

## AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE PASTORAL MINISTRY IN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES IN ILOILO CITY<sup>1</sup>

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In recent years, there has been a growing awareness around the world of the role of women in shaping and building the destiny of humanity. Women play important roles in the social, economic and political life of a nation. Even in Christian churches today, it cannot be denied that women constitute a vital and dynamic force.

The influx of women into the pastoral ministry has been one of the most significant developments in the past decade. It can be observed, however, that there are still some Christian churches today that forbid the ordination of women in the pastoral ministry. Questions regarding the women's role in the church historically dominated by men have been raised. In spite of this opposition, some women have stood their ground and bravely assumed their role in the pastoral ministry. Who are these new breed of courageous, committed, and dedicated servants of the Lord? What story do they tell about themselves, their families, their childhood and adolescence? What experiences did they encounter in their personal and professional life as adults? These questions inspired this exploratory study of women in the pastoral ministry.

It was the purpose of this study (1) to determine the psycho-social characteristics of women in the pastoral ministry in evangelical churches in Iloilo City today; (2) to ascertain how effectively these women are functioning in the various roles of the pastoral ministry; (3) to explore the extent of acceptance of these women ministers by their congregation and by their male co-workers; and (4) to ascertain the changes that these women have brought to the pastoral ministry and the church.

To achieve this purpose, a study using the personal narrative of women actually in the pastoral ministry in evangelical churches in Iloilo City was conducted. Evangelical churches are churches that maintain the doctrine that the Bible is the only rule of faith and that salvation is attained chiefly by faith in the

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person and in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is often characterized by the zealous preaching or spreading of the gospel. For the purpose of this study, it was found necessary to exclude those evangelical churches that did not recognize and ordain women to the pastoral ministry. The focus of this study was the local or parish ministry.

This study, it is hoped, would bring out information that would be most valuable not only to evangelical churches but also to other Christian churches in the Philippines.

Data were gathered by interviewing ten women who were actually working in the pastoral ministry. An equal number of male pastors were also interviewed. In addition, lay leaders and/or key members of evangelical churches having women pastors were asked to answer a questionnaire. The manual "A Guide to Reading Narratives of Conflict and Choice For Self and Moral Voice" edited by Dr. Lyn Mikel Brown of the Center for the Study of Gender, Education and Human Development, Harvard University, was used in analyzing the interview narratives.

This study revealed that most of the evangelical churches in Iloilo City served by women pastors have a congregation of adult women with ages ranging from 21 to 60 years old and whose socio-economic status falls below the monthly poverty threshold. Evangelism tends to be the major mission or thrust of these local churches. They have a local governing body such as a Board or Council of Elders or Deacons and/or lay leaders. These lay leaders are likely to be single, college students or graduates, and members of the church for about five years.

The results of this study also show that women in the pastoral ministry in evangelical churches in Iloilo City are mostly middle-aged, married to laymen, and have one to four children. Most of them have finished the Bachelor of Theology degree or the Associate of Theology course, indicating their educational and intellectual preparedness for the pastoral ministry. In addition, most of the women pastors have engaged in some other profession before entering the pastoral ministry.

From the findings of this study, the following conclusions are derived:

1. Experiences in childhood and adolescence have greatly influenced the psycho-social life of women ministers as adults.

2. Most conversion experiences of women pastors occur during adolescence, resulting in the early development of their spiritual life.
3. There is no observable pattern in the decision of women pastors to enter the seminary or Bible school except their strong determination to “live out” their faith in Jesus Christ and His words in spite of financial and other difficulties, as a result of their conversion experiences.
4. The central task in the lives of women ministers is the ever present tension between their professional roles as pastors and their roles as wives and mothers.
5. Most women ministers show a strong sense of themselves as women with a divine calling from God. Their strong conviction and whole hearted commitment to the Lord are very inspiring to those who really know their life story.
6. The issue of gender has not been considered “very important” in evangelical churches. Most women pastors believe that both men and women have their own spheres of service and they can help one another build the church. Where one is weak, the strength of the other can compensate.
7. Women in the pastoral ministry tend to be women who have a “healthy” understanding and appreciation of themselves as women. These women have revealed themselves to be prayerful, therefore, powerful servants of God.
8. Most women pastors have a very strong professional self-concept, in spite of some difficulties in their ministry. They consider themselves very effective in the role of a minister, revealing a reasonably high self-esteem in a male-dominated profession.
9. Women pastors have relatively pleasant and enjoyable memories of their seminary or Bible school life. Their determination to go on and their commitment to the calling of God have given them the strength despite the hardships encountered.
10. The call of God for them to join the pastoral ministry is the most important reason for ordination, in the case of majority of women pastors studied.

11. Independent Pentecostal women ministers tend to organize or establish their own local churches instead of submitting to a male pastor or to a denomination.
12. Most of the women pastors officiate in church ordinances and rites except in the solemnizing of marriages. Most of them do not have a license to officiate in marriages and are not interested in securing one as they feel this is no longer necessary since most couples getting married prefer a male pastor to officiate in their wedding.
13. Women pastors are likely to develop good relationships with their families, with the congregation, with denominational leaders and with other pastors in the area. but not with high government officials and other social and professional groups.
14. Women ministers appear to be acceptable to the congregation and their male co-workers. However, this acceptance may be considered as simply a tolerance and not a true acceptance since women still do not occupy positions of power even in their own profession.
15. Women ministers are great agents of change. They tend to use their creative ability to bring useful and significant changes in the pattern of their church activities, particularly in worship and in prayer. However, they may sometimes be impeded from bringing about the more significant changes because of denominational practices and policies.

Six measures are recommended for the improvement of present practices and policies:

1. The reevaluation by evangelical churches of institutional attitudes and practices relative to women.
2. The holding of seminars and lectures in evangelical churches to create among Christian women a new awareness of their image as "woman" in God's eyes and as co-laborers in His kingdom.
3. The patterning of women's ministry in evangelical churches after the example which Jesus Christ left His church - - that of giving women due respect and recognition.

4. The organizing of a fellowship of women ministers that will serve as the support system for all women ministers in evangelical churches in Iloilo.
5. The giving of creative gender education to members of evangelical churches to reexamine preconceptions and clear misunderstandings of the cultural roles of men and women.
6. Educating and making the congregations aware of the proper role of pastors, their role as ministers, and their working together for the common goal of serving God, regardless of gender.

The following recommendations for further studies are also given:

1. A further study of women in the pastoral ministry that includes churches outside of the City of Iloilo, whether by denomination or not.
2. Further studies to explore the attitudes of men to women in the pastoral ministry at different developmental stages and different denominations.
3. A study to translate these findings to concrete programs for gender education and to follow-up studies on attitudinal changes.
4. A further study in the psycho-history of spirituality in various dimensions of gender and sub-cultures of the Philippines.
5. A further inquiry into the growing body of literature on the relationships of the “babaylan” to Philippines spirituality.
6. Further studies which would utilize qualitative methodologies in exploring the synthesis required of the Philippine Christian “pilgrimage” into finding the uniqueness of their spiritual experience, both “Eastern and Western.”