

WOMEN
OF THE
CLOTH

A New Opportunity for the Churches

Jackson W. Carroll, Ph.D.

Barbara Hargrove, Ph.D.

Adair T. Lummis, Ph.D.



1817

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Preface

Cultural images do not change easily, especially those weighted with the aura of sacred tradition. This book is about changes that one such image is undergoing as increasing numbers of women enter the ordained ministry of several Protestant denominations. The image of the ordained ministry is for many people a masculine one, as we have been repeatedly reminded in sharing our findings with various audiences. But it is changing, and this book shares some of the successes and difficulties experienced by women in breaking the old stereotypes as they have entered parish ministry. Using data from interviews with samples of clergywomen, clergymen, lay leaders, and other church officials in nine Protestant denominations, we present an analysis of clergywomen, comparing them with clergymen. Our focus is on who they are and what their experiences have been in seminary, the job market, the parish, and balancing their careers with their personal lives.

We wish to emphasize the comparative perspective of the book. While the primary focus is on clergywomen, the book also gives considerable attention to clergymen. While there are unique dimensions to the experiences of clergywomen, it is important that the experiences of women pastors be seen both in their similarities as well as differences from those of men.

The book is intended for a broad audience, but especially for those interested in the ministry of the church. Clergy (both women and men), laity puzzling over whether to call a woman as pastor, denominational officials, and seminary students, faculty, and administrators will, we hope, find the book helpful. Additionally, because the entry of women into the ordained ministry is part of a larger movement of women into a variety of traditionally male occupations and professions, sociologists and others interested in these broad changes should find the book of interest.

A word about the point of view of the book is important. It is basically a descriptive work, drawing principally on sociological perspectives and methods. The authors themselves are sociologists, and one is

also an ordained minister. We are likewise faculty members in theological seminaries and involved in the life of the church. These various statuses that we occupy are important in informing our work and commitments. As sociologists, we have tried to present our findings as objectively and fairly as possible, avoiding—insofar as we are aware—ideological stances in the various controversies regarding women as ordained ministers. At the same time, we would be less than candid if we did not acknowledge our fundamental sympathy for women in ordained ministry. We believe, as the subtitle suggests, that they provide a new opportunity for the churches. Nevertheless, we believe that their cause is best served by an honest telling of their story.

The study has been made possible by a generous grant from the Ford Foundation and by additional support from our respective institutions, Hartford Seminary and the Iliff School of Theology. We are particularly grateful to Mariam Chamberlain, Program Officer in Education and Public Policy at the Ford Foundation during much of the course of this study. Her concern for women in the professions, and her support and counsel in the development of this project have been very helpful.

It has also been essential to have the cooperation and assistance of the nine denominations included in the study. Official representatives of the denominations who worked with us helpfully in a variety of ways include the Rev. Faye Ignatius, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; the Rev. Dr. Roger Fjeld, The American Lutheran Church; the Rev. Susan M. Robinson, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); the Rt. Rev. Elliott L. Sorge, The Episcopal Church; the Rev. Joseph Wagner, Lutheran Church in America; the Rev. Dr. Dianne Tennis, Presbyterian Church in the United States; Marilyn Breitling, United Church of Christ; the Rev. Kathy Nickerson, The United Methodist Church; and the Rev. Ann DuBois, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. We could not have completed the study without their cooperation and support.

Additionally, a number of other denominational executives, seminary faculty, clergywomen, and sociologists either served on an advisory committee or contributed insights and feedback regarding the research design and early drafts of the book. They include LaVonne Althouse, Christine Brewer, Fran Craddock, Sister Sophie Damm, Mary Sudman Donovan, Davida Foy Crabtree, Sara A. Edwards, Yoshio Fukuyama, Anne Harrison, Beverly Wildung Harrison, Suzanne Hiatt, Edward Lehman, Doris Jones, Larry Mamiya, D. Barry Menuetz, Jeanne Audrey Powers, Ruth Rasche, Roddey Reid, David A. Roozen, Joan Russell, Lois Sanders, Lloyd E. Sheneman, Hilah Thomas, Kathryn Williams, Deaconess Louise Williams, and Barbara Wheeler.

A large number of other individuals also helped with the research.

While space precludes listing all of them, several are due particular thanks for their assistance in the collection, organization, and processing of the data and in preparation of the manuscript. They include Mary Jane Ross (principal research assistant), Wilhelmina Bijlefeld, Nancy and Tom Harney, Arlene Nickerson, Gilda Simpson, and Kathy D. Jansen.

Finally, we must express our deepest appreciation to the clergywomen and men, denominational officials, and seminary personnel who gave of their time in sharing insights and experiences in the interviews and questionnaires. Without their help this study would—literally—have not been possible.

Jackson W. Carroll
Barbara Hargrove
Adair T. Lummis