

What encouragements can you give to a young woman entering pastoral ministry? What cautions?

Women's Responses:

A) Encouraged to follow God's leading and sense of call:

Listen to her heart (God is talking). Politics cannot be avoided (God is talking). A lot of men just do not see all sides of an issue/picture; a lot of women are shy of risk; if traditional male leadership has not been holistic, then (only) women in leadership can also be lacking a holistic vision. Both are needed—male and female.

To a young woman considering ministry I would say: Listen to God's Spirit within. Study and develop your gifts. Gather a discerning group from your congregation who will be honest with you about your gifts. Keep asking questions and testing your call. Love God, yourself and others. Know yourself well. Never let gender questions undermine God's leading.

If you have the call, listen.

If God is calling you and this is affirmed by the community of faith, nothing can stop you! A good number of times I moved in another direction and God continued to call me, in spite of Lancaster Mennonite Conference and my own fears.

Be sure you are called of God. Trust God to guide you at all times.

Listen carefully to the voice of God in those you trust (friends, teachers, mentors).

God is faithful in enabling us to fulfill our calling.

If the desire and call are in you, follow that.

God calls men and women alike according to the gifts He gave them! Be confident in yourself and know who God is calling you to be; surround yourself with encouragers as you begin your ministry. This will help you address any setbacks without losing sight of God's call.

Women throughout the Old and New Testaments were vessels through which God worked. God equips those He calls for ministry. It is possible to pursue ministry while you have a family and to excel in your area of gifting.

If God has given you the talents and abilities; who are we to not use them for the kingdom?

Go where God leads you.

Follow your call. God will open the door; although you might have to wait awhile, bloom where you're planted – BUT DON'T GIVE UP!

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We do our best, but ministry grows out of what God is doing, not out of our expertise. Or in other words, God is in charge, not we.

Follow your own sense of call and move confidently into it. Congregations need women leaders alongside men. Exercise your gifts assertively and freely.

If a young (or older) woman feels the call to ministry, don't let yourself be overwhelmed by possible obstacles. The blessings one receives are worth the risks. If God has touched your heart with the call to ministry allow him to lead; in His time and in His place.

I do not encourage women to pursue pastoral ministry unless they have an unavoidable call; then I tell them what my conference minister told me. I encourage women considering and training for ministry to train for a second, more practical career.

If the Lord has led you to consider pastoral ministry, jump in with both feet. Get a good Anabaptist education; land a position that matches your gifts and will stretch you; establish a trustworthy relationship with a mentor or spiritual director; assess the fruitfulness of your ministry (with help from congregation, peers, conference ministers, and others).

If there is spiritual confirmation of this vocation, stick with it. This is hard, but deeply satisfying work.

The same encouragements and cautions I would give to a man: If God is calling you, go for it. But opportunities to serve in full-time positions are limited.

Pastoral ministry is an important calling and it's best to be able to rely on a strong inner call.

Encouragement: most fulfilling work (along with teaching) I've done. The key is to go where you believe God is calling you. Joy, contentment, fulfillment found by being in the center of God's will. God's people are wonderful and challenging. Caution: Don't enter (or stay) if you haven't sensed God's call. Go and stay only if you must, i.e. no other place you'd rather be. Don't expect everyone to love you or what you do.

This is a better time, and improving, to enter ministry as a woman than 20 years ago. Listen to God and follow with your heart. But also be aware of the world and the politics inherent in any and every situation. Choose your places of ministry carefully. Be bold in God's love and care.

God is so faithful! If God has called you to pastoral ministry, then your needs will be supplied. Maybe not right away but God will be faithful.

Trust God's leading as you embrace your gifts and calling. Let God open the door; no need to force the door to open.

If you are called by God into ministry, God will provide a way in supportive people.

The call of God is more important than any obstacle you face. God takes care of you and gives you the grace to carry out that which He called you to do.

I think it is very important to follow God's call in your life. For a young woman with a family, it is also important to maintain a healthy ratio of personal and family time and church work.

If God is leading you, follow Him. Make sure God is leading you. Be yourself; don't try to be someone else. Ultimately it is your faithfulness in being obedient to God that will earn you respect from others.

Be sure of calling; it's what keeps me in.

She should listen to the inner call and do it.

If God calls, heed His call.

Follow your heart.

If God called you then God will open the way for you to minister. If all you do is for God's glory then personal offenses or threats are irrelevant. There's no greater joy than pursuing what God has called you to do.

Trust God's calling and leading in your life. Be your "authentic self" in Christ as much as you can.

If God is calling, God will equip. There are unique challenges for women but not many challenges and rewards similar to those faced by men. Concentrate on your own ministry and what God is doing; not on opening doors for others (it's a big enough responsibility without feeling indebted to future generations)! You do not have to "go it alone;" many have gone before and there are others willing to come alongside and give support.

Follow God's call in your life. The church is in great need of your giftedness. Establish a strong, supportive group of friends to walk with you. (Pastoring is not a solitary vocation.) Find a good spiritual director. Work hard not to be isolated. Enjoy each new day fully. Each day is God's special gift to you and your congregation.

Test out your calling, but be open to guidance. Trust that God will guide you if you sincerely seek that guidance. Be open to seminary training. If you are starting out, seek a safe, affirming congregation; not necessarily your home congregation. Home congregations are not necessarily "safe" even though they may be affirming of your call to begin with.

To be alert to God's call, as it is sometimes that call that sustains when you are questioning what you are doing or when others make ministry difficult.

It's God's church and He's the one calling you, therefore it's His problem to find you a placement. Keep focusing on Him and surround yourself with people who will encourage you and pray for you.

God is always faithful. Know who you are in God's eyes. Be true to that vision first and always.

Trust your inner sense of call and gifting.

Be grounded in your identity as God's child, have a spiritual director; congregational ministry can be brutal.

To know without a shadow of doubt that this is where God is calling them. To use opportunities for learning and ministry along the way.

Follow your call. You are blessed. Name the sexism you continue to experience even if it is more subtle than the exclusion of the past. Be yourself as a pastor. Get enough support. Take vacations.

I've found pastoring to be a joyful and exciting journey. I continue to learn and grow in my identity as a pastor and in my role. Although the joy is often offset by great burden, it is just one more opportunity to grow in faith as well as in service of Christ. I would encourage a

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young woman to explore and discern the call considering time and place. I would warn that this call is especially difficult to integrate with family life and considerations, yet not without special opportunities therein as well!

Be certain of your sense of call and support systems.

B) Encouraged to know self and care for self

Do a ministerial internship; test your gifts. Do spiritual direction; test your discernment. Follow your bliss; this is the least work in the world, but can also be draining.

Know yourself; your strengths and weaknesses. Be self-aware; study Family Systems theory and use it often to self-regulate and stay healthy.

Use your gifts and skills to the utmost; if it is ministry; do it!

Whew, you want an answer to this here? It is an answer that has to be lived. I guess if pushed I'd say be sure of your call to ministry. Can you articulate it? You must! There will be times when this is all you have to go on. Know what is life-giving to you and make sure this is a part of your life! There is much about ministry that is life-giving! But there is also stuff that sucks the life right out of you. Practice spiritual disciplines. Yes. YES. YES.

Do not be concerned what every one else is doing.

Trust yourself; nurture the gifts that give you joy and fulfillment and trust that God will use those in ministry. At the same time, challenge yourself to learn new things, take risks, accept criticism. Don't take every criticism as an offense against women in ministry. First, examine whether it is valid and if there is something to be learned from it. Then, if it is being directed at you simply because you're female, realize it's the other person's problem, not yours!

Know yourself first. Be aware of your own "triggers"—things which set you off emotionally.

Be yourself; do NOT try to imitate male pastors. Women bring wonderful gifts to the ministry of the local church. Learn early NOT to wear your heart on your sleeve. Don't shoot from the hip even if you have excellent verbal skills. A pastor should be so well organized that they plan a 20-minute succinct sermon.

Follow your heart and be sensitive to those around you.

It's a great life if the pastor and congregation match is right and the family issues are worked out. Don't feel you have to follow traditional male models of success, which are based on business. Church is NOT a business; ministry is a call as well as profession.

Be yourself! Don't try to prove yourself. Keep time for yourself and your family.

It's a wonderful use of our gifts that often are part of being female—nurturing, merciful, loving, listening. Stay open to God and people even when it doesn't fit prescribed tradition. Find lots of ways to take care of yourself emotionally and physically. Maintain close friends.

Being a pastor is varied and delightful work much of the time. Knowing yourself and what sustains you and what drains you, and being able to find the supports you need is crucial.

Take care of yourself first and as completely as you can.

Women, the same as men, need to define their gifts and calling and pursue the vocation they feel called to and in which their gifts support. Cautions: I would caution seeking leadership

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simply to prove a point or because it's the "in thing." Ministry needs to be a calling. When the calling is genuine, I believe the person will also enjoy the involvement.

Work on your own personal and spiritual issues. Work on family of origin issues (family systems). Do not shove those under the carpet; they will come out in ministry! Keep asking Jesus for healing and guidance in your life. PRAY! PRAY! PRAY! Take CPE and a ministry internship; they will help you. Don't fear; God will be with you!

Be true to who you are and who God wants you to be.

Know yourself. What do you need to thrive in ministry? How can you arrange for those things and qualities in your ministry placement?

Work in a career outside a ministry before becoming a minister. Know yourself. Take a unit of clinical pastoral education in a hospital to get to know your pastoral style and to uncover personal issues that might come up for you as a minister. CPE will also help in learning to claim one's pastoral authority. Take some courses in counseling skills.

Tune into the people you are shepherding; learn to know them, care for them, pray for them. Keep yourself focused on the vision this group has and enable them to move in that direction. Help them to rely on God. When someone expresses a passion, encourage them to utilize this energy to benefit the kingdom of God.

If you do well, controlling your anger regarding injustices against women in the church, many doors are open to you.

Recognize your weaknesses and find others to complement you with their strengths.

It is invigorating, satisfying and important work. You have to have good boundaries and be well differentiated. Think carefully about what you might be giving up in personal and family life, whether the price is too high. Be yourself. Don't be pushy.

C) Encouraged to seek support

Seek lots of counsel, know yourself well and be sure this is the clear calling of God and the church.

This is a wonderful work; richly varied, challenging, humbling, affirming. Find good mentors, both men and women. I'm a firm believer in the joys of team ministry and strongly encourage creative ways to make it work!

Always have spiritual direction, companionship to maintain perspective, balance and direction as the journey is not necessarily easy, but it is Good!

This is an amazing profession that has aspects that are particularly well designed for the feminine. To see God at work in congregation and your own life is holy. The opportunities to keep growing and stretching are immense. Care for self. It's okay to stop working; make sure you have GREAT support systems.

Have a support group and spiritual directors.

It is wise to choose a female mentor who is doing what you desire to do and who has been where you yet need to go. Find a support group (family, respected clergy, etc.) Strive to maintain a balance, especially if you are married with children. God will never sacrifice a family for a ministry.

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Great gains have been made but there is still a good bit of hostility to women pastors out there. Surround yourself with the support of good women colleagues and mentors.

I caution young women considering pastor ministry to find a supportive spouse who will help with childcare, housework and financial support of their family as partners, or to consider remaining single. I caution them to expect sexual harassment and be prepared for it.

Make sure you have a solid support system behind you. Ministry can be a lonely calling, so it's important to know you're not alone. My experience has been that even folks, who are against women in ministry in principle, will grow to respect an individual woman in ministry so don't allow opposition to deter you. If you are called by God and affirmed by the community, you can do nothing else but serve to the best of your ability. Find balance in life, have interests beyond the congregation as well as within.

Find a mentor. Be authentic and genuine in how you lead.

Find a mentor; you might have to ask for one. Make sure you have a spiritual director.

Follow your sense of God's leading, but do not do this on your own. Find someone (or a support group, preferably) to help you.

It may not always be easy. Surround yourself with people who see your gifts and can freely affirm you for what you bring to the church.

There will be elements of "chaos" with any shift within the church. Network, create safe places with people to undo your anger and frustration. Draw healthy boundaries because the "need" of people exceeds our energies and time.

Take care of yourself. Put a support network in place before you need it.

Make sure you have a sound discernment process: inner call, congregational affirmation, family support and friendship support. Make sure you know your weaknesses, e.g. difficulty with delegating tasks; saying no; pleasing personality; lack of inner sense of authority etc. Make sure you understand that a call to ministry is very often a call to a life of simplicity and your congregation may be living at a higher standard! Know how to negotiate a just salary.

Find a trusted female minister to mentor you before and during your consideration of the ministry. Talk to experienced women ministers face-to-face or online to ask your questions. Read all you can get your hands on about women ministers: their experience, their call, their sermons and then see if any of them would fit with your aspirations. Find a support group to pray with you, help discern if God is calling you to consider pastoral ministry. Find a male minister you respect and ask his candid views of ministry challenges you might face.

D) Encouraged to be realistic about pastoral ministry

Don't assume there will be full-time financial support for you as a professional minister. It's still a struggle unless you have the means to pay for college and seminary up front, be prepared to borrow lots of money or pay as you go or beg!

Be aware of the theological discussions against women. Develop your own response of how God has called you.

Pastoral ministry is a special calling. I encourage young women, but I am also realistic about how tough it can be.

It is not easy and not everyone will like you.

There are churches out there that will accept you 100% and call you into service. It is truly the toughest job you will ever love so much. I am amazed how much I hear friends dread going to work each day and I feel bad for them because I love my job so much. Yes, it's hard and the hours are long, but it's more fulfilling than I could ever have imagined.

Not for the faint of heart; get appropriate and continuing education; don't assume everyone will be supportive.

Pastoring is tough and not for the thin skinned, but if you have a relationship with God and you trust God you will make it and your ministry will be joyful and fruitful.

Expect to have to work hard. Be exceptional in many ways. Still need in many ways to "prove" women can do it.

It's really a wonderful ride; constantly changing landscape and challenges. However, the costs can also be high; it's not just another career path and if one doesn't have a clear inner sense of call, "This is what I'm here to do," it can lose its shine really fast when hard things come along. With that inner sense, it's possible to approach anything with the equanimity and trust that says "This, too, will work together for good and the resources I need to minister in this situation will be here when needed." And they are.

If you enter ministry expecting lots of positive feedback or judging your role by what is mirrored back to you, you will become discouraged. But, if you can continue to find your centeredness in Christ within you and hang onto your calling, you will find true joy in ministry. There are numerous needs of ministry that women could effectively minister to, so join us!

Still many churches closed to woman pastors.

Know that there are many who would welcome you, and some who will be difficult. Focus on the first; deal gently with the latter.

Be ready for criticisms of your role; not everyone will accept you. You need to be alert to how you're treated differently as a woman. Placement difficulties are the realities in the church.

Don't expect smooth sailing. In western society it's still a man's world. Be happy with "baby steps" into acceptance of your ministry. Develop friendships with other pastors (both men and women) who encourage and validate your call.

Pastoral ministry is a natural outgrowth of nurturing personalities. However, women need to be politically wise in the community life of the congregation and astute in their understanding of how structures work. This is the growing edge for young pastors, I believe.

Sometimes people have a hard time sharing the pastoral office with a woman. Be ready and be self aware!

There will be times when your gender works against you, in that your opinion will not be taken seriously as a male church leader. Expect it, but remember that your authority grows with your God-centeredness.

There are good role models currently in ministry in ways that weren't even dreamed of 25 years ago. Our whole culture and world is open to spiritual guests in new and unique ways. There's research, education, dialogue, (multi-faith and multicultural and multi-disciplinary)

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opportunities. For those who are proactive, seekers, pioneers and/or risk takers, opportunities are there. Cautions: Expect it to be energy consuming, hard work, thankless, discouraging, frustrating etc. Women must be highly educated and experienced.

I would caution any young woman that ministry is not easy...ministry, as a woman, will have particularly difficult challenges.

Pastoral ministry is a wonderful and high calling to which women bring some unique and wonderful gifts that are needed in the church alongside those of men. At the same time we dare not put ourselves and our contributions on a pedestal any more than those of our male colleagues. We need to recognize that as white, heterosexual North American women, we are part of a privileged group. We are both “oppressed” and “oppressor.” We need that awareness to minister and live with integrity.

E) Encouraged to develop inner life

Regularly take time to nourish your spiritual life so you can minister from your “inner life.”

Always have spiritual direction, companionship to maintain perspective, balance and direction as the journey is not necessarily easy, but it is Good!

Don't do pastoral ministry without having a good spiritual director.

Have good support around you; be clear about when to set limits for time; develop inner spiritual life.

I tell them to pour out their lives as an extravagant love offering to Jesus. To “waste” their lives on Jesus. It is a life of deep joy.

Take time to listen to your inner voice and nurture that.

Tend to your own spiritual growth and physical health. Be clear on personal, family and pastoral priorities. Be accountable to a spiritual director you feel comfortable with. Find a small confidential support group where you feel safe. Have fun. Don't take yourself too seriously.

Tend to your spiritual life; listen to the nudging of the spirit.

Spiritual growth, closeness to God, staying “in tune” can tend to get lost in the press of “stuff that's got to be done.”

Encouragements: Develop a deep relationship with God. Be who God created you to be. Wait on God's plan; He will bring you where you need to be. Submit to God's timing.

Cautions: Count the cost! Ministry will test your character, faith and unconditional love!

Ministry is very challenging but God will supply. Be willing to live away from family. God will meet your loneliness.

Stay close to God, increase the intimacy of your relationship with Him, and put your full trust in Him. Study God's word; it will give you guidance. Beware of well intentioned dragons.

Spend time in devotions with the Lord, communing with Him, seeking guidance and counsel in ALL things from Him. Spend time in studying the scriptures and putting them to memory, then they will become a natural part of conversation and counseling. The Word of God has power that is unexplainable. If the Lord is calling you to pastoral ministry, He will also open doors. The words of Psalm 37:3-6 still hold true today.

I Timothy 4:12-16

Train yourself to be godly. Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them.

Keep your eyes on the Lord. Find a mentor/pastor who supports you in your call. Don't try to defend or prove yourself. Put energy in being all God has called you to be. Caution: Don't be really concerned about defending yourself to those who disagree. Let your life speak for you. Be humble, teachable and loving.

Develop a habit of prayer and reflection.

F) Encouraged to try pastoral ministry

Go for it! The church needs your gifts and voice!

There are many congregations which value the unique gifts women bring to pastoring.

People are often more open to a women's ministry: doing worship, preaching in new ways; making changes, simply because of gender difference. God's spirit is faithful and many women have gone ahead of you as you embark on this journey. Many will expect a woman to be warm, fuzzy or emotional in pastoral care contexts. Be confident in who you are and how you are gifted.

It is holy and fulfilling work.

It's a fine profession and needs preparation.

This is a rewarding profession and calling for women. Women are uniquely suited to be great ministers. The church is not fully served if pastors are all one gender.

Move into ministry with all your heart, but be ready to change the shape of your ministry as you move through various stages of your life (long-term singleness, marriage, children, aging parents, etc.).

Much greater openness in the church today than formerly. Church is open to a variety of gifts and a variety of combinations of gifts and leadership.

Don't take opposition personally, but also don't go where you have to deal with a lot of opposition (because of your gender). Go where you'll be free to minister.

You can do it. Pastoring is very rewarding and challenging and fun. Many different levels of functioning.

The church needs fresh voices and fresh vision. Young women are the ones to bring this. Don't be afraid to ask other women for help, their experience, but it does not necessarily have to be a woman pastor you ask. Get in a supportive women's group, work at your own issues.

Its wonderful and challenging work but don't let it eat you alive.

That being part of one way God is loving the world into shalom, by the Church, is an awesome privilege. Rich, deep, holy, sacred, fulfilling.....

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When one received criticism or question, seek to understand where the person is coming from. Accepting them for where they are at models for them to accept you for where you are at. God renews us as we serve God. When your ministry invigorates you, soak up that blessing.

I caution them (and men too) that anyone who stands in the middle of the road and says, "God called me," should not be surprised when cars and trucks come at them.

It is a wonderful profession and calling! To be entrusted with leading God's people; with sharing in their wonderful, high points of life and in the huge challenges they face and in the low, disappointing trials they go through; to be there to walk with them through the difficult decisions and choices in life is rewarding. Also to be in a position to be a strong influence in youth and children is a real privilege.

Being a pastor is a real privilege and a gift. There are congregations out there who want a woman pastor, and for whom having a woman pastor is no different than having a male pastor. Pastoring gives you the opportunity to be present with people at holy moments in their lives ...birth, baptism, communion, sickness, death. Pastoring is also a really flexible job full of variety. Things just keep changing ...new people, new opportunities, new conflicts, etc.

Encouragements: God certainly gifts women. People and congregations need the gifts of all and the gifts women specifically can bring. Cautions: half time is a fallacy.

It's an incredibly fulfilling job, full of adventures and challenges. One never knows where the spirit is going to lead. Find your center in God and work hard to maintain it. There are communities now in which acceptance based on gender is no longer an issue at all.

The church very much needs your voice. I would caution young women not to try to imitate someone else's (especially a man's) style of leadership but to find their own voice and power.

Be courageous in following God's call. Be bold in charting a feminine style of pastoring. Pastor as though all the little children are seeing you as their model; they are! Put the majority of your energy into the positive supporters of your mission and that of your mission and that of your congregation. Flow with the spirit.

Pastoral ministry is one of the most fulfilling jobs one can have with opportunities to hear people's stories and the cry of their hearts, to nurture and disciple people toward change, to see God at work in people's lives. Bottom line: don't take yourself too seriously or take the burdens and baggage and opposition personally, keeping in mind that it's God's church, not mine. God changes people, not me. But I have the opportunity to use my gifts and abilities to encourage and pull toward change.

If this is where your passions lie, it is the most life-giving, energizing, fruitful and rewarding vocation. Establish boundaries and stick to them in a deeply committed way.

It is a sacred privilege to have persons open windows of their lives to you in time of deep pain or loss or joy. I love the creative act of preparing a sermon!

Flexible schedule. There is only one savior, and it isn't the pastor! Know yourself and your family system well. Create and maintain boundaries in church relationships and taking time off. Choose a spiritual director; nourish your spirit regularly. Find a support group outside your congregation.

Be confident and yet vulnerable with your own strengths and weaknesses; be open to growth. Look and pay attention to wise ones. Don't think gender, just get in there.

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Congregations learn to appreciate women in pastoral ministry primarily through experiencing them in ministry. Even the most reluctant parishioner, once they receive care and teaching from a woman, can begin to understand that God gives gifts as God wills, with no regards as to gender. A gentle but strong spirit wins! Cautions: At some point many of us have decided to not join the battle about women in ministry. We go where we are welcomed. Pastoral ministry energy is misspent in the argument.

Female role models in the church are needed in today's society because men have dominated religious life. As women move into leadership roles in other areas of life and work, they need female pastors also. Don't measure your success and effectiveness by the norms that are set by men in leadership. It is important to be able to relate to other female leaders who speak the same language and have a similar approach to life and ministry.

Because the church is so much more open to women's leadership today, I strongly encourage young women with leadership gifts to consider a call to pastoral ministry. I encourage them to invest time in spiritual disciplines and growth in self-awareness, to take opportunities for leadership, to seek mentoring and to go to seminary.

Listen to your inner voice. Trust your sense of call. Be who you are. Be prepared or look for the unexpected. Micah 6:8

Follow and pursue the call of God that runs through you. When it seems obvious a congregation is not yet "ready" to "call" a woman, rather than spend energy trying to convince or bring about change, move on to where your gifts are embraced.

Work and play hard; it's a difficult road to take at this time.

Go for it. Make sure you have an inner call. Don't set your own expectations; you will be disappointed. Allow God the freedom to open the right doors for you. He often does things "out of the box." You are welcome here.

I think women bring incredible gifts to congregations. As I've worked alongside a male pastor, I realize how unique male and females are and what a gift each brings and how much we need each other. For too long women's voices and gifts have been too silent in the church and our churches are weaker because of it. Be yourself, lead out of your gifts, your strengths, your womanness. Be honest and open.

Pastoring a congregation is a wonderful career for those called to do so. It has multiple opportunities for experiencing and sharing God's work in the world. On-going learning and transformation are necessary and wonderful benefits. What a privilege, to be paid to do what I love; study the Bible, lead worship, preach, pray with people, teach the faith to new Christians. This work demands your heart, soul, mind and strength. Be committed to nurturing the inner life or you will burn out.

Our Mennonite Church USA affirms women in ministry. It is an exciting time in the life of the church. We are creating new paradigms so that the church is being enriched with the gifts of men and women. The possibilities are infinite! God calls us and is the ultimate giver of life and wisdom.

There is a real sense of joy and contentment in using your gifts and talents to help others in their walk of faith. Encouragement is to know and use your gifts personally and being able to do ministry, rather than an imposed structure. Caution is to always remember you are working within a structure that you cannot ignore but that you can help shape.

Go for it! God will be faithful; trust God! Trust yourself! Get your master's degree. Caution: A good match between pastor and congregation is very important.

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It's a wonderful job where you can use the gifts God has given you to help others. As clergy, you are given access to many holy and also difficult moments in people's lives. There is great joy to be found in leading people in worship. Cautions: Be very aware of the congregation and leave at the right time. I think people often over stay ministry terms or ignore warning signs because of the personal cost of unemployment or reluctance to move to a new area.

Pastoral ministry is very demanding but also rewarding. There's no other career or vocation I'd rather have. I would definitely encourage young women to listen for God's call to pastoral ministry and take every opportunity to explore that option. Caution: Do not pursue if you do not have a sense of humor and cannot laugh at yourself.

This is a great challenge and great vocation. While juggling kids and ministry is a challenge, the flexibility of the hours is an opportunity, taking time to go on a school trip. The caution is to keep time for yourself, learn to say no, to keep work at work as much as possible.

Go for it, if you feel a call. Be cautious what kind of church you look for. Ask lots of questions, not just of the search committee, so you get a real feel for attitudes of congregation. You live in a fish bowl. There are many things I don't talk about in my past life (not wrong or anything, simply they don't have to know).

I think there is a lot less explicit gender discrimination. I think that all professional women need more help and support in balancing work expectations (that are left from men who had a partner at home and could do more) and home expectations (that are left from when women didn't do anything outside of the home).

Pastoring is a vocation with endless variety. You have the privilege of being with people in the high and low points of their lives and confirming God's presence with them.

It's a wonderful vocation. I have no greater joy than to lead a soul to accept Jesus as Saviour.

God is good and ministry has huge rewards and unparalleled opportunities to relate to people. Try not to work hard!

Pastoral ministry can be (?) for men or women.

If you love the church and feel a passion for serving it, consider pastoral ministry!

If this is what you want, go for it! But get lots of mentoring and support both within the church and without. Search out your call carefully and prayerfully with others you trust as mentors and friends. See if they encourage you and can name your gifts for ministry. Don't shy away from the tough scholarly courses but also balance these with courses on church rituals and pastoral care.

G) Encouragement for chaplains

Women in chaplaincy have a unique perspective. We have been accepted longer than women in congregational ministry. We still face many of the same challenges, biases and blocks that women in congregations face. It seems to me that we chaplains have a more well-developed ecumenical or multi-faith support system than congregational pastors.

I do not work in pulpit ministry, but as a hospital chaplain. However, some issues apply to both in pulpit ministry. Many congregations are biased against women either because they (the congregation) believes she cannot or should not be doing the job or because they believe women will be used as scapegoats for other issues. (This was the discussion in my home

Advice for young women

congregation; they decided against a woman.) Be gentle, persistent and assertive. The Old Boy's Club still applies to pastors in my experience. In hospital chaplaincy, there is less bias except that most hospitals are staffed mostly by women and many people assume the chaplain is a man. Again, persistence, great clinical skills, compassion and assertiveness will help mold them.

H) Encouragement from pastoral experience

Beware of being the bringer of a hostile agenda. Live to love your congregation, in being they will know your calling.

If you need your world to be predictable, this may not be a good fit.

Ask God to have a spouse that understands about sacrifice in serving him.

Go to seminary where women are encouraged to enter ministry; get good training and experience so you don't burn out; find or develop a good support group.

Get some life experience in the workplace before attending seminary. Do go to seminary.

Keep your "call" always in view. Nurture a sense of humor; surround yourself with people who make you laugh and bring out your lighter side.

It's very varied and fulfilling. Be very careful about burn-out and boundaries. Do it part-time when your children are young; full-time later. It only works if you have a very supportive spouse. Be sure to give your relationship to God. Top priority: spiritual direction, retreats, meaningful prayer life.

Foster the call. Do a short-term internship first. Take a course or read material related to setting boundaries. Find a spiritual director.

Be persistent. Speak out for yourself and your sisters. Use the experience to identify with others who might be struggling. Find support. Be supportive. Accept the uniqueness and gifts to pastoral ministry that women bring but at the same time we don't need to make "converts" out of every "hold out." However, wherever you are, do what God calls.

I will encourage young women to attend seminary. I will encourage a young woman to develop a relationship with a woman who is already in ministry.

I see gifts women have and I am ready to have them be used. I have asked women to preach for me. But I still think a senior pastor should be a male.

Work hard to see yourself as called, gifted and capable of growing and learning in any setting and capable of leading and ministry in any setting. God will guide you. Caution: Don't jump too quickly to blame issue, struggle, on "being a woman" in ministry.

Consider ministry together with another profession. Get some life experience beyond or outside of church ministry. Take life seriously, but live life lightly. Ask "Will it matter 10 years from now?" If not, then maybe it isn't important.

This would be a hard job for a single woman, especially a young single woman.
Encouragements: Go for it!

This sounds silly, but what one wears while preaching matters greatly. I'm tall and usually favor flat shoes, but for preaching I reach for a pair of solid black heels about 2½" high. Somehow being anchored yet elevated helps my confidence and projection!

Advice for young women

It's important to be confident of your sense of calling. Trust the encouragements that come. Women have some unique gifts to offer. I found that many seniors in the home (especially women, but men too) were very free with sharing personally and openly. I believe it's because women are stereotyped as being better to talk with than men, but also people felt comfortable and non-threatened with a woman pastor. Caution: Think through office procedures, visitation, etc...so that you and those you relate to are protected so that neither can be taken advantage of. Physical: emotional safety is crucial to healthy healing pastor-congregation relationships. I would say the same goes for male pastors, although they may not have thought of this as deliberately.

Learn to listen; really listen. That takes away so many concerns about "what do I say? How do I respond?" Learn to be non-defensive. Be genuine.

Don't take yourself too seriously. Maintain a sense of humor. Have a solid network of friends and support outside the congregation. Find a consultant/supervisor/therapist before you need one. Respect the holy work that you are privileged to be a part of.

In Canada, I don't see the same huge obstacles there are in some U.S areas. Encouragements: Trust God with all of yourself! Find "more than adequate" methods of support and self care. And then, trust yourself! Accept conflict as a normal part of human relationships: learn more about it and be "non-anxious" in response (take your anxiety outside the situation for help).

It's great and demanding. Learn to say NO.

One has to have a very clear sense of boundaries to not be swallowed by the job and responsibilities.

You will never be so aware of your own gifts and failings. The variety of work, the chances to touch people's lives, heal and engage them on many social, emotional and spiritual levels is fantastic. The opportunity to see God alive, present and real in many, many lives and places is amazing. Cautions: You can work yourself to death in one year and people will cheer you on as you do it. You may let your own spiritual life wither, because you see it as "work" or professional time, not as personal necessity.

Choose your first congregation carefully. It will shape you as a pastor!

Congregational life takes LOTS of patience and willingness to work with dysfunctional people who are part of the fold voluntarily. We earn our influence and it can be depressingly insignificant at times. You have to TRUST God IS at work when we can't see it.

Its hard to stay centered with so many pulls on your time and attention; people's expectations can be overwhelming and convincing ...The challenge is to hear them and see them and yet always be looking toward what God is saying and expecting of you. Church politics can be confusing and challenging, but you might as well accept them and figure out a way to work with them. Much of pastoral work is unquantifiable so you may begin to feel like you aren't doing anything worthwhile. Don't let yourself be convinced. Remember metaphors like seeds and roots, things that you can't see but are growing nonetheless.

The congregations I have worked with have been incredibly supportive. It has been a career that is meaningful and demanding, but also flexible, and that has been great for me as I've had children and have rearranged my time commitments and responsibilities.

If doors close, there is a reason.

Men's Responses:

A) Encouraged to follow God's leading

Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you and keep Jesus Christ at the forefront in everything! The Church of Jesus Christ has benefited greatly from women using their spiritual gifts. Without women serving in the church we would struggle immensely. When women demand, it can be dangerous. We give up our rights when we follow Jesus Christ. Grow in your passion for the Lord and love Him with all of your heart!

Follow God's call and remember that it is God's call that creates the primary qualification for ministry.

There is hope. Stay persistent and faithful to God's call in your life.

Go with God's call.

Trust the inner call and the congregational call.

Know your sense of call; be secure in that. Know that not everyone will accept your call.

Listen for God's call; assess and test your pastoral gifts; the church needs women pastors!

Listen to God's calling and do not give up if the doors don't open right away.

Have a clear inner call from God.

Be true to God's calling.

Be sure it's the Lord's calling.

If you are called, take confidence in what God is doing in your life.

When God calls and you must respond, respond and speak out.

Listen closely to the call of the Lord. Let your skills and unflustered/non-anxious presence win people over to your work/role.

Let the Spirit of God guide you.

Follow the call of God confirmed by a congregation.

Be willing to lead, follow your passion that God has called you to serve in this way.

B) Encouraged to know self

Be yourself and who God has made you.

Be patient. Be yourself. Be a woman.

Follow your heart and keep your relationship with God at the top of your priority list. They should follow their heart, i.e. God's call on their life. If they _____ their own agenda they will fail. If they do God's plan they are fine.

Integrity. Influence. Stay the course.

Advice for young women

Be genuine. Let your nature define your ministry. Be critical of expectations of self and others. Affirm the spiritual capacity of others.

C) Encouraged to seek support

Surround yourself with a strong supporting cast and peer group. Know your calling; boldly embrace and nurture it. Not all resistance is deeply imbedded, but will (can) change as they begin to experience a positive ministry from you.

Seek the Lord and counsel of others. Then pursue your humble understanding as the Spirit directs. Be careful you do not try to please me or seek my approval or that of others you may respect. I will encourage you and pray for you and walk with you.

Surround self with people, especially women, who will support her.

Find support system; use your gifts.

D) Encouraged to be realistic about pastoral ministry

You must be secure. The “Jackie Robinson” effect is still present. To be accepted you may need to be above average.

It will be a hard road.

The field will become more open with time, but, we are not nearly as far along in terms of being truly egalitarian/inclusive as we think we are. Do not overstep the authority that has been given. I don’t care if the pastor is male or female, people need to be loved not bossed around.

Be realistic that some churches/conferences still are struggling to accepting women in pastoral ministry.

I try to be realistic in the challenges while encouraging the ventures of faith.

Don’t react to the negative comments some people make to women in ministry. Hear the Lord’s call.

Don’t assume that people are resistant to your gender.

Hard work still remains to overcome boundaries of women in ministry.

It is possible and there are many good role models, but there are still areas of resistance and stereotypes to overcome.

Be prepared for male obstructionism. Men don’t seem to want to give up their influence/power.

Anticipate difficulties, don’t let them get you down.

There is often a price, different than the price men pay, for ministry. But it’s a price to following a call.

They are usually better pastors. The road is “less traveled” and has many hills to climb. Not a role to work out their personal issues.

I wouldn’t. It’s a heart-breaker. Not anymore than I would recommend she be a fighter pilot or a platoon leader.

Advice for young women

Strong advocacy for women's rights is likely a hindrance in the same way any advocacy group in churches will appreciate you based on your selfless service, especially your listening ability. Be ready to be a servant; this goes for men and for women.

It is an honor and a privilege to be called to ministry. It can be a rewarding and satisfying position. I suspect a single female pastor is still less "eligible" than a male. Consider the effect on future relationships.

Strong encouragement. Caution: in some settings, attitudes have not changed .

E) Encouraged to develop inner life

F) Encouraged to try pastoral ministry

To those called and committed, it can be a wonderful way to use gifts and can be very rewarding.

Change is happening; there is greater openness and opportunity than a generation ago.

The rewards and satisfaction of pastoral ministry are worth it. More doors are opening for women in ministry.

God bless. If God has gifted you for this work, do it because we need women pastors. Don't let those who are going to give you a hard time discourage you. It will happen, know that and expect it and it will be easier to deal with.

The church needs more women pastors badly. It's a wonderful life as long as you're called and you're matched with a good church.

Times are changing and the need is great. Be prepared for a struggle.

God calls women and men to be pastors.

Gradually women are being more accepted as valid and valued pastors. There are also some very good mentoring female pastors these days.

The church (Mennonite) is changing, growing. Follow your call and something will open up. It will take strength. Expect some obstacles and prejudice but there are male colleagues who are interested and will help you succeed.

Certainly encourage women to not only consider but work towards accepting a calling. Recognize ministry can and probably will be very stressful.

If God has called, God will provide a place. Expect resistance from some areas of the congregation.

If you feel called go for it. If you're not sure, push on anyway. Be prepared to be fully trained and not have many churches to choose from.

Go for it and be prepared for challenges.

The church is becoming more open to women in ministry.

Many women are serving in Mennonite churches; some are doing very well. All things being equal, men are still at an advantage in being called by many congregations. Sometimes it's the

Advice for young women

other way. If God is calling you, you can't say no. Discerning that call is hard. Balancing home and ministry is harder.

We desperately need women involved in ministry to see the full image of God. I personally, value the mix.

If God calls you and your community affirms you, go for it.

Your gifts are needed, but choose your congregation carefully.

Know that God calls women to church leadership that becomes central and larger than anything you will face.

Follow your faith and conviction. Minister to those who are ready to accept your ministry. You cannot serve those who oppose you.

Follow their heart. If you are aware of doors being closed, be assured there are also doors that are open. Be sensitive and you will find them.

Believe that your gifts, training and quality of person will gradually open doors. To become critical of congregations, conference leaders, and the slowness of the process is to blow yourself out of the water. This will close many doors!!

If you feel God calling you, go for it! Be cautious about the possibility of sexual harassment.

Let such figures as Deborah be an encouragement to you. Be prepared for sexist criticism.

Go for it! But be ready for opposition from the conservative-minded people.

Go hard! Bring your best passion! And confidence!

Don't despair. Attitudes against women in ministry are becoming more positive as congregations witness the benefits and blessings of it. At the same time, women pastors need to be able to show a great deal of understanding and grace to deal with those who simply cannot bring themselves to accept women in ministry.

Use the gifts that God has given you. I believe there is a definite need for women in pastoral ministry. I'm wondering if there are areas of ministry that women might be more suited for than men. I would caution women with the same caution that I would give to men: make sure that your ministry is in response to God's call and/or leading, and is carried out in a manner in which to serve God and not to serve self, or to make a name for oneself. Whatever we do, may it be to the glory of God.

My only caution is don't let any one tell you, you can't!

Please consider it as a career. The gifts of women are needed; it will be hard to find a proper balance between home and work.

When a woman (or man) has a love of scripture, a healthy spirituality and a love for people, they will generally do well in pastoral ministry.

God has gifted both women and men. Both need to respond to God's call.

Go for it! We need you; the church needs you.

Advice for young women

All are equal--priesthood/all believers. Caution: Don't get hung up about being a woman; expect and assume equality.

There are lots of opportunities to serve. Develop your gifts, get the training you need, enter ministry settings with a willingness to learn.

Be confident in your calling by the Lord. Cautions: Don't blame all your difficulties and personality conflicts on gender!

G) Encouragement for chaplains

H) Encouragement from pastoral experience

Be a servant leader.

It is hard work, sometimes without much affirmation and positive feedback. Be biblically proficient, strong desire to preach and teach.

Don't try to prove that women are to be given special consideration over men. In other words don't grind your ax or be motivated by a feminist agenda.

If you are a mother, be careful not to let your pastoral duties interfere with family, as many male pastors have done to their deep regret.

Proceed carefully. Proceed carefully.

It's a great job. Have a backup plan.

Don't allow ignorance and/or prejudice in congregations to discourage you. Gain experience in whatever ministry settings are available.

After 17 years as a Mennonite pastor, 11 years as a correctional chaplain and in other evangelical Christian leadership circles, I would caution any young man or woman to pastor only in a denomination/congregation/setting when the governing structure will let them lead as God is leading them and not oppose where the Holy Spirit wants to take them.

Be patient with the pace of change, and be patient with your brothers in ministry.

Be strong! Refuse to accept or take patriarchal, literal interpretations of scripture as a reason NOT to be in ministry. Of course, refuse to do so with grace and dignity, as much as possible!

I think women make great pastors. I like the feelings that women bring to the ministry. Often men can't do it. We have some very, very good women pastors in Mennonite Church USA!!!

Get your training in what interests you.

Don't push too hard in male-dominated cultures. Win your way in through servant relationships and attitudes.

Working on a team can diffuse the overall expectations that go with the pastoral role. One would likely be freed up more to release the personal gifts within.

Recognize the differences in men's and women's spirituality and affirm both. Proportionate male participation in church is decreasing.

Advice for young women

Develop a strong pulpit presence. Choose a congregation that supports/nurtures a female pastor. Be a good listener.

The church needs women and men of passion and compassion. Be prepared to get hurt emotionally, to be a “wounded healer.”

Be true and honest with your emotions. I have experienced the power that women ministers can carry into pastoral care relationships when this is their calling.

As for every person entering ministry, the giftedness is important, not gender. There must be a heart for the ministry, without the love for ministry and people do not enter for job or to push a gender issue, there will be pain.