

CHALLENGES FACING FEMALE MINISTERS IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SOCIETY IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

It is obvious that female ministers among Christian churches are making waves in almost every sphere of Christianity. They are noticeable in the apostolic, evangelistic, prophetic, pastoral and administrative roles in the body of Christ. They have been found among founders/co-founders of various denominations and their works have been adjudged by remarkable miracles, signs and wonders. The objectives of the study were to determine the contributions of female ministers in the body of Christ, assess their uniqueness, and appraise the challenges facing female ministers in Akwa Ibom State. The research methodology employed was descriptive method of gathering information. Few scholars say that gender discrimination is their major challenge however; the researchers observe that, there are other challenges that are more frustrating than gender discrimination. The study concludes that the church and the society need to re-examine their beliefs and structural formations in relation to female ministers especially in the area of leadership. The study recommends that the family, church and the society should practically recognize women as God's unique creatures who are able to respond to God's calling; thus, creating an enabling platform for them to express their ministerial gifts so that God's redemptive plan for human race might be completely accomplished.

Introduction

The Bible's paradigm for womanhood is entirely consistent, and without any contradiction is a presentation of God's plan in totality. The creator act of creating humanity, presents the unity of the human race, the worth of a female minister, and forges an excellent and permanent kinship between the man and the woman. The woman was received by man as designed and offered to him by the Creator (Genesis 2:22). Indeed, she is the only creature fashioned by God. God made a woman from raw resources derived from man, when Adam

said, “She was taken from the man,” he used a clever play of words to affirm the physical congruity of this new person.

However, man and woman are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and their position in Christ eliminates any possibility of inferiority of either to the other, rather they complement one another. Man and woman are equipped to continue in exercising dominion over the earth and its resources. The divine order calls for reciprocity exhibited in male servant leadership and female submission which are both modeled in Jesus Christ. Apparently, for a female minister to discover her purpose in life, she must turn to God’s word and not on the philosophy of man. It is in God’s word that she will unravel the plans and purposes of her being. God never does anything by mistake and no female minister is where she is by accident, she was designed to be there. God is not haphazard; He planned and designed a female minister with great precision, she must realize how uniquely suited she is for the ministry she is called into.

Nevertheless, achieving this comes with so many challenges. In many denominations today, women are still not given certain responsibilities and roles. Women are treated in contrast to the word of Apostle Paul in Galatians. 3:26-28. For in Christ Jesus, ye are all the sons of God through faith for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put in Christ

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Here we are made to see that a woman is never seen less by God, as such there is no discrimination in God’s agenda. It is pertinent for a female minister to know why she is here and also follow religiously the calling of God upon her life, as this would help her to make decisions that would be convenient for her. An understanding of who she is in Christ Jesus would help her to weather through the storm that comes in the course of pursuing her purpose. Answering God’s call is not a onetime decision but it is a daily pursuit of becoming whom she was prepared to be to the glory of God.

The Lord God made a woman out of a man (Adam). Which could be deduced that, a woman was first in a created man of Genesis 1: 27, but was brought out into existence in Genesis 2:22 and was given a mandate: A help meet. Achieving these come with many challenges. Various scholars viewed the implication of challenges faced by female ministers in different perspectives, the study observes that there are various researches that have been carried out concerning the roles, prospects and effectiveness of female ministers, but no attention has been paid to the challenges faced by them. Few scholars say that gender discrimination is their major challenge but the researchers observe that, there are other challenges that are more frustrating than gender discrimination. The researchers therefore identify this gap in

knowledge as lack of scholarly investigation in this regard and proffer possible solutions to such challenges.

In many denominations today, women are still regarded as second-class citizens in Christ. There are many positions and responsibilities that would never be given to a woman, even in the Pentecostal sect, women are treated in contrast to the admonition of Apostle Paul in Galatians. 3:26-28. Social dogma and beliefs have denied so many women the right of exercising their gifts in the manner at which they should have if given the right atmosphere. This work is aimed at examining the various challenges facing female ministers in a contemporary Christian society and also suggests ways to curb the challenges.

The issue of gender discrimination, lack of appropriate support from family and friends, societal rejections and poor financial support are few of the challenges that a female minister faces in the course of fulfilling her divine mandate. But with God on her side, she shall scale through confidently because she is highly treasured by, He that calls her. There is an urgent need therefore for every woman called by God for a specific assignment to understand that the challenges she is facing are not to deter her from the work but to strengthen her, build her faith, and help her to remain focused. Female ministers are thereby urged to remain faithful and focused on their tasks; they are encouraged to shun all appearances of pride, timidity and display of incompetency in the discharge of their ministerial responsibilities.

Female Minister and Her Ministry

Even though we all know that differences between men and women exist, being different does not mean being inferior or superior to the other; it has nothing to do with being lesser as human. A woman is not less than a man because she is a woman and vice versa, they remain equal but different, they remain equal but different, they are simply different because of their difference in purposes. This work therefore, would explore the female minister and her ministry. It is no news that today Female Ministers are playing increasingly prominent roles all over the world. This is seen in various activities, which are organized by women everywhere.

The biblical account of Genesis 2:22, makes us to understand the originality of the female minister which presupposed means that she can be all that her source is, she possesses a strong mental and physical agility, she is spiritually endowed, empowered and can do all things through Christ that strengthens her. In our contemporary society, women have displayed great ministerial skills beyond reasonable doubt that indeed God called them. Not minding the way, they are sometimes treated and accused of feebleness. Female ministers today exhibit no trait of weakness in their area of calling rather they draw strength from the

wrong notions people have about them and challenge the negative assumptions against them and their ministry.

Just as Akinfenwa (2005) put up, “Deborah was a heroine and was called a Prophetess”, she was known to be full of knowledge and wisdom that men and women came to her for counseling. That king Barak could say “if thou wilt go with me, then I will not go...” (Judges 4:8). This he said because he knew what Deborah was made of, she was not a “weaker vessel” but a warrior. In the New Testaments especially the gospels, Jesus Christ interacted, associated, ministered and was ministered to by women, because He understood the ministries of those women. He knew that they all had substances. He helped them to maximize it and never looked down on them, in contrast to what female ministers are facing today.

Wotogbe (2020) stated that, in spite of the negative prevailing culture of the Jews, Jesus still has interest in women abilities. He overlooked the culture and brought womanhood to limelight. The New Testament highlighted “women of great faith” as opposed to men of “little faith”. Jesus uplifted the dignity of women and helped them to actualize God’s original plan, which is domination and not subjection by calling them into His ministry. The lists of women who played one role or the other is scattered all over the Bible. Women in both New and Old Testaments have been of great impact; it would not be out of place to say that every woman is a minister. In all ramifications, she is a minister to herself, at home, to the church and anywhere she found herself. In 2 Kings 22:14-20, a Prophetess by name Huldah was consulted during the reign of King Josiah. In an era where male Prophets were all over but she was consulted to speak the mind of God concerning the discovered book of the law. Her prophecy came to pass as she said. King Josiah did not see the evil that would have befallen Jerusalem because he humbled himself before the Lord according to the counsel of Prophetess Huldah.

The five daughters of Zelophehad; Mahiah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah, caused a change in the law of inheritance of Israel. In Numbers 27:1-11, the Bible records that, they asked Moses to give them a share of their father’s inheritance; “why should the name of our father be done away from among his family because he hath no sons, cause us therefore to have possession among the brethren of our father...” and their petition was brought before the Lord. God in His infinite love and mercy commanded Moses to give them a portion of their father’s inheritance. One of the Egyptian midwives refused to kill the male children as instructed by the evil king but spared them, because of this, God blessed her and others. Because of them having the fear of God, they spared the life of little Moses whom God sent as a deliverer. Imagine if Puah and Shiphrah did not fear God, God’s divine agenda for the children of Israel would be thwarted. According to Meyer (2003), ministry is about hearing from God and doing what he has impressed in our inner consciousness. Nothing can satisfy

our living for God except by communion and fellowshiping with Him. Every female minister is able to fulfill her purpose because of her relationship with God. There women mentioned above were able to do what did because they somewhat had a relationship with God.

Just as Munroe (1984), opines that, God intended female ministers to lead in the church from creation of the world, He confirmed His continuous commitment to this intention through the ministry of His son, Jesus Christ. Women and men are spiritually equal before God. The dimension of dominion in Genesis 1:27-30 and the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20 is given to the created male and female. The complementary role and ability of both genders bring balance, strength and help for each other to fulfill his/her divine assignment. It should be noted here that, a female minister's leadership function is determined by her specific assignment, as such, God wired her specially, so that she would be able to face any challenge that would come in the course of her trying to fulfill her purpose.

A female minister influences everybody that encounters her by providing a nurturing and transforming environment as captured by Myles Munroe in one of his teachings on The Power and Purpose of a Woman. He adds that, a woman naturally does not need a title to lead but she leads by influence, which is her natural endowment. He also says that a woman does not need to talk to run things or get things done but just by influence; her presence is influencing enough to get things in its right perspectives. She would just wink and a message is passed, this is a powerful influence.

However, a female minister influences her environment for good, the world and the body of Christ today are benefiting from women ministry. It is God's desire that female ministers exercise their God's given giftedness and use it to influence His good purpose for humanity. Apparently, there is an end-time outpouring of God's spirit on sons and daughters of God as was prophesied by Prophet Joel. The daughters of God are doing exploits in the kingdom of God. Women called into the sacred profession are not failing God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, they are making disciples of men unto God. In spite of the despicable and ridicule they sometimes experienced in the society; they still have their hands in the plough.

Who is a Female Minister?

A female minister is any woman called and authorized by God to represent Him here on earth. She is to lead in the performance of sacred religious rituals such as baptism, wedding, child dedication, funeral services and Holy Communion etc. The female minister is the recipient of the grace of God through the working of the Holy Spirit in her to preach, teach, counsel and provides spiritual guardians and directions to the body of Christ and the society.

Qualifications of a Female Minister

Apostle Paul in one of his epistles declared, “Paul an Apostle, not of men neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the father, who raised him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1). This he meant, God is the one that created him, equipped him, qualified him, consecrated him and sent him to the body of Christ in Galatians. Which depicts that, any man called by God is also qualified by Him. a female minister is not an exemption to God’s justification, sanctification and qualification, for they are one in Christ. Her qualifications depend solely on these and many others, the ultimate qualifier is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Below are the qualifications of a female minister:

- i. She must build her faith on nothing else but on God. (Heb. 11:6) “For without faith, no man can please God...” Her steadfastness, focus, consistency and commitment lie in how much she trusts Him that called her. Fubara-Manuel (2010) is of the opinion that no female minister can serve God effectively without displaying a very high degree of faith and faithfulness to God.
- ii. Titus 1:8 pictures that a Female Minister must be hospitable, sober, strive to be holy and exhibit a high level of self-control when need arises. Munroe (2001) postulates that a female minister must be a recipient of God’s grace, for it is the Holy Spirit that will help her to live peacefully with all men.
- iii. As a woman whose authority is extraordinary, she must be a woman of the Word. She must desire the sincere milk of the word of God for her spiritual growth, insightful understanding and interpretation of the word of truth. God in Joshua 1:8 advises, Joshua to always meditate on the Word daily if he must obtain good success, likewise the female minister. Her stability, sustainability, preservation, protection, tenacity etc. depend on how much of the Word of God she has in her spirit.
- iv. She must have personal integrity in her relationship within and outside the church. She must be truthful, fair, accountable and transparent in her dealings with human in order not to put the name of God to shame for she is Christ’s Ambassador. She remains a mirror where God is reflected to humanity. People tend to see God through her (Matthew 5:14).
- v. She must be diligent in her calling, for this will empower her, equip the church for the work of the ministry and perfect the body of Christ at large. (Ephesians 4:10)

Basic Roles of a Female Minister

A female minister should:

- i. Preach and teach the undiluted word of God in and out of season. Her teachings must be void of all form of false teachings (Matthew 5:19, Matthew 28:19-20)
- ii. Lead God's people in worship, offering with them spiritual praise of thanksgiving (Exodus 15:20-21)
- iii. Bless and declare prophetic word of God over the congregation of believers. (Numbers. 6:22-27)
- iv. Lay hands and pray for the sick. (Mark 16:16-18, James 5:14)
- v. She is responsible for the spiritual growth of her congregation as she would give account of every soul entrusted into her hands (Hebrews. 13:12).

Uniqueness of a Female Minister

God did not create the woman as an afterthought but as an integral part of His plan in creation. As such He made and built her in love and care. This is reflected in her uniqueness. A female minister is a reflection of God's purposes for mankind.

This work would explore the uniqueness of a female minister in the following five significant ways:

- i. *The female minister is God's divine idea:* In Genesis 2:18 God said, "it is not good for a man to be alone...", because He saw the need for completeness. The creation of a woman is God's complete idea. According to Munroe (1984) a woman is unique because she is God's idea, a female minister is a product of God; if you cuddle her, you are cuddling God's Idea, if you curse her, you are cursing God's idea, if you harm her in any form, you do that to God's idea. God's mind and spirit brought a woman into existence.
- ii. *The female minister has a spirit:* A female minister is unique because she has a spirit; she ministers as a spiritual being just as her male counterpart. Williams (1977) declares that, men and women are spiritually equal; they have the same spirit working within them. God called both male and female "man". Paul says, "There is neither male nor female" (Galatians. 3:28). God would look down from heaven today and says "there are a lot of man down there", in Genesis 11:5 "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the people of men built; the "people" here described as "children of men" are born by women. God does not discriminate, thus He called them "children of men" as He sees the father and mother as one.

Accordingly, 1Peter 3:4 says that a woman's beauty should not be that of an outer adornment but should be that of her inner self, of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. This "inner-self" is her spirit. A female minister is spiritually different from her physical being. It is her spirit man that is in relationship with God and not her physical looks.

Jesus says, "God is spirit and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). For a female minister to serve God in her area of calling, her spirit man must be in constant relationship with God. Accordingly, a female minister has her spirit-being knitted with whom she worships. She has what it takes to attract God's attention, she can hear directly from God. She is able to preach and teach with great anointing and power. She can command demons and they obey. Demons will not say "that's a woman talking" but they obey because it is a higher spirit that is commanding them. God honors the word of every woman called of Him the same way He honors that of a man.

- iii. *Her originality:* The third uniqueness of a female minister is where she comes from, 1Corinthians 11:8 says, "a man did not come from a woman, but a woman from a man". Which presupposes that, a "man" was taken from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7) but a woman was made from the "rib of a man" (Genesis 2:22). This implies that, something that was taken from something has the same component of that which it was taken out of. Adam out of excitement exclaimed "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of me" (Genesis 2:23).

Schlessinger (2004) says, a female minister is what she is because she came out of the male, as such she must stay connected to what she came out of in order to live the life she is created to live. Apostle Paul admonishes husbands to take proper care of their bodies and the "bodies" here is refers to their wives. Jesus in (Matthew 19:19) says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." A man's first neighbor is his wife.

- iv. *She is equal but different:* A woman is spiritually equal to a man but physically different from a man. She is a spirit-man with a female body, a womb-man, (a man with a womb). A Female Minister is unique because she looks physically weak but gigantic in the spirit. 1Peter 3:7 says, "Likewise, ye husbands dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered". Munroe (2001) explains that, the word "weaker" here is not referring to physical weakness because many women are stronger than men physically. Women endure much adversity and still survive. Many men cannot handle what women go

through in life. He added that, he would rather translate the word “weaker” as “more delicate” and should be handled with care. God built a Female Minister much more elegantly, nicely shaped and fashioned her beautifully than her male counterpart. Her soul is delicate because of her purpose; she is more sensitive and detailed in her consideration, which is why God told the husband to be careful of what he stimulates her with because she would reproduce and multiply whatever he offers her.

Akintunde (2001) opines that, God never make the female to be the same as the male physically but He designed her with a womb for purpose of multiplication and replenishing the earth (Genesis 1:27). A man is physically strong because of his recreation purposes, a woman receives the seed, incubate it and bring forth in due time. In this way God entrusted the female with a major role in furtherance and survival of the human race. For this, she is made distinctly different.

- v. *She has her being from God:* Finally, a woman was specifically placed in the garden with the man. The Bible makes us to understand that, God walked in the garden in the cool of the day to fellowship with Eve as much as she was with Adam. A female minister cannot fulfill her purpose unless she is in a constant and refreshing relationship with God. She cannot be all that she was created to be outside God.

Munroe (2001) asserts that, a female minister that has her being outside God is a disaster waiting to explode. A female minister must be filled with the Holy Spirit. She must live by the Word, and she must meditate on the Word of God in and out of season. She must be a warrior in the place of prayer. She must have a specific place manicured, prepared, sanctified and set aside for constant meeting with the Trinity.

Malcolm (1998) advises that, a female minister should not just read a magazine and watch a talk show then expect to get revelations from God. No, she can only receive in the place of prayer and study. These would take her deeper and deeper into the realm of the supernatural. Every female minister must remain connected to her source, Paul in (Act 17:28) says, “In Him we live, and move and have our being...” God wants the female minister that He thrust His mandate to remain in Him, then and only then will she experience fulfillment as a woman of God’s purpose. For these reasons, every female minister is a unique creature, respected, honoured and cherished by God.

Challenges Facing Female Ministers in Akwa Ibom State

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2000), challenge is a barrier or an obstacle that impedes something from moving or prevents it from being access; a blockade that prevents people from moving from one place to another. Challenge can also be seen as an objection; this usually is done to prevent something or someone from expressing an intention. The progress or achievement of a person is prevented because the person has many things to contend with. A female minister without doubt is faced with so many challenges that do not allow her to buttress her purpose as supernaturally designed. Female ministers are facing a lot of challenges at home, church and in the society. Sometimes, they fall out of place at home and in the church, despite the fact that the home and the family are expected to be a place of safety for them rather; they are exposed to domination and marginalization. This work therefore would categorise the various challenges facing female ministers in Akwa Ibom State into the following segments:

- i. Socio-cultural belief:* In our contemporary society, specifically in Akwa Ibom State, there is a general belief that a woman is less than a man. This is seen in how a male child enjoys much preference than the female child, there is this general aberration that "a woman should not talk while the men are talking", she should remain silent as much as she is not asked to speak. For the men, she is a second-class citizen, she is less human and so her opinion does not matter because she won't offer anything reasonable. A typical Akwa Ibom Female Minister is pre-occupied by cultural oppression. The socio-cultural authority articulates that a man is superior to a woman Esema (2002), and this ideology crept into the church. Some customs, traditions and norms have succeeded in silencing many Female Ministers and make them not to enjoy the liberty promised by God. The role and image of a Female Minister to some extent is socially and culturally defined in Akwa Ibom State. Eyoh (2014) concludes that women are culturally and socially disadvantaged in Ibibioland (Akwa Ibom State).

Watson (1989) advises that, it is significant to explore the cultural implication that influences the fulfillment of a female minister. As earlier pointed out, culture has silenced many women in the body of Christ and in the society. The oppressive patriarchal system found itself into the African culture even before the whites came with their western capitalistic culture. Patriarchy is still in existence as some persons see culture as static rather than dynamic. There is this popular adage that says "Awo akusikhe adaŋa eset" (Don't shift the ancient landmark), and Akwa Ibom people hold on to this adage even till tomorrow

However, Akangbe (2003) sees a static culture as being oppressive. Akwa Ibom society largely emphasizes on cultural stereotypes, which is one aspect that has placed women in obscurity by marginalizing their roles in the society and in the church. The result therefore is that women are lowly regarded and discriminated in almost every sphere of their lives. However, the researchers believe in a new church and a new society, a season where women would be free to express their God's given gifts as advocated also by Adetunji (2023). According to Ukpong (2023), the spirit-empowered women represent an in-breaking of this newness and freedom for service in Christian communities.

- ii. *Economic constraint:* most female ministers in Akwa Ibom State are financially constrained, 3 John1:2 says: "beloved I wish you prosper in all things even as your soul prospers". God Himself knows that His kingdom can be expanded more through prosperity. Lack of financial support from friends and family has been one of the major challenges of Female Ministers. People can readily support male pastors than their female counterparts: This largely hinders the progress of the female minister in her ministry.
- iii. *Poor political culture:* It is no more news that women are underrepresented at all level of decision making in Nigeria. Women are seen as less qualified to occupy some political position, no matter how competent they are. They are most time given a second place in the leadership structure of the state. Conversely, women have equal right to engage in civil responsibilities. Women have the right to vote and be voted for. They have what it takes to serve in board of directors and make their voices to be heard but the reverse has been the case over time.

Despite the advances towards gender equality and social interaction with men in our contemporary society, there is continuing lack of women in governance in Nigeria and in Akwa Ibom state in particular. Women are largely absent from positions in local, national and international institutions. There is an observation that women tend to be discriminated when it comes to participation in political activities. This problem seems to be acute in Akwa Ibom, although women played vital role in campaigning and mobilizing support for the individual parties in the political arena. It is rare to find them where real power belongs. They are always relegated to the background.

The cultural and political marginalization of women from certain positions has found its way in to the church. It is hard for women to acquire five percent (5%) position in policy making as far as Akwa Ibom State Government is concern. The church is not left out in this polity. Women are sidelined in top decision-making of the church.

Some denominations do not ordain women at all into high-ranking ecclesiastical offices. Women are most time limited to teaching and preaching in women's and children's fellowships. Some women meetings are presided by the church senior officer which always would be a man. Some women's meetings are presided by men who happen to be the church senior officers. The society and the church believe that women are weaker vessels and should not occupy certain leadership positions in the society and in the church. This has made the women to lost interest in the work; they refuse to develop their potentials as it would amount to waste of time and energy (<https://akwaibomstate.gov.ng>.)

- iv. *Inappropriate theological and doctrinal teachings:* It is unbelievable for any Christian to hear that there are some elements in the Bible that distort images of women. The Hebrew text which is similar to the African culture portrays a woman as a second-class citizen; that she is inferior to man physically, morally, socially, intellectually and spiritually. Therefore, she should only "serve at the table" for her husband, children and relatives. The perception of women as inferior, tantamount to belittling God's creative design of women, for they are created in God's image like her male counterpart. Women theologians in Africa like Oduyoye (1986) perceive that, the Hebrew Text is a man's book where women appear simply as inferior to men. She therefore asserts that, in Africa, it is not unusual to hear reminders of what "the Bible says" about women. The church with their various doctrinal teachings is yet to produce an official dogmatic context that would develop an accurate theological interpretation of what God requires of women, which would be useful to people who are believing in a God "who made all things new". Rather, they continue to use the norms, traditions and culture of the Hebrew text and epistle of Paul and enforce such doctrines in the church. In the Hebrew text, the primary contribution of a woman to her family is her sexuality; she is an exclusive property of her husband both in pleasure and in childbearing. The subjection role of wives to their husbands as seen in the Hebrew literature is often taken to indicate her subordinate roles in the family and in the society. That is why it is difficult for some husbands to come to terms with the fact that, their wives are called, ordained and commissioned by God, to head a church. That doctrinal teaching of wives being in subjection to their husbands would not allow the man to sit and watch his wife play any ecclesiastical role in the body of Christ but can readily visit a "prophetess" somewhere for prayers and prophecies rather than appreciate the gifts of God in the life of his wife.

Apostle Paul gave an impression on women that, male and female are equal in Christ (Galatians 3:26-28). Paul, was a notable Christian, he recognized, recommended and included women in his ministry in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and in

Corinth. (Acts 16:13-16; 17:4; 18:2). On the other hand, he commands women to be silent and accept their worthlessness before the men. This contradictory statement has caused more harm than good in the body of Christ from Bible times until now. So many Christians held unto this without any form of change of mind. The common argument against female ministers playing leadership roles in the church is that, they are instructed to be subordinate to men and therefore have no basis for leading men in whatever capacity. The church is seen as a community of men and women, but the question is, do men and women receive the same treatment in the church? Does the church's leadership structure depict the principle of essential unity and equality"? Oduyoye (1986) observes that, there are evidential limitations for Female Ministers in the church. Women experience extreme exploitation, oppression and domination by men in the church. Patriarchal structures of the church must be worked down if women must be given place in the church totally.

Poor educational standard: Educational standard of some female ministers is low. This low level of education leads to lack of employment in the formal sector and sometimes if they are employed, they occupy lowest possible positions, which still make them to be regarded as inferior to their male counterparts. The result of this low educational qualification of women has its origin from the fact that some families send their male children to school and subject the female children to an informal education like skill acquisition or trading. As regards theological study, many Female Ministers see it as a waste of time, money and energy as there is this belief that the "Holy Spirit will teach all things". Majority of the female ministers do not have the basic knowledge of how the Bible is interpreted as such find it difficult to preach or teach. They rather give themselves to singing or prophesying. The challenge of most female ministers in Bible interpretation is that, they lack confidence to teach and preach, which is only obtainable through training. Some of them settle for less and could not step into the right position that God called them. Most of the untrained ones settle for women and children's ministry because they feel, they do not have what to offer the men. They accept what the society thinks of then based on what Apostle Paul said in 1Timothy 2:12 "that women should not teach nor usurp authority over men but should be in silence".

- v. *Natural peculiarities:* There are things that are naturally associated with women, some of them are:
 - a. *Inferiority complex:* The general belief that women are weaker sex gives room to the reason many female ministers cannot face the crowd. This in turn, would inhibit her ministerial responsibilities. There are certain roles that she would not play because she feels she is still not qualified to do such. For instance, a

female minister would ask her male counterparts to conduct solemnization of Holy matrimony, child naming and dedication, baptism etc. because she views herself from the society's lens. Abogunrin, et al (2003), quoted Kendall who said "in most religion of the world women has less influence in the church matters because they feel they cannot do anything good".

- b. Another peculiarity is spousal abuse. A lot of women cannot and would not express their gifts because of marriage. Some husbands feel intimidated because of their wives' ministerial involvements. Many female ministers suffer spousal rejection, negligence and abuse. Many are emotionally and psychologically traumatized by a man who is supposed to be an encouragement. Some suffer societal rejection and humiliation because of divorce. Some husbands do not support their wives financially, thereby exposing them to seek financial assistance from other men who sometimes take advantage of their vulnerability. Jakes (1998) attests that a successful marriage is an authenticity of committed love. A female minister who enjoys committed love from her husband would definitely do well but the reverse would be the case if she lacks spousal love, encouragement and support. She will be struggling to achieve many things that she would have gotten with ease with her husband's recognition and acceptance.
- c. Dramatically, child bearing to some extent can hinder a Female Minister from meeting the demands of her ministerial assignments. The society would not employ a pregnant woman; also, the church would not allow a pregnant and a menstrual woman to exercise certain roles as at that time. A female minister would not be comfortable and might not function well during this season of life due to many myths that surround this season of her life.
- d. In most cases, women are women's problems. Some women envy their fellow women achievements. They gossip one another, malign and fight each other's progress. These attitudes are also found in the church among the womenfolk. Pathetically, they compete rather than support themselves. They use all kinds of abusive words and name calling to attack one another, thereby becoming tools in the hands of the Devil to cause setback in the body of Christ. Empathetically, this study reveals that a female minister cannot and will never have the opportunity to showcase as supernatural endowments because of the above-mentioned forces. Also, scholars like, Meehan (2020), Mupangwa (2021), Tarlton (2022), Adetunji (2023) and Phelps (2023) affirm that issues as patriarchy, gender discrimination, loneliness, balancing house chores with ministry, being overshadowed by the Pastors' wives who are not pastors, and

so on, are issues facing female ministers. However, not many solutions are given on how to curb such challenges.

How can these Challenges be Curbed?

In studying the challenges faced by the female ministers in the contemporary society in Akwa Ibom State, the following are suggestions on how they can be curbed:

To the female minister

- i. This work suggests that, she should come to direct understanding of her calling and the responsibilities that accrue to the assignment. She should come to terms with the reality of her position in her family, community church and the larger society.
- ii. She must accept the uniqueness of her divine mandate and see herself from God's perspective as this would help her to remain focused and committed to her ecclesiastical and ministerial responsibilities.
- iii. She should make a conscious effort to equip herself with adequate trainings, exposures, counsels, mentorship and appropriate theological and secular scholarship, as this will build up her self-confidence, self-worth and self-mastery.
- iv. She should make the Holy Spirit her confidant and source of inspiration as He will empower her for the task that has been entrusted into her hands.
- v. She should develop an insatiable thirst for God's Words and must seek to encounter God personally through His Word as this would lead to deeper revelatory knowledge of God's redemptive plan for humanity, and would expose her to newer insight and visions.
- vi. She should create a balance for her marital engagement and her ministerial responsibilities. She should devote time for her family needs and should not neglect the work because of her domestic engagements.
- vii. She should not allow the society to deter her commitments, zeal, passion, steadfastness and devotion. She should understand that her consecration is more pertinent than how the society rejects or accepts her.

To the family

- i. The immediate family should attest, and encourage the female minister based on the evidence that the child displayed from birth and early childhood. When the female minister has the basic virtual support and encouragement from her parents

and siblings it can be certain that, the rest of the community would tow the same line.

- ii. The female minister's spouse and children formed the immediate foundational base of her ministry. When her husband and the children particularly accept and support her holistically, she would be psychologically, emotionally, economically, socially and even spiritually balanced

To the Church

Aside from the immediate family, the church should be the second most important support base for the female minister. The church should be the fulcrum of her divine assignment. The church should recognize the specific ministerial gifts of the female ministers. Each female minister should be commissioned into her specific area of calling within the five-fold ministry. Women should not be compensating with offices that does not depict their area of calling.

In order to achieve a balance in the body of Christ:

- i. The church should practically recognize women as God's unique creatures who are able to respond to God's calling. Therefore, they should be allowed to fully participate in every sphere of the church leadership.
- ii. The church as a community of believers is directly responsible for baptizing and consecrating women into the church. Therefore, the Female Ministers should not be restricted from exercising such ecclesiastical rituals.
- iii. The church should embark on educative programs that would include women and men, which would strategically be geared towards instituting positive images of Female Ministers in the church.

To the society

The historical background of the study exposes that, Female Ministers have been despised, castigated, humiliated, sexually harassed and relegated to the background; the society generally stands to gain and benefit more when the female ministers are recognized, accepted, encouraged, supported and revered as their male counterparts.

Conclusion

The work focused on the challenges facing female ministers in Akwa Ibom State. The researchers perused on who the female minister is – a being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and filled with the spirit of God becomes a unique personality qualified by God

to be in leadership position in His Church. Though, faced with multi-faceted challenges from the family, Church and society, suggestions were highlighted on how to curb such challenges so as to fulfill her calling and commission as a minister of God. It is the belief of researchers that female ministers in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State in particular should be supported and encouraged to display their God-given potentialities and gifts for the growth of the Church and the benefit of humanity.

Recommendations

The researchers therefore recommend that, the society should create a requisite platform for the female ministers to add value to her immediate Christian society. If the Christian society does not benefit holistically from the callings of the female ministers, it is apparent that, the society would miss the spiritual credentials of the female ministers and also miss the redemptive plan of God for humanity. There are some societal vices that would be handled better by female ministers; cases like rape, premarital sex, unwanted pregnancy, lesbianism, prostitution and the likes, would be put under control or totally erased by female ministers. The female ministers will be vocal to the younger generation especially the younger ladies as to how they could conduct themselves at home, in the church and the society. The researchers therefore advocate that every female minister should be given an equitable support and encouragement by her immediate family, the church and the society.

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