



Introduction to the packet

Many readers will find this captivating reading. But women pastors in a Mennonite church or those considering it are the intended audience for this material. The contents have been drawn from current Mennonite pastors, male and female, Canadian and American.

In 2005, a survey was administered to all women pastors in the USA and Canada and a random sample of male pastors for comparison purposes. Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership spearheaded this project with cooperation from Mennonite Church Canada.

Enthusiastic thanks go to Dr. Pamela Nath, and her students at Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio for the scientific analysis of this survey. Administration and analysis of this survey was made possible through funding from the Pathways to Mission and Vocation program with generous support from the Lilly Endowment. Additionally, heartfelt thanks go to Louise Wideman, a pastor at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio for her donated sabbatical time to gather the enclosed wisdom and seek permission where names were used.

These pages contain advice from women pastors to other women pastors, examples of how women pastors handle gender criticism, their surprises in ministry and, of course, humorous anecdotes that women love to tell.

There is a special section of advice to young women considering the ministry. Both female and male pastors were asked what encouragements and cautions they would give to a young woman considering ministry. Many answers centered on themes of call and discernment, preparation, self-awareness and boundaries and gender issues. Both joys and pain were shared. All legible advice was included so many themes are repeated yet included so one hears where the weight of advice rests. Do remember that a range of attitudes still exist among the survey respondents. One will find here some wonderful advice, some painful advice and some who disagree with each other. Keep in mind the overwhelming advice to young women considering the ministry is: "Go for it!"

Finally, the survey results themselves are included, as well as an executive summary for those who want a quick look. Some comparisons are drawn from a 1992 survey of women in ministry administered by Renee Sauder, of the then Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries. Women pastors report being more satisfied with their pastorates than in 1992. Additionally, the leadership style many women use is the style most closely linked with high satisfaction in a study by sociologist Edward C. Lehman, Jr. Women pastors work in a way Mennonite churches need. Yet there are challenges faced by both men and women in ministry. The four most often cited are: 1) the continuing structural and attitudinal gender inequities, 2) finding appropriate leadership and ministry styles, 3) balancing ministry, family and other roles and 4) setting appropriate boundaries. Recommendations consistent with the survey can be found at the end of the Executive Summary.

It is the hope of denominational leadership that this material is used to strengthen and encourage women in ministry and aids those in a discernment process. Additionally, it is hoped that male pastors and those who work with or oversee women in ministry would grow in understanding what it means to be a Mennonite woman in ministry today.

For it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in ministry and hence, we do not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4.1).

—*Diane Zaerr Brenneman*