

History of Women in Professional Covenant Ministry

The Association of Covenant Clergy Women (ACCW) endeavors to keep track of the unfolding history of women in professional ministry in the Evangelical Covenant Church. The following is a timeline of events, people, and decisions made.

1903 | Victoria Welter was the first women to graduate from the seminary, but was denied placement in the class photo. She went on to become a missionary to China for the Covenant.

1911-1912 | Women's Deaconess degree was established at the seminary. Five women enrolled and graduated. Two women received placement in their original churches; the other three received no call. The program was rescinded within two years for lack of practicality.

1920s | Several female missionaries (6-8) were ordained (note: there was a difference between being ordained as a missionary and ordained to word and sacrament. Women were banned from the latter.).

1936-1940 | Several women were allowed to study at the Parish Workers Bible Institute but were not allowed to receive diplomas for their studies.

1970s | Women were granted degrees at North Park Theological Seminary but were not allowed to use them as credentials toward ordination.

1973 | Eight North Park Seminary women began to meet weekly to discuss the compatibility of Christianity with feminism and formed the nucleus of the group that produced Daughters of Sarah magazine. These women were: Sherron Hughes-Tremper, Grace Nelson, Doreen Olson, Frances Mason, Gwen Bagaas, Bonnie Borgeson, Carol Brown, and Lucille Sider Dayton.

1974 | Emmie Mueller was one of the first women to receive an M.Div. degree from North Park Seminary but was not granted a diploma at graduation. She served as a missionary but has not been ordained.

1975 | An article on "Women in Ministry" by Keith Fullerton appeared in the December Covenant Companion in preparation for the vote to be taken at the Annual Meeting the following June. Frances Anderson joined the seminary faculty as the first full time female seminary professor, and established the Master's in Christian Education program.

1976 | At the Covenant Annual Meeting in Tacoma, Washington, Don Njaa called for a motion in favor of the ordination of women to Covenant ministry. There was a voice vote in which about 70% of the assembly voted in favor of the motion. No one called for a written vote. Financial appropriation to educate and enable churches to accept the ordination of women was voted on and failed.

1977 | Women in ministry gathered at Hinsdale Covenant Church following the Covenant Annual Meeting for an overnight retreat/support time.

1978 | The first women were ordained in the Covenant, Carol Shimmin (Nordstrom) and Sherron Hughes-Tremper. The event made the inside cover of the Chicago Tribune.

1979 | Erma G. Chinander became the first woman on the Council of Administers as Executive Director of Covenant Women. Adele O. Cole was ordained.

1980 | The Covenant church in Donaldson, Indiana, was the first to call a woman as solo pastor, Janet Lundblad. Jean Lambert officiated Holy Communion at the Covenant Ministerium meeting. Carla Lang was ordained, but later transferred to the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

1981 | At Annual Meeting, a resolution was passed affirming "Placement of Women in Pastoral Ministry," and a challenge from Billings, Montana to rescind the 1976 decision to ordain women was overwhelmingly defeated by a standing vote. Marilyn Sandin served as interim dean of students at North Park Theological Seminary between Glenn Palmberg and Jay Phelan. Janet Lundblad, Mary Miller and Marilyn Ross were ordained. Ross later transferred to the Presbyterian USA Church.

1982 | The Ministerium established the Task Force on Women in Pastoral Ministry, under the leadership of Janet Lundblad, David Hawkinson, and Jean Lambert. Isolde Anderson and Jean Lambert were ordained.

1983 | The Task Force presented an initiative for hiring women in Covenant ministry at the annual meeting of the Ministerium. This plan detailed a 4-year plan to have 5 women jointly hired by the Department of Ordered Ministry and conference and to be assigned to ten carefully selected churches throughout the country for one-year assignments. The project proposed funding at \$250,000. It did not pass because of the lack of conference funding necessary to support it. The Task Force chose to withdraw the proposal. The Covenant Companion ran a four-session Bible Study series called "Women in Ministry," by David Scholer. At the Annual Meeting, Mary Miller and Marie Wiebe led devotions. Elizabeth Cassel of Knollbrook Covenant Church in Fargo, ND moved to change the ECC constitution to reflect gender inclusive language. Catherine Bouts, Patricia Dickson, Karen Palmatier, Jan Hallstrom Potts and Marie Wiebe were ordained.

1984 | Occasional Paper #1: A Resolution on Women in Ministry--"A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry" was presented at the Ministerium Annual Meeting. It was approved. The exegetical work was done by Klyne Snodgrass with assistance from Jean Lambert, Robert Johnston, and David Scholer. No women were ordained at this annual meeting.

1985 | Evelyn M. R. Johnson was called as interim superintendent of the Midwest Conference upon the passing of Warren Swanson. Linda Belleville (New Testament) and Priscilla Pope-Levinson (Theology) were called to the seminary as professors. Frances Anderson, Helen Casey and Lynne Floto were ordained.

1986 | Camarillo (California) Covenant was the first church established by a woman church planter, Marie Wiebe. Evelyn M.R. Johnson was the first woman moderator of the Annual Meeting (the denomination's 101st meeting). Evelyn M.R. Johnson was called to denominational leadership in (at that time named) the Department of Christian Education and Discipleship. During her twelve-year tenure, Evelyn Johnson lead the creation of the Covenant Mission Connection and the Covenant External Orientation Program. Johnson was also the first woman to serve on the Council of Administrators as head of a department funded through the operating budget. Jean Lambert was elected Executive Secretary of the Board of Ordered Ministry. Frances Decker was ordained.

1987 | Joanne Benson, Carol Roth and Ruthanne Werner were ordained.

1988 | Covenant Ministerium reported that 21 women had been ordained in 10 years, and Dr. Klyne Snodgrass lectured on "Do We Really Value Women?" Anne Kregelberg and Laurel Morrison were ordained. Morrison transferred to the American Baptist Church.

1989 | Pearl Hamilton was the first woman to be commissioned as Director of Women's Ministries (Rolling Hills Covenant, California). No women were ordained.

1990 | Ruth Cederberg was elected to vice-chair of the Executive Board of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Catherine Campobello, Helen Cepero, Jan Epps-Dawson, Martha Freeman and Melanie Tomquist were ordained.

1991 | Sandra Bochonok, Kathleen Graves, Carolyn Johnson and Eva Sullivan-Knoff were ordained. Bochonok transferred out of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

1992 | Missionary pastor called to Russia Far East (through Alaska), Barbara Sediakira Larson. Kathy Denman was the first woman ECC Clinical Pastoral Education supervisor (Iowa). Isolde Anderson becomes the first woman senior pastor with multiple staff, at Community Covenant, West Peabody, Massachusetts. Linda Belleville, Judith Hamrick, Viji Nakka-Cammauf, Joan Porter and Deborah Power were ordained.

1993 | First second-generation woman in ministry ordained, Heidi Wiebe, daughter of Marie Wiebe. Linnea Carnes, Kathleen Denman, Andrea Johnson, LuAnn Johnson, Kari Lindholm-Johnson, Megan McNicholas White and Heidi Wiebe were ordained.

1994 | Mary Nella McLaughlin, Nancy Gordon, Anne Vining Pederson and Alison Wiens were ordained.

1995 | Doreen Olson was called as associate superintendent in the Midwest Conference. Sandy Anderson was hired as assistant superintendent (financial administration 1995-96), East Coast Conference. Deirdre Banks, Marie Sander Carlson, Jodi Mullen Fondell, Sharon Elvira Gradin and Stephanie Udell Thompson were ordained.

1996 | Jolene Bergstrom Carlson, Lynnae Joy Johnson, Wendy Crawford Larson, Donna M. Nelson, Diane E. Ruebel, Linda Sommerville, Kristine E. Stewart were ordained.

1997 | Vicki Bernard, Kathy Brawley, Gloria Good, Judith McCullough, Sherry Peterson, Diana Trautwein were ordained.

1998 | At Midwinter Conference, the Task Force on Women in Pastoral Ministry was replaced with the Association for Covenant Clergy Women. The constitution reflected four main goals: advocacy, education, resourcing, and fellowship. Nancy Gordon was named the first ACCW president. Doreen Olson was called as Executive Minister of the Department of Christian Formation. Sandra Norris, Jamie Hales, Margaret Larson, Diane Stevenson, and Matilde Urbano were ordained.

1999 | Carol Lawson was appointed a director of staff ministry in the Department of the Ministry. Mary Miller was appointed Vice President for Administration, the first woman to become an officer of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Laurie Cornell, Debra Gustafson, Ann Maleski, Rita Kay Lochner Scruton-Wilson, Catherine Stanley, and Shelly Timber were ordained.

2000 | Evelyn M.R. Johnson was called as the first woman superintendent (Pacific Southwest Conference). Phillis Sheppard was called as the first female African American faculty member of North Park Theological Seminary. Jo Ann Deasy was called as the first full-time woman administrator of North Park Theological Seminary as dean of students.

An Evangelical Covenant Church consultation occurred, which led to the creation of the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality 18 months later. The consultation set a list of goals that guided many projects and restructuring. The celebration of 25 years of women's ordination included at least two significant sermons on women in ministry at the annual meeting in St. Paul, MN. One of those sermons was delivered by John (Jay) E. Phelan. Katherine Kyoung-Mi Choi, JoAnn Deasy, Christine Frazon, Karen Hallberg, Evelyn M. R. Johnson, and Judy Swanberg were ordained.

2001 | Judy Swanberg was called as East Coast Conference Associate Superintendent. Alise Barrymore was called as North Park University's campus pastor. Rose Cornelious from the Dept. of World Mission lead a team of African American Covenant Pastors and ministers on a fact-finding mission trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. Karen Hinz, Ida Regina Lucas Oliver, Harriet Shelton, and Kay Sorvik were ordained.

2002 | The Commission on Biblical Gender Equality began its work, seeking to address issues involving women in ministry at the pastoral, staff and laity levels. Jolene Bergstrom Carlson was called as Associate Superintendent of the Central Conference. The President of the Covenant Seminary in Japan, Yoshimi Ito, reported that women made up about 25% of the student body. "There is no resistance to women in senior pastor roles," Ito said, noting with a smile, "we went ahead of the American Covenant in ordination of women." Marla Parker and Sara Salomons were ordained.

2003 | Nancy Venegas became the first woman pastor to be ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church of Ecuador (known as the IPEE). Two women from the Hsintien Covenant Church, Amy Chang and Lyou Wei Ling, were ordained to various pastoral positions during the annual meeting of the Taiwan Covenant Church. At the 2003 Annual Meeting in Rosemont, IL, Graham (Washington) Evangelical Covenant Church proposed a resolution entitled, "Resolution on Covenant Freedom & Women in Ministry," which stated that "conformity to a particular view of women in ministry" not be used as "grounds for exclusion of any church, new or existing, from association with the Evangelical Covenant Church or exclusion of any qualified applicant for ministerial license, ordination, or commissioning." The resolution was defeated. Catherine Gilliard was elected as the first woman chair of the Executive Board of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Deborah Blue, Merrie Carson, Susan Fabbro, Darrah Garvin, Alice Johnson, Patricia Johnson, Carol Lawson, Doreen Olson, Barbara Pettit, Wendy Sorvik, Sara-Jane Sosa, Irene Stauffer, Diana Wymore, Dawn Burnett, Linda Forbes, Tina Herrin, I. Dawn Mortimer, and Lindsay Small were ordained.

2004 | A new booklet on gender equality was affirmed by the Covenant Executive Board, Council of Administrators, Council of Superintendents and Board of the Ordered Ministry, and was handed out to pastors at the 2004 Midwinter conference. It was later sent to all Covenant churches. John (Jay) E. Phelan's curriculum, All God's People, was released, along with Sharon Cairns Mann's

Called and Gifted curriculum. Aleese Moore-Orbith was commissioned to lead Women Ministries three-year Advocacy for Victims of Abuse Project. Ten women clergy were recognized and lifted up in prayer at the Covenant Women's Triennial X event in North Carolina. Allyson Dickie, Kelly Erickson, Martha Berg, Jane DeYoung, Dulcie Gannett, Sally Gill, Susan Knight, and Martha Williams were ordained.

2005 | ACCW elected a new board to carry the vision for women in ministry in a new era. Changes to the ACCW constitution established stronger partnerships between ACCW and other departments, commissions and individuals. An idea for conference liaisons takes shape and various women clergy from conferences and the seminary volunteer to serve.

ACCW, Women Ministries and the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality partner in advocacy and providing educational resources. DVD created at the suggestion of the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality to help celebrate 30 years of ordaining women in ministry. ACCW board members discuss awards, grants and scholarships. The discussion of names for these awards prompted North Park Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Phillip Anderson, who consulted with the board on Victoria Welter's story, to commission a painting in honor of Victoria Welter, which now hangs in the seminary's lounge. Ellen An, Tammi Biggs, Margaret Bingham, Tamara Buchan, Jacqueline Clark, Eva Cudmore, Rebekah Eklund, Susan Gillespie, Sarah Hillabrant, Win Jackson Houwen, Judy Peterson, Beverly Scripter, Sharon Stenger, and Tammy Swanson-Draheim ordained.

2006 | In April, the Covenant Church in the Congo (CEUM) ordained its first two women pastors, Kikwiti Apiomo Corine (after already serving in ministry for 21 years) and Yakote Bebolongonde Lily (after 11 years of ministry service). In celebration of 30 years of ordaining women, the Commission for Biblical Gender Equality creates a DVD, "Called & Gifted" for release at the 2006 Annual Meeting. The first simultaneous mother-daughter ordination occurs with Marti Burger and her daughter, Melissa Wall. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom was called as assistant professor (theology and ethics) to the seminary. ACCW created and bestowed its first recognition awards at the ECC Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Ileana Garcia-Soto was the first recipient of the Victoria Welter Scholarship. Jocelyn Thornton was the first recipient of the Phoebe Church Planters Grant and Evelyn M.R. Johnson was the first recipient of the award bearing her name. By the Spring of 2006, the ECC had 31 women serving as senior pastors or co-senior pastors. Lorraine Beaumont, Martha Burger, Deborah Griffith-Samuels, Elizabeth Mosbo VerHage, Denise Anderson, Debra Auger, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, Nancy Ebner, Cathleen Johnson, Karen Lichlyter-Klein, Adria Pearson, Amy Rohler, Melissa Wall were ordained. Beth Ernest and Deena Jones were the first women to transfer ordination into the ECC.

2007 | Debbie Blue was called as the first Executive Minister of the newly created Department of Compassion, Mercy and Justice. Karen Groot was the first recipient of the ACCW Anderson/Nordlund Missionary Scholarship. Karen Brewer was the first recipient of the Priscilla Pastorate Grant. Herbert Freedholm was the first recipient of the ACCW Mordecai Award for Outstanding Partnership. Heidi Wiebe was elected the first woman president of the Covenant Ministerium. Catherine Gilliard was elected the first woman president of the African-American Ministers Association. Elizabeth Cisneros, Rebecca Erickson, Cherie Harris, Andrea Johnson, Debra Lewis, Velda Love, Penny Nance, Mary Pinley, Carolyn Poterek were ordained.

2008 | Kirsten Kronberg received the ACCW Victoria Welter Scholarship. Camille Russell Wooden received the Phoebe Church Planter's Grant. Mary Miller received the Evelyn M.R. Johnson Leadership Award. Heather Monkmeier, Stacey Greely, Laura Isakson, Vicki Marxen, Amanda Olson, Lisa Orris, Kristen Nelson, Jodi Moore, Nancy Sugikawa, Katie Smith, Mae Cannon, Erin Dougherty, Amy Mark, Kristin Michealsen, Johnna Hayward, were ordained. Camille Russell Wooden transferred ordination to the ECC.

2009 | Linda Williams received the ACCW Priscilla Pastorate Grant. Grace Shimm received the Anderson/Nordlund Missionary Scholarship. Richard Carlson received the Mordecai Award for Outstanding Partnership. Yacid Cardenas, Whitney Hall, Gladys Haralu, Elizabeth Jensen, Terri King, Leah McCann Klug, Brenda Salter McNeil, Gricel Medina, Queen O'Neal, Deborah Penny, Mary Rowlands, Jocelyn Thornton, Christina Tinglof, Elisa Holmlund, Holly Hovestol, Anna Marie Peterson, and Marva Watts were ordained. Patricia Restrepo and Grace Shimm were consecrated to missionary service.

2010 | Janine Davis received the ACCW Phoebe Church Planter's Grant. Hauna Ondrey received the Victoria Welter Book Scholarship. Ruth Hill received the Evelyn M.R. Johnson Leadership Award. Kristin E. Devine, Terri L. Gunderson, Michelle G. Kurth, Joyce E. Norman, Diana M. Shiflett, Kara J. Stromberg, Kirsten K. Waldenschmidt, Rebecca Manseau Barnett, Janice E. Bros, Linda J. Carlson, Susan A. Cosio, Joyce I. Cosman, Ericka C. Haub, Colleen R. Nelson, Mary F. Putera, Tammy J. Smith, Robin P. Swieringa and Linda S. Williams were ordained. Sharon R. Anderson was commissioned. Erika B. Clauson and Anna S. Kim were consecrated to missionary service.