

# FEMALE LEAD PASTORS

A DISCUSSION WORTH HAVING

A COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE  
BY ASSEMBLIES OF GOD  
DISTRICT/NETWORK  
SUPERINTENDENTS





# **Female Lead Pastors: A Discussion Worth Having**

A Collaborative Resource by Assemblies of God District/Network Superintendents

Curated by Gene Roncone (September, 2021)

Your church is currently seeking God's will for leadership. It is our hope that the thoroughness of your search will include both male and female candidates. To help your search committee explore the possibilities of God's will, I have collaborated with over 25 district/network superintendents representing nearly 5,700 churches; 17,000 ministers; and 1,566,000 constituents to help you consider the issues surrounding female leadership.<sup>1</sup> Few people understand the dynamics of pastoral transitions better than district/network superintendents. They frequently assist churches experiencing pastoral transition while, also leading a diverse constituency of ministers. Their combined wisdom is reflected in this unprecedented report which will address ...

1. Female Ministers and The Assemblies of God
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5. Unique Contributions of Female Leadership
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## **Female Ministers and The Assemblies of God**

Since its formation, the Assemblies of God has recognized the call of God upon female leadership. Today, our Fellowship is blessed with female leaders serving as deacons, board members, missionaries, chaplains, associate pastors, lead pastors, presbyters, district/network officials, and as a member of our National Executive Leadership Team.

At the time of this writing, the Assemblies of God USA has 37,713 ministers. Twenty-seven percent or 10,281 of our credentialed ministers are female. Of our 10,281 female ministers:

- 2,214 are certified; 4,016 are licensed; and 4,051 are ordained.
- Of our 21,444 ordained ministers, 4,051 or 18.9 percent are female.
- Of our 12,930 churches, 630 are led by female pastors which represents 4.9 percent of our churches.
- 1,030 are missionaries (244 AGUSM and 786 AGWM).
- 22 are General Council general presbyters. The General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God is made up of approximately 375 elected representatives who serve as the official policy-making body of our Fellowship when the General Council is not in session. As of the August 2021 meeting of the General Presbytery, 7 percent were female.

- 4 are district/network officials.
- 55 are elected by their colleagues to serve as sectional presbyters representing a region of churches and sit on a District/Network Presbytery board of directors. There are 687 sections in the Assemblies of God USA, and female presbyters lead 8 percent of them.
- 3 are General Council executive presbyters. The Executive Presbytery is the Executive Board of the Assemblies of God and consists of 15 members, 20 percent of whom are females.
- 1 is a member of the six-person Executive Leadership Team which is 17 percent of that group.

These statistics reveal the valuable and increasing contribution of females at every level of leadership within the Assemblies of God,<sup>2</sup> but what about female lead pastors on the local level? How should qualified females be considered for a lead pastorate and what issues should be addressed?

## Scripture and Female Leadership

The most repeated concern raised by district/network superintendents who were surveyed was the lack of knowledge among pastoral search committees concerning whether Scripture permits women to serve as lead pastors. Our district/network leaders are also concerned that so many of our churches are out of step with the Assemblies of God's position and our rich history of female ministers and leadership.

The Assemblies of God does not believe there are any biblical grounds to limit the role of women in ministry; however, some disagree with this position for various reasons. With that said, let's consider why some do not believe women should serve as lead pastors as well as the overwhelming biblical evidence for why they can.<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Reasons some believe lead pastors must be male.** Complementarianism is a theological view that precludes women from specific leadership functions of ministry within the church. The term egalitarianism is a view meaning the exact opposite—that God calls and bestows spiritual giftings without partiality as to gender, race, or background.

Those who oppose women being ordained and or serving as a lead pastor claim the Bible prohibits women from leadership roles in ministry. However, there are only two passages in the entire New Testament which might seem to forbid females from ministry.

The first is 1 Corinthians 14:34 (NIV):

*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.*

However, there is a problem with this isolated interpretation. Instead of identifying the specific situation in Corinth that Paul was addressing, proponents of this view try to associate Paul's demand for silence as if he were speaking about ones call to ministry. The entire

context of this passage is addressing the disorderly, chaotic, and confusing use of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. That is why Paul would later close this thought unit with the admonition that *everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way* (1 Corinthians 14:40 NIV).

Apparently, there were women in the Corinthian church who made a significant contribution to the confusion surrounding spiritual gifts, orderly worship, and unity in that specific community of faith. Paul chose to address the specific situation and the individuals involved. However, Paul was NOT addressing a woman's call, qualifications, or ordination to the ministry. To lift this verse out of its proper context is a step away from sound biblical interpretation.

The second verse that is often used to prohibit women from serving in the ministry is 1 Timothy 2:12 (NIV):

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.*

Paul is again addressing the subject of orderly worship to a church in the wake of conflict and division. Ephesus also had several problems that seemed to center around a group of influential but divisive women. The issues addressed to this church seem to imply that these women may have:

- Participated in disorderly worship and misguided public prayer (1 Timothy 1:1-2).
- Distracted men in worship with immodest dress and materialistic apparel (1 Timothy 2:9-10).
- Practiced gossip, idle talk, and nonproductive discussion (1 Timothy 5:13).
- Embraced heresy and false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-7). Some believe these women were the wives of false teachers who were seeking positions of spiritual influence in the church.

It seems that these issues were being initiated by a group of women who recklessly ignored social customs and may have attempted to usurp authority over the male leaders in their community of faith. To correct the problem, Paul was using the authority of his apostleship to place a restraining order upon their teaching ministry and vocal participation in worship.

However, some sincere but misguided believers cut verses 11-12 out of the context of a local church problem and try to paste it as a universal rule relating to all women in all circumstances, all times, and all cultures when, in fact, Paul is giving Timothy advice about how to deal with heretical teaching and the behavior of women within the Ephesian church.

In light of Paul's recognition of the ministry of women in nearly all of his writings, it seems obvious that he was addressing an isolated incident with a specific solution that was not meant to be a universal application. Had Paul meant for gender to be a criterion for ministry, he would have included it in his other writings which list very specific qualifications for pastors and spiritual leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and Ephesians 4:11). In addition, when Paul addresses the spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-12, he does not indicate that these gifts are given according to gender, ethnicity, or class. If being a woman disqualified a person from serving as a pastor or spiritual leader, would not these

passages have been the best place for Paul to make that clear? In other words, the situation in Ephesus did not warrant a prohibition of women in leadership everywhere; otherwise, Paul's prohibition would have been repeated in his other writings that mention the spiritual gifts of teaching, leadership, or pastoring.

At the outset, Paul does appear to restrict women from speaking in the church in these two specific letters; however, Paul was addressing specific problems that involved immature women within the context of certain situations. Using these two scriptures as proof texts to restrict ALL women from speaking publicly would be as unwise as using Paul's admonition in Titus 2:9 for Christian slaves to be obedient to their masters as a biblical endorsement of slavery.

- 2. Reasons the Assemblies of God believes females can serve as lead pastors.** The Assemblies of God has always believed that God has called and continues to call women into ministry as lead pastors, associate pastors, and missionaries. As Spirit-filled believers, we take Paul at his word when he said that God distributes spiritual gifts *to each one, just as he determines* (1 Corinthians 12:11 NIV). Nowhere in Scripture are we told that God's distribution of the spiritual gifts is confined to any one gender. That means women can receive and use any spiritual gift the Lord bestows upon them including teaching, pastoring, and every other gift mentioned in Scripture. There are several reasons why an increasing number of denominations ordain women into ministry.

First, we believe that Scripture, not culture, should be the rule of faith and conduct. Instead of allowing the Bible to transform our culture, we sometimes allow our culture to interpret the Bible. There are two examples of this in the history of biblical translation.

- The first is where Paul mentions Junia and says she was *outstanding among the apostles* (Romans 16:7 NIV). Until around 1946, some Bible translators translated that name into the male form of "Junias," implying the person the Apostle Paul said was an outstanding apostle was a male; however, the earliest translations of the Bible have the female name "Junia," not the masculine form of "Junias." Why? In the Middle Ages, the translators of the Bible changed the female name "Junia" to the male name "Junias" because of a cultural belief that women could not be apostles.<sup>4</sup> We even have writings of Saint Jerome and John Chrysostom which were written three hundred years after Christ that speak of the noble qualities of this *woman*, Junia.<sup>5</sup> In this case, cultural bias robbed us of seeing a woman not only as being recognized as an apostle but also as being an outstanding example of one at that.
- A second example is found in Romans 16:1-2 where, in closing the epistle, Paul commends the ministry of a female deaconess by the name of Phoebe. In calling her a deacon, Paul used the Greek word *diakonos*, the same word he used to describe other positions of leadership in the New Testament church. However, the bias of some modern translators has obscured Phoebe's position of leadership by choosing to translate the word "servant" or "helper" rather than "deacon."<sup>6</sup> As a result, cultural bias blinds us from seeing Phoebe as she really was—a female deacon in the church of Cenchrea who had won the respect and admiration of the Apostle Paul.

Let me say it again—as believers, we must allow the Bible to shape our perspective and not our perspectives to shape the Bible.

Second, there have always been women who were active in leadership and service within Biblical history. In addition to the Apostle Junia, other examples would include:

- **Miriam:** A prophet among Moses' leadership community during the Exodus (Exodus 15:20).
- **Deborah:** A prophet, judge, and military leader who led the armies of God in successful battle (Judges 4-5).
- **Huldah:** A prophetess who authenticated the scroll of the law and helped lead a national revival (2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34).
- **Priscilla:** One who had a teaching ministry in Ephesus along with her husband, Aquila. Five of the seven times the couple is mentioned in the Book of Acts, her name is given first. In one of those instances, she is even said to have taught the scholar Apollos and *explained to him the way of God more adequately* (Acts 18:26).
- **Anna:** Called a prophet (Luke 2:36).
- **Philip:** Had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9).

The Bible's "big picture" image of women is of God's using them as leaders, apostles, prophets, advisers, teachers, and servants. On top of this, biblical history proves that God continued to use women even when they may have lived among cultures that viewed them as less than equal to men. There is overwhelming evidence throughout God's Word that He calls and uses women in ministry. Ignoring this and focusing on two texts that correct the behavior of women in a specific situation is like quoting two instances of divorce as proof texts condemning marriage.

Third, Spirit-filled faith has always embraced women in ministry. The Bible makes it very clear that the gifts and the outpouring of the Spirit were given for ministry. Nowhere does God's Word limit the expression of these gifts to men. As a matter of fact, we find the opposite. When the New Testament describes the Holy Spirit's sovereign distribution of gifts, we are told they are given for service without regard to gender. For example, the gift of prophecy is for both men and women. Author Debby Lamm Bray writes:

Paul also expected women to pray and prophesy in the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:5, he wrote that "every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head." Paul's concern was not that women were verbally participating in the gathering but that they were doing so without their heads covered—a cultural issue unique to that time and place.<sup>7</sup>

At Pentecost, Peter quoted the Prophet Joel in predicting that *your sons and daughters will prophesy* (Acts 2:16-17 NIV). As stated above, we are told that Philip had four unmarried daughters who exercised the gift of prophecy in the Caesarean church (Acts 21: 9). We are also told that women prophesied in the early church (1 Corinthians 11:5).

*God does not show favoritism* (Romans 2:11). He calls whomever He wants and gives gifts and ministries to whomever He chooses. Paul made an all-encompassing statement that defined a



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

### Practical Reasons to Consider Women

In addition to the biblical precedents mentioned above, there are a few practical reasons why a search committee should consider female applicants in their selection of a lead pastor. Those surveyed stated the following:

1. **Maximizing opportunity.** Finding a good match for your church is hard enough. “By excluding female candidates, a search committee is potentially eliminating a good match for their church. It important to cast the net as far as you can,” said Andy Smith, secretary/treasurer of the Central District.<sup>8</sup>
2. **Due Diligence.** The people of your church expect the search committee and board to represent them well, take their time, be guided by process, make wise decisions, and vet all potential candidates. Nicole Heidt is not only a female but also a network officer in the Wyoming Ministry Network and said, “A local search committee would not be doing its due diligence if they did not look at every possible candidate.”<sup>9</sup>
3. **Proven success.** Don Detrick, secretary/treasurer of the Northwest Ministry Network, reminds search committees about the priceless contribution women have made in Assemblies of God history. “The Assemblies of God has a long history of women in ministry and many of our churches were planted by women,” Detrick reminds.<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, when writing about why the Assemblies of God has been so successful in the Mormon dominated state of Utah, one Mormon scholar even went so far as to attribute female leadership as one of the primary reasons Spirit-filled Christians have been more effective than their evangelical counterparts in reaching Mormons in Utah.<sup>11</sup> Many district/network superintendents who participated in the survey mentioned that they have numerous success stories regarding female lead pastors. “The ladies leading our churches in South Texas serve with distinction and bring a perspective that is unique. In each case, these churches are among our growing numbers,” said Tim Barker, superintendent of the South Texas District.<sup>12</sup>
4. **Called and qualified.** If a female minister has the required theological preparation, ministry experience, pastoral gifting, and leadership capabilities, every respondent felt they should be considered as a candidate for your pastoral search. If God has called and gifted them with pastoral gifts, then the body of Christ needs them.



## When Is Caution Warranted?

While activists tend to be “all in” despite the cost, obstacles, or outcomes, district/network superintendents are inclined to be more pragmatic. Although those surveyed do not believe the Bible disqualifies females from serving as lead pastors, they do believe there are certain situations that may require better timing, cultural fit, and preparation before engaging female leadership. When asked the question, “When might a female candidate not be a good choice for a church?” they responded with seasoned wisdom. Following are a few common denominators they felt should be considered.

1. **High resistance.** When resistance to the idea of female leadership is so prevalent that it would create a high likelihood of failure for a female candidate, search committees should proceed with caution. There is little to gain in setting a new pastor up for endless conflict and resentful resistance. In this case, more training for that congregation and its leadership community should be pursued so that a culture of acceptance is not only created but also given a chance to thrive.
2. **Inferior motives.** Some churches may want female leaders for no other reason than to appear open minded or to make a social statement. This alone is not a good enough reason and places unfair pressure on female lead pastors to “live up to something” that is not normally required of male lead pastors. The only motivation a search committee should have is to embrace God’s will for their church no matter what gender a candidate may be.
3. **Community fit.** There are some small communities, towns, and church cultures that are heavily influenced by Calvinistic and Reformed theology that have for decades believed females cannot be ordained or serve in any positions of authority (complementarianism). This view may even have become the accepted perspective of nonbelievers in these communities. “Board members and congregants who were raised with, educated by, or hold Calvinist theology will often struggle accepting female pastors”, said Superintendent Bret Allen of the Northern California and Nevada District.<sup>13</sup> In these cases, it may be wiser to find a male candidate who can introduce a more biblical perspective and represent an egalitarian understanding of Scripture.
4. **Inadequate qualifications.** When a female does not have the character, theological preparation, competence, potential, or qualifications to serve as a lead pastor, the search committee owes it to the church to identify a more competent candidate.
5. **Leadership division.** When a search committee or board is extremely divided as to whether it is biblical or the right time or if the church is ready, it should pause to better understand the situation. A word of caution would be in order here. Some search committees make the mistake of thinking that all decisions must be unanimous before moving forward. However, making one dissenting member a “super delegate” with veto power over the entire group is not wise. One superintendent who participated in the survey told a story about a church whose board had ten members in favor of amending the bylaws to provide for female leadership with only one opposed. Believing they needed to be united and fearing division on the board, the revision was reviewed annually but



was stalled for nearly a decade. Finally, one member resented the fact that one person was holding the group back. They decided to move ahead only to see the amendment met with applause and cheers from the congregation in the annual business meeting. Sadly, they had allowed a few opinionated people to cause them to become disconnected from biblical truth and the desires and tolerance levels of the congregations they served.

There is no simple test to know if female leadership is God's will for your church other than to examine all qualified candidates, no matter their gender.

## **Unique Contributions of Female Leadership**

Although genders do have unique qualities, it would be a mistake to assume they do in every case and circumstance. Some leadership scholars even claim that the higher a person goes up the organizational ladder, the more gender differences seem to give way to common characteristics that most effective leaders have whether male or female. One extensive study even found that arguments for female leadership based upon the assumption that they possess gender qualities that make them better leaders creates more resistance to the idea, not less.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, when asked what positive attributes they saw female lead pastors bring to the table, there were several common denominators that district/network leaders mentioned in the survey. Following is a summary of the recurring feedback under general headings:

- 1. Inclusivity.** Female leaders can be more relational in their approach, collaborative, and inclusive because they understand what it is like to be a minority in leadership circles. They are often discerning and enjoy an instant connection with the majority of church volunteers who, in most cases, are women as well.
- 2. Pastoral.** Female leaders can be more caring, generous, relational, empathetic, and maternal. They are often less task oriented and more people driven.
- 3. Leadership.** Organizationally, female leaders can be more detailed, analytic, organized, methodical, and gifted at multitasking. Rich Guerra, Superintendent of the SoCal Network and Southwest Regional Executive Presbyter, has been an advocate for female lead pastors for decades. "I would challenge search committees to consider a female credentialed minister as their lead pastor, as they are the fastest growing credentialed group in the Assemblies of God. I believe they have the three qualities that are needed to lead a church in today's culture. They communicate a compelling vision, build teams to accomplish vision and generally manage conflict well. If we're going to reach our communities for Christ, we are going to have to change our approach, and with change comes conflict. Great leaders know how to manage that conflict and I believe a female pastor can lead a church to impact their community for Christ in a positive way," said Guerra.

4. **Outreach.** Female leaders tend to be more community oriented both in and outside the church. They enjoy a quicker connection with children, mothers, single moms, single-parent families, and nonbelievers who value diversity.
5. **Perspective.** Female leadership introduces a new perspective on many things. The church can see new opportunities for outreach to the community, a fresh perspective on life, Scripture, family ministry, unique wisdom, diversity, mentoring young females for ministry, etc. Phil Schneider, superintendent of the Illinois Ministry Network, reiterated this point saying, “Women have a different perspective that can be a breath of fresh air from the pulpit to the execution of a church strategy.”<sup>15</sup>
6. **Authenticity.** Having a female lead pastor can communicate to the community that your church is consistent in its theology of gender. It is living proof that equality and inclusion is more than a tagline. Superintendent Toby Schneckloth of the Nebraska District has seen this firsthand and affirms that “female lead pastors can increase the influence of the church in your community. As every other aspect of society is reaching for more inclusion and diversity, the church is seen as valuing them as well.”<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps Superintendent Aaron Hlavin of the Michigan District summarized the thoughts of his colleagues best saying, “Female leaders bring a perspective that is needed in leadership within the kingdom. We are not the same without them.”<sup>17</sup>

The most important thing to remember is that the image of God is most accurately reflected in both male and female, not in just one gender (Genesis 5:1-2). Female leadership helps us see the fullness of the Lord’s character and divine nature in humanity.

## Questions to Consider

What are the most important things a pastoral search committee would need to ask themselves before considering a female candidate? That was the question posed to district/network superintendents in the survey. Their responses could serve as an invaluable list of questions your search committee can use as a springboard for discussion.

1. Does each individual member of the search committee subscribe to the Assemblies of God’s interpretation of Scripture as it relates to females in ministry? Why or why not?
2. Are we willing to accept that God may call a female to serve as the lead pastor of our church? Why or why not?
3. Can we as a board support a female pastor in the same way and to the same degree that we have supported male lead pastors in the past? If no, then why?
4. Does the theology, culture, and leadership community of our church allow for the acceptance of a female lead pastor?

5. What kind of resistance might we expect from those in our church and community who might not be able to accept a female lead pastor? How will we address any objections that may come from influencers and stakeholders?
6. How can a female leader help us address the needs and weaknesses of our church? How can they help build upon our strengths?
7. What are our motives for considering a female lead pastor? Are they based on God's will or a desire to make a social statement?
8. Do we have a female candidate who possesses the qualifications, experience, and leadership skills to lead our church? Why or why not?
9. Will female candidates be exposed to the same kind of examination, respect, honor, and remuneration as male candidates?
10. Will having a female lead pastor make Jesus more or less appealing to nonbelievers in our surrounding neighborhood, town, or city?
11. How did our people respond to the question on our congregational survey that asked if they were open to female leadership? What insight do these responses give us in this process?
12. Have we asked our district/network leadership for résumés or recommendations of female candidates that meet our spiritual, educational, experiential, and leadership standards? Why or why not?
13. What practical impact points might need to be addressed as a result of having a female lead pastor in our church?
14. Are we capable of seeing a female leader as one whom God has placed in spiritual authority over us as individuals and our church?
15. Are there any other questions we should be asking ourselves regarding this matter?

Even if you do not have a female candidate that is qualified at this time, having this discussion now can strengthen your leadership community, increase your church's capacity for inclusion, and better equip your church for future pastoral searches.



## Common Challenges to Overcome

When asked what the most important challenges a local church may need to overcome before considering a female candidate, those surveyed seemed to focus on five recurring themes: biblical illiteracy, male bias, apportionment, adjustments, and stereotypes.

1. **Biblical illiteracy.** As mentioned earlier, the most repeated obstacle raised by district superintendents was the existence of biblical illiteracy concerning the topic of female leadership. The Assemblies of God does not believe there are any biblical grounds to limit the role of women in ministry or pastoral leadership. Despite published position papers on the topic, our rich history of female leadership, and the growing number of female ordained ministers and elected female leaders, some in our Assemblies of God churches seem unwilling to embrace a biblical view on this matter. "This is about the Bible, and



biblical leadership is not gender specific,” writes Superintendent Rick Ross of the North Carolina AG Network.<sup>18</sup> Superintendent Hilario Garza of the Northwest Hispanic District echoes this conviction saying, “God makes no exceptions when calling people to shepherd His Church; and as for the function of pastoring, women are just as capable as men.”<sup>19</sup> Bill Welch of the Alaska District further elaborates saying, “Since early church history, women have been making significant contributions in leadership. Women established the Philippian church and Priscilla taught Apollos. We could go on and on. Leaving women out of the consideration marginalizes what God may want to do in a congregation.”<sup>20</sup> If your team is considering a female candidate, it may be worth the effort to ask your district/network superintendent to teach on this subject during a Sunday morning service while you are in the search process. It may help your people better understand what Scripture says on the topic by hearing it from a person who represents the Fellowship in an official capacity.

2. **Internal bias.** Nearly every superintendent mentioned the existence of a bias towards male leadership as an obstacle. The reasons given for this bias were the overwhelming prevalence of males in the upper levels of local church leadership. Although females normally make up a majority of a church’s volunteers, more men seem to serve in leadership positions such as Bible teacher, board member, deacon and on important teams like finance, missions, and search committees. Because male leadership has been so prevalent, it has found a seat front and center in our comfort zone. As a result, many church leaders who have an internal bias towards men have become one of the largest obstacles for women serving in lead pastoral roles.
3. **Secularized apportionment.** Bias can often be found on the opposite ends of most controversial issues. A challenge has emerged in recent years from believers who aim for quotas without equal regard to qualifications. On the opposite end of the spectrum from the male bias mentioned earlier, the goal of apportionment is to grant or necessitate female leadership on the grounds that they are underrepresented. The result may be the perception that females should be lead pastors even if they lack the qualifications, theological training, or ministry experience. Just as male bias hinders female consideration, so also does a congregation’s fear of what may appear to be a form of gender activism.
4. **Needed adjustments.** Getting a new pastor is a lot like a heart transplant. It takes time for the body to accept the heart and for the heart to adjust to the body. In the same way, the church will need to adjust to the realities of female leadership. Meeting places, decorum, potential pregnancy leaves, the level of spousal availability, the role of the pastor’s husband, and other stylistic differences are all things that will require time and adjustment. Hosting town hall meetings to prepare your people for these adjustments will go a long way.
5. **General stereotypes.** Pop psychology has made a fortune selling gender stereotypes to the American public. We can mistakenly believe that men are more task oriented, and females are more relational or perhaps that women are more emotional, and men are more logical. The list can go on and on. The fact of the matter is that we cannot evaluate candidates through the prism of our own stereotypes. Your team will do well not only to avoid this pitfall but also to educate your church to do so as well.

Despite these obstacles, there was a general sense of optimism among those surveyed concerning the church's ability to overcome these obstacles. Over 600 churches nationally have already embraced female leadership and paved the way for others to follow. Don Detrick of the Northwest Ministry Network shared this sense of confidence saying, "Many congregants are open to having a woman lead pastor but need more information about AG history and a biblical theology about women in ministry."<sup>21</sup>



As of 2021, the Assemblies of God has 37,713 ministers. Of that number, 21,442 are ordained males; and 4,051 or 18.9 percent are ordained females. If all churches required ordained lead pastors (which they do not) and those lead pastors represented our current proportion of female ordained ministers, then out of our 12,938 churches, 2,443 would be led by female pastors. At the present time, there are only 630 female lead pastors which means we have more work to do to close the gap. It begs the question: What can your search committee do now to explore this possibility? Allow me to suggest six practical things to move forward.

1. **Include a female minister in the interview process.** Explore God's will by including a female candidate among those you interview. No matter what the outcome may be, this enables your board to do due diligence, get ahead of the learning curve, and communicate your openness to all the possibilities of God's will in the search process.
2. **Ask your district/network superintendent for help.** There are several things they can do to help your team consider female leadership:
  - Meet with your pastoral search team to discuss the subject of female candidates, explaining the Assemblies of God's position on the subject, and answering any questions your team may have.
  - Share positive success stories of other churches in the district/network that have or have had female lead pastors.
  - Recommend qualified female candidates and identifying emerging female leaders as well as providing contact information and résumés.
  - Connect your search committee with other superintendents who have already explored these possibilities to share their observations.
  - Provide the names of current female lead pastors and churches that your team can speak with to better understand what female leadership looks like in its working gloves. Please see the footnotes for a list of the top four districts/networks that have the most female lead pastors.<sup>22</sup>
3. **Use the online congregational survey the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network provides free of charge.** It can be customized for your church and one of the questions on the survey asks congregants if they would be open to female leadership. Using the survey and reviewing the results will help you navigate this possibility. A generic sample can be viewed at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RMMNchurch>.

4. **Facilitate honest discussion.** Budget time in your search committee meeting to have an honest discussion about this topic. Using the list of discussion questions listed above in the section entitled “Questions to Consider” is a great place to start.
5. **Review your bylaws.** It is common for older and outdated bylaws to use words like he, him, his, and himself to refer to the lead pastor and other leadership roles in your church. Replacing these gender specific words with more inclusive language will help your church consider all the possibilities of God’s will now and in the future.
6. **Prepare your church.** If your church is not open to female lead pastors or cannot come to an agreement on this issue, help your church wade into the water slowly by exposing them to effective female guest speakers on Sundays (other than Mother’s Day), female board members, or female associate pastors.

The Assemblies of God affirms that God calls women and gives them spiritual gifts for ministry. We believe our local churches should as well and now is the time for your team to ask, “Have we prayed about whether God has called a female to be our lead pastor?”



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<sup>1</sup> In addition to resource contributors, 24 district/network superintendents and 5 secretary/treasurers collaborated to produce this resource. The survey was conducted using Survey Monkey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/female-lead> and included 31 total respondents, a completion rate of 71 percent, and an average response time of 36m:28s. The list of contributors and their names are listed in alphabetical order: Brett Allen (Superintendent, Northern California and Nevada District), Tim Barker (Superintendent, South Texas District), Glenn Beaver (Superintendent, West Texas District), Ivan De la Torre (Superintendent, Puerto Rico District), Don Detrick (Secretary/Treasurer, Northwest Ministry Network), David Dillon (Superintendent, Appalachian Ministry Network), Ken Draughon (Superintendent, Alabama Ministry Network), Jim Filbeck (Secretary/Treasurer, Minnesota District), Jesse Galindo (Superintendent, Central Pacific Ministry Network), Hilario Garza (Superintendent, Northwest Hispanic District), Don Gifford (Superintendent, Indiana District), Rich Guerra (Superintendent, SOCAL Network of the AG), Nicole Heidt (Secretary/Treasurer, Wyoming Ministry Network), Aaron Hlavin (Superintendent, Michigan District), Den Hussey (Secretary/Treasurer, Louisiana District), Rich Lemberg (District Secretary, Wisconsin-Northern Michigan District), Brooks McElhenny (Secretary/Treasurer, Michigan District), Sergio Navarrete, (Superintendent, Southern Pacific District), Daniel Olivarez (Superintendent, Central District), Gene Roncone (Superintendent, Rocky Mountain Ministry Network), Rick Ross (Superintendent, North Carolina AG Network), Robert W. Sandler (Superintendent, South Carolina District), Alan Schaberg (Superintendent, Wyoming Ministry Network), Toby Schnechloth (Superintendent, Nebraska District), Phil Schneider (Superintendent, Illinois District), Winston Titus (Superintendent, North Dakota Ministry Network), Bill Welch (Superintendent, Alaska Ministry Network), Joel Wendland (Superintendent, Southern Idaho District), and Darryl Wooten (Superintendent, Oklahoma District).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics provided by Sherri Doty, Statistics Supervisor, Office of the General Secretary at the Assemblies of God National Office (personal email communication between August 30, 2021, and September 2, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Gene Roncone, *Explore the Call, Is Ministry God's Will for Your Life*, Monroe, IL, 2021, portions of Chapters 15 and 16.

<sup>4</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet*, 2nd Edition, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, Kindle Edition, 2018, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2005, p. ?; Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2009, pp. 214–217.

<sup>6</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet*, 2nd Edition, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, Kindle Edition, 2018, p. 234.

<sup>7</sup> Debbie Lamm Bray, "Ministry Without Walls," *Influence Magazine*, August 18, 2021, p. ?.

<sup>8</sup> Andy Smith's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Nicole Heidt's response<sup>4</sup> on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Don Detrick's response on Gene Roncone's, Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Allan J. Clark, "The Full Gospel in Zion: A History of Pentecostalism in Utah," PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2019, pp. 171-193.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Barker's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Bret Allen's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carlie, "The Female Leadership Advantage: An Evaluation of the Evidence," *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, Pergamon Publishing, 2003, pp. 807-844.

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<sup>15</sup> Phil Schneider's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Toby Schneckloth's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Aaron Hlavin's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Rick Ross's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Hilario Garza's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Bill Welch's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Don Detrick's response on Gene Roncone's Superintendent's Survey (Survey of Assemblies of God District Superintendents concerning why pastoral search committees should consider female candidates), 2021.

<sup>22</sup> The following four Assemblies of God districts/networks participated in the survey and reported the most female lead pastors: Northern California and Nevada District (25 female lead pastors), Southern Pacific District (18 female lead pastors), SOCAL Network of the AG (16 female lead pastors), and the Michigan District (15 female lead pastors).