by having women serving on your church staff, what have you seen women bring to the table that is special?
9. Does sexism play a role as your congregation works to embrace the pastoral leadership of women? If so, in what way?

I audibly recorded each interview, as well as took notes on each interviewee's responses; however, these interviews will not be presented in a verbatim transcript. Each interview has been summarized and coupled with direct quotations of each interviewee's responses that are based on the audio recordings of the interviews, notes taken during the interviews, and the most important points of discussion that came up based on each woman's responses. Any direct quotations within a woman's interview pertain to that individual woman only. Though I have remained as objective as possible in this process in order to keep each woman's responses accurate, there is an inevitable layer of my own interpretation and perception woven into the summaries of the interviews. My hope is that these summaries evoke the same power, thoughtfulness, passion and eloquence all of the women exuded in their own ways during their respective interviews.

Each interview will be introduced by the interviewee's name, denomination, church and official title as follows:

**Name**

Denomination, Church: *Official Title*



## 2.1: Jessie Davis

Evangelical Presbyterian, Cherry Hills Community Church: *Church Planting Resident*

For Jessie Davis, pursuing ministry has been an evolution not only of her own faith, but of her call to ministry as well. Davis served at Red Rocks Church, a non-denominational church, for 11 years. Davis became ordained through the Assemblies of God (a Pentecostal denomination of Christianity) while on staff at Red Rocks, and for eight years she acted as the ‘Ministry Lead’ for the Young Adults ministry, a ministry for 20-somethings in the Denver Metro Area. Currently, Davis is a Church Planting Resident at Cherry Hills Community Church, an Evangelical Presbyterian church, and is working to plant her own church with her husband John in Denver next fall.

Davis felt called to ministry while attending Colorado Christian University, and while she did not have a firm theological stance on women at the time, she only knew that “women only worked in women’s ministries” (Davis). Davis did not have many women to look up to in ministry, as there were practically none, but in spite of this she told me “In my heart, I knew that God called me and that I was going to teach the bible. And I assumed, and honestly assumed that it was ok, with it only being women.” Shortly after Davis was married, Red Rocks Church allowed her to start and lead the Young Adults ministry there. It was in this role where Davis experienced her first push back as a woman pursuing ministry, specifically from the congregants of the church. It was in this push back that Davis and her husband began to figure out what they truly believed about scripture, and more specifically, about women’s place and authority in ministry.

Davis explained that “if you’re going to look at scripture that talks about a woman’s place and authority in the church, you can either look at it as cultural or normative.” Looking at scripture as cultural or normative differs as follows: ‘cultural’ scripture is scripture that is considered to have been applicable and relevant to the time in which it was written. Davis gave the example of Paul’s commandment to Christians to greet each other with a Holy Kiss, but as time has gone on and culture has evolved, the Holy Kiss has simply become a warm embrace between Christian brothers and sisters. This is an example of cultural scripture because the Holy Kiss was applicable and relevant at the time it was written but is no longer practiced in current culture. ‘Normative’ scripture is scripture that is considered to be applicable and relevant to all scenarios, all of the time, such as the Bible’s commandments to remain sexually pure until marriage. When it

comes to looking at scripture through a cultural or a normative lens, Davis says that “I am not willing to change scripture to fit my needs, but at the same time, I do need to look at scripture appropriately.”

Davis has had a lot of experience in ministry where there is no clear statement about a woman’s authority or place, yet unspoken boundaries are still placed over women. She remarked: “I think in the American church, misogyny is a huge issue. A deep underbelly of misogyny, that has been my experience.” Overall, though Davis has loved her experience in ministry, she feels that it has been very difficult and frustrating. “I feel honored that this is my call, I feel honored that this is my walk, but I think that it is going to be a very different walk than our Christian brothers for a while.”

Currently, Davis is working at Cherry Hills Community Church. Cherry Hills not only ordains women, but also supports women in their pursuits to attain executive positions of leadership within the church. The staff at Cherry Hills Community Church is egalitarian in their theology as well as in the make-up of their staff, with women serving in multiple executive positions of leadership, including pastors. Davis’ experience at Cherry Hills has been incredibly positive, and one of the reasons why is Cherry Hills’ up-front approach to their mission. On their website, Cherry Hills publicly and clearly states their view on women’s authority and leadership with regard to their Church Planting Resident job description, stating: “Cherry Hills Community Church is theologically conservative, holding to the inspiration and authority of Scripture. It affirms all of the spiritual gifts found in Scripture as well as women in ministry” (*Thousand Churches...*). When Davis found Cherry Hills and their statement about women in ministry, she was thrilled. She expressed: “I appreciate as a female when a church is upfront. I am a huge fan of clarity and structure because I think it creates safety; it can get really messy when there is no structure.”

Davis had a very crucial point to make for women who are pursuing ministry, stating: “I have loved being an example for the next generation of young women, and I have also loved mentoring men and women. I think it is good for a young man to have a female leader just as it is good for a young woman to have a male leader.” Davis continued to speak, sharing an observation she has made on the movement for women to pursue Protestant ministry in the 21st century. Davis has observed that this movement is not centered on a theology of dominance or power; rather, the movement is centered on egalitarian principles that are advocating for the voices and the rights of women in

ministry. Davis feels that this egalitarian approach is one of the ways women will begin to be more respected and heard in ministry, and that this approach will ultimately pave the way for future generations of women who are called to ministry as well.

## 2.2: Tamara Boynton

United Church of Christ, Regis University: *Interfaith Alliance*

A call to pastorship surrounded by men and women alike has been an incredible experience within Boynton's life in ministry. Being raised in a United Church of Christ setting, Boynton always saw women in executive positions of leadership, especially as pastors. Boynton was ordained in the UCC in 2004, and currently works as a member of the Interfaith Alliance at Regis University. The United Church of Christ has been ordaining women since 1877 and has been an example in many areas for other Protestant denominations to see women's place and authority in ministry. She expressed: "By and large, my experience has been fairly positive" (Boynton). Boynton attributes the reasons why the UCC has been so ahead of the times with women in ministry to what she calls the polity--the form or process of governance--of the UCC itself. "The polity of the congregational system works in such a way that the power is in the pews, not in the leadership. There is not a hierarchy for leadership; the leaders are hired to speak *to* the churches, not *for* the churches. Freedom and responsibility are linked together in this denomination in a particular way. So, we have not struggled [in the UCC] in the same way that our sister congregations have struggled with regards to societal issues. The only reason we were able to ordain a woman in the 1870s is because there was a female congregant who could really preach the word, and the congregation thought she should be a pastor!" Some of the most crucial values of the UCC are independence, freedom, and autonomy. However, this freedom is not interpreted by each church of the UCC in the same way.

Not every church within the UCC permits the ordination of women, nor does every UCC church respect or recognize the qualifications of women who are ordained through other UCC churches. During Boynton's time in the UCC, one of the most specific instances of push back against her occurred when she was appointed as the Associate Conference Minister for the Rocky Mountain chapter of the UCC. Boynton said that "the churches that were more conservative [at the conference] did not feel like I was necessarily a good voice. I was also a young woman, and many of the people I was working with were older men, and it was apparent that they did not necessarily believe I was qualified to be there." Boynton has experienced many other instances of discrimination for her role and gender outside of this conference setting, stating: "I have gotten emails from people telling me that 'I know you think you're a minister, but you're not. You don't know how to read the bible.'" With experiencing these forms of

discrimination, Boynton has observed that “the culture surrounding the church is not supportive of women ministers, it is local churches that do that.” By ‘culture,’ Boynton is talking about the overarching, patriarchal culture within the UCC, as well as the patriarchal culture outside of the UCC that is upheld by many of the denomination’s congregants. This is the give and take of the freedom within the UCC and can make for a frustrating experience for ordained women. However, Boynton also strongly believes in equal opportunity for all voices, expressing “If I want to speak my truth about my beliefs, I have to allow other people who disagree with me to speak their truth as well.”

When it comes to representation and paving the way for other women, Boynton feels that she had incredible influences along the way. Boynton always saw female pastors, and other female clergy in positions of leadership at her church, and was given a variety of leadership opportunities while growing up there. She reflected, “I lead retreats, I worked with the young people, I worked on the leadership team for my youth group.” Now, Boynton feels that she holds a unique opportunity and responsibility for other women who are interested in pursuing Protestant ministry. “I have a dual identity. I always have an opportunity to represent a female clergyperson, and whether I speak or have any sort of power---like if I am at Regis and I’m wearing a collar, people come up to me like ‘What are you doing?!’ Whenever I go to the capital, I wear a collar. A female faith voice says something, even if I don’t say anything.” In order for Protestant denominations in the U.S. to make a change, Boynton feels that men and women must work together in order to truly make a lasting impact in Protestantism for women with a dream to pursue ministry. She states that “Collective liberation comes not just from the oppressed--which in this case is women--but from men, too.” Rather than opposing a seemingly patriarchal system with a matriarchal one, Boynton feels that equality for both sexes in Protestant ministry would be much more effectively obtained via an egalitarian approach.

### **2.3: Brooks Buckwalter**

Evangelical Presbyterian, Lookout Mountain Community Church:  
*Assistant Pastor of Congregational Care*

Brooks Buckwalter's journey in ministry has been as serendipitous as it has been rewarding. "I never pursued a pastoral position; I was pursued to be a pastor" (Buckwalter). Encouraged to pursue ministry by the senior pastor of her home church at Lookout Mountain Community Church in Evergreen, Colorado, Buckwalter went from a dedicated volunteer to a Denver Seminary graduate with a Master of Divinity degree and is now the Assistant Pastor of Congregational Care at Lookout Mountain Community Church. Buckwalter described her experience as a positive one, and primarily attributed it to the specific role she has in her church. "I have experienced a lot of support there, I have experienced men and women responding well to my ministry."

In Buckwalter's experience at this Evangelical Presbyterian (EP) church, she feels very fortunate, as many EP churches across the country do not allow women to be pastors, or even be ordained. Lookout Mountain Community Church is in the EPC Presbytery of the West, which has churches in 13 states. However, there are 13 other EPC presbyteries in the country that cover the other 37 states, and of all 14 presbyteries, only the EPC Presbytery of the West permits women to be pastors. This is because, similar to the UCC, each church holds its own autonomy and can thus make independent decisions on who is qualified for a position based on their own theology. Therefore, the ordination of women is a disputable matter, and women who are ordained in the EPC Presbytery of the West will not be recognized for their roles or credentials in any other EPC Presbyteries in the country. Buckwalter spoke on this tough reality in relation to her life, stating that "if my church went under, and I went on the EPC website to look for another pastoral position, if you look under the job board, every job description begins with 'A man who...'" Though Buckwalter's experience has been positive and rewarding, it is simultaneously limited and often times frustrating. "Whenever you're a woman in ministry, it's going to be a mixed bag. I don't know what would happen if I had to go out and find another pastoral position."

Buckwalter feels that the most crucial part in progress towards equality for women pursuing ministry comes not only from the women themselves, but also from their Christian brothers. "We need unity. You want to feel like your brothers are 100% behind

you, and I could not say that is the case. It's hard to go to a presbytery meeting knowing that some of the guys do not think I should be there. I really think our greatest advocates are men. Not long ago, the chaplain for our presbytery is a male, we had a luncheon with him, and we were bluntly honest about some of the women's experiences and that we are hurt. And he asked me to speak about it at our next EP regional meeting, and I said no. I told him that if I'm advocating for us, I'm just going to look like the angry, mad woman. And I told him that he needs to do it." Rather than try to make a statement from an already limited position in the EPC, Buckwalter feels that the men within the EPC who are known and respected across the board can do a lot more for the women pursuing ministry within the EPC in advocating for equality in recognition, leadership, and overall respect.

When it comes to seeing women in ministry, Buckwalter feels that it is vital to the future of Protestant America. "I think it's huge because a lot of women have been raised in churches where they never even knew that was a possibility. They don't realize that [being a pastor] is something God can call them to do." Buckwalter does not feel that sexism has played a role in her congregation's perception and reaction to her as she has been a pastor, stating "I don't think I would call it sexism. I would just call it a different theological take." Furthermore, Buckwalter has experienced firsthand that having multiple perspectives on the table makes for a very well-rounded environment. Buckwalter spoke highly of the successful meetings involving both male and female leaders, explaining that "we just had a meeting for some staff corrections, and it was just so cool to see men and women work together." To Buckwalter, the strife surrounding women in ministry is not one sided, nor can it be ameliorated with only the efforts of women. It must be a joint effort.

## 2.4: Lauren Bohn

### Non-Denominational, Red Rocks Church: *Campus Internal Relations*

In the fast-paced, ever-changing and energetic environment of a mega-church such as Red Rocks Church, Lauren Bohn passionately pursues her call to ministry as a staff member with Campus Internal Relations. Red Rocks Church does ordain women and is a non-denominational church, meaning that they do not have ties to any organized denominations of Protestant Christianity. Bohn's pursuit of ministry is the most unique of all the women interviewed for this thesis. Bohn is not ordained, but she is viewed by many as working in a crucial, pastoral role. "I'm often the first person to talk to someone who is saying they're suicidal, I'm kind of like a gatekeeper for this place. I work with a lot of broken people who come through these doors, particularly with broken women" (Bohn). Though Bohn's role is technically administrative, it is anything but pencil-pushing. She feels very empowered in her call to ministry there. Furthermore, women consistently report to Red Rocks Church how much they love attending services, which is something Bohn says RRC has taken note of. "Every time we have ever had a female speaker, we have gotten a crazy positive response from the congregation. You know, apart from Christmas and Easter, Mother's Day is our next highest attended service. Father's Day is our least attended service. Women go to church, women come to this church. If women are clearly coming here and supporting this place, why can't we have more women speak? And that is something that is being discussed and is very present on the hearts of our staff at Red Rocks." From Bohn's perspective and experience, the congregation of Red Rocks Church is more than ready to have more women in leadership and pastoral positions.

Red Rocks has eight campuses. They are planted in various locations in Colorado; Austin, Texas; and Brussels, Belgium. With a platform such as this, Bohn feels it is crucial that Red Rocks becomes a voice to advocate for women's authority and leadership in Protestant ministry. Furthermore, Bohn attributes a majority of the church's success to the fact that men and women work together nearly every step of the way. "We check in with the directors on their vision. We make sure that their visions are focused on the original 'Prodigal Son' mission of the church. We keep things grounded." This 'Prodigal Son mission' means that RRC welcomes anyone and everyone and works diligently to help those who would never normally experience church or Jesus to be able to have that experience in a safe, welcoming place. Bohn has witnessed the women on staff at Red Rocks provide a "mothering, homey" feel that enriches this welcoming



ambiance, and has had an overwhelmingly positive experience in her time at Red Rocks. She hopes to see more women become leaders, be ordained, and preach at Red Rocks Church in the near future.

## 2.5: Kathleen Kegel

Presbyterian USA/Non-Denominational, The Sanctuary: *Pastor of Community Life*

In her four years of employment at The Sanctuary, Kathleen Kegel has experienced the entire spectrum of emotions that comes along with being a woman in ministry. Kegel was originally ordained through Presbyterian-USA, and later transferred her ordination over to The Sanctuary, which is a non-denominational church in Denver. She has her Master of Divinity degree and has largely enjoyed her time in ministry. However, her theological views have brought about a surprising obstacle in this process. “There are two kinds of churches: egalitarian, and complementarian. Egalitarian churches mostly allow women to be ordained and be pastors, but they do not hold a high value to scripture. Whereas complementarian churches hold a high value to scripture, but they do not allow women to be pastors, and many times not even be ordained. I believe that the Bible is authoritative, so I want to work in a ministry where scripture is held in a high view. However, most of the time, the churches that are in line with my theological views will not hire me” (Kegel).

This has resulted in a very frustrating experience for Kegel and caused her to be very selective while searching for positions at other churches for preaching. “When considering applying to a church, I would always look at their website and see whether or not their staff was predominantly male. If their board was all male, I would just stop looking.” Often times, Protestant churches that permit the ordaining of women will allow them to preach to women’s ministries and children, but not to the entire adult congregation of men and women. Kegel hopes to see this change and believes that “because of how the scripture talks about the Body of Christ, we need each other because we are different body parts. There is an interdependence that is inherent in the whole Body of Christ, and I do feel like either through nature or nurture that there are some things women bring that men don’t, but I feel the same way about men towards women. I feel like groups of women need to hear a male voice and groups of men need to hear a woman’s perspective. It kills me when I read a Christian book that says women want love and men want respect. No, women want love and respect. Or when they say men are logical and women are emotional, because I am a woman and I am both emotional and logical. I hate that broad-brush stroke thing.”

Kegel feels that these generalizations do more harm than good and take away from the unity of the Body of Christ. If both sexes worked together in similar positions of

leadership within the Protestant denominations in the U.S, Kegel firmly believes that the result would be a much more well-rounded Christian community, with many things that both sexes can bring to the table.

## **Part Three: Revelation**

### **3.1: Synthesis**

After analyzing three published studies on ordained women in the United States and conducting interviews with five women working in Protestant ministry in the Denver-Metro area, it has become evident to me that many correlations exist between the experiences of the interviewees and the information that has been presented by The Barna Group, Campbell-Reed, and the ELCA studies. The most evident correlations between the three studies and the interviews are as follows: i) representation, ii) gender-based discrimination, iii) lack of job opportunities, and iv) the rise in the number of women pursuing careers in ministry. Each of these topics will be reflected upon using information from multiple portions of this thesis.

### 3.1.1: Representation

In this thesis, the concept of representation is complex because ordained women often carry multiple identities. In section 1.2, we read about Sentilles' and Bright's remarks on the conflicting standards of being an ordained woman living in America's sexually objectifying culture. Sentilles states "An ordained woman reveals both our expectations about *ministers* and our expectations about *women*, and she often conforms to neither." Bright also states that ordained women are "encouraged to lower their voices in pitch, to claim and fill more space, while simultaneously being silenced in denominational gatherings, critiqued for clothing or hairstyle or jewelry, height or weight, maternal or marital status, in ways that their male counterparts rarely if ever experience."

From section 1.5.2a, we observed that amongst ELCA rostered leaders, women reported at much higher rates than men that they feel they represent their gender in nearly every ELCA setting. In section 2.2, Boynton's interview, she reflected this same sentiment, stating: "I have a dual identity. I always have an opportunity to represent a female clergyperson... A female faith voice says something, even if I don't say anything," upon the subject of wearing her collar in public at Regis University.

Not only do Protestant ordained women often times undergo more pressure than their male colleagues to present a certain image of themselves and assert the purpose of their position, they also carry the identity of being a woman in the face of America's sexually objectifying culture. Representing clergywomen and representing women in this country are each trying in their own right, but to hold a dual identity that includes both these

forms of representation is as contradictory as it is demanding. Ordained women face criticism on every front of their identity in American Protestantism, thus the concept of ordained women representing women in ministry impacts much more than employment rates, it impacts the dual identity of being ordained and being a woman in this country as well.

### **3.1.2: Gender-Based Discrimination**

This correlation between the studies and the interviews is nearly universal with respect to the women I interviewed for this thesis. Four of the five women expressed that they have experienced some form of gender-based discrimination over the course of their career in ministry, all instances of which were in a congregation or staff setting. Davis deeply resonated with this reality, stating she has experienced “a deep underbelly of misogyny” throughout her career as a pastor. Boynton also expressed a few instances of discrimination she has encountered by simply being a woman in ministry. “I have gotten emails from people telling me that ‘I know you think you’re a minister, but you’re not. You don’t know how to read the bible.’” Buckwalter expressed her frustrations with the EPC, stating “It’s hard to go to a presbytery meeting knowing that some of the guys do not think I should be there.” Kegel also discussed some discriminatory experiences she has had because of her gender, explaining that “...complementarian churches hold a high value to scripture, but they do not allow women to be pastors, and many times not even be ordained. I believe that the Bible is authoritative, so I want to work in a ministry where scripture is held in a high view. However, most of the time, the churches that are in line with my theological views will not hire me.” These women’s discriminatory experiences reflect section 1.5.2a, the ELCA study, which states that 56.7% of female ELCA rostered leaders have experienced gender-based discrimination in the congregation and/or ministry setting.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking aspect of this correlation is how rooted in congregational attitudes the gender-based discrimination seems to be. Kegel's experiences are mostly related to the theological positions of a church's staff and elders; however, the staff and elders of a church seem to be heavily influenced by their congregants. This gender discrimination that many ordained women experience comes not from a few pastors; rather, it seems to be a cultural and societal phenomenon that prevails within many Protestant communities. Though there exist churches, congregations and communities that are supportive of female pastors, it has become evident that this does not mean a female pastor will receive identical respect within all Protestant churches in the United States, or even within her own Protestant denomination.



### **3.1.3: Lack of Job Opportunities**

In section 1.4, we learned that even though Campbell-Reed's study reported that Mainline seminaries have kept a steady female student population of around 44-49% since 1998, the study also found that as of 2016 male MDiv graduates remain more likely than female graduates to receive a job offer by the time of degree completion. Forty-two percent of women and 32% of men were still without a job offer at graduation.

In section 2.3, Buckwalter's interview, she expressed her frustrations toward the lack of job opportunities for women in ministry. "If my church went under, and I went on the EPC website to look for another pastoral position, if you look under the job board, every job description begins with 'A man who...'. Whenever you're a woman in ministry, it's going to be a mixed bag. I don't know what would happen if I had to go out and find another pastoral position."

We still do not know how many women apply to pastoral positions within Protestant denominations, and how many of these positions are given to men who may or may not be equally qualified with their female competitors. However, this apparent lack of job opportunities for ordained women may be one of the reasons why there is a large disconnect between what Protestant denominations state in support of female pastorship, compared to the number of ordained women actually hired on as pastors in these denominations.

### **3.1.4: Rise in the Number of Women Pursuing Careers in Ministry**

In section 1.4.1, we learned that Campbell-Reed's study indicated from 1994 to 2017, the percentage of clergywomen in denominations that accept female pastors jumped from 15.5% to 32%, a more than two-fold increase in the proportion of women to men in the clergy in over 23 years. In section 2.1 and 2.4 of the interviews, both Bohn and Davis indicated that they have observed an egalitarian movement of women pursuing ministry, specifically towards leadership and pastoral positions within certain Protestant denominations.

Though there is an apparent lack of job opportunities for ordained women, there has also been a rise in the number of women pursuing careers in ministry, even if not in a pastoral setting. Although many Protestant denominations do not have an equal number of male and female pastors, the fact that women are still pioneering their way into multiple niches within these denominations is an accomplishment in and of itself. Even if ordained women still face push-back for pursuing pastoral positions, the increasing presence and representation of both sexes in these Protestant denominations brings multiple perspectives into conversation and, most importantly, encourages women who are curious about working in ministry that there can be a place for them at the table.

### **3.1.5: Separate Observations**

Apart from any studies or articles, all interviewees believed in and supported a unified, egalitarian movement for women to pursue ministry that consists of men and women alike. None felt that women needed to take on more responsibility in order to advocate for equal treatment and recognition of ordained women, but rather that ordained men who think women should be allowed to be pastors need to start advocating for these women and become their allies.

#### **What does this tell us?**

Though our interviewees do not perfectly mirror all of the findings of the studies, there are definite correlations between the various experiences of five interviewees and the three published studies that have been analyzed for this thesis. Furthermore, these correlations tell us that the statistics found in these studies do not solely exist on a page, they exist in everyday life, and can have real, harmful impacts on ordained women.

### **3.2: Why is the Disconnect Harmful?**

Throughout this thesis, it has been made evident that there is a profound disconnect between what Protestant denominations in the United States claim about supporting female pastors, juxtaposed with the number of female pastors that are actually employed in these denominations. This discrepancy is created with many of the aspects discussed in this thesis: sexually objectifying American culture, differences in theological interpretations, and the overall mistreatment and lack of respect toward women working in ministry. This disrespect is not just from other male clergy, but also seems to be from many of the congregants within these Protestant denominations.

If someone who lives in the United States, and is not Protestant or religious at all, why does this discrepancy matter? After synthesizing different theological perspectives, remarking on America's sexually objectifying culture, dissecting three statistical analyses on the state of female pastors in the U.S., and interviewing female pastors, I have come to the tentative conclusion that the way female pastors are viewed and treated is as harmful as it is relevant to everyone residing in the United States, no matter what one's belief is.

Whether we look at the Constitution, the national currency, the Pledge of Allegiance, or the National Anthem, the United States is presented as "One Nation Under God." Protestantism has been woven into the fabric of the United States; in our country's entire history, every President has identified as Christian, and as previously stated, 46% of the nation identifies as Protestant. On May 31, 2019, Franklin Graham called on the nation to have a 'National Day of Prayer' for the president. Protestantism in the United States is

not static, it is alive and highly influential to this day. Due to this prominent Protestant influence, it is inevitable that well-known Protestant leaders, pastors, and presidents alike, will have a strong social--and often political--sway. Thus, the way Protestant female pastors are viewed and treated in this country--whether by fellow male pastors, church congregants, or society in general--will ultimately impact the message the United States conveys about which principles it accepts and practices with respect to women.

I also believe that when it comes to advocating for women's right to equal opportunities in this country, religious communities should not be excluded. I firmly believe the constitutional separation of church and state should continue; on the other hand, I do not think it is beneficial to American Protestantism for the ordination and pastorship of women to never be discussed. I believe it is always good practice to hear all sides of an argument before making definitive decisions, and since Protestant denominations have total autonomy and discretion when it comes to employing female pastors, perhaps introducing a discussion around female ordination and pastorship within the American Protestant Community would provide a new, egalitarian perspective to denominations that are traditionally against women being pastors.

Thus, regardless of your religious beliefs or lack thereof, I concur that the 'stained-glass ceiling' inevitably impacts the daily experiences and overall equality of all individuals who call this country their home, both socially and politically.

### **3.3: Suggestions**

With the separation of church and state, there can be no widespread, legal change towards equal employment opportunities for ordained women in this country. However, this does not mean there are no feasible measures that can be taken by willing Protestant denominations and/or churches to create equitable opportunities for women who feel called to ordination or pastorship within them. This thesis inspired me to come up with four possible solutions that could ameliorate the adverse disconnect that ordained Protestant women live in every day, read below.

### **3.3.1: Transparency and Consistency**

Though there are no regulations for churches to follow any sort of anti-discrimination laws, this does not mean that it is necessarily wise for Protestant churches and denominations to remain ambiguous on their beliefs and practices regarding the ordination and pastorship women. If Protestant churches and/or denominations became more transparent with their practices, beliefs, and policies towards ordained women, perhaps women who are interested in ministry would be able to educate themselves about which denominations and/or churches would or would not offer them employment. Furthermore, church congregants may also appreciate knowing where their place of worship stands on difficult topics such as the ordination and pastorship of women. This transparency could be as simple as an online mission statement, or as complex as an in-depth theology-based report. Simultaneously, no practice can stand without consistency. So, if a Protestant church or denomination decides to become fully transparent with their theological beliefs, they should remain consistent and diligent with this transparency so as to respect and uphold that which they have advertised and promised to their congregants and/or prospective employees.

### **3.3.2: Male Pastors Become Allies**

This suggestion is inspired by the women I interviewed. As we have learned over the course of this thesis, ordained women and/or female pastors are often not as respected as ordained men and/or male pastors. Thus, Protestant women in ministry advocating for female ordination and pastorship would probably not gain much attention in the American Protestant community. However, male pastors hold much more recognition, presence, and power within the American Protestant community. Thus, if male pastors who do support the ordination and pastorship of women want to see more women become ordained and/or pastors in this country, they should use their platforms to advocate for equal employment opportunities and equal treatment of ordained women and/or female pastors within denominations that claim to support female ordination and pastorship. American Protestants would likely be more receptive to the reality of being an ordained woman from the perspective of a male pastor, which may in turn create change for these women that would otherwise never transpire.



### **3.3.3: Female Recruitment for Ordination**

Since being a pastor is a male-dominated profession, many Protestant women may not even know that working in ministry, being ordained, or being a pastor in some denominations is an option for them. Thus, if a Protestant church and/or denomination wants to ordain women and/or hire female pastors, perhaps they could host workshops, recruit women interested in ministry, and teach classes for women about what it means to be a pastor, what does the Bible say about pastors, etc. Simply raising awareness about the available employment opportunities for women within Protestant ministry may help close the employment gap between male and female pastors within denominations that do permit the ordination and pastorship of women.

### **3.3.4: Third-Party/Unbiased Support Staff**

Since most counseling/disciplinary boards within Protestant churches are appointed by senior pastors, and these senior pastors are overwhelmingly male, it may be in the best interest of churches to use outside counseling services in order to resolve and mitigate conflict between staff members. This way, when female staff/pastors of a church have a conflict with other staff members or the senior pastor, there will not be a conflict of interest within the counseling/disciplinary board to side with the senior pastor's judgement. Many universities bring in unbiased third-party companies to resolve conflict, counsel, and implement disciplinary action for staff and students. These third-party companies could also be very effective in resolving church conflict, as well as help create a safe environment for all church staff, especially female staff members.

### **3.3.5: Anti-Sexism, Anti-Bias Training**

Anti-Sexism/Anti-Bias training is easy to facilitate, cost effective, and can provide practical knowledge to church staff on appropriate behavior between staff members and congregants alike. This training can be conducted once a year and be facilitated online, similarly to the anti-sexual harassment course required for all incoming freshman at Regis University. This training wouldn't need to be used as a tool of accountability for church staff if there is a behavioral issue/conflict. It would simply provide a baseline example for respectful, appropriate behavior that could be applied to the hiring process and overall work environment for males and females alike in ministry.

### **3.4: What questions do I still have? What do I want to research more?**

I was not able to analyze or juxtapose data on ordained women with regards to race or sexual orientation, as there was enough information on ordained women specific to those categories to be their own theses. Each of these fields of study interest me, so I would definitely like to do more research toward these specific topics in the future.

I would also like to research the Catholic and Orthodox perspective of the ordination of women. I was born and raised a non-denominational Christian, so I think it would be valuable to see what the perspective is on the ordination of women in a more tradition-based context.

### **3.5: Personal Reflections**

Being a math major, I would have never believed it before beginning this process that I would write my entire Honors thesis on ordained women in Protestant America. However, I have also learned in the last year that if you want to make God laugh, just tell Him your plans. I learned more than I ever thought possible and became more passionate about this topic than any other I have researched in my time at Regis University. This thesis is without a doubt the most meaningful work I have ever done, and I hope I never stop learning about or advocating for Protestant ordained women in this country.

Out of all the things I did for this thesis, my favorite was the interviews. The women I interviewed stunned me. Not only did their testimonies move me, but their outlook on being women in ministry inspired me as well. Every woman I interviewed provides space for their counterparts to disagree with them, and even disregard them. Yet rather than act out in anger, these women listen to the perspective that opposes their position in ministry, so they can in turn ask for the same space to advocate for their vocation and for other women who are called to their profession. The most striking part of the interviews for me was with Brooks Buckwalter, who stated that she has not experienced sexism in her time as a female pastor, instead, she's just experienced "a different theological take." When I conducted her interview, that moment made me consider something I hadn't thought of before: what is the line between theological differences and sexism?

In most cases, I found that there is no definitive answer, and this reality rocked my entire thesis. I was hoping to present an effective solution to the sexism and

discrimination that many women in ministry face in the United States. However, due to church autonomy and the constitutional separation of church and state, I also discovered that it is impossible to implement widespread solutions like this in the American Protestant community (see section 3.3). There is no possible way to implement a system that can hold our autonomous Protestant churches accountable for making false or misleading claims about supporting female ordination and pastorship, nor for disrespecting or discriminating against female staff within and outside of these churches. On the other hand, this autonomy is the same reason why women were allowed to start being ordained and become pastors in the first place. Thus, this autonomy is absolutely necessary, even if it still permits the misguidance and maltreatment of ordained women.

Needless to say, the sentiment I have after this thesis is bittersweet. I am frustrated that there is so much to be done for ordained women in this country, yet there are so few ways to implement legitimate change. However, as previously stated, I feel inspired by the women I interviewed and their diligent work to create an even playing field for ordained women in Protestant America. I began to feel called to ministry around January 2019 and writing this thesis has totally solidified that calling. Now, I know what challenges I am bound to encounter, and with this knowledge I can go into the world and continue to advocate for women in ministry. I feel like I am at the beginning of a tidal wave of change, and though the path ahead of me is daunting, I firmly believe that I am well prepared for the challenge.

Most of all, I hope you, the reader, took something away from this thesis. Whether it was a new perspective, a moment of inspiration, a sense of curiosity, or simply a gain in knowledge, I hope that what you took away does not remain sheltered within you. To quote St. Ignatius of Loyola, “Go forth and set the world on fire.” I know I will, and I hope you do too.

**Galatians 3:28 (NIV):** There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

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