
Opinion Poll of Women in Pastoral Ministry

February 2012

• What is the most pressing need for women clergy in the Adventist Church today?

• Now that the number of woman pastors has doubled in North America in the past 5 years, are you finding greater acceptability for your leadership/equipping role?

• What can the NAD Ministerial Department do to assist you most in your assignment?



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A total of 50 Seventh-day Adventist pastors were interviewed from January 10 through February 13, 2012. All of them are women. The focus of this survey is to hear the experiences and opinions of women serving in pastoral ministry in the North American Division of the denomination. These pastors were randomly selected from among the women employed in pastoral ministry in many local conferences. The sample was stratified to include a balance of several characteristics. Numbers in parentheses represent numbers of pastors. A few of these pastors have multiple assignments and to allow for these data the numbers below are Full-time Equivalent (FTE) totals. "Credentials" refer to the actual language on the card issued by the conference to each pastor.

- **ASSIGNMENT:** 33.5 are in multi-pastor staffs, 10 lead multi-church districts, 4 lead one congregation, 2.5 have other assignments, including half-time as a hospital chaplain, church planter, conference department director, and secular campus chaplain
- **CREDENTIALS:** 28 have Commissioned Minister credentials, 7 have a Commissioned Minister license, 4 hold Commissioned/Ordained credentials, 4 have Ordained/Commissioned credentials, 3 have Ministerial Credentials, one each holds Licensed Minister, Missionary, Lay Pastor, and Chaplain credentials
- **LANGUAGE:** 47 work in English, on each in French, Portuguese, and Chinese
- **AGE BY GENERATION:** 2 are Seniors (born before 1946), 24 are Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), 12 are from GenX (born 1965-1976), 12 are Millennials (born 1977-1994)

Because the pastors interviewed were free to express anything in response to each question, there is a subjective element to the results. The percentages in this report have modifiers like "about" or "around." The percentages of comments may add up to more than 100% on some items because more than one idea was shared by some pastors.

QUESTION 1: What is the most pressing need for women clergy in the Adventist Church today?

Equal treatment of women and men in ministry was the most common response. Almost 60% stated that the most pressing issue is fairness. Two phrases used again and again were “equal treatment” and “acceptance.” Female pastors would like to be valued for the unique contributions they make to ministry, yet they are all aware of inequality in treatment either by the denomination or by individual church members. Some feel compensation is not always equal. Others have had experiences at pastor’s meetings where they were assumed to be pastor’s wives or when gender inclusive language was not used. A few wish the role of “pastor” was clarified to include women and men. Still others feel that more of the men in church administration need to see the value of having women serve in pastoral ministry. Equality touches on almost all the other responses described below, but 60% of the respondents specifically used words like “equality” or “fair” or “acceptance.”

The second largest cluster of responses focused on networking, training, and resources for women in pastoral ministry. Over 40% of the pastors feel that support in these areas is the most pressing need. Many specifically mentioned the need for networking with other women serving as pastors and the isolation they sometimes feel. They suggested that ways be created for safe and confidential connections between women in ministry, for mentoring opportunities, and for information about women pastors in the Division or their Union Conference. Training events that would bring women together and address issues relevant to women in ministry are also needed, as are resources specifically designed for women serving as pastors.

Job opportunities for women in ministry were mentioned by 38% of the pastors interviewed. They emphasized the need to provide equal opportunity for women in pastoral employment and to create more opportunities for women to serve in pastoral ministry. Some are concerned about whether or not up and coming women will be offered any openings. Others find opportunities to move to new pastorates to be a challenge. One pastor suggested that a “clearinghouse” for pastoral vacancies be created by the NAD.

Ordination for women pastors was mentioned by less than a third of the pastors. The words used most often on this topic were “affirmation” and “empowerment” and “support.” Several feel this issue needs to be settled. Others are discouraged by the denomination or the GC President’s stance and feel it is discriminatory. Some women pastors feel ordination is about equal treatment.

One in four of the pastors interviewed expressed a need to educate local congregations about women serving as pastors and their value to the church. They expressed a wish for more awareness across the Division of the valuable role women bring as pastors in the church.

There were other responses to this questions that were mentioned *less often*, including: Recognize that pastors have similar issues regardless of gender ... understand the unique issues of women in pastoral ministry ... burnout ... creative help with the challenges of pastors who are mothers of young children—options for continued service, part-time work during this period of family life, etc.

Along with the difficult and often painful issues mentioned, it is important to note that 20% of the pastors responding to this question volunteered strong appreciation of the support they receive from their local church and/or conference. One said, "I am a happy camper." Another said, "I'm extremely blessed."

QUESTION 2: Now that the number of woman pastors has doubled in North America in the past five years, are you finding greater acceptance for your leadership?

Half of these pastors feel there is greater acceptance for their role as a pastor. A total of 22% gave a clear “yes” with comments such as: “it has especially improved at the conference office” ... “the numbers of members asking for my services has gone up” ... “the length of time I have served at this local church has certainly helped.” Another group (28% of the total sample) gave a qualified “yes” with comments such as: “things have improved but there are still some members who do not accept me” ... “it depends on the age group” ... “it depends on the geography” ... “it depends on the culture” ... “I’ve had bad experiences but it was a long time ago.” Those who say “it depends” also say there has been clear improvement.

Nearly one in five of the pastors interviewed (18%) said no, there is less acceptance to their leadership as pastors. About 12% of the total sample gave a clear “no” with comments such as: “there is still a long road ahead toward acceptance” ... “I have people who still resist or undermine my work” ... “male leaders at the conference measure my work in a male-oriented way” ... “my new church accepts me less than my previous church.” Another 6% stated a qualified “no,” adding comments such as: “It’s tough finding job openings” ... “there are still large groups that are not accepting.”

The rest of the responses include a mixture of “yes” and “no” or some version of “not sure/don’t know” or there is no need for increased acceptance because of the supportive attitudes where they have worked.

Nine pastors (18%) said they were not sure or didn’t know if acceptance had improved. Several expressed surprise at the statistic shared in this question. (“Now that the number of women pastors has doubled ...”) Others stated that this statistic needs to be shared more widely. Some other quotes from individual pastors in this cluster: “I moved to a conference with fewer women pastors so it feels like less, but I’m not sure support is less. ... I’m not concerned about acceptance as a woman in ministry. ... I’ve only pastored a couple years and in a good situation so I don’t know.”

Eight pastors (16%) said acceptance is a mixed bag, “yes and no.” They said “it depends.” Unlike the “it depends” comments above, which leaned toward a “yes, it has improved,” these comments were more uncertain either way. One of these pastors said there is greater acceptance among Caucasian church members than Hispanics. Another said there is greater acceptance among African-Americans than Caucasians.

Six pastors (12%) said, “No, it hasn’t improved because it has always been good.” Or, “I’ve always been accepted, so it hasn’t changed.”

The numbers above do not add up to 100% because some pastors gave more than one response.

Fourteen of the pastors also made miscellaneous comments in response to this question. The most frequent include: "Educating people has helped with the acceptance of women in ministry ... some church members look to higher levels of the denomination for acceptance instead of studying it for themselves ... the statistics mentioned are not common knowledge and should be shared more widely." Comments made *less frequently* include: "A previous woman pastor at my church left a bad impression ... change comes slowly ... I encourage young women to be very sure of their calling to help them face negativity ... acceptance needs to be more than verbal, it needs to be in actions when more men retire acceptance will improve ... I've had positive experiences, but I've heard horror stories."

QUESTION 3: What can the NAD Ministerial Department do to assist you most in your assignment?

Raise the level of awareness about women pastors in ministry. Almost 50% of the pastors interviewed said that simply informing church members that there are women serving as pastors is important. This helps to educate church members. This can be accomplished through a variety of channels, including books, adding a new section in the Church Manual on women in ministry, materials from Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, encouraging church administrators to withhold their personal opinions against women in ministry, and sharing the unique contributions women make to pastoral ministry.

Equally important was holding conferences for women pastors. Almost 50% of the pastors in this study either asked for such meetings or mentioned the Women's Clergy Conferences and urged that they be continued. Suggestions made for these events include: "Provide time for interaction ... provide travel expenses to attend (men are covered to attend local pastor's meetings where there is plenty of male interaction, women often have to use CEU funds to receive similar interaction with other women) ... make it a requirement ... these events have been a huge help ... ask women serving as pastors to speak at these events and at the NAD Ministries Convention ... provide presentations on issues specific to women in ministry ... provide training on how to prepare for an interview.

Almost as many of the pastors interviewed (46%), suggested that the NAD Ministerial Department provide networking opportunities for women in pastoral ministry. They want the NAD to create ways for female pastors to connect with each other for the purpose of encouragement, support, and mentoring. Comments in this area include: "Provide a directory of women serving as pastors and department leaders in the NAD ... create a newsletter for women pastors (not a brag sheet) ... set up an online forum for women in ministry to interact or ask questions ... create regional meetings for women pastors ... create online chats and podcasts."

About 40% of the pastors interviewed stated that it would be helpful for the NAD Ministerial Department to address the issue of ordination. They feel that it is an important issue that needs to be faced in the church. The comments made *more often* include: "I am pleased the NAD is seeking to address the issue I am concerned with the GC stance on the issue ... the desire for more men to take up the issue boldly on behalf of women." Comments made *less often* include: "Wish the issue was settled ... have an ambassador for women pastors in the world field ... change will come from the bottom up ... we should back off the issue and be patient ... I am tired of the differences between the GC and NAD." One pastor said, "It's pretty simple. Ordination is recognition that I am a pastor."

An other response to this question was the 36% of the pastors who asked for the NAD to encourage more women pastors to be hired. They suggest that more emphasis be placed on considering women for ministry openings. These comments include: "Encourage equality in hiring ... make sure women pastors are given the policy book and made aware of policies/benefits ... help Ministerial Directors know how to help women transition into pastoral assignments ... consider women for leadership positions ... help Conference Presidents see the value of hiring women as pastors ... be

consistent in hiring practices, job descriptions, gender inclusive language, retirement benefits, service records, credentials, and the treatment of women in ministry ... make sure the policy book is gender inclusive.”

Some miscellaneous comments that do not fall into any of the categories mentioned above were also made by a few of the pastors interviewed: “Provide resources specific to women in ministry (materials specific to my work as a female pastor, web page listing resources for women in ministry, make such materials more visible, help pastors brush up on Greek and Hebrew) ... family issues (address needs of husbands who are married to pastors, challenges of starting a family and being a female pastor, burnout) ... how to reach missing members ... concern about losing my job if my administration changes ... encourage more innovative dialog and collaboration ... create a Division-wide strategy for marketing Adventist education which would especially help small schools ... provide pastoral skill development in mental health/counseling ... pray for all pastors—the challenges are big.”

About a third of the pastors interviewed voluntarily thanked the NAD for conducting this survey. It gave encouragement to many. Several appreciate the NAD taking a stand for women pastors. Several thanked Dan Jackson for his leadership. One mentioned deep appreciation for the work of Esther Knott. Another said, “The fact that this survey is happening is awesome. Knowing that this is being done makes me feel there is a willingness to listen to the women in the field.”