ABSTRACT

AT THE INTERSECTION OF ACTS AND GALATIANS:

NEW STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN CHURCH PLANTERS

by

Carolyn Moore

Standing at the intersection of Acts 1:8 and Galatians 3:28, women who plant new churches have the opportunity to shape the future of the American church. Yet, the rate of growth among women church planters has not kept pace with the rate of church planting in general in the United States. Perhaps because of that, the resources to equip especially women church planters are still very much in the developmental stage. Without effective solutions, women will continue to operate with poorly designed training systems and timelines, and ill-equipped denominational offices and boards. The result, too often, is another failed venture, another burned-out pastor, another deeply wounded congregation.

Meanwhile, LifeWay's comprehensive national research project showed that "the chance of survivability increases by over four-hundred percent when the church planter has 'realistic' expectations of the church-planting experience" (Stetzer and Bird). This principle underlies my own research into the barriers facing women planters. The theory is that women should plant, and can plant, but they need better information about the unique circumstances they will face so they can adequately and strategically meet those barriers head on.

This project was designed to address this under-explored issue within a Wesleyan context by asking these key questions: What are unique pressures do women church planters face? What training and support offer the best opportunity for effective ministry?

How can female planters equip their congregational leaders to become partners in positively influencing their community and culture? I asked these questions through the use of an online survey tool, as well as through personal interviews with planters.

The solution is in education. By training women planters about the barriers that have the potential to hinder their success in their work, they can more realistically process the effect of these barriers on their work. They must get training in the areas of leadership development, financial management, time management, the art of negotiation, and the recruitment of coaches and mentors, so that they are adequately equipped for the work to which they are called. Finally, denominational leaders and coaches must do their own research so that they can constructively coach planters on the journey.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is done to the glory of God; with deepest appreciation for the good people of Mosaic Church, who have loved me well and taught me daily what it means to be the Church; with heartfelt love for Steve, Claire Marie and Pierce, who have supported this call to ministry so generously; and in memory of Helenor Davisson, a female circuit rider in the early Methodist movement who became the first woman to be ordained in the former Methodist Protestant Church, predecessor to The United Methodist Church in the United States.

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Chapter

The work of starting a new church is challenging for the best among pastors. Doing so without the right tools and context is a recipe for discouragement and will mean failure for some. In this work, women planters especially must be eyes-wide-open to the gender-based differences that can create natural barriers to success. These differences must be acknowledged and addressed in order for women to succeed as planters. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the experience of one female church planter, the barriers she encountered and the questions with which she now wrestles. An argument is made for further study of the experiences of women planters to discover what barriers they faced and what possible accommodations might make the best of a pastor's efforts. The goal of this project is to help women church planters increase their chances for moving past the barriers faced by many so they can successfully plant and grow a thriving church.

Personal Introduction

I am beginning to think it was actually a sign from God.

I found it on the church sign standing in front of The Holy House of Prayer of Jesus Christ. At the end of a string of other announcements about repenting and where you can find them on the radio, the sign read, "God have [sic] never called a woman to preach. Never will." The sign stood in front of a little building with burglar bars, deep in one of the most impoverished areas of Georgia (known as Frog Holler or Bethlehem), in downtown Augusta, Georgia.

I will admit that the day I found it, I delighted in that sign. Things like that validate my experience of being a woman in ministry in the South. A remarkable amount of prejudice still exists around the issue women in spiritual leadership, I don't hear it in every conversation, but I will admit that over time I have developed more of a suspicion about people's motives. I have had enough conversations with others in my church to know they debate their friends and co-workers regularly on this issue. They defend their church and their pastor admirably. I wish they did not have to, but I am grateful beyond words for their convictions.

I wonder how many people I will never meet, how many opportunities I will never even know I missed, because the people I might have known do not trust my place as a pastor. I have taken way too much time reflecting on this concern. The inequality exposes something broken in me. I feel trapped. I get angry, defensive. I obsess. I find myself talking about it far too often, with far too much passion. I go beyond good sense. Because I am irrationally competitive, I have a hard time making peace with the realities of life, and this becomes a problem. These are the frustrations many women face in the quest to plant churches. How can women lead past the barriers inherent in ministry so they can plant successfully?

Ten years ago, I moved to Evans, Georgia (part of Augusta) with my husband and daughter to plant a United Methodist church. We were a parachute drop; Mosaic began in our home and moved to an office complex before settling in a school auditorium. We began worshiping weekly in 2004 and our average attendance today is 200. Our members are mostly working class. The typical person at Mosaic lives on the margins of suburban life. Half the women in our church (literally half) are single, most of them with multiple

dependent children. We are also home to young families struggling to make ends meet and single adults with addiction issues. We have worked to develop healthy leaders from among those whom God has sent into our community and God has been slowly, quietly, faithfully building us up. Our people have a burning vision for changing the spiritual atmosphere of our community.

We own and occupy a 20,000 square-foot warehouse. We host a thriving pantry and a community outreach ministry on the third Saturday of every month. We sponsor twelve mission partners (local, regional and global) and raise about $50,000 annually in addition to operating funds to support those partners. We run ten to fifteen small groups each semester, along with a one-to-one mentoring program called O3 (mentor, mentee, and the Holy Spirit). We have a strong recovery and discipleship culture and very contemporary worship. We regularly host healing services and outreach events. We operate a satellite ministry in downtown Augusta that focuses on low- and no-income adults with disabilities. Our downtown ministry includes a mobile food pantry, weekly Bible study group and monthly meals with a time of prayer and devotion, all led by a lay ministry team. With four full-timers and four part-timers on our staff team, our church is small but thriving. We are dedicated to making disciples.

I love my role as the founding pastor of this church. In this season, at least, I can not imagine leaving this setting to move into a more traditional pastoral role. I am quite aware, however, of the limitations faced by this ministry because of my place as its leader. We face gender-based barriers. The goal of this study is not to dispute or defend the role of women in ministry but to discover ways to lead past the barriers women face, not just for the sake of my own ministry but for the sake of the next generation of female

church planters. My passion is to equip other women to lead new churches more effectively and with greater authority by giving them tools and context to lead past the barriers they face as leaders, as pastors, and especially as planters.

Statement of the Problem

Women who plant new churches face a unique opportunity. In their vocation, they stand at the intersection of Acts 1:8 (NIV) and Galatians 3:28 (NIV). Acts 1:8 is the charge given by the resurrected Jesus to his followers just before his ascension: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (NIV). Galatians 3:28 is the seminal passage about freedom and equality offered by Paul to the people of the early Church: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). As evangelists and church planters, women stand at the convergence of these two biblical truths. They are actively engaged in developing new systems for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in their communities and beyond, just as mapped out in Acts 1:8. As women, they are an embodiment of Galatians 3:28, equipping congregations to live out the truth that, in Christ, all are gifted and called to serve.

This intersection of Acts and Galatians is indeed an interesting vantage point from which to view the future of the American church. In a study of female pastors in Protestant churches, George Barna reports that between 1999 and 2009, the percentage of women pastors doubled in the United States. Yet, the rate of growth among women church planters has not kept pace. Perhaps because of that, the resources to equip especially women church planters are still very much in the developmental stage.

Training opportunities are often geared toward a male audience. Women may not find mentors and coaches equipped to help them negotiate the cultural biases and limited resources in the communities within which they serve (especially in the regional South). In fact, they may identify few if any role models in their local context.

Faced with these and other more typical lifestyle pressures, women church planters are challenged to succeed in an area of ministry that is difficult for even the best trained among pastors. Without effective solutions, women will continue to operate with poorly designed training, systems, and timelines, and ill-**e**quipped denominational offices and boards. The lack of resources for this study stands as a testament to the problem; advanced research about women planters does not seem to exist. The practical result of this dearth of information, too often, is another failed venture, another burned-out pastor, another deeply wounded congregation.

God is calling the global Church in the twenty-first century to make room for women at the leadership and church planting table. The Church is challenged to respond to that call by honestly addressing the barriers facing women church planters with a generous spirit, rejecting both naiveté and defensiveness so that gifted and called women can lead successfully past those barriers. The Church is challenged to hear Jesus as he tells Mary, "Go and tell the others," and to trust that he is speaking that word to women still today. In fact, he is. He is raising up women leaders all over the world, many of whom are being called specifically to plant new churches, many of whom are leading tremendous movements of the Spirit.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to explore the barriers faced by women church planters in the United States in order to discover which barriers compromise effectiveness and to identify ways women church planters can learn to lead past them effectively.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

Research Question #1

What common barriers are faced by women who plant new churches in the United States?

Research Question #2

"What barriers compromise effectiveness and how can women church planters lead past the barriers they encounter?

Research Question #3

Once serious barriers and possible solutions to those barriers are uncovered, what best practices (training and support) will offer the next generation of female church planters the best opportunity for effective ministry?

Rationale for the Project

To be relevant to a new generation of planters, trainers and coaches must be candid about the common barriers to growth in churches planted by women. The fact of such barriers is borne out by the evidence that so few female planters exist, with even fewer successful plants. These barriers create discouragement, impede success and ultimately prevent women from fully answering the call of God. To date, almost no resources exist to educate women about the barriers they face and tools they need to lead

past them. Until these obstacles are acknowledged and studied and strategies are formed for moving beyond them, women will continue to struggle to fully realize their call and experience the joy of successfully planting new churches. Worse, the Wesleyan tradition will fall short of living out the spirit of a theology that fully embraces the leadership of both women and men. Even worse still, the Body of Christ will suffer for the lack of full participation of all those whom God has called to this work.

As a pastor who has personally sensed the tension present in planting as a woman, I entered this project with some hypotheses about the nature of those barriers. I voiced and tested these suppositions through research to discover their merit and impact on new church plants.

The Theological Barrier

Women planters face theological barriers in the twenty-first century. Because half of Christians do not hold an egalitarian position on women in ministry leadership roles, the available pool of laypersons and leaders to participate is much smaller. Women must cast a wider net in order to gather a congregation. There are people women planters will never meet simply because of gender—people who disagree with them theologically. Women must learn to make the most of their encounters with those who are theologically open?

The Perception Barrier

Consciously or not, many view women leaders in a different and perhaps negative light. Most people have an opinion about how they want their leaders to act; yet, the leadership style of women may be different from what is most usual or comfortable. The tensions produced by a less familiar leadership style may create personal pressures for the

planter if she is not fully grounded personally. How do church members want women in leadership positions to act? How do they want mothers in leadership positions to act? How can the leadership style of women (often more collaborative in its approach) be used to its advantage in a new church? How can women better prepare themselves for the pressures of planting?

The Resource Barrier

Resources to equip women church planters are still very much in the developmental stage. Training opportunities are often geared toward a male audience, likely driven by sheer economics; the narrow share of women planters simply does not drive the market. Women may find few mentors and coaches equipped to help negotiate the cultural biases influencing the communities within which they serve, especially in the regional south. In fact, they may identify few if any role models in their local context. Financial resources for church planting in general are limited, causing boards and agencies to make gender-biased choices. (A clergywoman reports being told by a denominational official, "There is little evidence supporting the idea that women can successfully plant churches, so we are not willing to put any money into it.") Faced with these and other more typical lifestyle pressures, how do women church planters find the resources they need to succeed in an area of ministry that is difficult for even the best trained among pastors?

The Benchmark Barrier

Much of the conversation in the church planting world focuses on rapid growth, but women may not be able to meet that standard. As has already been stated, they are drawing from a smaller pool and pushing against culture. That means the rate of growth

for a female-pastored church plant may be slower than that for a male-pastored church plant. If benchmarks are too aggressive and expectations are based on a male-dominated field, women will feel frustration before they have a chance to develop the plant they have been given. This frustration is not an issue of failure but pace. What benchmarks can women faced with complicating pressures realistically achieve? What benchmarks will ensure both the viability of the church and the sense of accomplishment needed for the planter to press forward in ministry?

The Pastoral Care Barrier

Women in general have a more nurturing, connected approach to relationship fueled by a maternal bent, or what Erich Neumann calls "The Great Mother." This factor alone has multiple psychological implications for the kind of congregation that forms. Further, it may foster pastor-centered pastoral care practices that stifle growth. A woman with a strong nurturing instinct may feel more responsibility for personally tending to each member, rather than giving this responsibility over to others in favor of vision-level leadership. If a congregation supports this practice in a desire to capitalize on that nurturing presence, it will feed a pattern of stunted growth. As Carey Nieuwhof writes in a web post about the factors limiting church growth, "pastoral care can kill a church".

The Biological Barrier

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the seasons of life for women are markedly different than for men. From child-bearing years to midlife, women experience distinct seasons, each of which may present challenges women will face differently than men. This factor has been debated and discussed in volume after volume so the question of

whether it ought to be is not a question for this study. The assumption is that it simply *is* and is something women will need to acknowledge if they want to lead past it.

Conversations with women planters currently in the field at times confirmed and at times contradicted these suppositions. New barriers and practices were added as research continued. The constant remains: identifying and studying both the barriers and the keys to effective growth in a female-pastored church plant is critical. Women are waiting for the resources and teaching that will unlock opportunities and decrease discouragement and failure. The expectation is that this research will positively impact Kingdom work while protecting ministry marriages, congregational health and viability. It will positively contribute to a Wesleyan theology of the Body of Christ. It will also impact the ability of the church planter to hang onto the calling and finish what she began.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

1. **Barriers**—any obstacle to normal growth in a developing church. *Natural* barriers are those obstacles that exist in the culture surrounding the church planter apart from the planter's personal gifts and abilities. *Common* barriers are the barriers experienced by many women who lead, especially through church planting.
2. **Complementarian**—The idea that God created male and female as equal in dignity, but with different roles to play especially in terms of leadership capacity and authority.
3. **Connected**—Characterizes a leadership style that is more collaborative and more naturally team-based.

4. **Egalitarian**—The idea that God created male and female as equal in dignity and equal in responsibility, with no distinction between them in terms of leadership potential.
5. **Female-pastored church plant**—A church started by a female pastor. For the purposes of this research, this term refers only to female pastors functioning as the sole planter of a new church, not as an integral part (at its inception) of a team or ministry couple.
6. **Female church planter** (or woman church planter)—A woman who plants and develops a church from the ground up. In this study, no intended distinction exists between the terms "female" and "woman."
7. **Mother/Daughter Model—**A church planted out of an existing "mother" church, with a core group established prior to launch.
8. **Parachute Drop**—A church planted by a pastor without the help of a sponsoring congregation or core team already in place.
9. **Solo Church Planter**—A pastor who is deployed without a team, and who is not in a ministry partnership with her spouse. She is the sole or key leader at the inception of the planting project.
10. **Team-based Churches**—Churches that are built or developed through a multi-person approach to leadership.

Delimitations

For this project, I chose to interview women who have planted churches within the last ten years. While the initial invitation was to planters in any Christian denomination and any geographic area within the United States, respondents were almost

exclusively from the United Methodist Church. Only pastors who planted individually, without the direct ministry partnership of a spouse or team at the outset, were considered (they will have developed a team eventually, but did not begin as an integrated part of a team). Additionally, conversations extended to denominational leaders and ministry coaches from a variety of denominations and networks in order to get the fullest possible picture of the challenge facing women planters. Through these discussions, I discovered common themes and best practices for women pastors seeking to lead new congregations. Age of the pastor, size of the congregation nor style of worship were limiting factors in the research.

Review of Relevant Literature

Very little has been written that directly addresses women planters or the barriers they face in carrying out the call to start new churches. I found no studies conducted to measure the success of women planters. One assumes this is because most major contemporary church planting movements are hosted by Baptist and Reformed movements, neither of which affirms women in ministry leadership.

Given the lack of relevant literature directly addressing women planters, the heart of the research for this project depended on online surveys and person-to-person interviews with women pastors currently engaged in a church planting project. In addition, reading was undertaken in several parallel disciplines, such as women in business and political leadership, the theology of gender-neutral leadership, the psychology of gender, moral development, and issues in pastoral care.

In order to adequately discuss the theological concerns around women in leadership, it was necessary to read dissenting views. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and*

Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (John Piper and Wayne Grudem) is the popular, seminal work representing a complementarian view of gender that excludes female leadership in church. *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (Wayne Grudem) goes into more depth on contemporary debates around gender and identity. A host of essays collected into *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, editors) explores the notion of complementarian theology that celebrates giftedness. John Paul's *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* gives another perspective on the creation narrative and its implications for male and female roles. Timothy Tennent's blog commentaries of John Paul's work helped to decipher a dense theological treatise. In addition, Dr. Ben Witherington's extensive work in the area of gender and leadership was consulted.

Two books were of particular interest in the discovery of how women think, lead, develop relationships and view themselves as leaders: *Women's Ways of Knowing*, by Mary Field Belenky, and *In A Different Voice,* by Carol Gilligan. These volumes were an invaluable launching point for exploring the subtle but real psychology beneath women's approach to leadership and men's acceptance of women leaders. Much was learned about the ways women understand the world around them and how their voices are heard.

A wealth of information was found in Harvard Business Review's library. I explored a number of studies conducted to assess the acceptance of women in the workplace, the style of women's leadership and the barriers to effective leadership. Several other books and articles delved into the ways women are perceived. *Implications of the Masculine and the Feminine in Pastoral Ministry,* by Edward Morgan and *In Her Own Time: Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care*, by Jeanne Stevenson

Neuhoff helped to make sense of the pastoral care factor, a major contributor to the stifling of church growth beyond the two-hundred mark. Morgan's following statement was a critical link to understanding the implications of gender and the role it plays in the growth and health of a church:

> If the pastor is a woman, she may need to be particularly aware of the "Great Mother" archetype lurking within her. As Ulanov notes, 'To be able to say no to another's need … is notoriously difficult for a woman.' A sort of pastoral masochism can result from an inability to say no to certain needs expressed under certain conditions by other people. The pastor walks the second mile so often that her feet bleed, when actually this seemingly pastoral attitude may simply reinforce the dependent's dependency and prevent the steps needed for growing independence. The pastor is adroitly taking care of this need to be needed. (273)

As Morgan discusses, women without the ability to disconnect from dependent congregants in order to better lead the larger organization will find themselves mired in individual care at the expense of the whole. Carey Nieuwhof wrote about the phenomenon of how pastoral care can actually stifle growth, contradicting conventional wisdom on the subject. Conversations with women planters allowed me to test the suppositions of this author and others who made similar claims.

Books on how women lead (including one called *How Women Lead*) were plentiful and helped with the task of understanding how women succeed in secular environments. I developed an eye for detecting those transferrable skills and principles

that would help women lead past the barriers. Books on team-based leadership were particularly helpful.

I explored some biographies of strong contemporary leaders, including Carly Fiorina (*Rising to the Challenge: My Leadership Journey*) and Margaret Thatcher (*Margaret Thatcher: Power and Personality*). Eric Metaxas's study of seven notable women and what made them great was a tremendously insightful work. He examined Joan of Arc, Susanna Wesley, Hannah More, Maria Skobtsova, Corrie ten Boom, Rosa Parks, and Mother Teresa. In Metaxas's own words, "Whenever men have used their positions of authority or their power to denigrate women, they have denigrated themselves and have denied themselves the fullness of manhood God intended for them" (Metaxas xviii). When women are devalued, everyone is devalued.

An article in *The New York Times* on the barriers faced by women Marines magnified the problem of hyper-masculinity in some male-dominated fields. Books and articles exploring the history of women such as Aimee Semple McPherson (founder of the Foursquare movement) and Myrtle Dorthea Beall (founder of Bethesda Temple in Detroit) helped give a historical context to the story being written by women who plant whole movements. Stuart Murray writes, "A recurring feature in the history of the church has been the significant role played by women in first-generation church planting movements, and their marginalization in subsequent generations. Institutionalization and reversion to a maintenance mentality seems to be accompanied by displacement of women from leadership responsibility …" (Church Planting 2692-2738). Murray acknowledged several natural challenges to women who undertake this work and

provided a strong argument for examining structures and networks to ensure they are not gender-limiting—whether purposefully or not.

Some study was done in the area of how contemporary movements measure growth. Is the best measure still largely contained to the number of people in chairs or pews on Sunday morning? Or have the benchmarks shifted from head counts to conversion and transformation as measures of growth? If so, the story being written by women planters will have a more productive ending as the gifts unique to their gender are allowed to flourish.

Perhaps the most exciting find was the discovery of Helenor Davisson, a female circuit rider in the early Methodist movement who became the first woman to be ordained a deacon in the former Methodist Protestant Church, predecessor to The United Methodist Church in the United States. She was ordained in Jasper County, the daughter of an early Methodist circuit rider. Ms. Davisson (known also as Helenor Draper) traveled with her father through frontier Indiana in the mid-1800s, eventually organizing a Methodist Protestant Church at Alter's Grove. This makes Ms. Davisson, Methodism's first ordained woman, also Methodism's first female church planter (Shoemaker). The discovery of her story provided ample inspiration and it is to her memory this study is dedicated. Methodist women who choose to plant new works have a rich heritage that runs nearly as deep as the tradition itself.

Research Methodology

The approach to this mix-methods project was layered. Conversations with mentors, coaches, pastors and congregations were designed to give the fullest picture possible of the experience of a female church planter. To that end, online surveys, phone

conversations, and group discussions were developed; findings were gleaned, collated and translated into resources to benefit the next generation of planters.

I undertook the following layers of research and development:

Conduct preliminary reading and research.

Research began with a season of reading focused on leadership practices among women, followed by a series of interviews with experienced leaders in the field of leadership and church planting. Research included reading not only in the areas of women and leadership but also in areas focused on the barriers perceived to be faced by women as well as dynamics specific to them. Drawing on the combined wisdom and experience of authors and leaders, a survey was developed to be sent to women planters across the country who are actively engaged as the lead pastor in a church planting venture less than ten years old.

Develop a national directory of women church planters.

Concurrently with the above season of research and interviews, I developed a directory of women church planters. Using social media, denominational contacts and word of mouth, a list of more than two hundred names and email addresses was collected. This list became the base for the second phase of research.

Email surveys and collect results.

In the third phase of research, surveys were delivered through an online service to the church planters identified in the formation of a database. Results were collected and collated, and common themes began to emerge.

Conduct phone conversations with selected respondents.

After collecting survey results, I followed up through phone conversations with

ten pastors to clarify points, gain context and hear the stories of these pastors who have entered into the world of church planting in order to understand their challenges and successes. I identified these ten pastors by the diversity of their responses, ages, and settings.

Conduct a focus group of leaders in the field of church planting.

After collecting surveys and collating results, ten people were invited to participate in an online conference call (four were able to participate in one call, with one additional being interviewed separately), during which they discussed the "ideal church planter." They were invited to describe the character traits of a successful planter (not gender-specific), along with the major obstacles facing planters. These answers by leaders in the field were compared with the surveys collected by women planters to better understand how the market views successful planters and how the experience of women compares.

Conclude with a written report.

I spent the last phase of my project working with the material gained from surveys, interviews, reading and conversations. Initial observations were developed, followed by recommendations for women planters.

The goal of this project was to place better tools and training into the hands of women called to the ministry of church planting. The hope is that women who hear that call will have every resource at their disposal so they can bear much fruit as they participate in the coming Kingdom of God.

Type of Research

This project was a pre-intervention study in the descriptive mode. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods: surveys, interviews and relevant research, I peered into the experiences of women planters around the country, asking what the experience was like for them and what challenges they faced along the way. Using the findings, conclusions were drawn that may be used by planters, coaches and denominational leaders to better train women planters.

Participants

The participants tapped for this study were women church planters in the United States still serving in the church they planted, planting as solo pastors (not initially part of a team or ministry couple). No other restrictions were placed on those chosen; participants were chosen from various denominations and from around the country.

In addition, I spoke with five leaders in the field of church planting (denominational leaders, coaches and trainers), for the purpose of comparing their vision and benchmarks for church planters in general with those that best fit women in the field.

Instrumentation

Instruments used included a survey I developed specifically for this project, disseminated through Google.docs. Phone interviews were recorded using a dB9Pro audio recorder, with "Tape A Call" (a cell phone application) as a back-up. Google.docs created the graphs published with this study. The conference call of denominational leaders was hosted through GoToMeeting.com.

Data Collection

Data collection happened through online surveys, followed by telephone interviews with ten pastors. I compared the information gained from these surveys and interviews with data gained from the conference-call conversation with a focus group of five leaders in the area of church planting.

Data Analysis

All the information gleaned from surveys and conversations was coded and organized into a report of findings and translated into a list of recommendations for ministry leaders and pastors seeking to successfully plant new churches.

Generalizability

This study is by women for women. While men certainly experience their own barriers and challenges in the process of planting churches, the intent of this project was to determine those barriers unique to women. Therefore, the field of inquiry was necessarily limited to women and the results were tailored to a female audience. Because the field of research intentionally spanned ages, settings and geographical areas, the assumption is that it will be useful across a spectrum of ministry. Because this study moves into uncharted territory, the hope is that this work will produce a model for empowering women planters to succeed more often and more profoundly in the projects they undertake.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 includes an in-depth review of selected literature. Chapter 3 details the journey of developing strong research questions, conducting and processing an online survey of women church planters, and processing the results of multiple phone interviews

with both planters and church development directors. I document how the questions were tested, data was collected and analyzation achieved. Chapter 4 provides findings of the study and relevant observations made. Chapter 5 provides my conclusions and recommendations for how women who plan to plant churches can strategically navigate past the barriers they face so they can successfully grow a new work.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The end-goal of this project was not to defend the role of women in church leadership, nor to build an argument for why women deserve a place at the church planting table. A plethora of studies already cover the question, "Can women be pastors?" While this was not the thrust of the project, some amount of attention was paid to the theological argument for female leadership, as that became the foundation on which the greater weight of the project rested. Once that foundation was established, this project sought to acknowledge the challenges facing women who choose to plant so they can think strategically about best practices for successfully leading past those barriers.

Very few articles (and no books found by this writer) are written exclusively to equip women church planters. Barriers to church planting facing women have been explored informally but not yet formally. What the church has not addressed, however, the secular world has explored extensively. There are hundreds of studies addressing the issues that face women in leadership, and many of these studies are directly relevant for women planters. Beginning with the theological underpinning women need in order to take authority and lead, this chapter moves to a survey of the literature identifying the barriers to women in leadership. That survey concludes with a brief overview of major findings and some proposals for the project design.

Biblical Foundations

The purpose of this section is to answer the question of female leadership from a classically Wesleyan perspective in order to lay the foundation on which this entire

project rests, namely that women are called to lead, preach and plant churches in agreement with Christ's call to make disciples. In later sections, other perspectives will be introduced.

What the Bible Says About Human Design

The first creation story in Genesis describes the work of man and woman together. "God blessed them," Genesis 1:28-29 states, "and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (ESV Genesis 1:28-29). This was their work, to steward the rest of creation in partnership with one another. The clear hierarchy established in both creation stories of Genesis is the hierarchy of humans over animals, not male over female. Men and women are cut from the same cloth, as it were; their creation story is not a text of hierarchy or value but of unity and interrelatedness.

In his remarkable treatise on the theology of the body, John Paul II explains that the word that spoke man and woman into existence is a word rooted more in their being than in their doing. What is good, John Paul seems to imply, is that man "is," and not what he "does." As this relates to this discussion, it is not the roles played by men and women that made them good in the beginning, but their very existence, and it is the combination of the two sexes—male and female—that reflects the image of God (locs 3417, 3725). Moreover, their relationship reflects an ontological equality as well as a functional equality (Ware). Both are created in the image of God; both are given the task of stewarding creation.

Then comes the Fall. Genesis, Chapter Three, turns a partnership of equals into an antagonistic relationship. Adam and Eve, both condemned by their own failings, will experience suffering in this life. Adam will fight against the ground as he works it for his existence. Eve will no longer have a partnership with Adam; he will rule over her. Groothuis calls this "the failure of mankind, not the design of our Creator" (Dale loc 2743). The story in Genesis, Chapter Three, describes what happened when the enemy of God and humanity entered in and attempted to distort the created design. This narrative is *de*scriptive, not *pre*scriptive.

The theological question swirling around these first three chapters of Genesis is: Were women given an equal right to leadership and stewardship at creation (a right distorted at the Fall), or were women from the beginning designed to play the role of "helper" (Gen. 2:18), with the role of leadership reserved for men only? An egalitarian view would assert that while the Fall is responsible for setting man and woman against each other in an antagonistic relationship, the intended purpose at creation is for man and woman to fight the battle of evil together as equal partners (Beckert). Indeed, the Hebrew term translated as "helper," *ezer kenegdo*—the same term used to describe God's relationship to his chosen people—lends itself to this interpretation.

This study asserts that the original design for men and women is partnership, not hierarchy. Given that assumption, the focus is not on the question of whether or not women ought to preach or lead men, but rather to explore that intersection of human design with human fallenness—that point at which fallenness distorts and stunts female leadership, especially in the arena of church planting. The goal is to discover pathways to

negotiate that intersection so that those called to lead as church planters can contribute effectively to Kingdom work and reclaim the joy and meaning of their created design.

What the Bible Says About Men, Women and Leadership

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul begins a section on the relationship between husbands and wives with this statement: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). This line recalls the essence of Genesis, Chapter One, reminding men and women that they are designed for a relational posture that points away from self and toward both God and others. Submission is not oppression; it is a self-giving posture that calls men and women to something bigger than themselves. Husbands and wives, men and women, submit to God and one another because they are designed to bear the image of God.

In the theological world, submission has become something of a controversy. The arguments gather not around submission itself, but around the nature of human design. The question that forms is one of hierarchy versus partnership. What is the proper relationship between men and women? Two terms surface in this debate—complementarianism and egalitarianism.

A complementarian worldview says men and women are equal in dignity but different in roles. In this way of viewing human design, the man has responsibility for "loving authority over the female" and the woman has the role of "willing, glad-hearted and submissive assistance to the man" (Ware). Antagonism is introduced into this design at the Fall, leading the woman to compete for authority. Complementarians are adamant that the power given to men is to be used only in self-sacrificing ways, in keeping with the character of Christ. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, who have both written

extensively on this view of human design, claim that the male-female hierarchy has been so from the beginning. They argue from Genesis, Chapter Two, that woman was taken out of man, and that man was given dominion over the whole earth before woman came on the scene. They both lean on their heavy exegesis of the word "helper" to suggest a woman's supportive role (loc 2384). Complementarianism emphasizes the distinctions between men and women, as well as their roles (Tennent; Piper and Grudem loc 2384). In the healthiest view of this theological stance, men and women bear God's image equally, with the man having the role of leader and the woman having the role of helper (Tennent; Piper and Grudem loc 2144).

In its most extreme form, complementarianism may imply that the image of God is given to men alone ("God did not name the human race 'woman'"—Piper and Grudem loc 2224). The danger of this approach to human design is that it emphasizes roles over gifts. Where Genesis, Chapter One, paints the picture of partnership, complementarianism introduces a hierarchy.

An egalitarian worldview says men and women are equal in dignity and equal in responsibility. Both men and women are created in God's image and both are given responsibility to rule over His creation. "Submission is not the duty of one, but the call of all" (Tennent). The emphasis is on responsibility rather than role, on being rather than doing (Groothuis 325). Egalitarians emphasize our common responsibility to live out our design. This worldview is more consistent with all of Paul's extensive teaching on spiritual gifts. Groothuis embraces the same emphasis on being that John Paul expresses, noting that body and soul, character and ministry, gifts and call, are all interwoven, so that humans are divinely prepared for service and expected to live out that call (Dale 324;

John Paul II loc 3338). Egalitarianism emphasizes equality but its danger is that it can actually minimize the inherent differences between genders (Tennent). In reality men and women have clear distinctions — physically, emotionally, socially. Physical differences reflect deeper realities. Men in general are wired to provide and protect; women in general are wired for nurture and community. These differences do not necessarily equate to roles, however, as a complementarian worldview might suggest.

> "Being determines role and role defines being; thus there can be no real distinction between the two. If the one is inferior, so much be the other. If, on the other hand, woman is not less than man in her personal being, neither can there be any biblical or theological warrant for woman's permanent, comprehensive and ontologically grounded subordination to man's authority" (Dale 324).

This project asserts that those differences expressed through spiritual gifts offer the church complementary styles of leadership that build the Body of Christ. Men and women add dignity to the work of the church when they learn to submit to one another's strengths, rather than establishing power bases. This is the biblical design for women and men. Submission means placing "self" at the feet of Jesus for the sake of a greater mission—the building of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus says, "This is my body, given for you," he is painting a picture of God's Kingdom and of human design. When men and women enter into true partnership with one another, they also become a picture of that Kingdom.

This symbiotic relationship is perhaps most poignantly pictured in a scene between Jesus and a woman of the city (Luke 7:36-50). When the story begins, Jesus is in the home of a religious leader for dinner. A woman with a questionable reputation shows

up at the house during dinner and, standing at Jesus' feet, begins to weep. Her tears fall on his feet. Having nothing else to wipe them with, she bends down to wipe the tears away with her hair. Kneeling there on the floor, her head close to his feet, she begins to kiss the feet of Jesus and massage them with oil. Crossing over the line of Genesis Three and back toward her created design, this woman joins a fellowship of biblical women who dared to walk back into the Garden of Eden. She is now in the company of the woman who grabbed the fringe of Jesus prayer shawl and the woman who reached out to touch the resurrected body of Jesus in the garden. She is in community with the woman who sat at his feet soaking in every word while her sister fussed over a meal in the kitchen, and also the woman at the well who dared to have a deep, theological discussion with Jesus before asking if she could drink from his well of living water.

Going deeper still into theological waters, these women push back against the idea of a hierarchical relationship within the Trinity (Giles 194). The women in relationship with Jesus discovered that in him they could reconnect body to soul as they answered a deep hunger for their original design. Originally, women and men were to be one. In a redeemed Kingdom ruled by Christ's selfless love, that is the way it should be (Dale loc 2749). Humanity's great offense is to default to a post-Genesis Three worldview dictated by the enemy of God that places men and women in opposition, when in fact they are created to exist in harmony, reflecting a Trinitarian image (Dale loc 2754; Giles, 352). Jesus' recognition and respect for the women in his presence affirms that humans are more than biological wiring. Humans have bodies and stories and spiritual gifts, all designed to be in partnership with God to build the Kingdom on earth.

If indeed, Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist as a hierarchy (a notion that destroys unity of essence), a hierarchical relationship between men and women is justifiable. But if within the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit are equal in both essence and relationship, any other theological stance defines the Trinity in the same terms as one might define fallen humanity, "where some rule and others obey" (Giles, 352). A hierarchy within the Trinity tears at the fabric of unity. Likewise, a hierarchy among humans tears at the fabric of created design.

How Biblical Women Supported the Spread of the Gospel

The list of women in the New Testament who led in the spread of the good news about Jesus Christ is impressive: Mary and Martha (mentioned as personal friends of Jesus in John 11:5), Phoebe, Chloe, Priscilla, Lydia, Junia, the four daughters of Philip, Euodia, Syntyche. These are all notable examples. The story of Jesus "radically altered the position of women, elevating them to a partnership with men unparalleled in first-century society" (Grenz and Kjesbo 78). Women were visibly present throughout the story, traveling with Jesus, praying over him and with other disciples, leading churches, coaching other evangelists, and leading in assemblies (Dale loc 620).

Ben Witherington, professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, has written extensively on the role of women in the spread of the gospel. His doctoral work was a study of women in the New Testament, and his first three published works were in defense of the role of women as spiritual leaders. His arguments are not new, but in his more popular writings he summarizes well a generation of argument and research on the subject. These points are offered as a summary of his findings:

- Women were last at the cross, first at the tomb and first to be told to "go and tell."

- Jesus himself chose a woman to be the first preacher of the gospel. It was Mary to whom the resurrected Jesus said, “Go and tell the others” (John 20:17).
- Women seemed to be present as leaders in early house churches (Bridges). The home, which was the domain of women, was the primary location of the early church and it is this location that shaped its early identity as a “family” and as a message of freedom from oppression in all its forms (Bridges). The New Testament narrative clearly notes the integral role played by women in the development of the first-century church, “commissioned in their conversion to Jesus’ ministry and Kingdom” (Hirsch and Ferguson loc 3437). It is surely no coincidence that after Paul meets Lydia in a gathering by the river and presides over her conversion, she invites him into her home (Acts 16:11-15). Out of that simple yet profound meeting came the beginnings of the evangelistic effort into Europe which impacted countless lives (Beckert).

Two passages in Paul’s letters are most often cited to discredit women as leaders of men and as preachers? These passages (1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:12) must be taken within the context of the overall message of the Bible. They must be read through the lens of Deborah’s story and through the lens of Mary’s charge; through the lens of Galatians 3:28 (“there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female”) and the stories of Priscilla and Junia who labored in the gospel with integrity. God has surely not called all women into vocational, pastoral leadership (nor has he called all men into ministry leadership), but he has surely called some. The Bible itself testifies to this. That women were mentioned at all is a testament to their dynamic contribution in the early church and gospel story. These verses must also be read through the lens of the

creation story, which did not create hierarchies but fulfillment. Men and women fulfill each other's contributions to the Kingdom. Male and female are partners in the work of realizing God's Kingdom on earth. In some obvious ways the genders complement and in all ways they are in partnership.

Without exception, the Bible must be read within its historical context. Paul's letters are not *bound* historically but they are *rooted* historically. What we know about women in the first century is that they were not yet equipped to lead. They were largely uneducated. They had no experience in public gatherings. The Christian ethos gave them far more freedom than they had experienced before and Paul's instructions agreed with that. He allowed them to learn; he encouraged them to ask questions. In his letters, he honored a number of women who were laboring in the gospel. If Paul's intention in his letters was to create a theology of women, surely he would have devoted many more lines to the subject. What seems more likely, given the context of these verses, is that the mission of these letters was to manage a rapidly growing movement rooted in a particular context. Perhaps a more universal truth to arise from his comments would be, "In all you do, be humble, recognizing your limits."

In this regard, Jesus' words carry much weight. His commands and charges at his resurrection were all gender-neutral: "Go make disciples;" "You will be my witnesses;" "Take up your cross and follow me" (Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8, Matthew 16:24 respectively). These commands and commissions were not spoken to only half an audience in the first century; likewise, they are not spoken to half an audience today.

Contemporary women church planters owe much to those first-century evangelizing women who embraced the whole gospel, believing that Christ had indeed

set them free to live as they were designed. While there were few role models for them, women of the early church boldly and faithfully operated within their spiritual gifts rather than being constrained by role. As with the Church today, the first followers discovered that those not already bound by religious rules were more open to the gospel, regardless of who delivered it (Beckert). Felicity Dale asks a poignant question: "There have been times when everyone knew God did not want women to lead in the church. Could there be a time when everyone knows the opposite is true?" (loc 318). The first-century church proved that when men and women work together to build the Kingdom of God, operating in freedom and in the power and giftedness of the Holy Spirit, the effects of the Fall are reversed and the glories of the gospel are exposed.

Beyond the Biblical Witness

Women in History

Some of history's more interesting Christian movements have been initiated by women. Consider these ten women, some from within the Methodist movement and some from beyond it. Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) was the founder of the Foursquare movement. Myrtle Dorthea Beall (1894-1979) started Bethesda Temple in Detroit. According to the Victoria United Methodist Church website, Barbara Heck (1734-1804) was the designer of John Street Methodist Church in New York and a planter who established congregations in both New York and Canada. Margaret Fell (1614-1702) opened her home to many traveling evangelists, including George Fox, whom she later married and joined as a partner in developing the Quaker tradition (Crosfield). Because she would not take the "oath of obedience" to the King of England, Fell was imprisoned twice. During her first incarceration, she wrote a pamphlet entitled, "Women's Speaking

Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All Such as Speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus And How Women Were the First That Preached the Tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, and Were Sent by Christ's Own Command Before He Ascended to the Father (John 20:17)."

Hannah More (1745-1833), far ahead of her time in her social activism on behalf of girls, was a playwright who taught Methodism and started new schools for the education of girls (Metaxas 67). Mother Teresa (1910-1997) began a social justice movement that spanned the globe, leaving four-thousand sisters as her legacy upon death, along with hundreds of others who served as monks, Fathers, lay missionaries and volunteers (188).

Several husband-wife teams birthed significant movements. Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874), Catherine Booth (1829-1890) and Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911) all capitalized on exceptional partnerships with their husbands (Groothuis 49). Palmer and Booth were both Methodists who defected from that movement to start their own (Dale 625). Catherine Booth was the co-founder with her husband William of the Salvation Army. Palmer is known as the Mother of the Holiness movement, having started a prayer gathering in her home that spawned gatherings like it around the country (Christianity Today website). Palmer was also the founder of New York's Five Points Mission. Smith and her husband were prominent leaders in an interdenominational movement, though she was definitely the more well-recognized and received of the two. Hannah Whitehall Smith went on to become a writer, her most widely read book being *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life,* which sold two million copies initially and is still in publication today.

John Wesley stood at the intersection of Acts 1:8 and Galatians 3:28 and found himself conflicted by the direction his movement should take. Officially, he asked women not to preach or lead men. Unofficially, however, he encouraged them to organize class meetings, teach in those meetings and conduct evangelism. Raised by a strong and outspoken mother, Wesley was never able to embrace a complete ban of women from the pulpit. He would say they ought not preach except by "an extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit'' (Eklund and Phelan 148). Nonetheless, Methodist women found it difficult to be constrained. Long before the more recent vote in the Methodist Church to ordain women as pastors (according to the United Methodist Church website, the Methodist Church gave full clergy rights to women in 1956, when Maud Keister Jensen was ordained an elder), women were actively preaching the gospel and extending the movement called Methodism. In 1787, Wesley blessed Sarah Mallet (1764-1846) to preach as long as "she proclaimed the doctrines and adhered to the disciplines that all Methodist preachers were expected to accept" (Centennial Churches website).

In 1866, Helenor Alter Davisson (1823-1876) became the first woman to be ordained a deacon in the Methodist Protestant Church in America (Centennial). Her journey toward ordination began in 1863 when she was recommended—over some objection—to the Indiana Conference as a candidate for ministry, at which time she was considered fit to preach the gospel "or at least a small work" (Shoemaker 4). Ordained or not, Davisson had already proven herself capable of bearing fruit for the Kingdom. Together with her father, the Reverend John Alter, she traveled by horseback as a circuit rider through Indiana, planting a Methodist Protestant congregation in Alter's Grove (6). A second congregation was planted in the Barkley Township, making the first woman to

be ordained in the American Methodist Church also the first woman to plant a church. It is in the DNA of Methodist women to do a new thing.

What Contemporary Women Experience in Leadership

This project openly deals with the spoken and unspoken challenges faced by women leaders within the church, but clergy women are not alone in their experience. Women in business and politics also experience gender bias yet it seems those arenas have been more open to discussion of the subtle dynamics faced by women. Media coverage in general is an issue for women in politics. The Global Media Monitoring Project explores the ways people are portrayed in all media outlets. Their 2015 report indicates that coverage of women lags significantly behind men. While women make up half the population, overall news coverage of women stands at about 24% (Bloom). The gap is most pronounced in stories about politics and government, meaning that women in politics who depend on the media to carry their message have less of a public voice than their male colleagues (Bloom).

As this project was being researched, two women—Carly Fiorina and Hillary Clinton—were vying for the presidency. During her campaign, Fiorina released a brief autobiography. In the chapter entitled "What Women Want," she begins with a story about a bill making its way through the New York State legislature. The bill was entitled "The Women's Equality Act." It held ten points, nine of which were benign. The tenth, though, would permit abortion up to the ninth month of pregnancy and even allow a non-doctor to perform the procedure. Fiorina learned of this bill while at a campaign event, and found herself incredulous. How could something so extreme be entitled, "The Women's Equality Act"? The spin was infuriating. What made it worse, Fiorina said, was

that with a title like that, activists could "wrap an extreme policy proposal in a benign sounding title and dare … opponents to oppose it. When they do, use it in a thirty-second ad" (Fiorina loc 1341). This story is representative of so many things surrounding the conversation about women's leadership, equality and challenges. The issues are densely layered and often laden with hot-button vocabulary. Misspeak and one quickly begins to sound like a victim, feminist or (if one is male) woman-hater when the thrust of a thought is far from any of those camps. Speak in character and one's voice may not be heard at all. In this environment, women in leadership have discovered the importance of sensitively listening to the "crowd," so as not to move more quickly than the crowd is able to go. One of Margaret Thatcher's weaknesses as a leader was her unwillingness to slow down in order to get her supporters on board. "Prime ministers who do not take their parliamentary supporters along with them on their crusades are more at risk than they realize" (Aitken 398). The same holds true with church planters who do not take their teams along with them. Moving faster than the pace of the people one is leading is remarkably counter-productive. As with so many conversations relating to women, gender and leadership, there is great wisdom in learning to pray and live into this simple prayer: "God, what is mine to do?" (Dale 225)

Sallie Krawchek was the CFO of Citigroup before being fired for an incompatible leadership style. "If you asked me when it happened if I got fired from Citi because I'm a woman, I would have told you absolutely not," says Sallie Krawcheck. "But now I'd say, not exactly." She is referring to something much more subtle, something cultural within the Wall Street culture that has crystalized for her in the years since. "I was invited to leave because I had a fundamentally different business perspective than the powers that

be" (Safian). The accepted leadership style of the financial world was more patriarchal and hierarchical, while Krawchek's style was more collaborative. Because of her experience, Krawchek now sees the value of women mentoring women and wants to see more diversity at higher levels in business for the health of the larger culture. Krawchek believes women add a client-centered perspective that is important (Safian).

Networking is what distinguished Heidi Roizen as a leader in her field. She rose to a level of prominence in the music technology industry, eventually running her own company. She built relationships on a foundation of consistency and performance. "Consistency means that in each interaction with that person, you are consistent in your actions" (McGinn and Tempest). She also made a career of learning what other people need, carefully weighing when to ask favors and of whom. She maintained an extensive network, "in part … by establishing very close ties with people who were the nuclei of other networks so that she could tap into their networks if needed, without having to stay in close contact with each person in those networks individually" (McGinn and Tempest).

Roizen's genius was in understanding the tendency of others to like women leaders they know while disliking those with whom they are not personally familiar. Shannon Kelley discusses an experiment conducted by Columbia Business School professor Francis Flynn on the likability factor between students and their peers:

> "More assertive men were seen as more hirable while more assertive women were seen as less hirable. But when students were more personally familiar with the person they were rating, the 'backlash' vanished. Assertive men and women were seen as equally hirable. And more assertive women were more likely to be hired than their less assertive female peers (just like men)." (Kelley)

Roizen discovered a documented secret of success for women in leadership. By making herself a familiar face and by becoming a no-nonsense business colleague in her field, she was able to knock through a key barrier for women in leadership. Several personal interviews with leading business women have produced similar findings. Linda Berquist, a professional coach who lives in California, advises women to invest time in relationships with others, developing relational authority. Cheryl Holland, president and CEO of Abacus Planning Group in Columbia, South Carolina, notes that her rise as a leader in the world of financial planning was built on a relational style of leadership, not just among clients but also among her staffers. She has built an office culture that emphasizes celebration, making the work environment both attractive and competitive. Holland notes that when she began Abacus, she was the only woman in the field of financial planning in her community and often the only woman in boardrooms into which she was invited. “I had to believe that if I was invited to the table, I deserved a place at the table.” For her, it was an intimidating dynamic, one she overcame by practicing confidence.

Both Holland and Yvonne Davis, a bank executive in Augusta, Georgia, note that their success in business came at a cost. Davis believes she had to work twice as hard as her male colleagues to earn the same recognition. Holland would agree. Lt. Col. Kate Germano discovered the downside of such diligence. As commander of an all-women’s boot camp in the Marines, Germano was committed to preparing women to serve alongside men in combat. She believed women “would not be taken seriously” (Ackerman) if they were not prepared physically, so she was aggressive in her training style. Under her leadership, retention rates for women improved significantly, as did

physical fitness and rifle competency. Nonetheless, Germano was relieved of her duties after complaints about her aggressive approach to leadership. Despite her work ethic and success rates (and the work ethic of women who succeeded under her leadership), she was deemed unfit for duty. The culture of the Marines, it seems, is not yet ready for an influx of women leaders.

The story is often told of a time when Bill Gates was speaking to a group of Saudi Arabian businessmen and political leaders. Most in the room were men (the women, according to custom, were veiled and sat in a separate section). After his speech, Gates took questions, during which time an audience member commented on the rank of his country in the field of technology, asking what Gates thought might lift his country into the top ten globally. "Well, if you're not fully utilizing half the talent in the country," Gates responded, "you're not going to get too close to the top ten" (Dale loc 882). In politics, business, media and military arenas, the culture is not fully making use of its people resources. What women in these circles are learning can instruct the church, which may well be lagging furthest behind. This project uses lessons learned from other disciplines to explore both the barriers facing women who intend to lead by planting churches as well as the ways they can compensate so they can plant successfully and contribute meaningfully to building the Kingdom of God.

A Lag in Progress Among Women Leaders

The obvious find in this research is that women lag behind men in leading in both secular and sacred arenas. What may not be so obvious is that the progress of women toward narrowing that gap has slowed and, in some cases, stalled in recent years. This is just as true in the business sector as in the religious sector. According to the 2013 Catalyst

Census conducted by Fortune Magazine, there was no increase in the number of women in executive positions, with women holding less than 15% of executive roles (Soares et al.).

The news inside the church is no more encouraging. At the writing of this study, Bill Hybels, long-time pastor of Willow Creek Church in Chicago, announced his retirement and named as his replacements a woman as Executive Pastor and a man as Teaching Pastor. This was a remarkable move and the first of its kind among American mega-churches. (In 2018, Hybels was accused of sexual misconduct but in the absence of solid evidence, this author will assume his integrity until otherwise proven.) Hybels has long been a proponent of women in ministry. In a 2015 interview, he reflected on the trajectory of women in church leadership. “Somewhere in the middle 90’s, I think, I said I don’t have to carry that flag anymore. Because the whole church gets it; we are done with that. We’ve crossed over. In the last ten years, I am embarrassed to say, it’s gone the other way. There is a generation of leaders coming up now who are back in the old school of limiting the potential of what women can do; limiting where women can serve; limiting their potential service in the church” (Leach). Hybels is likely referring to a generation of neo-Calvinists led by popular pastor and writer, John Piper. Events like Passion, an annual mega-gathering for young adults (attendance at the 2015 event was 20,000; attendance in 2016 was 40,000—Malhotra, Holowell) features speakers like Piper and Beth Moore, both of whom reject the role of women in church leadership.

Hybels' sense of a decline in women’s leadership within the church is affirmed statistically. According to The National Congregations Study conducted by Duke University, pastors in America are becoming more diverse and older, but since 1998 they

have not become more female. “Despite large percentages of female seminarians and increased numbers of female clergy in some denominations, women lead only a small minority of American congregations. Moreover, we do not detect any increase since 1998 in the overall percentage of congregations led by women” (Duke study). These congregations represent 6% of all people who claim regular attendance in church, reflecting the trend of women to lead in smaller congregations.

According to Matt Price, a pastor in the Church of Nazarene, only 7 percent of pastors in his denomination are women (97 of 1418 pastors in 2014). More notably, only four of those ninety-seven pastors serve in churches with an attendance above one hundred, and only one serves in a church with an attendance greater than 350. According to Dawn Wiggins Hare with the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the number of women clergy in the United Methodist Church has not increased since 2009.

The Duke study addresses factors influencing this lag in female church leadership, including the fact that fewer women were enrolled in seminary in 2014 than in 2002 and not all women pursuing a Masters of Divinity degree will pursue parish ministry. “Consistent with developments in other occupations,” the study concludes, “the trend toward gender equality in American religion is uneven and stalled.” What is happening in the larger church is reflected more starkly in the church planting world. Exponential is a popular and well-attended gathering of planters in America (according to their website, more than three thousand church planting leaders attend their conferences; their website says five thousand attended in 2017), yet there are few women represented in that crowd and even fewer on stage. Kevin Miller notes that there were no plenary speakers at the 2009 gathering and of the eleven who led break-out sessions, almost all were teaching in

the spouses' track. In 2015, there was one female speaker on the main stage. Linda Wurtzbacher, in attendance at that event in 2015, wrote about her enthusiasm over the presence of a female planter as a plenary speaker, even as she acknowledged the loneliness of her own role as a planter. "The journey has been harder than I ever imagined," she writes, "and one of the most difficult parts has been the loneliness I've experienced. Though I've searched, I've found few other women church planters. Worse, I've found minimal support for women in this role." In 2016, Exponential East (held in Orlando, Florida) hosted the first ever break-out session for women in church planting. Hosted by Path1 (a United Methodist initiative) this pre-conference session was designed to offer networking and support for women planters. It was a great start and a strong effort. However, attendance revealed reality: in a room of about fifty women, only four were currently actively working as the primary planters in their context. The rest were the wives of planters, and conversation in the room centered around the lack of "voice" they felt in the process of supporting the new work in which their family was involved.

Dave Olson, church development leader in the Evangelical Covenant Church, explains the absence of women at gatherings like Exponential. "For every one church plant by a mainline denomination, there are nine church plants by an evangelical group, and most evangelical denominations were more open to women's leadership a hundred years ago than they are today" (Miller). Olson's observation supports the idea that church leadership is trending away from and not toward an increase in female pastors, with fewer still accepting the role of planter.

The implications for women intending to plant churches are notable. If the broader trend in business, politics and religion has still not reached critical mass (and in

fact, seems to be stalled in momentum), the climb is steep for women entering leadership positions and steeper still for those initiating a new work. For the foreseeable future, women planters will continue to be an exception and not the rule, making their acceptance, support and training a challenge. Statistics that bear this fact out hint at a number of underlying barriers women will face in their quest to lead new churches, from limited resources and theological biases to gender bias for women in leadership roles. Craig Ott and Gene Wilson have researched the state of church planting around the world. In a chapter of their book on the subject, called "The Personal Life of Church Planters," the authors address some of the more common issues faced by women. "There are difficulties that must be faced" (318) the authors warn, such as role inequities and unrealistic expectations. Rather than arguing against this state of affairs or discussing the inequity of it, this project is designed to acknowledge the current culture so planters can realistically plan for the barriers they will face and design solutions to help them negotiate those barriers. However, in order to accurately assess steps toward success, this study now turns to a reflection on the barriers women face to planting churches in the twenty-first century.

Barriers to Church Planting for Women

The Theological Barrier

While some denominations, like the United Methodist Church, have long affirmed the role of women as leaders in the church, at least 50 percent of the Christian world takes a position against women spiritual leaders, based on scriptural interpretation, as has already been discussed. The argument for female leadership has already been made. The task in this section is to breed some familiarity with the view of those who oppose female

leadership by looking at the theological barrier faced by women who intend to start a new congregation in a community.

For generations, women have received messages like, “Of course you can lead—but only through your influence on your husband.” “Men lead; women follow.” “A strong woman probably has a ‘Jezebel spirit.’” “God using a woman is an exception—like when he spoke through Balaam’s ass … The only time a woman can lead is when God cannot find a man to do the job” (Dale loc 1121). Two fundamental world views—egalitarian and complementarian—have already been discussed, so these will not be revisited except to acknowledge that the complementarian view of gender tends to preclude women from leadership positions in the church. Wayne Grudem, a widely read author in the complementarian camp, writes,

> “We should not make rules that the Bible does not support, and we should not add restrictions to ministry positions when the Bible does not justify these restrictions … This leadership function had implications even for Christian churches in the first century, because Paul gives it as a reason why a woman should not teach or have authority over a man in the assembled congregation.” (Grudem, *Countering the Claims* loc 479)

The argument against female leadership—a barrier for women pastors — begins in the Garden of Eden. Adam was created first, before Eve; therefore, Adam is the leader and Eve’s role is to follow (Grudem loc 520). Further, Eve is referred to as a “helper”—indicating her role as an assistant to the man as he leads. Grudem further argues that men are not only first in line, but better designed to lead. “God gave men, in general, a disposition that is better suited to teaching and governing in the church, a disposition that

inclines more to rational, logical analysis of doctrine and a desire to protect the doctrinal purity of the church, and God gave women, in general, a disposition that inclines more toward a relational, nurturing emphasis that places a higher value on unity and community in the church" (loc 530). Addressing the controversial comments made by Paul in his letter to Timothy, Grudem makes the following distinction:

> Paul did not allow women to teach the Bible or have governing authority over the assembled church. But this text would not prevent women from teaching skills (such as Greek or Hebrew or counseling) or teaching information (such as reporting on missionary activity or giving a personal testimony) to the church. This passage talks about Bible teaching, and therefore it is appropriate to distinguish between teaching the Bible and teaching skills or information. (loc 515)

This is perhaps the most interesting facet of the complementarian position. To grasp it, one must parse through many behaviors to determine which are scripturally in bounds and which are not. While Methodists would likely find this Pharisaical, the practice is alive and well even in Methodist churches, where parishioners who would chafe at the thought of a female senior pastor are almost relieved to have a female associate. It allows them to feel inclusive without the burden of female leadership in that top post.

John Piper is quick to point out that women can lead women and children, just not men (Kumar). In his interview with The Christian Post, he goes so far as to say that women are "more competent than [men] in most ways" and that a wife can be "smarter, more read, and know her Bible better than her husband" (Kumar). And yet, God has called her, according to Piper, to bend toward her husband's leadership in all matters, in

what he terms “the ballet of leadership and submission.” Piper makes it clear that this is not just a matter for the home.

> “We are persuaded that the Bible teaches that only men should be pastors and elders. That is, men should bear primary responsibility for Christlike leadership and teaching in the church. So it is unbiblical, we believe, and therefore detrimental, for women to assume this role.” (Piper and Grudem, “Fifty Questions Answered”)

Discussing what they call “patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church,” Piper and Grudem teach that female leadership leads to gender confusion and tears at the very fabric of human design. Kent Hughes asserts that this has been the majority view of the church for nearly two thousand years and that it is only since 1969 and the rise of the women’s movement that a more progressive view has invaded the church (101).

Depending on one’s perspective, that “progressive view” may or may not have been very successful. The 2012 National Congregations Study, which polls a representative sample of American congregations, reports that 41 percent of Americans believe women should not lead in a religious institution. This ideology skews higher in the South, where 43 percent of all persons disagree with women in religious leadership and for conservative Christians, where 58 percent disagree with female church leadership. Interestingly, the study also took note of the size of congregations responding. The larger the congregation, the less likely the parishioners were to approve of women leaders. Only 32 percent of those attending small churches (with fifty or less in attendance) disagree that women can lead, while 78 percent of those in churches of more

than one-thousand in attendance disagree with female leadership (2012 National Congregations Study).

When churches were polled to discover the gender of their religious leaders, the findings were even more obvious. Nationally, 11.4% of churches are led by women (since 1998, the percentage of women pastors has risen less than one percentage point, according to the 2012 National Congregations Study). However, just 5.1% of churches with a conservative theology are led by women. This raises an interesting side point, which might be termed a theological double-bind. While conservative churches led by women will receive fewer members because of the sheer nature of conservative theology, liberal churches led by women will receive fewer funds. A 2013 MIT study revealed that while conservatives give more to religious institutions, liberals give less to religious organizations and more to secular concerns (Margolis and Sances 3). Conservative or liberal, women are on the losing end of the numbers.

Clearly, women—especially theologically conservative women—face a significant theological barrier to leadership. Even if a female planter is pursuing those who have had a bad experience of church or no experience of church, the person being pursued was likely influenced earlier in life by a staunch anti-female-leader tradition. If not that person, it may be the co-worker, spouse, friend or family member who hears they are attending a church led by a woman. Women pastors in general and church planters in particular must remain grateful for the members of their congregations who often defend their right to lead when members engage in personal conversations with detractors at work and home.

The theological barrier is not going away in this generation. In fact, much as Jesus said, "the poor you will always have with you" (Matt. 26:11), there will always be those who believe the work of women is best done in the home, within the bounds of family life—certainly not in a vocational leadership role within a church. For church planters, this is a particularly difficult truth. While those in existing churches may receive a woman pastor reluctantly, they typically have the staying power to either give her a chance or wait her out. Their loyalty is to the church where their parents' funeral was held, where they were married, where their children were baptized and confirmed. A disagreement over leadership will not run them off immediately, if ever, especially if their theological leanings are more culturally oriented than biblically defended. However, a female church planter does not begin a new work with that kind of loyalty on her side. She begins with a clean slate and those who have not only bought into her vision but also her place as their visionary leader. As for those who disagree with her leadership role, she will likely never meet them. If she does, she may find herself discouraged by the conversation (those recurring conversations are a subtle but very real piece of this barrier). For women who plant, a strong Wesleyan theology of gender combined with a solid sense of Christ-rooted identity is critical to withstand the opposition.

The Perception Barrier

Heidi Roizen is a successful venture capitalist in Silicon Valley. She has built a viable business on several innovative relational practices (a more relational or collaborative style is an often-prominent feature of women's leadership). Roizen is a master networker who made a name for herself in the tech industry. She became more widely known through a case study about her career developed by two Harvard Business

School professors (McGinn and Tempest) who wrote about how Roizen used networking and hospitality to build a positive reputation and successful business.

Sometime later two other professors, Francis Flynn of Columbia Business School and Cameron Anderson of New York University, took the Roizen case study and adapted it for an experiment in gender perceptions. They changed the name "Heidi" in the case study to "Howard," also changing all the pronouns from feminine to masculine. All other language remained exactly the same. Flynn distributed the "Howard" case study to half of a business school class and the "Heidi" case study to the other half of that same class. Students were instructed to read the case study and evaluate Roizen based on several standards. "As you might expect," Flynn later said in an interview,

> the results show that students were much harsher on Heidi than on Howard across the board. Although they think she is just as competent and effective as Howard, they don't like her, they wouldn't hire her, and they wouldn't want to work with her. As gender researchers would predict, this seems to be driven by how much they disliked Heidi's aggressive personality. The more assertive they thought Heidi was, the more harshly they judged her. (Martin; Sandberg loc 505)

Meanwhile, Howard's assertiveness (the same level of assertiveness as Heidi, it should be emphasized, since it was the same study) was seen as a positive thing.

Roizen's case demonstrates an issue at the heart of female leadership. The subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle bias women leaders discern over time has been extraordinarily well researched, documented and dissected (though rarely if ever discussed inside the church or pastoral culture). As Sheryl Sandberg notes, "women pay a likability penalty specifically in arenas considered to be male domains" (loc 3104). In

study after study, results show that women experience resistance when they lead in aggressive or even simply assertive ways, while men experience favor (loc 586). Further, studies show that the more successful a woman appears, the less well-liked she is. “Such trends affect both organizational openness to female leaders and the conceptions women have about themselves as leaders” (Nohria and Khurana 18).

Since the Fall, men and women have been pitted against each other and their stereotypical behaviors have become the norm for measuring likability. When women violate that norm, they pay a price in reputation, because people tend to link assertive behavior with men and find it unattractive in women. “In experiment after experiment, when women achieve in distinctly male arenas, they are seen as competent but are less well liked than equally successful men. By the same token, when women performing traditionally male roles are seen as nice, they are liked but not respected” (Nohria and Khurana 18).

Gallup pollsters first asked Americans in 1953 whether they would prefer a male or female boss. As one might expect, respondents in that decade overwhelmingly preferred a male boss (66%), while only 5% stated a preference for a female boss; the rest said it did not matter to them (Riffkin). In 2014 when the question was asked again, most Americans still preferred a male boss, although the highest number of respondents said they did not care. The percentage of respondents who said they would prefer a female boss has never exceeded 25% (Riffkin). An analysis of dozens of studies of the behavior patterns of men and women in leadership proves the point even more starkly. When their behavior and professional experience was similar or even equal, men were consistently rated as more qualified.

> Even in experimental situations where male and female performance is objectively equal, women are held to higher standards and their competence is rated lower … In another meta-analysis of fifty-eight studies, when women did well on traditionally masculine tasks, the common explanation was hard work; when men did well, the assumed reason was generally competence … Superstars attract special notice and receive higher evaluations than their male counterparts, but women who are just below that level tend to get disproportionately lower evaluations … At the same time, the presence of a few highly regarded women at the top creates the illusion that the glass ceiling has been shattered for everyone else. And when superstars fail or opt out, their departures attract particular notice and reinforce stereotypes about women's lesser capabilities and commitment … (Ely and Rhode 386)

Taken within the context of pastoral leadership and especially church planting, this finding has great relevance. While a woman moving into an existing congregation may not be the clear preference of most parishioners, they may be likely to wait her out. The prevailing mood may be expressed as something like, "Even if we do not like the idea of a woman pastor, we were here when she got here and we will be here when she leaves." A parishioner's connection to the church itself and to its history and community will likely be enough to hold him or her there until the pastor leaves.

However, that mood vanishes when the woman is the founding pastor. In that case, she was there before "they" got there and since there is no history to cling to and no emotional bond with a community, the people who hear about this new church have no compelling reason to push against their gender biases to connect with this new work.

Further, because it is a human tendency to gravitate toward others with whom one has common interests and affinities, strong male leaders are more likely to be attracted to other strong male leaders, leaving women who plant with the challenge of attracting effective leadership teams (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb). In other words, men prefer to relate to other men while failing to take note of the contributions of women. This means that women planters may have to work harder and take longer than their male counterparts to develop an effective team to lead a new work.

This has two effects on women themselves. First, it creates an inner tension. To remain focused and stable can be trying in an environment where one's position as a leader is questioned on multiple levels, and where it takes longer hours and more work to achieve success. "Integrating leadership into one's core identity is particularly challenging for women, who must establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise authority" (Ely Ibarra and Kolb). For many women, that internal pressure can chip away at the sense of call.

Second, it places women in what is often referred to as a "double bind." If a woman acts like a leader (assertive, aggressive), she will be less liked than her male colleagues. If a woman leader behaves in more feminine ways, she is less likely to be respected. This is why Sallie Krawchek became passionate about helping women achieve their potential. She left a lucrative career in executive leadership to become a spokeswoman for women in leadership because she believes these barriers to leadership have far-reaching effects. Having led Citigroup and Merrill Lynch, Krawchek experienced these tensions from inside boardrooms and corner offices and now asserts that a healthier view of gender diversity in the leadership of organizations and a more

aggressive approach toward normalizing female leaders could actually have averted the financial crisis that happened in the early 2000s. “What could have averted the financial crisis [was] more diversity of perspective, of opinion” (Safian). A commitment to breaking down barriers and restoring gender-diverse partnerships has a ripple effect on the larger culture.

John Piper has indicated that the bias against women in leadership is proof that when women lead they are working against their created design—that the very fact of our conscious and subconscious resistance is evidence that female leadership is not natural. Even in secular contexts, the question arises: If leadership practices that are more natural for men are more commonly accepted, the question becomes one of a woman’s capacity to lead (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb). The theological debate is whether this is fact of design or a fact of the fall. This project is predicated on the notion that the suppression of women in leadership positions is an effect of fallen human nature, not created design. Fallen nature causes humans to think hierarchically. Fallen human nature creates competition, suppresses partnership and depletes a woman’s sense of self. Fallen human nature systematically chooses male gender as more valuable than female gender even from the womb. A global study estimates the number of aborted females annually to be at 160 million, resulting in severe gender disparities in some countries. In China, for instance, men outnumber women by as much as thirty-three million (Zacharias). Statistics like this are an important reminder of how deeply woven into the fabric of society gender bias is. It is not only a theological issue; it is a justice issue. It is an issue of how humanity values creation—all of it.

Academic literature reveals the damage that can be caused by embracing a gender-biased line of thought. The Catalyst study notes,

> Through the extensive research on gender differences and similarities, we learn that women and men are actually more similar than different and that there is more variation among women and among men than there is between women and men. By creating false perceptions that women and men are 'planets apart,' however, stereotyping results in women being overlooked for the top jobs—no matter how strong their actual credentials. (9)

The perception barrier can be further separated into two halves: the impact of self-image of women leaders and the impact of others' image of women leaders.

Self-Image: How Women Leaders Perceive Themselves

Much like the proverbial chicken-and-egg question, it is difficult to say which comes first: do many women tend to have low self-esteem because of the negative perceptions of them as leaders, or does their impaired self-image create negative perceptions that disable their leadership capacity? The answer is likely, "Yes." Self-image and outside perception feed on one another. Women who struggle with a negative self-image as they enter leadership and church planting roles will find themselves on a steeper climb than those who do not. Yet, even women who enter leadership and church planting with a healthy self-image will certainly find it threatened as they come face to face with the challenge of leading against a negative tide of opinion—a tide that is often unacknowledged, even unknowingly so. Presumably, women in leadership whose self-image suffers from the biases they face will internalize those feelings and manifest them as self-protectiveness or lower self-esteem (Ely and Rhode 397).

Studies have shown that women tend to respond to success in more modest, less self-affirming ways than men (Belenky loc 464). It begins in the subtlest forms, with women interacting less in mixed groups and being interrupted more often. In her TED talk about women in leadership, Sheryl Sandberg quotes several studies related to the assertiveness of women. The results are shared in stereotypical language, but the data shows that the tendencies are real. In conversation, women tend to downplay their strengths. Answering questions about accomplishments, men will likely exaggerate while women will under-estimate their contributions. On accepting a first job, men are more likely to negotiate higher salaries (57%), while women are much less likely to do so (7%). Does any of this matter to the overall process of leading others? "Boy, it matters a lot," Sandberg says. "Because no one gets to the corner office by sitting on the side, not at the table, and no one gets the promotion if they don't think they deserve their success, or they don't even understand their own success" (TED talk transcript). According to a Harvard Business Review study, leaders excel when they display greater confidence and they are more likely to develop the skills of others on the team (Livingston). That confidence does not tend to be externally motivated but comes from within. Simply put, superior leaders think more highly of themselves and treat others with more respect as a result. One's self-perspective becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A view of oneself as unable to attain success for whatever reason (whether because of a leader's own inadequacies or the perception that others view that leader as inadequate) is self-limiting. This may seem an obvious statement, but as a dynamic of women's leadership—particularly in the world of church planting—it is a woefully under-processed factor.

> More than 25 years ago the social psychologist Faye Crosby stumbled on a surprising phenomenon: Most women are unaware of having personally been victims of gender discrimination and deny it even when it is objectively true and they see that women in general experience it. (Ely Ibarra and Kolb)

If women planters and leaders are experiencing discrimination without an awareness of its presence, one must assume they are internalizing its negative effects, creating self-image issues that will in turn affect the Body of Christ. To leave them uninformed under the guise of not wanting to offend is naive and unkind at best and career-stunting and even Kingdom-thwarting at worst. Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb note that when women openly voice the barriers present to their leadership potential, they are better able to negotiate those barriers and lead past them so they can plant successfully ("Women Rising"). "They feel empowered, not victimized, because they can take action to counter those effects. They can put themselves forward for leadership roles when they are qualified but have been overlooked. They can seek out sponsors and others to support and develop them in those roles" (Ely Ibarra and Kolb).

G. Breakwell, in her work on the way dominant representations of gender may work to threaten girls' identities, argues that social constructs feed into our sense of identity (6.1). For instance, when a male pastor walks into a room and announces to strangers what his vocation is, he likely expects to be applauded, certainly in the South. When a female pastor walks into a room and announces her vocation, she expects to be questioned if not verbally, then certainly in non-verbal cues. She sets aside her own strong opinions when others in the room make gender-related comments about marriage, pastoral or leadership roles, or women in the workplace. She takes on a sympathetic and

even advocating tone when discussing the wives of other pastors who do not work outside the home. She learns an ability to laugh when others laugh and to be patient with others' questions (anecdotally, this author has ongoing conversations with a niece whose pastors have challenged her about her acceptance of her aunt in pastoral leadership; navigating that conversation so that no relationships are damaged in the process is challenging), but those constant hits affect her at a subconscious level and create a building argument against the very identity she has embraced with her calling. It creates a sense of self-doubt that may translate in the pulpit and certainly in leadership moments (Ashforth and Kreiner 95). She finds herself "apologizing her way into the room," to quote Dr. Phil Schroeder, Director of Church Planting for the United Methodist Church in North Georgia.

Working these angles in public has a definite effect on the private development of identity. Carol Gilligan explains that this effect can be heard even in the physical voice. A voice connected with positive and affirming thoughts differs from one that blocks those thoughts (loc 160). Self-image determines influence because it drives presentation. Self-presentation plays a huge role in the influence leaders have over others. When the sense of self is weak or when identity is presented in an uncertain or less confident voice, that translates into effectiveness as a leader and planter. R.M. Arkin calls it "self-handicapping" (333). By contrast, a study done in 2001 by LeadLabs demonstrated that women who intentionally improved self-confidence levels became more effective in their careers. For the women in the study, it became an issue of reframing challenges as opportunities so as to tackle them from a place of mental strength. The pay-off is a better self-presentation. Women who portray themselves as confident, with high expectations of

themselves, tend to come off as more competent. Women who are not willing to "self-promote" will lose traction on the success track. "The big hurdle for women is not performance but how they are perceived" (Ashforth and Kreiner 413). Ashforth and Kreiner expand on this theory in their work on identity issues, noting that people are prone to seeing themselves as others see them, and it affects their sense of self-esteem (413). Being affirmed helps; being questioned hurts not only a person's sense of self but their ability to lead. That thought process tends to make women—anyone—less assertive, less confident, and less attractive as a leader and more prone to a defensive posture. A person with a weakened sense of identity will create a defense that puts others at odds. Once a person become defensive, she becomes self-deceptive. She is no longer able to see the world as it is. She becomes self-justifying and her view of reality becomes distorted (Arbinger Institute loc 1174). When she begins to see herself as a victim—unheard and unappreciated—she betrays her own reality (loc 1110). That self-justifying image has the opposite of its intended effect. The antidote for one female leader was a willingness to become honest with herself. "I had to learn to trust my judgment and recognize that I am responsible for creating my own success" (Hadary and Henderson loc 633). A major factor in helping women move beyond this cycle of negative critique and negative self-image is embracing one's own leadership style. As has already been noted, women tend to be judged negatively (by both genders) when they use a more assertive leadership style (Brown 188).

Resistance to the role of women in church leadership takes its toll and what is surely true of women in general is particularly true of female church planters as every habit and leadership decision is seen through a less sympathetic lens. How women

respond to this dynamic makes a difference. Assuming a self-defensive posture will result in a reluctance to take risks (Atkinson 365), even as it projects a negative light over her ministry. Women without a strong sense of self or lacking a strong sense of call either to parish ministry or church planting will be much less likely to take the risk of a church planting venture or to stay with it if there is sufficient pressure in the process.

The Double Bind: How Others Perceive Women Leaders

Add to this internal pressure the external pressure of a double standard and it is remarkable that many women succeed, despite the odds. As already noted, the presence of a bias in how leaders ought to act has been well-documented. This is the double bind for women: When a woman acts in ways consistent with leadership (strong personality, assertive behavior, aggressive decision-making), she is less likely to be liked than her male counterparts. When she acts in ways consistent with her gender (softer tone of voice, more feminine behavior, less aggressive in meetings), she is less likely to be respected as a leader. In either direction, women leaders face both a bias and a challenge because the larger culture expects women to act like women and men to act like men. “In most cultures masculinity and leadership are closely linked: The ideal leader, like the ideal man, is decisive, assertive, and independent. In contrast, women are expected to be nice, care-taking, and unselfish. The mismatch between conventionally feminine qualities and the qualities thought necessary for leadership puts female leaders in a double bind” (Ely Ibarra and Kolb). This leaves women with a personality problem to solve: either allow themselves to be true to their tendencies as leaders, risking the respect and enjoyment of their colleagues, or remain true to gender stereotypes and place at risk their potential as leaders.

In a book tellingly entitled *Impossible Selves*, Ibarra and Petriglieri put into sharp relief the challenge women face. “Because women are evaluated on their qualities as professionals and as women, they may be sanctioned for either ‘acting like men,’ or conforming too closely to norms for female behavior—being ‘too timid’ or ‘lacking presence with clients’” (19). Many of the women examined by these authors chose to adopt a neutral position which manifested as a self-protective stance. As the title of the study suggests, they found it impossible to strike a balance that would allow them to please everyone around them while being true to themselves. A Catalyst report also tellingly entitled (“The Double Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned If You Do, Doomed If You Don’t”) documented this double standard among senior executives in both America and Europe (5). Among high-level business leaders, more stereotypically “feminine” women are often “liked but not respected … judged too soft, emotional, and unassertive to make tough calls” and do not project the kind of presence usually required for positions of authority (Ely and Rhode 385).

According to the Catalyst report, an underlying bias against the female personality in leadership creates a series of predicaments for women to negotiate (37):

- Predicament 1: Women leaders are seen as being either “too soft” or too aggressive.
- Predicament 2: Women must work harder to reach the same level of accomplishment as their male colleagues. Women find that accomplishments are also fleeting; their competency must be proven over and over again.
- Predicament 3: Women must choose between being seen as competent or being liked. Unfortunately, many women have an image of themselves that has “led to a

discomfort with concepts of power and authority" (Ineson 130) making it easier for them to choose likability over competence.

The impact of these predicaments is often underestimated and possibly ignored in Wesleyan circles. Perhaps the sense among pastors in denominations that ordain women is that the issue has been resolved theologically and therefore is in no need of further debate. This mindset ignores the fact that the theological barrier is just one among several women leaders face. Even when women lead effectively in distinctively "female" styles (more collaborative, team-based approaches), those styles are seen as the exception and not the norm of good leadership (Catalyst 9). To the extent that men continue to be equated with behaviors typical of qualified leadership, and to the extent that both men and women naturally default to masculine leadership styles as the preference, and to the extent that women continue to work harder to achieve the same goals as their male counterparts, the issue remains wide open for acknowledgment, conversation and prayer.

What happens when women embrace a call to lead? Based on a host of studies and narratives, they will pay a cost for that privilege (Falbo, Hazen and Linimon 147-48). Women church planters may pay an even higher cost, since they will have the added responsibility of building allegiance to a vision as they gather a community of faith not already familiar with them. The cost to female leadership is less effectiveness at attaining the same goals as male counterparts, while doing the same work. The real challenge for denominational leaders and other financial backers becomes another chicken-and-egg question: In denominations committed to a Wesleyan interpretation of the Bible, women must be given the necessary funds and resources to succeed. When funds follow a predetermined definition of success, the assumption is that the denominational

commitment is not to theology but to pragmatism. This leads to yet another barrier for women planters, namely the lack of resources to support their call.

The Resource Barrier

On one hand, the lack of resources is understandable. There are no reliable statistics on the percentage of women among church planters (a written query of the Barna Group received this response: "Sorry, no data in our recent study. But on average, 10% of Protestant churches are led by females."), but a very unofficial estimate offered by Dr. Ed Stetzer—formerly of LifeWay Research and currently the Billy Graham Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism at Wheaton College and Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center (formerly of LifeWay Research) is less than five 5 percent. Stetzer states that he has not been able to find a firm number for women planters, though church planting in the United States was his research specialty until his move to the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College (where he continues the work of missions and evangelism training and research). He believes that even among egalitarian denominations and networks, the number is less than 5 percent, and across the theological board it would be less still. Coaches, mentors, trainers and writers go where the market dictates, and women who make up a possible 3 to 5 percent of the total do not dictate the church planting market. Materials and training opportunities are geared toward the majority audience.

The resource barrier presents its own kind of double bind. Because women may not be able to keep pace with rapid-growth models, they may be seen as less successful than their male counterparts when they do not meet benchmarks in targeted timeframes. In the United Methodist system in which this writer works (North Georgia Conference),

benchmarks for men and women are the same. Because they are measured by the same benchmarks, they are also rewarded by those benchmarks. In other words, if women do not produce church growth at the same rate as their male colleagues, available denominational funds will default to the faster growing churches. Women are measured by the same yardstick and also punished by that yardstick.

Another challenge is attached to resources available to women planters. Schroeder notes that theologically conservative women will attract fewer adult members into their congregation, while theologically liberal women will attract fewer dollars. The reasons are evident. Conservatives are less likely to approve of women in church leadership, making the pool of available members smaller. Liberals are less likely to give to churches. Either way, women will have fewer dollars at their disposal with which to work in building a congregation.

In their study of the challenges faced by women in leadership, Robin Ely and Deborah Rhode note that women often have difficulty accessing the same information as their male colleagues (380). Men in general have greater access to inner circles of support. "Women in traditionally male-dominated settings often have difficulty breaking into the 'old boys' loop of advice and professional development opportunities" (380). Due to family constructs, women may have less access to after-hours conversations and trips; due to human nature, men may simply prefer to dialogue with other men (Ely Ibarra and Kolb).

A gap in resources is also found in the paucity of church planting networks that embrace the role of women in leadership. Many of the more successful planting networks are geared toward men. Acts 29 network has a significant body of training and support,

all of which is geared toward men (Parsons), as is the Summit Network, the Southern Baptist Convention and The Gospel Coalition, to name a few of the more active networks. A lack of networks for women who plant means a lack of moral and emotional support in one of the most challenging tracks of ministry. Women leaders note the lack of strong connections with those ahead of them on the path as being a significant barrier. As Antoinette Alvarado discovered in her dissertation work (*My Sister's Keeper*), women who make use of female mentors have a greater ability to succeed as leaders. Women need women leaders who can help them wade through the options to find the leadership identity framework out of which they can successfully lead at each stage (Catalyst; Ely Ibarra and Kolb 21; Sinek 171). Mentors can also help women negotiate time-management issues by helping them identify their personal pace and rhythm (Ely and Rhode 381; Catalyst). This lopsided supply of training and resources results in a lopsided supply of coaches, mentors and role models. "Aspiring leaders need role models whose styles and behaviors they can experiment with and evaluate according to their own standards and others' reactions. Fewer female leaders means fewer role models and can suggest to young would-be leaders that being a woman is a liability" (Ely Ibarra and Kolb).

The Benchmark Barrier

Women planters facing the same benchmarks as their male counterparts will have to work harder in order to reach those goals within specified time frames as they navigate past multiple other barriers. If benchmarks are aggressively geared toward a "rapid growth" model, and if expectations are set based on the standards of a male-dominated culture, women will not be able to compete for limited resources. About forty percent of

women in business and political leadership believe they have to work harder or more than their male colleagues (Parker 31). Further, women report having to achieve higher standards and develop a more tailored set of management skills in order to compete with men (Parker 34). What is true in the secular world is surely true in a world where the barriers are more obvious. Not surprisingly, men and women have different views about the barriers facing women leaders. "About half of women (52%) say a major reason more women are not in top leadership positions in business is that women are held to higher standards and have to do more to prove themselves; one-third of men share this view" (Parker 34-35). This is a significant factor for women planters who seek the support of those in leadership over them, who will often (by sheer statistical probability) be male. A development director, district superintendent or even board chair who does not see the bias will be less likely to be supportive of conversations about how to compensate for those biases. Thus, benchmarks remain unequal by virtue of being the same across the board.

The Pastoral Care Barrier

In a 2015 blog post, Carey Nieuwhof makes the argument that a pastor whose time and attention is focused on congregational care will lack sufficient time, resources or perspective to create church growth. This becomes a factor for women to acknowledge and negotiate, since women in general have a more nurturing, connected approach to relationship. Carol Gilligan notes that women tend to define themselves in terms of their relationships, "but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" (loc 335). This is in contrast to typical ways men relate, which is defined not by connection but by separation. Psychological language tends to discuss men and women as disconnected or connected

learners and relaters, respectively (Gilligan 523). For men and women, intimacy is approached differently. Men tend to find identity first, before intimacy. For women, identity and intimacy happen simultaneously. Women tend to know themselves in relationship with others (Gilligan 598). Thus, while women are typically better at relational skills, this may be equated less as "pastoral care" and more generally as "who women are"—mothers, care-givers, nurturers. Pastoral care becomes the expectation rather than a piece of the professional puzzle. Further, for women themselves, nurture is not only their own expectation, but something that ought to be carried out in selfless ways (Belenky loc 808).

How does this affect the growth of a congregation? Nieuwhof says pastoral care "simply doesn't scale … When the pastor has to visit every sick person, do every wedding and funeral and make regular house calls, attend every meeting, and lead every Bible study or group, he or she becomes incapable of doing almost anything else" (Nieuwhof). And yet ironically, in a stressful environment like church planting, those personal connections may create the kind of good feelings that tend to feed her natural tendencies. Simon Sinek writes, "Our brains are wired to release oxytocin when in the presence of our tribe and cortisol, the chemical that produces the feeling of anxiety, when we feel vulnerable and alone" (loc 918). A preference for pastoral care is perpetuated by creating a pleasant mental environment in women who are already wired for care.

However, churches cannot sustain growth with a pastor-centered model. The Duke University study discusses the complications that result from the shifting needs as congregations grow. People in different-sized congregations have different expectations

of staff. What people expect from clergy in general in terms of relational contact and pastoral care, they will likely expect from women, and more intently. Especially in a church plant, she is often seen not as the professional but as the mother, and as the mother she will be held to certain standards of "ideal motherhood" (Ineson 124). When she does not live up to that image, she will be the focus of discouragement. Whether this ought to be the case or not is not the issue. "Often stereotypes and preconceptions are more powerful than facts in shaping views and influencing actions" (122).

The Biological Barrier

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the seasons of life for women are markedly different than for men. From child-bearing years to midlife, women experience distinctive seasons that may present challenges. This factor has been debated and discussed in volume after volume so the question of whether it ought to be is not a question for this study. The assumption here is that it simply *is*, and is something women will need to acknowledge if they want to lead past it.

Biology happens on two levels—physical and cultural. On the physical plane, women will have to make more choices than men about the time they need away from work to give birth and raise children. Because so much has been written about this elsewhere, it will not be explored in depth here, except to acknowledge that in church planting, age matters. Planters tend to attract the age of person they currently are. Women who choose to wait until later years to step into ministry and planting will discover more resistance in attracting a younger generation of congregants. They must also navigate biological challenges present during their middle years. "The constant change of hormone levels during this time can have a troubling effect on emotions ... leaving some women to

feel irritable and even depressed" (Bouchez), reports the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Navigating this season of life while carrying on the work of developing a church is a challenge specific to women and one to be negotiated honestly.

On the cultural side of the equation is the dual role many women play in both the home and workplace. "Women in paid employment generally spend more hours per day on household duties than do their male counterparts" (Cheung and Halpern 182). Given that there are only twenty-four hours in anyone's day, that means less time available for the work of planting and often more stress. Women are more likely to experience guilt for time spent away from home and children, creating another level of stress. Sheryl Sandberg's TED talk reflects on the reasons why so few women make it into higher levels of leadership. "The data shows … if a woman and a man work full-time and have a child, the woman does twice the amount of housework the man does, and the woman does three times the amount of childcare the man does."

Research Design Literature

The next step in this project developed a tool for testing the barriers discovered in the literature review. An in-depth written survey and a more generalized set of oral interview questions allowed the researcher to test the theory that these barriers do in fact exist in the real world of church planting, and are factors in the planter's ability to plant a successful church. The tools were also a means of better understanding what strategies women in the field have relied on to navigate past these barriers. The challenge was to design the questions that revealed the planter's experience without "coaching" responses that corroborated the theories.

Research into the development of an appropriate survey tool relied heavily on Tim Sensing's book, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Sensing describes fourteen kinds of questions and the information each is designed to evoke (loc 2362). Judith Bell's book, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers*, offered another option for crafting questions. Bell counseled using questions with limited input opportunity (short answers) so as to make collating the data less complicated. When data can more easily be collated into more generalized categories, it can then better serve the process of developing follow-up questions during person-to-person interviews (loc 3287). Bell also advised doing complete research before developing the survey. By doing so, the survey would mirror categories already uncovered in the literature review, making coding of data a more organic process. John Creswell's *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* assisted in defining this as a mixed methods project, and especially with understanding the difference between qualitative and quantitative results.

An online Google.docs survey tutorial helped in understanding the mechanics of building a survey. The assistance of a professional educator certified in the use and analysis of Google.docs surveys was instrumental in interpreting the graphs generated by the online program.

To interpret the survey results, Sensing's reference to the work of Mary Moschella was useful. Moschella suggests three ways to read the data: a literal reading, an interpretive reading and a reflexive reading (Sensing 4642). Reading the data through these three distinct lenses enabled me to generate themes, categories and patterns that made sense of many pages of quotes and ratings (Sensing 4664).

Moschella's description of a reflexive reading led to a fascinating find. By moving beyond the literal and interpretive phases to this less concrete phase of data analysis, an unspoken message emerged—namely, that planters tend to "sell" their work before they feel safe enough to share their reality. An initial reading of the data seemed at odds with the ample research uncovered in the literature review, which in turn left me with a question on whether the literature review missed the mark in identifying potential barriers faced by women planters, or if the women were less than forthcoming in their responses. Sensing helped interpret that "silence" in the survey data by describing this common phenomenon and demonstrating how to use reflexive reading and further interviews to break through to the message beneath the silence. "A cover story is what is acceptable to society. We often silence the stories we believe would be unacceptable even when they are deemed more real or authentic to our experiences. We discount what experience teaches and tell the cover stories instead" (Sensing 4729). This phenomenon emerged in this study, making the mixed method of both surveys and personal interviews a critical link in telling the whole story. My approach to uncovering the silences began with a conversation with another researcher (per Moschella's teaching), who advised focusing on the oral interviews to round out the whole story. Those conversations confirmed what was suspected: an optimism bias or "cover story" endemic among women planters (and perhaps even among planters in general). That finding was most instructive in the development of the three modules described in Chapters 4 and 5. What was initially intuited was now quantitatively proven: In order for women to optimize their opportunities without the barrier of optimism bias, they need the kind of education that allows them to give voice to their reality so they can lead past the barriers they face.

Summary of Literature

The picture that emerged from the literature review is not particularly attractive for women. There seems to be a fundamental dissonance between women's ways of leading and the dynamics present in the church planting culture. Planting in this environment is not particularly easy, nor always enjoyable. This project argues that the problem is not the fact that women plant, but the fact that the church planting culture has yet to develop tools necessary to help women lead past these common barriers. In other words, the problem is not the barriers; the problem is in the lack of understanding around the possibilities.

Taking a Wesleyan perspective, the assumption is that women are called to lead, preach and plant churches in agreement with Christ's call to make disciples. Through the literature review, six common or natural barriers to effectiveness for women pursuing that call were identified: Theology, Perception, Resources, Benchmarks, Pastoral Care, and Biology. Extrapolating from the information gleaned, seven practical themes emerged that invited questions for a survey. These themes are described briefly as follows:

Authority

The question of authority is a good starting point for the survey. When a United Methodist pastor is ordained, the bishop lays hands on her and charges her to "take authority as an elder." A survey sent to active solo female church planters began with how women understand their role as a leader, and what authority looks like to them. What leadership training have they received (not to plant a church, specifically, but to lead people)? What is their definition of a leader? How have they educated themselves as leaders and how have they educated their community about female leadership? Do they

see themselves as influencers (Orazi et al.)? Have they taken authority? Are there experiences in their church planting story of having their authority questioned or threatened? What might have helped them move more graciously past those moments?

Identity

The survey also explored the planter's sense of self, how they entered into the work, and how self-esteem impacts their ability to lead. Have they fully embraced their own sense of call to lead as a pastor? Have they been concerned with self-presentation, with finding their leadership "voice," with taking authority over areas of leadership that are less familiar to them? "What are the relational and social processes involved in coming to see oneself, and being seen by others, as a leader or a follower" (DeRue and Ashford 627; Ely and Rhode 400)? How have women internalized the stresses of planting? Where have they felt their sense of self-worth threatened? In what conversations have they felt stifled? To what tables have they been invited, and what tables have been denied to them? What strategies have helped them reach beyond themselves to embrace the larger mission of the church?

Team-based leadership style

Because women in general are connected learners and value building relationships and working collaboratively, the survey addressed the planter's use of team-building in church development (Hadary and Henderson 379; Lencioni loc 173; Belenky loc 1557). How have women been encouraged to operate out of a more natural style of leadership? Where have they felt stifled? What leadership traits have they adopted that are not working for them? Which ones are? How have they used collaborative leadership to their advantage? In what areas have they been confused for "mother" rather than "team

leader"? What strategies and resources have they used to raise up the teams they lead? How have they used staff resources and what strategies have they employed to raise up their staff team?

Leadership mentors and coaches

Because mentors are geared toward developing leadership capacity (not just training in the nuts-and-bolts of church development), women need strong mentors, not just coaches in the art of planting. Who is speaking into the life of the planter, beyond denominational leaders and friends? Who is taking time to ask accountability questions? Who is recommending books and resources for further professional development? Who is praying for the planter and pouring into them at both a personal and vocational level? Women need to be able to speak openly with someone about the dynamics they face even as they are made aware of the subtler roadblocks that are rarely (if ever) voiced in more traditional male-oriented (or generated) training opportunities. What has been the planter's coaching experience? Was she able to find a female mentor who was effective at coaching her in a distinctively feminine style of leadership? Did her coach understand the barriers she faced? Was the coach honest about the issues and creative in finding solutions? In what areas of resource development was the planter frustrated? Did she find sponsors willing to speak on her behalf when she needed support? Did she develop the support of those beyond her church community? If so, how?

Networking

Heidi Roizen's case study is an example of the unspoken biases against female leadership; her success story is an example of how one woman used a connected style of leadership to build networks that overcame the barriers. Roizen learned how to build

relationships to help others put a face to her qualifications as a businesswoman, understanding that familiarity breeds likability and respect (Kelley). A section of the survey included how networking (or the lack of it) affected the success of the planter. How did networking help the planter? How formal was the process of networking? In what ways was she intentional about building a wider net, and how did she employ her existing relationships to build new ones? How did she use mission to build relationships (as in the case of Roizen) and how did she prepare for personal meetings with those who might be strong connections—as team members, congregation members or outside supporters?

Balance

Finally, women planters must recognize that while they might have to work harder to make success happen in their context, there is also a limit to their time and energy. If a woman wants to succeed as a planter, she must value time with family and time to refuel so she does not burn out before the new church plant takes root. The point of planting is not just to succeed, but to enjoy the work God has given (Rhimes; Cheung 191). On a more pragmatic note, a failure to pace oneself realistically will lead to burning out before the project has time to take root. What personal boundaries have women planters set that have helped them sustain the process? How have they negotiated competing demands so that those at home and those in their faith communities received a positive and healthy example from them of discipleship and apostleship? What strategies have helped them avoid burn-out? What lessons have been learned?

Sheryl Sandberg ends her book on women in leadership by acknowledging that women do indeed have to work the angles in order to succeed. The fact that women have

to negotiate biases and self-doubt is a sign that they live on this side of Genesis 3. However, their very willingness to push against those barriers or learn to navigate past them will help them back across that line toward their created design even as they help the world move toward its completion, when all things will be made new again. Sandberg wisely and honestly gives this advice to women who want to be part of that great Kingdom-bringing work:

> I understand the paradox of advising women to change the world by adhering to biased-based rules and expectations. I understand it is not a perfect answer but a means to a desirable end. It is also true, as any good negotiator knows, that having a better understanding of the other side leads to a superior outcome … My hope of course is that we won't have to play by these archaic rules forever and that eventually we can all just be ourselves. (Sandberg loc 714, 729)

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to explore the barriers faced by women church planters in the United States to discover which barriers compromise effectiveness and to identify ways women church planters can learn to lead past them effectively. The goal was to effectively answer these questions: 1) What natural barriers do women who plant new churches in the United States face? 2) What barriers compromise effectiveness and how can women church planters lead past the barriers they encounter? 3) Based on these results, what best practices (training and support) will offer the next generation of female church planters the best opportunity for effective ministry?

The barriers discovered in the literature review phase became the foundation of a seventy-five-question survey offered to women planters, followed by person-to-person conversations with ten respondents. Given the lack of relevant literature directly addressing the needs and challenges facing women planters, the heart of the research for this project depended on the women themselves, and on conversations with them through online surveys and person-to-person interviews with those currently engaged in a church planting project. To give fullest exposure to their work, conversations were also had with coaches, church development leaders, and congregants engaged in ministry alongside women planters. Through these discussions, the expectation was that themes would emerge, leading to the development of best practices for women seeking to successfully plant new works. The end-goal of the project was to shape those practices into a set of

recommendations to be used in the training and equipping of solid spiritual entrepreneurs called to fruitful ministry. This chapter details the layers of research proposed.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The plan for this project was to produce a mix of interactions with women church planters—including online surveys sent to the widest audience possible, phone interviews conducted with a smaller selection of survey participants, and a final focus group interview with denominational leaders—in order to gain a more accurate read on the climate in which women plan, pursue and pastor new churches. From this research, themes emerged, assumptions were made, and a teaching module was developed to place better tools and training into the hands of women called to the ministry of church planting. The purpose of this research and development was to provide women with better resources so they can fully participate in the work of welcoming and advancing the Kingdom of God.

Type of Research

This project was a pre-intervention, mixed-methods study. Using literature research, surveys, telephone interviews, and focus groups, I sought to bring into focus the experience of women who pastor new works, both from their perspective and from the perspective of those who help them lead. The goal was not to justify the leadership of women (the assumption leading into this project is that women are called and gifted to lead) but to acknowledge the barriers they face and discern how best to help women lead beyond those barriers so they can successfully plant churches.

Research Questions

For this project, several instruments were developed: an online survey and a set of phone interview questions for pastors; and focus group questions for church development leaders. The questions in each of these instruments were designed to answer the overarching research questions for the project; these instruments also reflected the findings from the literature review.

Preliminary questions were designed to establish history and context for each church planter. Questions 1-8 in the online survey helped to identify the planter's setting and were used for classification purposes during data analysis. Questions 9 and 64 of the online survey established the pastor's own perception of whether she personally experienced the barriers discussed in the research and literature review phase of this project. Question 13 was an important question that allowed the pastor herself to articulate the barriers (personal or professional pressures) she has experienced as a ministry leader. All other questions in the instruments were designed to answer the three main research questions.

Research Question 1: What common barriers are faced by women who plant new churches in the United States?

This question addressed the first third of the purpose statement: "The purpose of this project was to explore the barriers faced by women church planters in the United States … " During the literature review, common barriers were identified and described. Those perceived barriers became the basis for developing the online survey, the primary instrument for addressing this question.

Chapter 2 of this project discussed six documented barriers discovered in the research phase: theological barrier, perception barrier, resource barrier, benchmark barrier, pastoral care barrier and biological barrier. Questions 10-56 addressed these barriers as follows:

Several sections of the online survey addressed the theological barrier. Questions 4-6 established from the pastor's own point of view the theological camp in which she most naturally placed herself. Questions 10-12 established the perception she had of the theological opinions of others in relation to her place as a ministry leader. Questions 17-18 pointed toward theological undertones in the pastor's perception of how she was treated by others compared with her male colleagues. Questions 44-45 sought to establish the authority others conferred on the planter as a ministry leader.

Questions 13-18 addressed the perception barrier, as the pastor reflected on her leadership style as it compared that of male colleagues. Question 11 nuanced this barrier by asking about the perceptions of the church members' family members, co-workers or others who disagreed with the notion of women in ministry leadership. Question 26 nuanced the perceptions of others in providing the pastor opportunities to advance in ministry when she had the introduction of a male colleague as opposed to when she did not. Questions 46-47 addressed the planter's own perception of herself and its impact on her ability to lead confidently. In addition, questions 8-9 of the planter's phone interview question set allowed the planter to discuss her own perception of how her gender affected the growth of her ministry. The phone interview questions for the planter took a more open-ended approach to information-gathering, allowing the planter to fill in gaps of information in a narrative way. Questions 3-5 addressed more generally her perception of

ministry challenges and their effect on her faith, marriage and sense of self. Questions 6-9 also addressed how a pastor perceives how others viewed her role. Question 5 of the denominational leader focus group question set allowed participants to explore their personal perceptions of women planters.

Questions 19-32 addressed the resource barrier. These questions touched on the perceived availability and use of coaches, mentors, "door openers" (male colleagues who helped to advance the opportunities of women by advocating on their behalf) and financial provision—resources that can make or break a ministry. Questions 10-11 of the phone interview question set also allowed the planter to voice areas of concern where resource accessibility is concerned.

Questions 33-43 addressed the benchmark barrier. These questions explored the planter's sense of success based on expectations of supervisors, the congregation and her own hopes for the ministry. Questions 52-53 also fed into this perceived barrier, inquiring about the number of hours per week a planter worked to achieve her ministry goals.

Questions 44-49 addressed the pastoral care barrier through questions that distinguished between the gift of nurturing and the conferral of leadership authority. Because pastoral care may be considered a more common gift set in women, women can be tempted to lean to this side of ministry to the neglect of building teams, strategies and systems. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this tendency can stifle the growth of a church. These questions explored the pastor's tendency to lean into this temptation. Questions 15-16 also gave opportunity to acknowledge any tendency a planter might have to lead pastorally rather than administratively. Question 53 hinted at the toll a ministry built on

pastoral care can take as a church grows, there being only so many hours in a day and so many people with whom one can personally connect.

The biological barrier was addressed in questions 50-52 and 55-56. Questions addressed issues such as the stage of life in which the planter was when she started the church (young mother, middle age, etc.), as well as the effect of middle life on a woman's overall outlook and how that affected her perception of ministry. Questions 57-60 addressed the physical health of the planter and how she coped with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual preparedness for leadership.

RQ #2. What barriers compromise effectiveness and how can women church planters lead past the barriers they encounter?

This question addressed the middle third of the purpose statement: "… to discover which barriers compromise effectiveness …" The instruments used to address this question were the phone and in-person interviews as well as the denominational leader focus group. Some online survey questions also helped to capture the spirit of this question. Questions 57-63 of the survey were designed to place the current self-perceived physical, mental and spiritual state of the pastor, in order to best understand if she is indeed experiencing a compromised ministry or quality of life due to barriers identified by other questions. Questions 7 and 11 of the phone interview allowed the planter to share more directly the challenges faced as a leader pursuing church growth. Questions 3, 6 and 7 of the leader focus group question set addressed from the supervisory perspective the challenges women faced as planters. Questions 8 and 9 gave leaders the opportunity to explore ways women can effectively lead past the barriers they faced.

RQ #3. Based on these results, what best practices (training and support) will offer the next generation of female church planters the best opportunity for effective ministry?

This question addressed the final third of the purpose statement: "… how women can learn to lead past [the barriers] so they can plant effectively." All three instruments—survey, interviews and focus groups—helped to address this question. Question 43 of the survey addressed the issue of coaching to set reasonable expectations for growth. Questions 12-13 of the planter phone interview question set were important questions that gave the planter opportunity to reflect on the thoughts and insights gained from completing the online survey. The hope was that by voicing specific issues and challenges faced by women planters, the survey would inspire better self-perception and perhaps even create concrete ideas for advancing ministry goals. Question 14 allowed the planter to inquire about this study and ways she might benefit from the findings. Questions 8-9 of the leader focus group question set also allowed for exploring best practices and resource development for women planters from the perspective of those most capable of producing such training and support.

Ministry Contexts

The subjects for this study were a field of women planters whose ministries span the country and cut across socio-economic lines; therefore, the ministry contexts varied widely. From United Methodist churches planted under the guidance and resourcing of mother churches to those planted in living rooms as parachute drops, the church settings were diverse, giving greater opportunity to discover what strategies and contexts were more effective for women called to this work of planting.

Diversity also allowed me to measure the impact on success for women of diverse theological persuasions. Did a more progressive context help not only to increase respect for a woman's leadership, but also her self-perception as a leader? Did women planters in the cultural south (a term connoting areas where a more conservative or traditional view of women is prominent, as opposed to southern, urban cities like Atlanta or Orlando where a much different ethos pervades the culture) fare differently than women on the west coast? How did the pervading political atmosphere at the time of this research affect views about women leaders? In a season when public commentary about perceptions of women is rampant, were women planters affected by the rhetoric? This research occurred in the midst of the 2016 presidential election, but before the #metoo phenomenon that sprang up in late 2017. Did the prevailing atmosphere around gender-related issues make a difference in the planters' work, in their conversations, in their strategies, in the ways they coped? What about the climate for young adults influenced by a neo-Calvinism that supports a complementarian view of gender that is non-supportive of women in church leadership? In cultures where this view was prevalent, did it make a difference to women attempting to do a new thing? The contemporary trends are challenging at best; unsettling at times, and more often even disturbing. How did women in this study cope with public scrutiny of their callings? These questions certainly helped to shape the climate in which discussions both online and in person were conducted.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

The participants tapped for this study were adult, female, Protestant church planters in the United States still serving in the church they planted, planting as solo

pastors (not initially part of a team or ministry couple). No other restrictions were placed on the collection of contacts, though the survey was completed almost exclusively by United Methodist pastors. In addition, five denominational leaders and coaches in the field of church planting were recruited for a focus group conversation toward the end of the study.

Participants were recruited through a combination of the following:

1. inviting participants who have subscribed to a female church planter FaceBook page ("Chick Planters").
2. asking denominational leaders to provide names of those they know.
3. asking colleagues to provide names of those they know.
4. talking with authors and coaches who work with female planters to provide names of those they know.
5. consulting with seminary faculty and staff.
6. directly soliciting names through Facebook and Twitter.

The contacts sought for the database were from any Protestant denominational affiliation or non-nondenominational church and from any region of the United States. There was no age restriction (beyond the obvious, that they be adults engaged in full- or part-time vocational work). As the lead pastor of a new church start, they were assumed to be accredited as a pastor or acknowledged as the pastor of their congregation. Physical and mental condition and ethnic background were not a determining factor for participation in the survey. All but two of the actual survey participants was United Methodist (and this by coincidence, not design).

Ten participants in the survey were chosen for further interview by phone. Those participants were chosen based on diversity of ministry circumstances. All were United Methodist pastors—eight elders, one deacon and one local pastor—and all worked full-time hours (or more than that) as a pastor. Ages of those interviewed ranged from 27 to 57. Four of the interviewees had been involved in their plant for 0-3 years, three for 3-5 years and three for 5-10 years, generally corresponding to the percentages in the larger survey sample. Every person interviewed was married, though that was not by design. The ten-person sample represented every region of the United States; women interviewed by phone were from California, South Dakota, Texas (2), Michigan, Oklahoma, Illinois, Tennessee, New York, and Virginia. They included pastors appointed by Annual Conferences to plant as parachute drops, those developed by mother churches for satellites, and one who planted and pastored without the blessing of her conference (she went without a salary, but her church maintained a United Methodist affiliation). Participants were identified by numeric code, not name, and were assured that the readers of this study would not know who participated. Participants were asked to be available to discuss several questions for about half an hour (most interviews lasted for about forty minutes), and they were sent these questions in advance. Participants in a final conference call made up of denominational leaders and coaches were chosen through networking. This group included four Annual Conference Church Development Directors and one General Board of Discipleship officer. Development Directors represented several regions of the country. Four regional directors met by conference call for about one hour and a fifth was contacted separately due to unavailability at the time of the

conference call. Participants in this group were identified in the dissertation by alphabetic code.

Description of Participants

Pastors who participated in the online surveys, phone interviews and in-person visits were all female, due to the nature of this study. Participants in the leadership focus group were male. Racial diversity was neither encouraged nor discouraged in the pursuit of respondents. No other determining factors were present in the choice of subjects for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in the survey were informed of the nature of the study using the text of a consent form in the introductory email. Their response to the survey served as implied consent to its terms. Participants in the phone interviews (which were recorded) were read the contents of the consent form and acknowledged by voice their consent to the interview process. Participants in the leader conference call were sent a consent form by email prior to the call and consented by voice (stating their name) during the call itself. Their decision to call into the conference meeting also served as implied consent.

Results were disseminated first through the publication of a dissertation housed in the Asbury Theological Seminary library. Results were also used for the production of a teaching module to be used in seminary classrooms and training opportunities. Publication of a book based on the findings was also intended.

The data collected was stored as a digital file with password protection. Any hard copies of human subject data were stored in a secure place to be shredded within one year after the final production of this dissertation.

Instrumentation

This project used a mixed media approach to the practical research phase. The goal was to create a convergence of information from multiple angles to maximize the validity of the conclusions drawn (Creswell, 201).

The project began with the accumulation of the names and contact information of women church planters around the country. The goal in developing this directory of planters was two-fold. First, it became the foundation for the second phase of research. Second, it became a resource to be shared among those who participated (with permission) for the purpose of mutual support.

After the creation of the database (using an Excel spreadsheet), an online survey instrument was sent to two-hundred women planters across the country from a variety of theological and denominational backgrounds, in order to get a wide sampling of experiences (the survey was delivered using email and Google.docs). Questions for the survey were designed to test the barriers theorized in Chapter 2.

After a thorough review and analysis of the survey results, ten planters were chosen for further conversation and study based on the variety of their responses. Care was given in their selection to congregational size, success (or lack) of the planting project, personal circumstances (were they married? parenting children? frustrated or content?), and theological leaning, all of which play a part in the planting experience. The purpose of the phone conversations (recorded on a digital recording device called the dB9Pro) was to clarify responses given in the survey, gain context and hear the stories of these pastors who have entered into the world of church planting. I listened specifically for their challenges and successes. A final focus group was convened (by conference call)

of denominational church development directors in order to test my theories against the points of view of those attempting to support pastors and congregations. The goal in providing multiple approaches to the subject was to gain a comprehensive view of a female planter's experience — from herself and those who supported, coached and supervised her.

Pilot Test or Expert Review

I crafted the questions for the online survey using as a guide the theories posited in Chapter 2. Once the questions were crafted, four expert reviews were sought: two from women planters, one from a denominational church development director, and one from a professional data analyst. The survey was sent in draft form to each of the expert reviewers along with a separate form for recording feedback on each question. The women planters did not take the survey; they reviewed it question by question and gave feedback on the wording, scoring and overall relevance of the survey.

A pilot test of the online survey was sent to several congregants within the pastor’s own congregation as well as one denominational leader and one church planter who had no personal interest or connection with the subject nor with any other female planter. Their purpose in taking the pilot test was simply to review the instrument for clarity of wording and ease of scoring. These reviews helped immensely in condensing the survey to its most pertinent questions, clarifying problems with the question-answer process, and noting those questions that might produce inaccurate measurements.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The purpose of this study was to better understand the barriers faced by women planters, so that strategies could be formed to lead past those barriers. To understand what

planters experienced, planters had to be at the center of this research. The project would not have succeeded by talking *around* the planter or *about* the planter, or even by reading about planters, since almost nothing has been written about them. The project required direct interaction with the women themselves, asking questions that would provoke meaningful responses about their experiences leading a new project. In a significant way, the human subjects for this study—the women planters themselves—owned the outcome. They decided, by their generous gift of time and willingness to be transparent about their experience, how the next generation of planters will be prepared for the life and work of church planting. Given that, the researcher did not seek to discover *how* they planted so much as how they *experienced the process* of planting. Conversations with the supervisors feeding into their work provided an objective response to the first-person experience. The online surveys, phone interviews with planters, and conference call focus group with directors placed the planter's experience at the center, putting the approach used in this study in direct line with its purpose.

Because the surveys were pre-examined by planters, then completed by a sufficient population relative to the total population of active women planters (about twenty-five percent of the total database), the assumption is that the instruments used were reliable. If the intent was to discover the experience of the planter, then as long as the planters were transparent in their responses the measures achieved were an accurate representation of their experiences. Questions were framed in such a way as to give the planter multiple opportunities to reflect on the various barriers they may have faced.

If this study had been limited geographically (to only planters in the South) or theologically (only progressives), or if the selection of subjects had been limited in

number, this study would not have resulted in a true picture of the challenges common to all women. In conversations about women in ministry leadership, those factors are critical. Southern women have a different experience of leading than women in the north. Women serving in more progressive settings have a different experience than theological conservatives. By seeking out planters from across the spectrum geographically, theologically, and denominationally, and by inquiring from a variety of sources to find eligible planters, the study sought to be generalizable and trustworthy. Since one of the premises on which this study was based was the idea that gender inequality is a human fallenness issue and not a cultural issue, the study was most useful as it sought to discover universal (rather than culturally bound) principles.

As a mixed method study, this project sought to capture with a wide lens the experience of women planters. The online survey was delivered to a large group with a wide variety of experiences, both personal and professional. The phone interviews were designed to clarify motives, experiences, and feelings about the challenges faced. Conversations with Development Directors, those in leadership charged with supporting the pastor, gave an objective perspective. By asking a consistent set of questions and by choosing each layer of conversation as objectively as possible (not using personal friends or close colleagues), I sought a high level of trustworthiness for the project. Details of each of those methods have been sufficiently delineated to assure that this project would be reproducible.

Data Collection

The purpose of this project was to explore the barriers faced by women church planters in the United States to discover which barriers compromise effectiveness and to

identify ways women church planters can learn to lead past them effectively. This pre-intervention study began by contacting church development directors, coaches, denominational leaders and church planters around the country to gather the names and contact information for as many women planters as possible. The list was reviewed and culled to ensure that each name was consistent with the project requirements: women actively involved with a church plant, who are the primary pastor in their setting (not part of a team or couple). These were the only definitions given to limit the subject range. Other variables were encouraged in order to provide a quantitative approach and the most generalizable theories (Creswell loc 1714). As names were collected, they were entered into a database (Excel spreadsheet). Email addresses were confirmed as reliable and intentions were made clear through a test email explaining to the planters that they would soon receive a survey from me and what the nature of that survey was. Those indicating a desire to opt out of the survey were removed from the list prior to sending the survey (the only ones to opt out were two men who inadvertently made the list because their names were not clearly male).

A survey was developed using the research of Chapter 2 as a basis for designing each section of questions. A draft of the survey was then sent to four expert reviewers along with a feedback form and a deadline of one week for giving feedback. On the advice of Judith Bell, author of *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers*, the researcher developed this survey as a Word document before building it in Google.docs (loc 3255). This allowed more flexibility for getting expert reviews. The survey instrument was then constructed online using Google.docs (which allows an unlimited number of questions and provides excellent data collection) and a test was sent

to several disinterested congregants within the researcher's own congregation. This pilot test focused on smoothing out any difficult-to-answer questions (loc 3255). Attention was given to constructing a variety of question types so that different questions were best suited to evoke the most accurate answers (3271). Once the Institutional Review Board authorized the execution of the study, the online surveys were launched to the entire database collected, using an email platform explaining the process and inviting participants to click on a link to begin the survey. A suggested timeframe for completion (three weeks) encouraged expedience in responding. A follow-up reminder email was sent two weeks later to those who had not yet responded. A third follow-up email was sent four weeks after the initial invitation.

As the surveys were returned, data was collated question by question and notes were made as themes emerged. Each survey was reviewed both for the overarching theme of the ministry (or dominant points made) as well as for distinctive comments. Ten surveys were chosen, based on diversity of theme, theological/ denominational background, personal circumstances and geography, for further conversation with the subjects.

A survey was developed for phone interviews with these ten subjects, so that there would be consistency among the conversations. The ten subjects were notified by email that I sought a one-hour (or less) phone conversation and were queried about availability. As subjects declined, others were substituted until ten appointments were made and ten conversations accomplished. Conversations were recorded digitally using a dB9Pro recording device and notes were also taken during the interview. Data from these conversations was then collated and predominant themes documented.

A final conference call was arranged for denominational leaders and church development directors. Ten participants were solicited by email or phone call and five responded with a willingness to participate (to be clear, all were willing but not all were available). One of those five cancelled just prior to the time of the conference call so a separate interview was arranged for that participant. Once a group was established, a conference call meeting was scheduled using the GoToMeeting.com conference calling service. Emails confirmed the date and time of the call, and a reminder email was sent the day prior to the call. The second email included the consent form and details about the purpose of the focus group. The expectation, given the group, was that at least one or two would cancel at the last minute, and that indeed occurred; the call continued as scheduled as long as at least four subjects were able to participate. The focus group began with verbal assent of their willingness to participate under the circumstances explained. Participants were reminded that they were being recorded using the dB9Pro device and that the conversation was confidential. Participants answered a predetermined set of questions.

Data Analysis

The final stage was the collation of data, the formation of generalized theories and the development of a set of recommendations for training the next generation of women planters. As already stated, the women themselves drove this study. Their stories, their experiences, their responses to their circumstances shaped the data and provided the narrative thread. Using Riessman's method of narrative analysis (year), I sought to listen to the stories of the women and the historical narrative of their churches, in order to best understand how they led past the barriers they experienced. Once the data was collected,

it was entered into an Excel spreadsheet for ease of comparison. At this stage, the assistance of a trained data analyst (certified in the analysis of Google surveys) was used to interpret the material and corroborate theories.

What distinguished this study was the step-by-step approach to data collection. Data was collected first from the online surveys using the statistical analysis tools offered by Google.docs and organized by spreadsheet into subject areas using the main topics of Chapter 2 as a guide. Where surprises surfaced—data contradicted the theories posited in Chapter 2, or additional barriers were identified—those findings were organized into separate categories and documented. These findings were collected and studied before any personal conversations were had with planters. Personal conversations then gave rise to further clarity of the survey results. The final conversation with denominational leaders allowed me to again pull back to a more objective distance in order to see the whole of the material and its impact.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Women who choose to plant churches face gender-based barriers with the potential to diminish the effectiveness of the work, the commitment of the planter, or both. Unaddressed, those barriers can create confusion, deplete passion, and undermine mission. Without a willingness to lean in, pragmatically brainstorm, and try options that lead past those barriers, church development directors may well shy away from appointing women planters due to a perceived lack of effectiveness. Worse, they may continue to recruit women planters without frankly addressing with them the strategies they will need to overcome barriers they will face, thus perpetuating a pattern of failed plants and discouraged pastors. This is a challenge ripe for a solution.

The purpose of this project was to explore the barriers faced by women church planters in the United States to discover which barriers compromise effectiveness and to identify ways women church planters can learn to lead past them effectively. The hope is that by honestly acknowledging "what is," planters and developers together can cut streams through the desert and create more fruitful communities of faith that effectively proclaim the Kingdom of God.

This chapter addresses the results gathered through surveys and personal interviews with women planters, as well as conversations with the church development directors who interact with them, to discover the intersections between the research and their experiences. The information was organized into three Research Questions: 1) What common barriers are faced by women who plant new churches in the United States? 2)

What barriers compromise effectiveness and how can women church planters lead past the barriers they encounter? 3) Based on these results, what best practices (training and support) will offer the next generation of female church planters the best opportunity for effective ministry? The first question was further delineated using the barriers discovered in the research phase of this project, to provide rich descriptions using multiple means of research including survey results and narratives from personal interviews to support the presence of these barriers in the experience of actual women planters. The second question developed the ideas formulated from the research for helping women move past the barriers they may face: authority, identity, team-based leadership, leadership mentors, coaches and mentors for planting, networking, and balance. The final question was addressed using a combination of input from planters, church development directors, and a denominational officer.

As was stated in Chapter 3, the literature that directly addresses the needs and solutions for women planters is virtually non-existent so the research was limited to the experiences of women themselves and those who advocate for them at the denominational level. Their combined experiences, narrated in survey responses and phone interviews, provided a unified voice of women calling out from the intersection of Acts and Galatians.

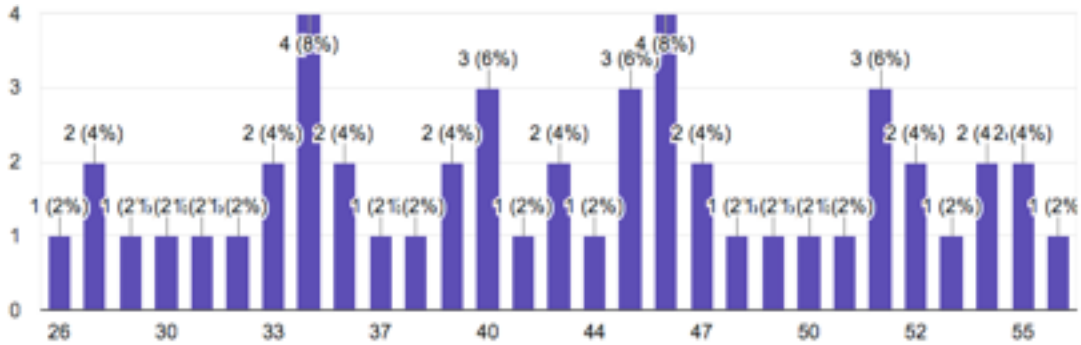
Profile of the Survey Participants

To administer the survey to as broad an audience as possible, I contacted United Methodist Church development directors, coaches, church planting directors serving other denominations, women planters and online groups serving women planters. I gathered email information for two-hundred female planters and sent an invitational

email to each of them, asking them to participate in a survey about women planters. I also posted a link to the survey on a site called "Chick Planters," which serves women planters across denominational lines. Despite the effort to hear from women across denominational lines, all but two of the respondents (96%; forty-eight of fifty respondents) were affiliated with the United Methodist Church at the time of their planting experience.

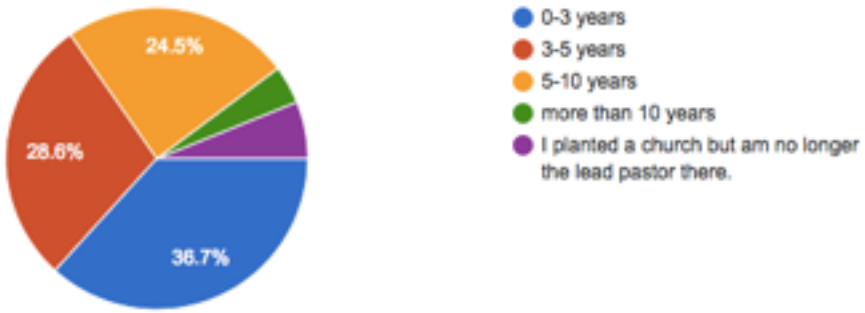
Fifty women successfully completed the survey. Five initially indicated they were not the founding pastor but further questions indicated that they were involved as a leader in a new work so their responses were included in the analysis. Respondents ranged in age from 26 to 57 at the time they became a planter. The mean age of respondents was 42.3. The mode was shared by ages 35 (4 respondents) and 46 (4 respondents), with slightly more respondents hovering around the 46 range (nine women were aged 45-47, versus eight women aged 34-36). Twenty-five respondents were at or below the age of 41, and twenty-five respondents were above the age of 41.

TABLE 4.1. Age of survey respondents at the time of planting



Eighty-eight percent of respondents were married, with 13.6% of those serving churches where their spouse was also on staff. Five planters had husbands who were also pastors or church staff members, though not necessarily at the same church. Most were within the first three years of their plant (36.7%, or eighteen respondents), with 28.6% having served 3-5 years (14 respondents) and 24.5% having served 5-10 years (12 respondents). Two respondents had been in their setting for more than ten years.

TABLE 4.2. Length of time serving in church plant



In the question asking how long they served in the plant, three indicated they were no longer serving the church they planted. However, in the question, "Are you the lead or primary pastor of that church," eleven indicated they were not. The discrepancy between these answers may lead to one of several assumptions: 1) a pastor may have been reappointed to another setting after having planted a church; 2) a pastor may still serve within the church plant (as clergy or lay) but not as the lead or primary pastor; 3) a pastor may have left the ministry or is on sabbatical; or 4) a pastor may have planted a church that is no longer in existence.

Profile of the Church Planter Interview Participants

Ten women were chosen from the initial fifty survey respondents for a follow-up interview by phone. The pool was limited to those who submitted email addresses at the end of the survey. From thirty respondents who submitted an email address, I looked first for a variation in age and time served in the plant. Ages of those interviewed ranged from 27 to 57. The mean age was 43.7, about one year higher than the mean for the fifty survey respondents. Five respondents were at or below the age of 40, which was also the mode, and five were above the age of 40, comparable to the larger survey sample. Four of the interviewees had been involved in their plant for 0-3 years, three for 3-5 years and three for 5-10 years, generally corresponding to the percentages in the larger survey sample. All interview respondents were United Methodist pastors—eight elders, one deacon and one local pastor—and all worked full-time hours (or more than that) as a pastor. Every person interviewed was married. The ten-person sample represented every region of the United States; women interviewed by phone were from California, South Dakota, Texas (2), Michigan, Oklahoma, Illinois, Tennessee, New York, and Virginia.

Attendance at the ten churches represented by the interviews ranged from twenty-two (after three years) to 250 (after seven years). It should be noted that the largest church (250 in weekly attendance) merged with another church of fifty members. Its attendance figure also included a large number of children (an average of eighty on Sundays out of a total attendance of 250). One church was formed as a vital merger of "four and a half" (planter's term) dying churches. Three churches were parachute drops, four were mother-daughter models, and two were formed out of other ministries (an urban mission and a campus ministry). One church is now developing a satellite campus.

Profile of the Church Development Director Interview Participants

Four development directors also participated in a conference call after the ten church planters were interviewed. All directors were United Methodist pastors. Two serve in the southeastern United States and two in the midwest, with the General Church participant serving Annual Conferences around the country. All were male. While female church development directors serve in several Annual Conferences, the choice to interview men only was intentional, since the vast majority of development directors are male and this sampling would better represent the norm. In addition, I interviewed a program director who at the time served at the denominational level who was unable to participate in the conference call. Their candid input was important to understanding how the role of women planters is viewed at the denominational level among those who are concerned not only with gender balance and advocacy, but also with more practical realities like budget. Inclusion and analysis of the input of these participants was mostly reserved for the third research question, although I reference the denominational director in multiple areas.

TABLE 4.3 Time served/ average weekly worship attendance/ kind of plant.

RESPONDENT	TIME SERVED AS PLANTER	AVERAGE ATTENDANCE	KIND OF PLANT
A	0-3	35 in groups (no worship yet)	parachute drop
B	5-10	45-60	mission-turned-church
C	5-10	250	mother-daughter
D	3-5	50	parachute drop
E	0-3	80-85	mother-daughter
F	3-5	125	campus ministry-to-church
G	0-3	no longer meeting	mother-daughter
H	0-3	22	parachute drop
J	5-10	90-125	mother-daughter
K	3-5	100	vital merger

Research Questions

To report the findings of both surveys and interviews, this study references statistics as well as narrative responses. Narrative responses from surveys are listed without identification, meaning that unidentified comments are drawn from the surveys. The ten women interviewed by phone are identified alphabetically from A through K (excluding the letter I, for clarity's sake); therefore, comments labeled alphabetically are from personal interviews. The development and denominational directors are identified as M, N, O, P, and Q.

A word seems in order at the outset of this report. While much of the research and conversation centered around the issue of gender and the barriers women thought they faced when compared to men, the intent was not in the least to disparage men or to externalize blame for any suffering women reported. In both surveys and phone interviews, questions were framed as objectively as possible, so as not to be negatively leading. In personal interviews, care was taken to ask questions without commentary, so as not to lead the interviewee.

That said, as a condensed collection the comments that follow may leave the reader wondering if all these women feel victimized. That is not the intent, nor was that the impression with which I as the researcher was left. To the contrary, respondents offered glowing compliments about remarkably supportive husbands, male colleagues, coaches and mentors. Where frustrations were voiced, it was most often an effect of the overall challenge of the planting experience.

The ultimate point of this study was not to prove women are challenged by their gender but to help them rise to the challenge of their vocation as they acknowledge the

barriers they face. Acknowledging the barriers is the first step. Designing effective strategies to move past them is the ultimate goal. On the whole, respondents were remarkably pragmatic and optimistic in their responses. In fact, when asked if gender was ever an issue in their ministry as a pastor and church planter, survey respondents were, as a whole, non-passionate. On a scale of one (often) to ten (never), mean, median and mode were all in the range of five. In other words, as a whole and at first blush, gender did not seem to present a major issue in the scaled survey responses. A deeper analysis of the narrative responses and person-to-person interview conversations were conducted that revealed a richer, more nuanced story—one that begins with what women planters *said* and ends with what they *did not* say. To tell the whole story, this study begins with what was said, using the categories described in the research phase of Chapter 2.

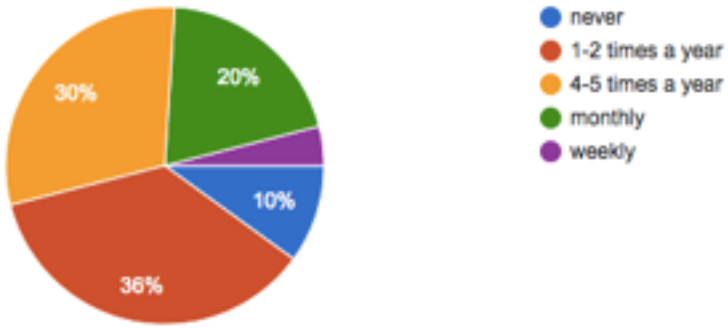
Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What common barriers are faced by women who plant new churches in the United States?

Theological

When asked how often they engage in conversation with others who disagree theologically with their position in ministry leadership, 90% of survey respondents reported that it occurs at least once per year, with 54% saying it happens multiple times in a year.

TABLE 4.4. Frequency of personal conversation about women in leadership



Narrative remarks in both surveys and personal interviews reveal that theological disagreement may take multiple forms:

B: "I've had one man literally walk away. I was standing there and he walked away and he said, 'I don't believe in women pastors.' And that's okay."

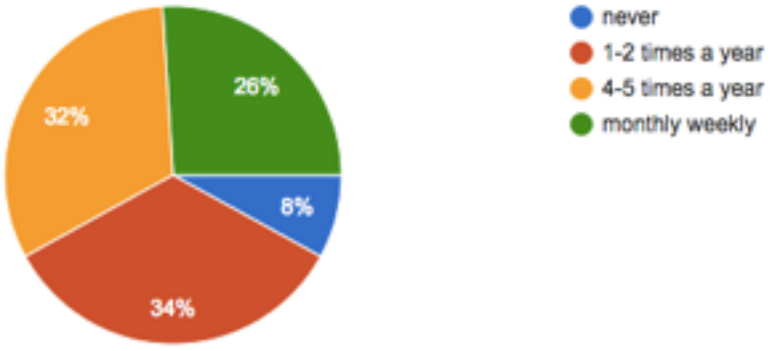
D: "We changed pastors and the new pastor didn't want anything to do with a female planter. And we had very different theological issues and he refused to even take it to the Board or the Council. … [he] basically ranted and raved and closed a lot of doors for me for potential partners. … He didn't want to invest anything to help me but then … he did everything he could to hurt me but he still wanted control."

J: "I certainly had many, probably more, who just couldn't get over 'women shouldn't preach, aren't supposed to talk in church.' I probably had, I couldn't put an exact number on it but I would guess it's probably 45-55% with the negative winning. It was a thing I had to overcome. Gender was something I had to … I had to prove myself."

The frequency of negative interactions around the issue of theology and gender increased when the question was asked, "How often do you hear from others about their conversations with family members, co-workers or others who disagree with their choice

of church/pastor?" In that case, 58% responded that they hear reports from others with some frequency, with 26% saying it happens monthly or weekly.

TABLE 4.5. Frequency of others' conversations about women in leadership



The numbers indicate that in non-direct conversation (with others, rather than the pastor herself), persons are more likely to voice negative opinions about women in church leadership.

B: "… even to this day my husband gets more push-back than I do. He just looks at them and says, 'Oh well.'"

D: "The area I'm planting in … the suburb I'm in runs more conservative. It is a white-flight community. So there have been people who say ugly things to the people who go to our church like that everybody who goes to that church is going to hell because you have a female pastor."

E: "I've had a couple of people who have told other members of the church, 'I can't come to your church because it is pastored by a woman and my husband won't let me.'"

Women reported noticeable push-back based on the theological opinions of those they sought to lead. They may not have immediately identified that push-back, but with reflection almost every planter interviewed was able to share anecdotal evidence of encountering people who disagree theologically with their place as pastoral leaders in the Church.

Perception

When asked, "Do you notice a difference between your leadership style and that of your colleagues," 88% of women said yes. When asked to describe the differences, some women pointed out their more nurturing or "mothering" style of relating to others. One survey respondent wrote: "As the woman you can give that mother feeling with a listening ear. And not worry about what anybody else thinks. That's a DNA you can't change." Another wrote, "I am more nurturing in my leadership approach yet I am still very 'big' in my position as pastor. I am respected but can be more personal than my male counterparts." One planter noted her more collaborative approach: "I tend to want to bring other voices into the conversation instead of plowing through voices to set my own agenda. I like a vision developing out of conversation and growing organically." Another planter noticed that her presence as a leader had a positive influence on perception: "I've actually had men come up to me and say, 'You've changed my perception because you're a woman."

In interviews, several women said they thought being a woman helped when it came to reaching unchurched people. E said, "I feel like I have more openings to unchurched and dechurched people because of my gender. It is an unfair advantage because I have a lot of male colleagues, but people have been hurt by the church or

learned not to trust the church, and mostly that happened with a male pastor. I get a new opening heard with a new voice."

More often, however, women noted negative perceptions when comparing men's leadership with women's. One wrote, "I tend to build consensus because I think as a woman I am used to having to convince people that it is a good idea. Sometimes people just give males the benefit of the doubt." Others noted:

"When a female in leadership is assertive or bold you are told you are a B*(&# [sic] but when a male is that way he is high achieving and equipped."

"Men are often more authoritative and it is received better."

"Even in a collaborative style, men are considered leading where women are perceived as not having a plan."

"[Men] tend to be more dictatorial. They are better at asking for what they need. There is never anyone questioning their authority to be a pastor."

"Men want to be agreed with. Women who don't are 'difficult'."

"Men are more easily 'heard' in meetings."

"I do think our church would grow more if I were a male. We are in North Carolina and there are still a LOT [emphasis in original] of people that disagree with women pastors."

Women experienced a negative perception of their leadership at various points along the planting journey. When talking about leadership challenges, A said: "It hasn't been until recently that my gender has become an issue. But you think that would be something that would have happened earlier on but it's really not. It's only been in the last two and a half, three years that people have made comments about my gender. And it

was from people I never would have thought." D took the opportunity to debrief with her conference committee and perceived a prejudice as a result of that interaction: "After my plant I kept saying to the committee, 'Don't ever do this to anyone else, this whole idea of a parachute drop.' I wasn't smart enough when I was asked to take it to know statistically that I wasn't going to make it. And so after all my training and I hear I have a 90% possibility of death, I start saying to the conference office, 'Why would you ask anybody to do this?' And I said don't ever do this again. So what they did instead of listening to me was they then appointed a year later … so it was my third year as a planter … they appointed a man to be a parachute drop almost as if in, 'maybe you can't do it but we'll see if a man can do it.' We're thinking statistics had nothing to do with it? That it was my femaleness, not the statistics? So this man … has not been any more successful than I am. … [I] wanted to mention that because they really thought if they asked a man to do it they'd get a different result and they did not."

E—who earlier said she thought her gender gave her an advantage—noted that her position as a planter in a military community negatively affected how she was perceived as a female in leadership: "Because we are between two military installations, some of the men go to [my husband] first before me. Old boys' club, that's the environment … misogyny is often strong in that area. I have felt it. Yes. It isn't all the men there, but it is probably a third of them. They will go to my husband, and it did take a while for him to not answer the question or fix the situation and instead say, 'You need to go talk to Pastor E.' We even had to get to where he used my title."

Perception is not simply an external affair. When it comes to women in leadership roles, there is also an internal dynamic at play. Women deal with both the perceptions of

others as well as how their self-perception is affected by the pressures of leadership. When asked how a comparison with the work of male colleagues personally affected their sense of competence, some women refused to allow that to demoralize them:

"I am working on ignoring my own negative feedback. I can sometimes undermine my confidence all on my own."

"I'm holding my own or have stronger numbers than my male colleagues, but my sense of competence doesn't come from comparing myself to male colleagues, it comes from living into the authority of my call."

"I remain competent and effective."

"I can't worry about what others think...I have enough to worry about!"

Others did not hold as positive an outlook. One noted, "I had to stay really centered in Christ and pray for indifference. I think my male colleagues also questioned their competence. It's a stressful gig." Others sensed the disparity between genders. When asked how perceptions affected her sense of competence, one planter wrote, "Poorly. Many male pastored churches seem to grow more quickly." "It is discouraging," another wrote. "Frustrating. Male planters get paid more." Others wrote:

"Demotivating."

"I'm an Hispanic woman, that's double the challenge. I need to work double to prove myself to others and let them know I'm prepared and capable of fulfilling my call."

When commenting on how the role of church planter affected her self-image, H said, "I think people would respect my authority more if I was [sic] male to plant a church. Not in the UMC but in my community … Sometimes it is helpful to have an

authoritarian [sic] when you're trying to get something off the ground. People feel more comforted by that. It is patriarchal in that way."

J said, "Church planting itself was great for my sense of self. It really taught me a lot about what I can do and perseverance and faith and all those things. But at the same time I can't separate being a church planter from the church and so I also … my self-esteem took a hit in the last couple of years, because I heard somebody saying, 'Oh, if you were a better preacher' or 'if you only did this.' I'm still kind of recovering from that. It was very hard and painful. I'm a very optimistic and positive person. But there were some dark days."

When asked how church planting has affected her sense of self, K said, "If I were not intentionally guarding that I think I could have very easily been in trouble." Later in the conversation she said, "Instead of asking if I am taking antidepressants, you should have said, 'Do you think you should be?' Because I think I should be. I think I should be seeing a counselor, too. But I'm not seeing a counselor. I have this entourage going here that makes it hard."

A failed attempt at a church start can be even more damaging to a person's sense of self. For G, that failure seemed to be attached to gender. After an attempt to start a church within a church and failing due to a perceived lack of support from other leadership, G wrote, "I was crushed. My parents raised us to have good self-esteem and good confidence and I come from a long line of civic leaders and people who are high achievers. I'm telling you, it made me feel like a total failure … Had I been a man in this situation with the way I was not allowed to build a succession and didn't have the support of our congregation. This was a vital congregation that wanted to be part of the United

Methodist Church and no one in our district fought for them. I was the one … I wonder … if I had been a man, would that have been different?"

Women overwhelmingly noticed (88%) that their leadership style differs from that of men, and most noted their style as more collaborative, less authoritarian. Again, in the numeric responses, the negative impact of this difference wasn't as obvious as with the narrative responses. Women were most animated and most frustrated when talking about the differences in how women and men are perceived and respected as leaders. The frustration extended to the pace of growth and rate of pay.

Resources

The lack of resources noted took a number of forms. Women mentioned the lack of coaching support, lack of funds, lack of denominational support, lack of salary support, and lack of qualified leaders within the church,

Eighty-four percent of female planters reported having a professional coach or consultant to help them grow as a leader. Of those who did not have a coach, 50% reported the reason as being unable to find the right person, while 16% reported being unable to afford one. One planter's comment emphasized her lack of peer support beyond coaching and mentoring support: "Sometimes you just feel like you're all by yourself."

TABLE 4.6. Reasons why women planters don't have coaches

Eighteen percent reported struggling financially and 16% said it is connected to their role as pastor. Four interviewees reported serving in dual roles for all or part of their planting experience, either as pastor of multiple churches or as the leader of multiple ministries. From comments made, these arrangements seemed to be constructed largely in order to meet the church planter's salary needs. C said, "I don't think the United Methodist Church—not just in (my) conference but in general—wants to invest in female church planters. I had a church developer from the Midwest call me and say we had this woman test well on everything and she looks like she'd be a good planter, but she is a woman and a mom so I was told to call you and ask if we should give her a chance. And I was like, why on earth would you not give her a chance? I think the denomination struggles …"

For one planter (a local pastor), the salary support never came from the denomination so she was left to create her own way through. B said, "It is totally God that has been involved with this. I received no pay for many, many years. Just that what I was supposed to do was that I was supposed to preach the word of God and whoever showed up, showed up." D was less optimistic about the level of denominational support she received: "They gave me an impossible task as the first female planter with no resources and no people and no support. And one of my friends says they set me up for failure from the very beginning and he thinks that was intentional." Others made comments that hinted at their lack of training in how to confidently gather resources:

"I am not a natural fundraiser, I avoid the 'ask.'"

"I think it's always challenging to be thinking about money versus mission even when we all know it takes money to do ministry. It still can be very hard to balance."

"Do I deserve a raise? Hell, yes, I deserve a raise. But I know the church can't do it. And you know, a man might just make it happen but I can't. I negotiate myself out of it, right?"

When asked, "Do you have any sense that your church's financial health is negatively influenced by your role as pastor," 83% said no; yet, comments in the survey and still more in the interviews seemed to indicate less confidence in that response. One wrote, "When the merger happened, some left because I am female." E said, "I should have known when I was introduced at the mother church and they said the mother church would not be spending one dime and everyone applauded. But I was so excited and raring to go that I didn't even think about it. It caught my husband off guard. We have received no financial support. We have not received even any congregational support."

Some planters noticed that their slower rate of growth affected their ability to gain the resources needed to establish momentum. One wrote: "My inability to draw and sustain a crowd which correlates to the giving needed to sustain a worshipping community." Another mentioned, "Again, because the church was growing slowly. Although it did not have to do only with me being a female pastor." Yet another planter experienced the fatal (for the plant) effects of a combination of events. "We started out in a church and congregation. An interim pastor was brought in when the church went into an intervention process after being threatened with closure. The interim pastor had a history of problems with women in authority and told me that I was in his way. Our new faith community was homeless after this and after struggling as a result, ended this year."

Planters also faced challenges with gathering and training effective leaders for the work of ministry. C said, "The most difficult thing is keeping [leaders] around. We lost

eleven staff in the last twelve months with the merger … it's hard when you invest that much time in someone and you know it's best if they step down but trying to cultivate other leaders and rebuilding that trust with them. Just finding the right people at the right time." D diagnosed her issue with leadership in this way: "It took me a while to figure out that when you're reaching the unchurched and the dechurched and the never-church, that they are not confident to lead. They don't feel equipped. They don't think they know the Bible which they don't, but I always felt like you learn as you teach, right? So it took me a while to figure out that none of those people felt ready. They were super-excited and they would do anything I ask. But the leading part was really, really hard. And so we figure out now that I'm four years down the line that it took three years to move my folks from attenders to leaders. You have to invest in them for three full years before they are ready to assume responsibility for their own passing in ministry." E, who planted from a mother church, expressed frustration with the fact that no leaders came to help. "We didn't have the people from the mother church there to help train people how to be the church."

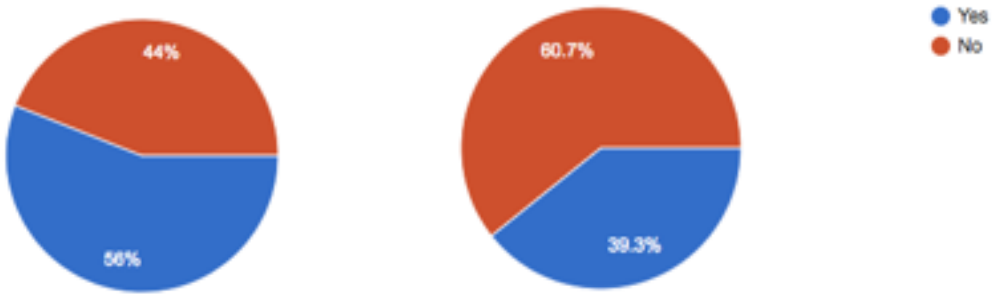
In summary, women noted a desire for more coaching and mentoring support, as well as more leadership training. There was also frustration around church financing and its impact on the pastor's salary.

Benchmarks

Women planters face a tough task when they step up to lead a new work. Those who take the challenge seem to be self-starters. When asked whether the conference set goals for her, one planter wrote: "I set the expectations, ambitious benchmarks, accomplished some, not all." Among the survey participants, 92% set their own goals,

whether the conference also set goals or not. Fifty-six percent were given goals by their conference when they set out, but only 39% were able to meet those goals.

TABLE 4.7. Percentage of planters given goals (first graph). Percentage of planters who met goals (second graph).



Some respondents reported that it was difficult to maintain positive personal momentum given the challenge of unattainable goals established by their Annual Conference, combined with the subtle pressure to succeed. E said, "We've noticed in my conference that currently there are only two women planting churches, myself and one other person. And the rest are male." D also sensed the pressure of being in the minority among planters in her state: "The conference gave this money and that was good and sent me out by myself and said, 'Go and create a church, and we need you to be at 150 in three years after you launch.' … I was older than anyone else who had been asked to plant a church so I could have been the mother of the other church planters biologically and we'd never had a female before in the state." D felt the pressure of the salary package required of an elder in full connection: "I'm a full-time elder and my church can't afford a full-time elder with the insurance and the pension and all that so that's what's hurting the church right now is the full-time elder." One survey respondent wrote: "None of the

church growth numbers or benchmarks seemed to embrace the church I planted. I planted a church that is missional and came out of an organic need—progressive Christian thought. Because we wanted to grow deep in conversation, growing in numbers just hasn't happened. Our model never seemed to meet the 'new church start' models."

What were the goals required of these planters?

"Meet 40 people a month until launch and then continue to grow by 10-20% each year."

"Critical mass needed to be achieved in 1 year or close."

"We had three years to become self-sustaining which meant getting to 100 average attendance."

"Get 250 members in 5 years to become a church."

"75 persons within the first 3-6 months, 200 as quick as possible."

"6 small groups, in 12 months of 6 employed adults giving $120 per month."

"220 in worship in 3-5 years; clear discipleship process; stewardship program; missionary engagement in community."

"I was expected to set a variety of bench marks including critical mass for launch, avg. attendance at different timeline milestones, small groups, etc."

"25 contacts per week, I set a goal for launch, I was given a goal for stewardship."

"Weekly worship within 12 months; but not realistic for multi-ethnic parachute drop."

"Consistently over 100 in attendance was a pretty clear expectation."

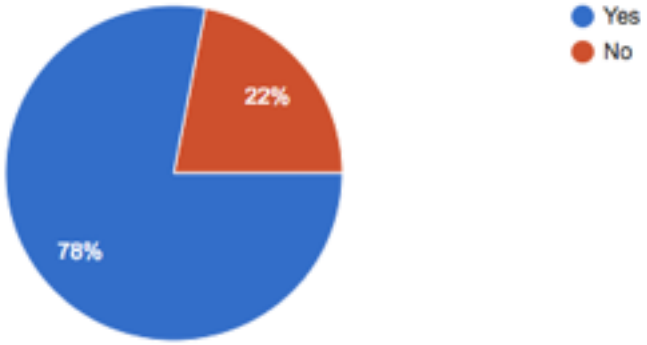
Some perceived the expectations as reasonable. Others did not. One wrote of the expectations placed on her: "They were not based on anything other than you need to get

this many people who pay this amount of money so you can pay yourself. They were made up by the DS without any planting experience or MissionInsite statistics." D's insight hints at the toll of absorbing unattainable expectations over an extended span of time: "I have excelled at anything so that's the hardest thing for me … to be okay with, 'Okay, that didn't work so let's move on to the next thing and try this.' I think it's hard on you to become comfortable with that kind of risk all the time. So I think you have to be pretty confident and self-restrictive to do it in the first place. If you aren't, it's going to kill your soul." Benchmarks provide a subtle, even subconscious, form of pressure for the planter. While they can be a catalyst for progress, women seemed to experience them as frustrating and at times unrealistic and unattainable.

Biology

Being female carries its own set of particularities. Women mother children and often bear primary responsibility for the care of the home. Church planting is often a young person's "game" but a decision to stay home during a child's early years can offset a woman's career by years, even decades. It is a choice and privilege every mother makes, whether she works within or outside the home. Women also face mid-life issues that can complicate pastoral duties. Menopause can be emotional, draining, confusing. There is no predictable pattern on which a woman can depend. How do these gender-related circumstances affect women planters?

TABLE 4.8. Women who had children at home while serving as a pastor.



For the women in this study, balance was a key word. Balancing motherhood, vocation and home life was a stretch and even a strain. In the question, "Which of the following statements seems most true for you?" Forty percent of respondents indicated, "I feel like I'm always juggling three or four roles in a day—mother, wife, pastor—that my male colleagues don't seem to be juggling." H summed up the mental stress on women with this comment: "This is something I feel I hear from every female pastor that I never hear from any male pastor: How am I balancing family life and pastoring? My kids are still very little. How am I able to be present to them fully without neglecting and how am I able to be present to work, you know? I think I'm always pulling tight." Survey respondents largely agreed with this dynamic, and in fact some of the most passionate responses were around this topic:

"It's the HARDEST [emphasis in original] thing to balance ever. Grateful for kids who get it, but always feel like I'm choosing and that's hard."

"I often felt guilty for the hours I worked and the blurring of my work and private life."

“It's just a difficult time balance, but currently as teenagers they are successfully finding their own place in ministry. Their dad and uncle are also ministers, so they have options.”

“The demand on time has been very challenging. I have become a much more empathetic and compassionate pastor in regards to other parents/young families. I think that the way I was viewed by my parishioners shifted to a more "motherly" and "adult" identity, somewhat. (My congregation is predominantly comprised of single or recently married young adults.)”

“This to me is the biggest impact. I don't feel the cabinet/Bishop affirmed my ‘motherhood.' I was actually told that I ‘failed’ as a new church start pastor because I had my first child during the launch time. I was told this (two times) by the conference staff person and Sr. Pastor of the ‘mothering’ church.”

Discussing the church’s role in her personal life, H said, “My kids still need—and I’m not talking about some youth that you put in the back room—actual childcare that I can trust my child to, not just who you can rustle up. How are we going to afford that? And can we afford it?”

C had a particularly compelling story. She did not set out to be a church planter. Recently graduated from seminary, she and her husband expected to go back to their conference and receive two appointments they could manage as young parents. She was asked by the conference to plant a church and declined the opportunity, but was told that declining wasn’t an option. “They sent me to boot camp with [a church planting consultant in another state] and I showed up with my son because I was still nursing and my mom who was going to watch him while I was in session and [the consultant] said,

‘Moms don’t plant.’ I didn’t want to do it and no one thought I could do it. My coach they assigned to me thought it was a joke.” Yet, she was requested to move forward, and did so with the best attitude possible. “I found out I was pregnant the day before our launch … that timing … birthing a daughter and a church in the same year. That’s probably the hardest year of my ministry. My husband and I were both working and couldn’t afford childcare in a place I felt safe leaving them. So our church opened up a missional preschool and now we have two campuses.” Finding support for her situation was difficult. She was a brand-new mother, a recent seminary graduate and a church planter in a complicated situation (her husband was also a pastor). “I thought women would be someone I could go to for encouragement and support but that has not been the case … It has happened with three different female clergy. The pastor of the anchor church was a woman … she let me know if I did things my way instead of her way things would not go well with me … And so when I shared with her that I was pregnant with my daughter she said, ‘I thought you were more committed to the church.’ She said it was irresponsible of me to have more than one child when God needed so much. So that was hard to hear. She said, ‘Your kids are a liability now in my ministry in the church.’”

C was blessed with a strong constitution and an optimistic spirit. What seemed like an impossible situation has since become an asset and an opportunity. “Initially it was hard until I learned that I was at my best as a pastor when I spent quality time with my family. The church is primarily composed of young families who were drawn to me because of my role as a mother.”

For one church planter, the dual role of mother and planter created a necessary decision for a season. “I changed from full time to part time to separate from our mother

church and only have one job rather than two." Others questioned how long they could maintain the pace. In the question asking which of several statements seems most true to them, twenty-eight percent indicated, "I feel stretched and am wondering how much longer I can do this." Another pastor/mom wrote, "It was often difficult to balance the two and feel I was doing an adequate job at both. My role as a parent, however, did make me a better pastor. It made me more compassionate and helped me to better understand the feelings and motivations of others. It also gave me confidence in taking authority." Similarly, others were able to find a creative outlook in a challenging season. One respondent talked about the importance of using "intuition and sensitivity" to navigate rough waters. Others wrote:

"I was able to work my schedule around my children's activities as the church planter. They helped me in many ways. They have helped me develop patience and have helped me connect to others in the community."

"I set clear boundaries and made purposeful time for family, only allowing true emergencies to infringe on that family time and space. I appreciate the flexibility of a pastor's schedule in the role of parenting."

"It has strengthened me spiritually and given me a stronger sense of connection with other parents."

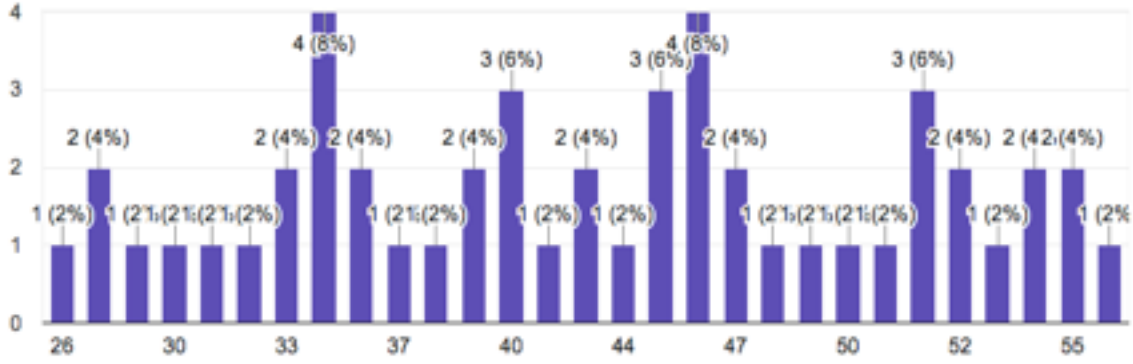
"I know I'm supposed to say parenting and church leadership is difficult - but for me, parenting has made pastoring easier. I became a church planter and a mom at age 40, and completed my DMin [sic] at 43. Through my 20s and 30s, I invested 70-80 hours/ week every week in service and leadership to the congregations I served. I would not

change a thing - but, parenting requires solid time boundaries that everyone respects! I love it!"

"I believe it inspired me. I understood part of my call to be re-visioning the church for my children... for me it was a legacy opportunity."

The age spread of women responding to the survey provides an interesting snapshot of their potential challenges as women and mothers. Women seem to step into planting in their thirties, with more beginning in their forties and fifties.

TABLE 4.9. Ages of survey participants

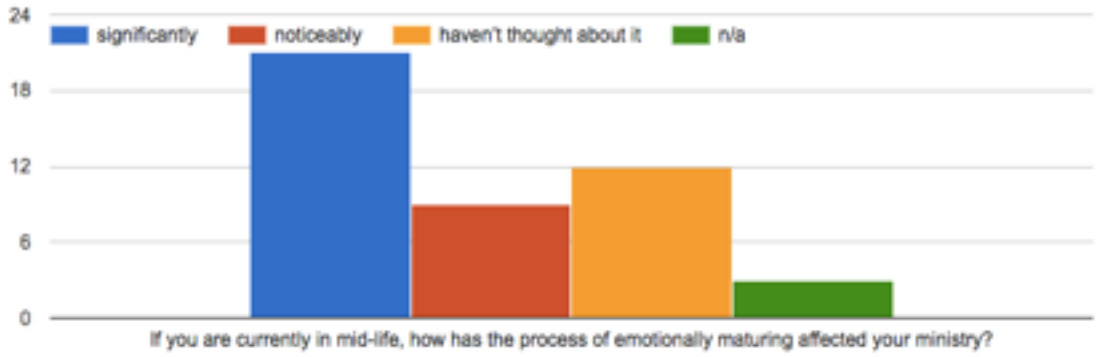


The mode is shared by women who are thirty-four and forty-six, with the preponderance falling toward the latter end of the spectrum (the median age was forty-one). This means that many women are experiencing the work of church planting at the same time they are experiencing the physical changes of mid-life.

Where women in child-bearing years may be more attentive to the physical needs of the children and have a priority of being present to their children and families, women in midlife reported a need to tend to their own physical needs and to be more attentive to their own emotional needs. When asked how the process of emotionally maturing has

affected their ministry, most indicated “significantly.” Several noted the challenges age brings to anyone. One noticed she has to “write things down more.” Another wrote, “I refuse to color my gray hair. That's OK for men but not for women.” Yet another woman felt the frustration of keeping up with technology: “Tech challenged - everything takes longer - learning curve is huge!!!” A planter had to make peace with competing demands: “I want to do so much, but have commitments with aging parents.”

TABLE 4.10. How mid-life emotions affect ministry



While the majority of respondents seemed attentive to their physical health (66% exercise regularly; 64% describe themselves as physically healthy), others discussed the toll on physical health:

“I have several chronic illnesses and as I age I have to be more aware of my body and its messages for rest and renewal.”

“I became exceedingly tired. I didn't find out I'm anemic until after I burned out and left the position, but it certainly had an impact on my ministry.”

“The only change in my health is that I now have to do breathing techniques to lower my heart rate under stress.”

“I also need to work harder to stay fit now.”

Fifty-four percent of women reported working fifty or more hours per week (16% work more than sixty hours per week). There were indications that women felt the strain. Ten women reported feeling more tired. “I need a nap!” one wrote. “I feel as though it's a ‘young person's game,’” wrote another. “I do not have the energy I used to have for the same level of activity.” Responding to a question of what best describes them in this season, three women marked the statement: “I am just going through the motions these days. I feel burned out.” More than 12% were on medication for depression; one-quarter were seeing a counselor or therapist. One said simply, “I drink more.” Another tellingly commented, “I am healthier now that I am no longer a church planter.”

As with younger moms, several middle-aged women were able to think creatively about their life stage and see ways it could work for their benefit:

“I don't have the stamina I had 10 years ago. On the other hand, it has made me more compassionate for the elderly and their contributions.”

“I work out, ride my bike and play tennis. Being fit physically, spiritually and mentally is important. As anyone experiences life, one understands the depth of the Bible more.”

“Has finally forced me to learn how to delegate.”

“Makes me think more and plan better just to use my time and energy where is better need and useful [sic].”

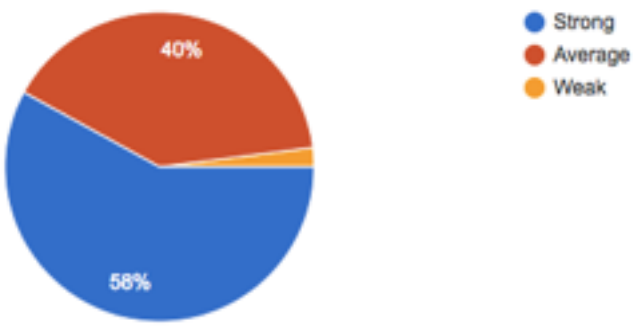
Finally, one woman noted the valuable role of life experience in church planting. “Experience is really big into anything you do in life. You need to have experience to be a church planter because that's the only way you can do this as a younger person has not experienced life.”

The comments about biology often evolved into conversations about balance. Women expressed their personal struggle with health, both mental and physical, in the course of church planting. Several became parents while giving birth to a church and noted the remarkable strain that it put on them personally as well as on their family. As one woman said, “It is the hardest thing to balance ever.”

Pastoral Care

Fifty-eight percent of women consider themselves to be nurturing toward others. In the category of pastoral care, planters discovered that every gift is a blessing and a curse. Having the more nurturing style of a woman is a grace and a gift to those who hurt and need care but, as stated in an earlier chapter, pastoral care can also stifle the growth of a congregation.

TABLE 4.11. How nurturing pastors consider themselves to be toward others



B, who works with people in the margins, has capitalized on her "mother's heart" and uses it to reach out to hurting people: "I think we're supposed to be mothers. Mothers. And there is nothing wrong with that, you know? Some of these people need physical love. I have one person that I walked past and touched her shoulder. And probably about three weeks later she came up to me and she said, 'That's the first human touch I've had in two years.' And my heart broke. I knew from there on that that's what I'm supposed to do, that this is why God has me in this position. Because I'm supposed to show love."

E noted both the positives and pressures of having a strong pastoral gift: "One of my strongest gifts aside from starting new things and fixing broken things is pastoral care. I have to really watch myself that I don't get so drawn into someone's issues or problems at the church that I forget I'm also the founding pastor/lead pastor of this church and that I have to delegate to others outside of me."

As was mentioned earlier, planters discovered that everything is a blessing and a curse. Having the more nurturing style of a woman is a gift but an emphasis on pastoral care can stifle the growth of a congregation.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What barriers compromise effectiveness and how can women church planters lead past the barriers they encounter?

In general, the women surveyed and interviewed validated many of the concerns uncovered in the research phase of this project. The women surveyed were, in my opinion, strong, resolved, practically-minded and faithful in their pursuit of their goals. Many were flourishing in their ministry, even as they acknowledged their challenges.

They were able to constructively name not only their challenges but the solutions they would want for the next generation. Through the narrative responses in their surveys and especially through the ten interviews, respondents gave validity to the discoveries made and recorded in Chapter 2. How do barriers compromise effectiveness, and how can women planters lead past the barriers they encounter so they can successfully plant churches? To answer this question, I categorized responses according to seven tools already described for building a more effective ministry: authority, identity, team-based leadership, leadership mentors, coaches and resources, networking, and balance.

Authority

Women planters often noticed challenges to their authority as leaders. That challenge may be the effect of theological differences in the role of women in leadership, or it may come from the perceptions others have of women leaders, no matter what their theological bent. Obviously, those who question their place as females in leadership due to theological reasons will wrestle with giving authority to woman planters. While they indicated on a scaled question that they felt confident in carrying out their ministry and also confident that they carried the authority of leadership among their people, the narrative answers of respondents provided more nuanced indications that things are not always easy.

TABLE 4.12. How confident are you in carrying out your ministry (1=very; 10=not very)?

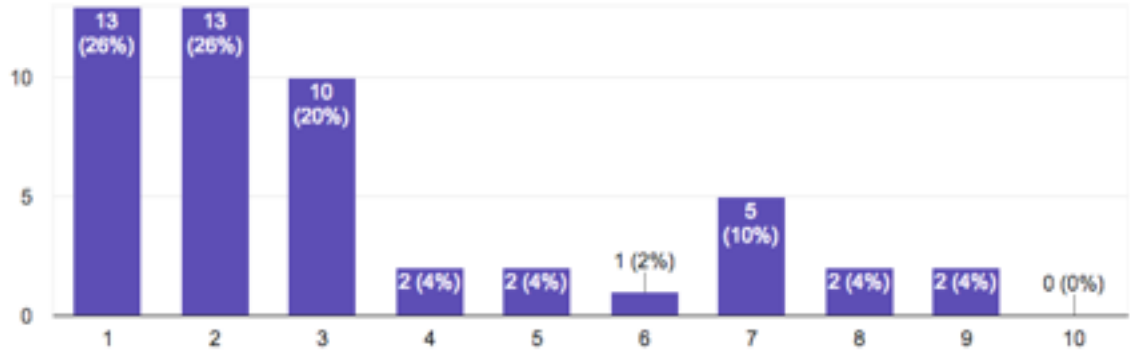
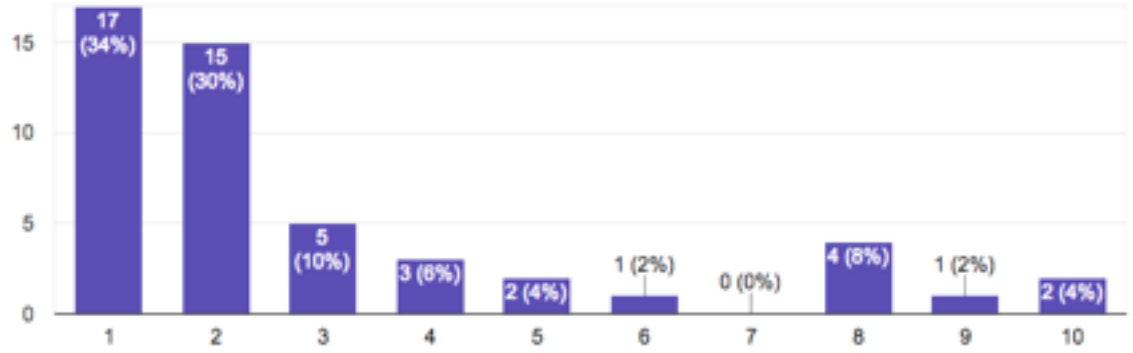


TABLE 4.13. How confident are you that you carry the authority of leadership among your people (1=very; 10=not very)?



While 24% did not feel confident that they can carry out their ministry (adding together those who responded with a five or above), 20% of respondents felt even less confident that they carried the authority of leadership among their people. Moreover, their narrative comments seemed to indicate that authority is something they either wrestled with personally or had to press for in their interactions. One noted that "taking authority and being accepted is difficult." Another felt the pressure of "having to prove I deserve a place."

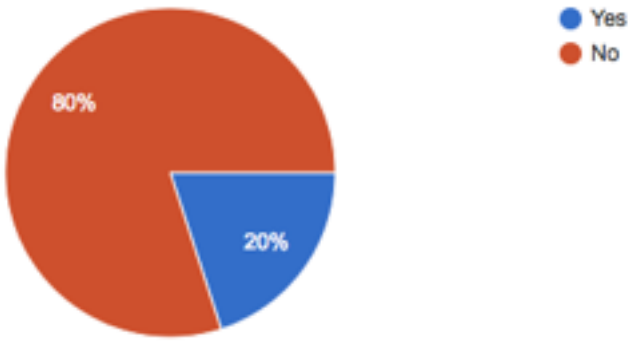
One respondent wrote that “leading forward with clear delegation to others rather than by consensus” was a challenge for her. “I'm not sure whether that is because I am worried about people's ‘feelings’ as a person or if that's an assumed women's leadership cultural expectation, or a mixture.”

For one church planter, it was not just a gathering of internal authority but a sense that her physical stature impeded her. Asked about personal or professional pressures, she wrote, “People recognizing my intelligence & expertise, especially since I am petite.” A Hispanic pastor wrote, “I work with the Latino community and that community is very strong on male leadership. For the most part they like to have a couple as their pastors. So my context can bring much pressure if I am serving alone in a church. It does not intimidate me but it does affect my outcome many times.”

The use of a title helped some women to establish authority. Even when it is not the preferred way of communicating, a title may help establish a woman’s place in leadership. In fact, the most common name used to refer to respondents was Pastor or some version of that (“Pastor Sue,” “Dr. Sue,” “Rev. Sue”), with thirty-eight respondents reporting that references to them usually have a title attached. The second most common name was the person’s first name (thirteen respondents go by first name only). Three women noted that they are often called “Ms. (name)” or “Miss (name),” though one specified her dislike of that (“The Miss bugs me.”).

Finding ways to establish authority as the leader of a new work seems important to the forward progress of a new church plant.

TABLE 4.14. Is your title ever an issue or topic of conversation?



Identity

Ten percent (five respondents) indicated faith in the idea that their life had purpose, but they struggled to understand what that purpose is. Six percent (three respondents) reported they are just going through the motions and feel burned out. One person indicated she may not know herself and it was affecting her ministry. That represents 18% of the total pool of respondents, or nearly one in five who wrestled with issues related to identity.“As a female planter,” one woman wrote, “folks are expecting me to fail either at ministry or motherhood.” The pressures of planting may exacerbate issues with identity.

TABLE 4.15. Which sentence best describes you in this season?

Distorted perceptions of women in leadership and how women perceive themselves has already been well documented in this project. These perceptions eat away at a planter's sense of self. Not knowing who one is, especially as it relates to faith in Christ as the author of one's identity, can be damaging to ministry progress. A said, "I am my biggest challenge; I need to get out of my own way … I have no doubt I'm called to be where I'm at doing what I'm doing and I don't doubt that, yet I often think could I be more effective doing something else. But I don't know what that would look like. Is that me just trying to get out of this?" Another respondent noted the added pressure of her minority status: "Knowing that I am a minority (in race and gender) among church planters, there is an underlying pressure that my success matters."

Interestingly, Q—the denominational leader who weighed in on women planters—noted that the opportunities for women and persons of color to "get out of this" are available for those who show promise. "When women church planters do a good job they tend to get promoted out. So I'm running through my head and [a] church … in Florida was on its way to being a really large church plant but then she joined the Path One staff. That's pretty typical. Our women church planters and planters of color don't tend to grow larger churches because they don't tend to stay at them. This is an issue with all of our women leaders and our leaders of color. They tend to get sucked into the administrative structure of the denomination."

According to Q, this trend was documented in an on-going study conducted by the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University, a center for women in ministry. Q recounted,

> "They've been tracking women in church leadership for thirty years. It's called the Clergy Women's Retention Study. At the heart of it is the question, 'Why is it that so many women leave ministry after five years of starting ministry?' In the early 90s, that was something like three-quarters of women who were graduated from seminary left any sort of ministry careers within five years after graduating and they wanted to know why. And they identified that trend of [women being] sucked into the hierarchy and away from parish ministry" (note: a review of this study online found the references made in this conversation to be accurate).

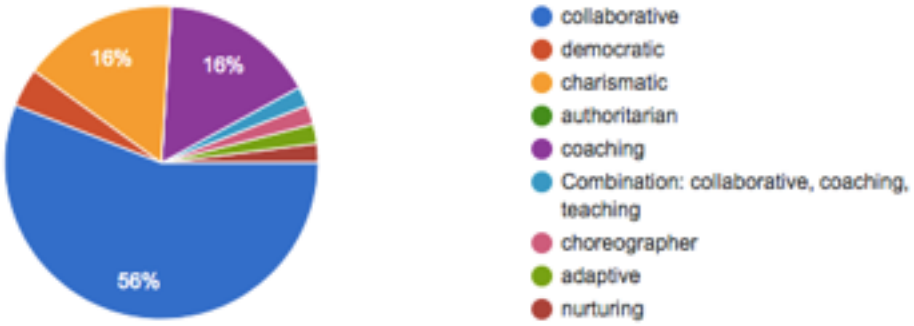
Because a woman in leadership may be presented with multiple opportunities to leave planting and parish ministry, knowing not only her giftedness but the essence of her calling becomes critical. Investing time in understanding who the planter is in Christ and how that is lived out daily in the work and in interactions would strengthen ministry effectiveness and give the planter courage to stand in the midst of challenging seasons without fear of how she is perceived by others. Women need mentoring to help them claim their identity as spiritual leaders so they can take authority in their work when tensions present themselves. Investing time in understanding who the planter is in Christ and how that is lived out daily in the work and in interactions would strengthen ministry effectiveness and give the planter courage to stand in the midst of challenging seasons without fear of how she is perceived by others.

Team-based leadership

One respondent likely spoke for all pastors everywhere when she wrote: "The pressure to know and do everything from accounting to building maintenance burned me out." That pressure seems to be multiplied in the work of church planting since

everything is being invented as the work unfolds. No processes are already in place. The stress of many responsibilities and being the expert in the room on all matters can be overwhelming. For this reason, team-based leadership is remarkably valuable for those who start new works. Because women tend to be more collaborative in their approach to leadership, training in team-based leadership would be a tremendous gift to the planter.

TABLE 4.16. Perceived leadership style of respondents.



Fifty-six percent of women viewed themselves as having a collaborative leadership style with another 16% leaning toward a coaching style. In general, respondents preferred to work with others rather than work independently. Speaking of the differences between male and female leadership styles, respondents commented:

"They tend to be authoritarian and I am collaborative."

"Male leaders are more directive and less collaborative."

"The main difference I've observed is that it appears that collaborative work seems to take more effort for … men; it is a practice learned later in life, if at all. And, there seems to be more effort exerted to remember to consider or consult the perspectives

of others – especially those who might be deemed lower in hierarchy – even though, in certain situations, they could be very valuable."

In contrast, women tended to view themselves as collaborators and coaches. J said,

> "I would always tell my leaders, 'You need to get other people involved. Do not be a lone ranger. Do not do it yourself.' And they would say, 'Oh it's so hard to delegate. It's so hard to ask for help. That was their big thing, but if you don't ask for help you don't develop a depth of leadership and depth is critically important because people do move and they do get sick and so if you don't have somebody else who can do your job then you have a couple of people who are exhausted. That is probably the biggest challenge … not necessarily recruiting them and not necessarily training them … it's getting them to release their power and replicating themselves."

Training in collaborative or team-based leadership would be a tremendous gift to women who reported working long hours. Sixteen percent reported working more than sixty hours per week, and 38% reported working fifty to sixty hours weekly. Team-based leadership might ease those numbers. For some, those hours were being offered without the benefit of a raise. Twenty-four answered that at some point in their ministry the church could not afford a raise for the pastor. For some who missed receiving a raise, it was the planter's decision to offer the limited funds to staff instead. "As we have grown over the past four years as a chartered church I had to decide priorities. Raise for me or allocate money for staff. I preferred to have staff so that the church could grow." Another planter wrote, "I wanted more staff over a raise."

If women planters are hard-wired for a more collaborative style of leadership, then training to maximize that gift would be a wise move. Women need training in leadership development, collaborative leadership, staff development, and gifts-based leadership to counter the long hours demanded of this work, as well as helping to offset the perception barrier.

Leadership mentor

Fifty-four percent of planters reported having no mentor. Of the 46% who do, it was interesting that 56% have a male mentor and 44% have a female mentor. One respondent wrote: "I sought a mentor not based on gender, but on excellence."

Further, 81% have had the experience of a male colleague helping them to achieve their goals, acting as a door-opener when they sought a position or opportunity. Respondents also reported having male coaches (62%) more often than female coaches, and 81% of those who had male coaches noted it as a positive experience. The inference here is that women would benefit from excellent leadership mentors of either gender, and that more aggressive recruitment and training of mentors would benefit women leaders.

Coaches and Resources for planting

Eighty-four percent of female planters reported having a professional coach or consultant to help them grow as a leader, and 62% of those coaches were male. Further, eighty-one percent of women said their coaching experience was positive. Among those who have not used a coach, 50% indicated that they have not been successful in finding the right coach. Another 16.7% said they were not encouraged to look for a coach, and a yet another 16.7% said they could not afford a coach. Educating planters about the value of coaching and helping them find a good match would be helpful to women planters.

One respondent wrote: “I’ve had both female and male coaches; and for a time, I had a couple who coached me in a group around leadership. My selection of a coach is more about their expertise with missional community development and developing discipleship among the unchurched than about gender. My current coach is to help me grow as a larger organizational leader and is male.”

Of the ten interview participants, five indicated finances as a major challenge and five indicated leadership and/or staff development as a major challenge. Three were concerned about breaking the next attendance barrier. Survey participants made the following comments in regard to resources: “lack of volunteers,” “financing the ministry,” “financial,” and “growth and finances like everyone else.”

B made a startling statement in her description of her community of faith, which serves persons in poverty: “Our average tithe is $23 per week.” She reported that her denomination recognized her work as a church planter but failed to provide the financial resources to help it flourish. “The UMC wanted to see if we would survive before offering any monetary funds. So my husband and I are the ones that had to put the funds in. However we have learned to live on very little and even had to ask other denominations to help.”

TABLE 4.17. Have you used a professional coach or consultant?

E sensed the pressure of finding financial support, also, to offset a congregation that cannot give enough to sustain the ministry. “We are dealing with people who have either been hurt by a church or unchurched for lack of a better term. They don’t understand discipleship or they want to see ‘where is my money going. I want to see what I’ve purchased.’ Operate on a rubber band, bubble gum type of budget. God has gotten us through hard times. We’ve never been in the red but I think that’s the biggest challenge. (It) is getting people especially now when the economy is hurting.”

E also noted the need for training leaders. “Training up people in areas of discipleship and evangelism has been a challenge. Especially when it was just me and twelve people. That has been a huge part of this. We didn’t have the people from the mother church there to help train people how to be the church.”

Offering training for new planters especially in the areas of leadership and financial development would be useful, as these two areas consistently emerged as challenges. Another planter wrote, “I would like more resources on the 'how' behind … expectations. More ways to figure out how to meet … goals.” Providing coaches equipped to help women navigate these areas particularly would be a great benefit. Coaching men in how to coach and mentor women would be a great gift, as women seek out competent mentors to help them grow as leaders. Offering training for new planters especially in the areas of leadership and financial development would be useful, as these two areas consistently emerged as challenges. Women expressed a desire to be equipped to reach their goals.

Networking

Heidi Roizen, Silicon Valley entrepreneur (see Chapter 2), discovered the value of networking especially for women. Female planters noted several ways that networking benefitted them. E sensed the need for more pastoral leadership but did not have the funds to pay for it. Through a connection with their mother church, she found a couple who planned to come on board as non-paid staff.

Women were also helped by finding men who could act as "door openers" for them, helping them find positions or resources for their ministries. Eighty-one percent reported having a male open a door of opportunity for them. The stories of how men have advocated for and supported women in ministry are varied and inspiring:

"My church development director opened the door to planting for me. Another male colleague connected me to leadership to help move along my ministry career."

"Previous church planter pointed me in the right direction for grants and other resources for my church."

"A new church start pastor in our area has offered mentoring and support."

"As an associate at a couple of large churches it has always felt like they were promoting me."

"Grant funding from the community was often initiated or largely supported by male colleagues - some clergy, some laity."

"I was moving from one conference to another and I had both males and females helping me get connected in the new conference. My male church planting coach also opened doors for me."

“I would not be a church planter if it hadn't been for male colleagues inviting me to join the team.”

“Many of my Male Pastor colleagues saw gifts in me before I saw them and welcomed that I walk in them, although I was usually the one extremely hesitant. I've had positive experiences as well in the nonprofit sector where I've worked for years where male leadership advocated for promotions, etc.”

“I have a lay leader who always stands behind me and agrees with me and encourages others to see where we are headed. He has opened so many doors since not only am I female but I am younger looking.”

“Where I served as a new faith community planter the Senior Pastor of the English-speaking congregation was very supportive to women in ministry and was very intentional in involving me in all the activities that I would be able to attend. I assisted the English-speaking service and served the Spanish speaking service.”

“The pastor of a nearby large congregation offered advice, some resources and the opportunity to speak to his congregation about our new church plant.”

“A male church planter has been supportive and given me advice and encouragement. He has told me about ways to get grants and things that I was not aware of. He has called me just to tell me not to give up. He has spoken on my behalf in meetings.”

Clearly, women were helped greatly by networking with colleagues and gaining the support of those who could open doors for them. A more intentional invitation for men to come around women planters and support them in tangible ways would be a great benefit. Women were grateful for colleagues who helped them to be successful and

encouraged them along the way. Many women mentioned a desire for more collaboration, more mentoring, more networking among both men and women. Women must learn to network both within and beyond clergy circles. They must learn to identify and encourage men in their circles to act more intentionally as door-openers for them.

Balance

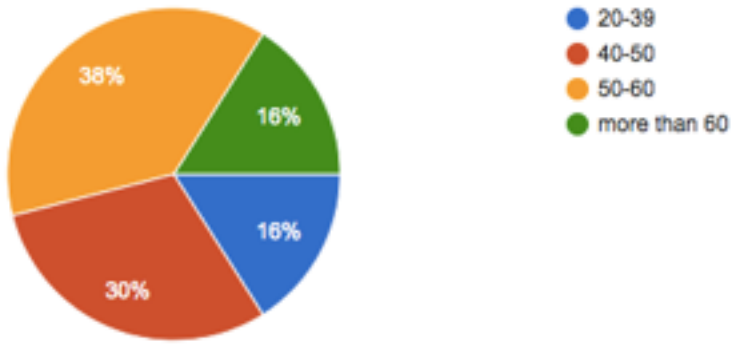
The good news in this project is that among the ten respondents who were personally interviewed, every marriage was reported as thriving. Two respondents shared that they had some issues in their marriage relationship during the course of the church planting experience but through counseling and changing circumstances (one couple moved to be closer to his job) they were able to work through their situation. Every interviewee was able to say that their marriage was as strong or stronger than when they began to plant, and every person was able to say that their husband was supportive and often sacrificial in this work. Several husbands were reported to have expressed concern that their wives were not treated well. One woman said, "He does complain sometimes about just the whole church process and the Methodist Church and he … feels like they set me up for failure from the very beginning. He tells me all the time, 'Don't feel like a failure because only 10% of these things work.' So he tells me all the time not to feel like a failure."

C said: "I think overall it has strengthened our marriage because we respect one another's gifts and skill sets so much. Outside of God and the support of the Holy Spirit, he is the number one reason this church has succeeded. He is so supportive of everything I do and understands the crazy hours."

That these ten women entered the work of ministry and church planting and maintained a strong marriage is to their credit, especially given the strain many felt with keeping a balance between ministry and personal life. Multiple survey respondents answered, when asked what the most obvious personal or professional pressures were for them as a ministry leader, that balance was a major issue. Balancing family and home with ministry, balancing home with work schedules, Sabbath management, being a mom and serving a church were common variations on a prominent theme. Planters seemed to have a hard time finding a life beyond the work.

The planters interviewed work significant hours in ministry. Sixteen percent reported working more than sixty hours per week, and 38% reported working fifty to sixty hours weekly.

TABLE 4.18. Hours worked per week.



J noted: “I was on all the time when I was out in public because I was always recruiting and talking and networking, and it’s a small town so you really can’t go anywhere and not run into people. So when we got the coach, one of the coach’s

requirements was that we have a date night once a week and we did that religiously and it was extremely, extremely good for our marriage and helpful."

H, who serves an older church while planting a house church in a community that has been difficult to penetrate spiritually, felt disconnected from others as a planter. "I have become lonely, I think. I think I feel lonelier … I think you feel lonely a lot because most of my day is spent by myself." Q, the denominational director, noted, "That is the number one issue that's expressed by church planters regardless of denomination is that they feel lonely. And within the UMC. We did a road trip where we visited a huge percentage of our active church plants four years ago and did conversations and interviews with a number of our church plants. And that was by far and away the number one concern expressed by every demographic of church planter was their sense of being lonely, isolated and disconnected."

E reported going through seasons of depression and noted the help she got from a network of friends. She related how she created a safe place for herself among friends. "I think what helped me is I have a strong network of friends who are not associated with the church. So with them I can just be E. In fact, I have told a couple of them if they want to come at Christmas Eve that's okay but I don't want them to be part of the church. I don't want to be their pastor. I just want to be E who can sit down, have a glass of wine and let my hair down and that's how they know me."

C said, "I learned that I was at my best as a pastor when I spent quality time with my family." Women planters would benefit from learning practical strategies that open up time for family, personal renewal, rest and play. Women need permission to do the work of a planter, but with time for rest, Sabbath and family. Training should have the needs of

women in mind, since balance for women is different than balance for men, many of whom are able to work while their wives stay at home. For women, balance is not solved by simply advising more time off.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

Based on these results, what best practices (training and support) will offer the next generation of female church planters the best opportunity for effective ministry?

The final phase of this project included a conversation with four Church Development Directors and one denominational official involved with church planting nationally. Those comments are included in this section, since as an audience it will be the trainers, directors and coaches who will glean from this study to improve their contribution to the work of women planters. This section begins with a description of those directors and then uses the results of Question #2 to organize the thoughts from these interviews into recommendations for best practices.

Two Church Development Directors were from northern states and two from southern states. The denominational official lives on the west coast and works at the General Church level of the United Methodist Church. Their experience in leading planters ranged from two to sixteen years, but their experience with leading women planters was more limited. M has seen two women plant churches, both successfully. N has seen one plant an extension campus, but it did not work. O recounted working with three women, two of whom are still in engaged in the plant. P said, “I think I have worked with six women planters in the sixteen years I’ve been doing this. I have a number of others in our academy and training.”

The five directors (four Conference office directors and one General Church director) all described their work in similar terms and described their job as assessing, recruiting, training and managing the process of placing church planters in appointments. For the purpose of this report, the development directors will be referred to as M, N, O, and P, with Q as the director serving with a General Church Board of the UMC.

Balance

Of the five development directors, O was the one who did not distinguish between the roles and challenges of men and women planters, though he acknowledged that limited experience may be a factor. "I don't know that I see any particular defining feature of church planters as relates to gender. I don't have a large enough group to see trends or patterns. I don't know that … the set of issues that predict success of failure or otherwise … they cross all those lines, and if you don't do a good job of assessing it doesn't matter. If you don't do a good job of training, it doesn't matter." He went on, however, to identify what women themselves saw as one of their biggest challenges: balance. "I would say, if child-bearing should intersect with that task, that would probably be the biggest challenge, would be my hunch. From what I hear, that's probably where the biggest challenge occurs, balancing family demands." M agreed. "Balancing family time and the local church and the expectations for participation in the denomination. My women who have struggled with how to do a decent job … women are expected to do more than men, and many men in the south expect their wives to do more." An interesting feature of the conversation about women planters and balance included comments about what is often expected of women planters in United Methodist settings. P said, "I think one of my concerns … biggest challenges … is the demands put

upon women at the conference level. They are asked to serve on boards and agencies simply because they are women and there are so few of them." O concurred, noting that women are stretched by the number of invitations and opportunities afforded and even expected of women who are successful in ministry.

Directors seemed to notice how many directions planters are stretched. Best practices might include helping women realistically acknowledge this barrier before planting and negotiate it after planting. Teaching time management and Sabbath management would be helpful. Perhaps most important would be the directors' willingness to advocate on behalf of the planter, urging Conference officials and District Superintendents to limit outside responsibilities in the first three to five years of the plant.

Benchmarks

When talking about challenges for women planters, P noticed that women tend to need more time to get momentum. He also noticed that they need more encouragement and assurance that they are heading in the right direction. "We find that it takes longer to get traction … I find I have to give a lot more of my time to women planters. They lean on me and my position a lot more, wanting to make sure they are doing it right. Wanting to make sure they are successful." Compare his comment with that of a survey respondent: "I think having people come alongside you to say that things are going well and offer other ways to expand makes you feel less like an oddity and more like a norm." Another wrote, "Emotionally and practically, it would be a very helpful to know what makes for reasonable goals." Likewise, another noted a desire to have her unique style of leadership affirmed: "It would be helpful to feel support and confidence in quiet leadership rather than in boastful leadership. Quiet people can do good ministry." Yet

another chose a path less traveled by changing the status of her congregation to better fit their context. “We're preparing for downsizing from a Worshipping community to a house church model of worship, study, fellowship, service, and giving on a more size appropriate scale.”

P’s comment about “giving more time” compares favorably with the comments of survey respondents, many of whom seemed hungry for a set of expectations that better suited their context. “I would appreciate another's perspective on what growth is realistic to expect,” one wrote. “I'm more concerned with what is realistic for my context than what others have done in their context.” Asked about a better definition of expectations, one planter wrote, “That would be HUGE [emphasis in original]! Every day I long for standards and measures that are reflective of me and my context rather than the non-denom [sic] model down the street or the mainline plant in another city.” Another respondent questioned whether her conference director was prepared enough to set benchmarks for her. Asked if she would appreciate having clearer expectations, she wrote, “It would probably be very good. The current goals were set by the Director of New Church Development for the conference. He does not understand context or culture or denominational expectations. He is an outsider hired to consult basically.”

Yet another challenged the expectations of a rapid-growth model. “Historically, success has been measured by fast growth in numbers; I challenge that concept altogether. Jesus had twelve and grew to seventy-two in 3 years. I challenged my concepts about growth through really good missional planting coaching and changed my views of myself and expectations of our future growth in those conversations. Instead, I expect that new disciples are being made constantly and can be measured annually; and I

expect that our missional leaders are practicing the same kinds of goals I set at the beginning - to meet new people, to train potential missional leaders, to serve the community, to disciple a few rather than many."

The stories of planters were all over the map. One on the west coast had an average Sunday attendance of twenty-two, but was still funded by her conference after three years; she reports she was told she was doing a great job. A number of others reported being given the same benchmarks as their male colleagues but were unable to fulfill those expectations. M mentioned a concern about how women are viewed in the South, though women across the country seemed unified in their concern for how they were perceived as pastors and planters.

Church Development Directors by and large do not have a wide enough experience of working with women planters to be able to adequately gauge what benchmarks are appropriate given the combination of other challenges women face. Based on those comments, the conclusion is that women need reasonable benchmarks and expectations, and Development Directors need the latitude and resources to offer that. Toward that end, Church development directors could benefit from conversations across state and even denominational lines about benchmarks, coaching, and other resources that might help planters and directors both to be more realistic about pace and growth. Clearly, benchmarks for women need to be realistic (and resistant to a planter's tendency toward optimism bias) and flexible based on context.

Training and Resources

When asked what resources they would be most interested in seeing developed, M indicated "more leadership training with women." He explained, "I find that my women

planters are very prepared theologically, they are good teachers … where they need help is the leadership part, recruiting the launch team …" P concurred. "I think leadership training is definitely what we need. Another area is in coaching. I think I only know two or three women coaches, it is hard to find really good women coaches." Three others wrote:

"It would be nice to actually talk to someone who has done this before but every setting is different and every community is different."

"It would be good to hear more from females who are doing amazing things in ministry and how they got to where they are. It would also be helpful to have more conversations around female leadership; barriers, and gender conversations in broader settings."

"Having a support system of other female clergy but also of male clergy which I have been very fortunate to have."

Development Directors need training in how to lead and support women planters, while planters themselves need training tailored to fit their particular circumstances as women. Based on other findings revealed in this chapter, training in financial management of churches, fund raising, leadership development and recruitment would all be beneficial for women planters.

Networking

Having positive, encouraging feedback was a value for several planters. "We are always going to need some input, guidance, new ideas and new resources. That will help the church and pastor with enthusiasm and a way to go." One respondent longed for more reflection around her context. "A full understanding of the complexities that I face in my

particular context, which is tremendously diverse (racial, theological, socio-economic, education levels) and transient. An understanding of this, I think, would give me greater confidence in the reasonable-ness of the expectations."

Planters and directors alike voiced a need for leadership training, which speaks to the foundational premise of this entire project. Directors would make good use of a national directory of women planters with whom they could put their own planters in touch. Denominational officials could create stronger networks of women planters and host more opportunities for women planters to be together in professional ways (not for "feel-good" gatherings, but for significant professional development). Women would benefit from networking with other female non-clergy professionals who can help them stretch as leaders. Women also expressed a desire for training in financial management and fund raising. Women expressed a desire for coaches who understand their context, also, and based on survey results women are not as interested in the gender of that coach so much as the effectiveness.

Effective training and support for women planters need to address issues like balancing ministry, family, and self-care, negotiating with denominational officials on measurable goals and realistic benchmarks that are influenced by the ministry context. The next section summarizes the major findings of the survey results and provides a foundation for the final section where recommendations will be made for laying a more solid foundation of training for women who lead by planting churches.

Summary of Major Findings

Based on these survey results, it seems clear that women need strategies for leading past the barriers they face so they can successfully plant new churches. The

survey, interviews and conversations with denominational leaders all seemed to validate the conclusions drawn in the research presented in Chapter 2. From the research in the literature review and the data gathered through surveys and interviews, six strategies emerged for helping women lead past the barriers they face so they can more effectively plant. The strategic themes identified include: authority, identity, team-based leadership style, leadership mentors and coaches, networking and balance. These six strategic themes can be grouped into three broad areas of emphasis: education, equipping and partnership.

Empowerment through Education—As Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird have noted, "The chance of survivability increases by over 400% when the church planter has realistic expectations of the church-planting experience" (LifeWay Research). As it turns out, what a person does not know can be damaging. The best gift women in leadership can receive—especially those who plant churches and start new works—is education that allows them to openly process the effect of barriers presented in this study. Women planters must become educated about the natural or common barriers that have the potential to hinder their success in their work. They must realistically process the effect these barriers have already had on their lives, so they can get the healing needed to take authority over their call. This education must begin with what it means to take authority over a call, and to live out of a God-given identity and giftedness.

Empowerment through Equipping—Women planters must become strategically oriented to the work of planting. They must get training in how to negotiate terms, fund development, identification of the right setting, identification of effective coaches and

mentors, leadership development, time management, life balance and networking. More will be said about these areas of equipping in Chapter 5.

Empowerment through Partnership—A third area of training should be developed specifically for mentors, coaches, development directors, district superintendents and others seeking to support planters in their work. Conversations with Church Development Directors revealed that education and resourcing must happen in two directions—both for the planter and for the one training and supporting the planter. Several areas were highlighted in these additional conversations, with further training opportunities identified. Development Directors must advocate on behalf of planters, urging Conference officials and District Superintendents to limit outside responsibilities in the first three to five years of the plant. Church Development Directors must research best practices for benchmarks and set reasonable standards based not on optimistic guesses but on industry research. Women must participate in those discussions and learn to negotiate so they can accomplish their goals given whole-life circumstances. Development Directors need training in how to lead and support women planters, while planters themselves need training tailored to fit their particular circumstances as women, especially in the areas of financial management and fund development, leadership development and recruitment and network development.

Women would benefit from opportunities to network with clergy and non-clergy professionals who can help them to stretch as leaders. Denominational leaders would be well advised to facilitate opportunities for women to network, and can act as door openers for women needing introductions to those with resources.

The experiences of fifty women planters and several of those who lead and facilitate in the work of church planting seem to corroborate the research of Chapter 2. Women planters gave voice to the research as they honestly shared their stories, successes, and frustrations. The barriers revealed in the research phase were given voice in the surveys and interviews. As acknowledged in the opening lines of this chapter, identifying the barriers is just the first step. Designing effective strategies to move past them is the ultimate goal. Those strategies will be effective only if they are designed to address not only what women said, but what they did not say. It is to the rest of the story that this study now turns.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

As Jim Collins has written, when what you are good at comes together with what you are passionate about, "not only does your work move toward greatness, but so does your life" (Collins 210). To be good at something is not only personally rewarding but ought to be the heart of any pastor worth her salt. The Church of Jesus Christ has met its quota of pastors who are under-prepared and under-qualified for the challenging work of Kingdom-building. Men and women called by God to plant new works are invited into nothing less than the answer to Jesus' own prayer: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Planters deeply passionate about the fulfillment of this prayer ought to aspire to Kingdom greatness, and ought to have every resource at their disposal to do the work well. Women planting in the Wesleyan tradition who hunger to be spiritually influential leaders—who long for something more than status quo—deserve the resources to become exceptional church planters. Gender-inclusiveness is our birthright as United Methodists. As Q (the denominational leader interviewed) said, "United Methodists are better at deploying women in church planting than anybody else in the world." Our theology, which affirms the place of women in leadership, has invited us to become privileged investors in a global movement. "For every church we plant here in the US, we plant three or four outside the US," Q explained. "And in some places we're the only people who can use women in the whole nation or region … it's the future for who we are." When what we are good at comes together with what drives us as a movement and what sets us apart theologically, then we bear the seeds of greatness and

the potential for a global renewal. What if the Kingdom of God is straining toward the day when *all* God's people are deployed in the work of the Great Commission?

Stop and consider the magnitude of this fact. Traditions that allow women to lead have twice the resources at their disposal as traditions that do not. Our Methodist movement has the potential to unleash the whole army of God for the whole work of God. United Methodists ought to make the most of this powerful asset. We can place tools and training into the hands of women called to the ministry of church planting, so that those who hear that call will have every resource at their disposal. We can design strategies to help women planters discover and own their unique leadership style. We can shift the conversation from what is wrong with women in church planting to what will release the massive leadership potential present in our gender.

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to explore the barriers faced by women church planters in the United States to discover which barriers compromise effectiveness and to identify ways women church planters can learn to lead past them effectively. The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the research, survey, and interview results into three major recommendations for those training, equipping, and supporting women exploring the role of church planter. Having examined the research, listened to the stories, and distilled the statistics, this study now turns to the work of drawing major conclusions, offering best practices and sharing unexpected results.

Major Findings

Empowerment Through Education

As it turns out, what we do not know actually *can* hurt us. Unaware of the barriers that can hinder growth and success, both women and those who lead them will find themselves frustrated by the dynamics at work when women plant churches. The best gift we can give women in leadership, especially those who plant churches and start new works, is education that allows them to openly process the effect of barriers presented in this study. Equipped with the facts, women will be "wise as serpents" (Matt. 10:16), able to develop their own strategies to lead past barriers encountered.

So little has been written to support women planters, and even less has been written within the Church about the barriers described in these pages. Perhaps the assumption has been that women already know these things. Any assumption to that end is naive at best. "More than 25 years ago the social psychologist Faye Crosby stumbled on a surprising phenomenon: Most women are unaware of having personally been victims of gender discrimination and deny it even when it is objectively true and they see that women in general experience it" (Ely Ibarra and Kolb). What Crosby stumbled on more than two decades ago is still a dynamic at work today. The surprise reaction and deep catharsis created by the #metoo phenomenon of 2017 is proof that much of what men and women both think about women, gender differences and cultural norms is still remarkably under-processed. Without the benefit of this conversation, women are left to enter the world of church-planting against a negative tide of opinion with inadequate defenses. As Ely and Rhode explain, this circumstance places an unfair burden on those around the planter to compensate for her personal lack of confidence, which is almost

certainly “a losing proposition” (Ely and Rhode 397). Internal pressures created due to lack of understanding of the dynamics present can chip away at the sense of call as well as the respect of others.

Jesus himself said that truth is freeing (John 8:32). As was stated in Chapter 2, Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb note that when women openly voice the barriers present to their leadership potential, they are better able to negotiate those barriers and lead past them so they can plant successfully (Women Rising). “They feel empowered, not victimized, because they can take action to counter those effects. They can put themselves forward for leadership roles when they are qualified but have been overlooked. They can seek out sponsors and others to support and develop them in those roles” (Women Rising). Women who have been empowered with the facts will lead from a place of greater authority and treat others with more respect and less pressure as a result. How exciting to be able to help women reframe the circumstances of their leadership so that potential is exposed and empowerment replaces anxiety. Rather than “apologizing their way into the room,” as Dr. Phil Schroeder, Church Development Director, quipped, women will learn to reframe challenges as opportunities so they can operate from a place of vocational strength. They will be firmly rooted in a Wesleyan understanding of their call so they can confidently lead forward.

The best gift we can give those who plant churches and start new works, especially women, is education. I suggest the development of an interactive training module to help planters think realistically about the barriers they will face. This training module is not for the purpose of airing grievances, but for the purpose of processing fully the barriers women face. This processing can only support women in their work of

planting. In fact, LifeWay's comprehensive national research project showed that "the chance of survivability increases by over 400 percent when the church planter has 'realistic' expectations of the church-planting experience" (Stetzer and Bird). This concept is the principle underlying my own research into the barriers facing women planters. The theory is that women should plant and can plant, but they need better information about the unique circumstances they will face so they can adequately and strategically meet those barriers head on. Giving the appropriate statistical evidence allows potential planters to trust the facts, which then allows them to move past excuses and toward opportunities for obtaining tools to overcome those barriers and plant successfully.

Every woman who plants a church—and every man intent on supporting her as a coach, district superintendent, development officer, or husband—ought to have the benefit of hearing the research attached to the barriers identified in Chapter 2. This module would allow that research to be processed. Students would be encouraged to discuss the barriers that have the most personal impact and would then be directed to develop practical strategies for overcoming those hurdles. They should be encouraged to seek coaching and/or healing in areas of admitted weakness. When women understand the barriers they face and can hear those barriers explained in quantitative terms, they will be better equipped to take authority over their position and claim as their final authority their identity in Christ. Knowing who they are, they will be empowered to embrace the most effective leadership style and find permission to achieve balance in ministry so they can be in this work for the long haul.

Empowerment Through Equipping

A second training module will help women address practical issues related to planting, such as negotiating benchmarks, salaries and other benefits, fund-raising and leadership development, team-based leadership and leading beyond pastoral care.

Women must learn to negotiate benchmarks so they can manage the expectations placed on them and have sufficient time and resources to build a healthy congregation. Likewise, women must learn to negotiate salary levels that appropriately compensate this demanding work. Studies show that women tend to undersell themselves and downplay their strengths. This lack of confidence translates into weakened positions for negotiating compensation. In general, men are more likely to negotiate higher salaries (57%), while women are much less likely to do so (7%), according to Sheryl Sandberg (TED talk transcript). This is an important statistic for women seeking to be compensated at levels commensurate with their abilities.

Women planters must find their places at the table and become active participants in shaping their involvement in a church planting venture. As it turns out, six of the ten interviewees for this project did not expect to plant a church, and some were vocally averse to it. “Okay, so totally never anything that I potentially thought I’d do …” said A. C said she and her husband were assigned the role without their consent. “I (had not) been vetted. My DS said, ‘Welcome to the itinerant system. You will do this or nothing at all.’ Most church planters I’ve met have wanted to do this for years but that was not my story.” F said, “I said no a lot of times and then said yes,” while H put it this way: “We kind of got into it backwards. Usually people come up with a ministry action plan and

then plant a church." In her case, the development director called her one day, showed up at her new appointment the next day, and bought a ministry house for them soon after.

J's opening comment to the interviewer was both classic and typical: "I am an accidental church planter." This ought never to be the case. Successful businesses rarely if ever succeed "by accident." That is the opposite of being "wise as serpents," and is a naive and possibly even foolish approach to the very serious work of planting. One is left to assume that directors or superintendents who impose on women in this way are either: a) woefully ignorant of how new works develop; b) sinfully unconcerned about the life, vocation, or family of the planter; or c) insensitive to the need for more conversation around the call to plant. To be clear, outside voices can indeed help a planter to define her calling, but that must be done in conversation and spiritual discernment, and not strictly as a pronouncement in order to fulfill a perceived or actual quota.

Planters should be properly trained to actively participate in the circumstances of their plants, actively negotiate their terms, and actively pursue training, coaches and mentors to help them make the most of their opportunities. However, acknowledging realistic limits and options is not the sole work of the planter. An interesting facet of optimism bias (a concept further explored in an upcoming section as a surprising finding) is that in order for us to value something more after committing to it, we have to be the ones making the decision. If someone else makes the choice for us, the change in value is not observed. (Sharot loc 2209). This fact is a warning to church development directors who may be over-zealous in recruiting women planters in order to satisfy expectations. Promotion for the sake of promotion is not healthy. Starting churches is far too challenging a field for accidental planters. While encouragement is a good thing, coercion

will only lead to greater discouragement when things get tough. At the end of the day, what we should all want most for women who plant is not a pessimistic view of their chances at conquering the summit, but a realistic measuring of the mountain combined with all the best climbing gear and a "take-no-prisoners" attitude.

As Antoinette Alvarado discovered in her dissertation work (My Sister's Keeper), women who make use of female mentors have a greater ability to succeed as leaders. Women need women leaders who can help them wade through the options to find the leadership identity framework out of which they can successfully lead at each stage (Catalyst; Ibarra and Petriglieri 21; Sinek 171). Mentors can also help women negotiate time-management issues by helping them identify their personal pace and rhythm (Ely and Rhode 381; Catalyst).

Women need at least the following:

- Training in how to negotiate terms—As was noted previously in the remarks of one planter, "Do I deserve a raise? Hell, yes, I deserve a raise. But I know the church can't do it. And you know, a man might just make it happen but I can't. I negotiate myself out of it, right?"
- Training in fund development—"I am not a natural fundraiser." This was the comment noted on prior pages by another planter. "I avoid the 'ask.'" Yet, fund development beyond the congregation is essential to growing a congregation.
- Training in identifying the right situation for their skill set—Without discernment and patience, a planter may find herself too quickly accepting a position for which she is poorly prepared. The planter who noted that her church rejoiced to acknowledge

they would not be funding her project at all was disappointed to find herself in a challenging situation with no support.

- Training in identifying effective coaches and mentors—Planters noted their desire for more training and coaching, but lacked access to resources for either one.
- Training in leadership development, especially leading beyond pastoral care—Some planters noticed that their slower rate of growth affected their ability to gain the resources needed to establish momentum.
- Training in time management and life balance—Directors seemed to notice how many directions planters are stretched. Best practices might include helping women realistically acknowledge this barrier before planting and negotiate it after planting. Teaching time management and Sabbath management would be helpful.

This training module should also provide an opportunity for networking. Q, the denominational officer with extensive experience interacting with women planters, identified networking as a key need. "I think an annual gathering of women church planters to come together to see each other face to face would be incredibly powerful. In the large-scale gatherings of church planters in the US—*Exponential* is the largest church planter focused gathering—our women in church planting work in *Exponential* has only in the last year or two come to be seen as not just for wives of church planters. So in those large gatherings there tends to be … they describe it as a complementarian view of gender authority. The one resource I would love is an annual women church planting retreat. I don't think it is content people need. It is relationship and support and encouragement and networking."

One might argue that all these modules are available in current boot camp settings. I would counter that I have identified no training that specifically addresses the unique circumstances of women planters. A session that takes both the challenges and affinities of women into account will maximize women's opportunities for success.

Empowerment Through Partnership

A third module of training should be developed specifically for mentors, coaches, development directors, district superintendents and others seeking to support women planters in their work. Leaders would benefit from sessions that teach best practices for benchmarks, so they can set reasonable goals based on quantitative research. Women should be active participants in that research and leaders should be prepared to engage in conversations and negotiations that take women's unique circumstances into account.

Likewise, development directors need training in how to best support women planters. The four development directors interviewed had relatively little experience working with or supporting women. Those who had experience noted the distinctive differences. P noticed that women planters need more time for gaining momentum, and because of that may need more encouragement and assurance. "We find that it takes longer to get traction … I find I have to give a lot more of my time to women planters. They lean on me and my position a lot more, wanting to make sure they are doing it right. Wanting to make sure they are successful." Compare his comment with that of the survey respondent who stated that having the support of others helped to normalize her position as a church planter. Collaborative leaders will seek more conversation and creative input as they accomplish their work and as noted in the research of Chapter 2, women are more likely to lead collaboratively.

Denominational leaders would be helped by training in how to facilitate networking opportunities for women. These opportunities do not necessarily have to be exclusive to women planters or pastors (in fact, parish pastors and planters are very different creatures; gender is not a sufficient common denominator in their work). Women would benefit from hearing from entrepreneurs across the business spectrum, and also from experts in the areas of fund development, leadership development and systems and processes.

Herein is perhaps one of the greatest contributions men can make to the advancement of women: it is in learning how to open doors for them to opportunities to which they may not already have access. Coaches, directors, mentors and others who support women can stand in the gap for planters and advocate for them on the Conference level, ensuring that they are not over-scheduled with denominational committees or roles, even as they help them gain access to funders, trainers and other resources.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," Jesus said (John 8:32). As Sir Francis Bacon once quipped, "Information is power" (Bacon *Meditationes Sacrae*). By giving planters and leaders alike relevant information and tools, we can reframe the planting experience as it relates to women and release untold potential. We can also create positive, life-giving opportunities for women called to plant new works, and raise up a generation of excellent role models who inspire still other potential planters. By leaning in and caring actively for the role of women in church planting, we prove ourselves Wesleyan. We collectively determine that we will not be so pragmatic in

our pursuit of church development that we leave women behind, effectively cutting ourselves off at the knees.

Limitations of the Study

Because the research in the field of women and church planting is so limited, this study was made possible only because of the fifty women who chose to share their stories. The study was limited by the fact that forty-eight of fifty respondents were affiliated with the United Methodist Church at the time of their planting experience. Having little access to women in other denominations (not because I did not ask but because I did not receive) limited the experience I was able to portray. Not many large denominations allow women into spiritual leadership. There would be no planters in the Roman Catholic Church, most Baptist traditions, and more conservative Reformed traditions (which includes many non-denominational churches). Smaller Arminian traditions (Nazarene and Wesleyan, for example) have few if any women planters.

This study was also limited to the churches in the United States. Very interesting church planting work is happening in India. Peter Pereira, a Methodist pastor who leads Hope for Today (a mission organization centered in Hyderabad), has boldly declared, "India will be won for Christ by its women."

Finally, the study survey did not include two important subjects—the laypeople served by women planters; and male planters. By interviewing laypersons, the study would have triangulated the results. By interviewing men, the study would have been able to compare answers between genders to find the truly unique experiences of women, versus the experiences common to most planters.

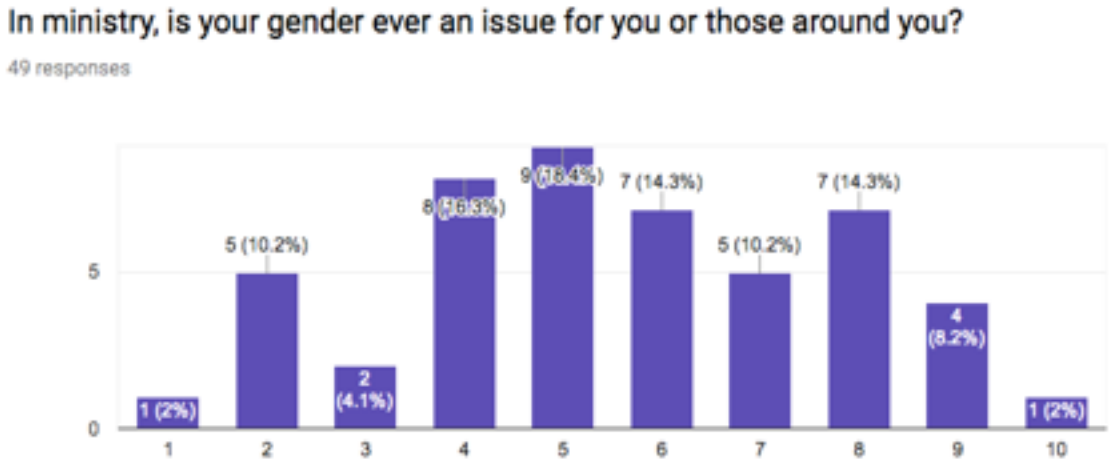
Unexpected Observations

Perhaps the most baffling moment in the study came the day I first seriously examined the fifty survey responses. Expecting to find glaring comments about the inequities they'd faced (after all, I had just finished a massive study of the barriers women leaders face), I found instead mostly dispassionate responses to the questions with numeric responses.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked (with one being often, ten being never): "In ministry, is your gender ever an issue for you or those around you?"

In that response, mean, median and mode were all in the range of five.

Table 5.1. In ministry, is your gender ever an issue for you or those around you?



At the end of the survey, they were asked again for their opinion about the intersection of gender and ministry and its effect on them (with one being very likely and ten being not a factor).

Table 5.2. How likely is it in your opinion that your ministry is negatively affected by your gender?

For this answer, median was seven, mode was ten, and mean was 6.5. In other words, respondents actually grew *more* optimistic as the survey progressed. In their short answers in the survey, several answered that they were not qualified to answer for themselves whether gender was an issue in their ministry.

A: "There are people that walk up and like, 'You're the pastor?' I don't know if that's just because they hear me talking or they see that I'm female or you know I'm not normal … I don't know if it is gender as much as it is … I don't know that at this point. I can't say definitively one way or the other."

B: "I don't know. I can't answer that question … And I don't know if I'm supposed to worry about that."

H: "I don't know, because I'm me. Would I be more likely to grow it faster if I were a male? I don't know."

One woman answered the survey questions much more transparently, discussing her concerns and difficulties. Her interview, however, was much more optimistic (or possibly guarded), until she got to the last question. Then, in conversation, she began to open up, revealing significant concerns about how her gender has affected her ministry. "I would say it is harder. I was invited to speak as a church planter at Annual Conference a year ago. The guys got up and said it has been awesome and I have five hundred (members), and I got up and said this is the hardest thing I've ever done and it has been miserable and it has been tough." When questioned about the dissonance between her survey answers and the overall tone of her interview, she said, "The only way to survive as a female church planter is to know how to sell yourself so people will invest in you." She had become so accustomed to selling herself that answering a survey optimistically was second-nature to her. As H put it: "We don't want to show a weakness. We are conditioned that everything has to be perfect. Your house has to be clean, your kids have to be well-fed. We don't realize the toll that takes on our psyche and we don't even realize it."

What made that initial surprise make sense was the term "optimism bias." I maintain that as women "sell" themselves, or even as they confront the challenges of planting, their optimism increases. Of course, there would be no grounds for making this claim if literally hundreds of studies in the secular world did not point to the barriers faced by women described in this project. Women face barriers. If women deny the experience of that, then women are in denial of an important reality that could alter their professional trajectory. As was mentioned multiple times in other places in this study, a dynamic of women's leadership—particularly in the world of church planting—is that

gender discrimination is under-acknowledged. A general disposition of optimism is not necessary a negative factor in someone who pursues a challenging new work. While an optimistic disposition may be admirable and even engender needed support, it can also work against a planter by preventing her from acknowledging signs of failure once the project has begun, or from seeking the information and support needed to create sustainable ministry over time. While the bulk of research for this project has already been explored and explained in Chapter 2, some detail about optimism bias seems in order here, as it was unexplored as a significant barrier in earlier research. Optimism bias, or unrealistic optimism, is defined as "a favorable difference between the risk estimate a person makes for him- or herself and the risk estimate suggested by a relevant, objective standard" (Ross 75). The most popular work in this field of study is *The Optimism Bias: Why We're Wired To Look on the Bright Side,* by Tali Sharot, a psychologist who runs a "brain lab" at University College London. Her work has been further popularized by a TED talk (Sharot) in which she describes in layman's terms the positive and negative effects of optimism bias on people and cultures. Sharot explains that roughly eighty percent of people are optimistic, a trait that leads to a greater sense of well-being and a decrease in anxiety and stress. Other researchers suggest the same—that an optimistic disposition in general leads to a stronger ability to persevere through trials and an increased sense of hope (Shepperd).

A general sense of optimism is not the same as unrealistic optimism, however. Those with unrealistic optimism tend to see their own futures as more positive than statistically probable (Shepperd). This attitude leads them to make decisions based on what is likely an unrealistic future. When this dynamic is applied to a new venture, it

quickly becomes a recipe for failure. Believing themselves to be invincible, the entrepreneur plows ahead with their dreams without proper assessment, mentors, or tools for the work. For the spiritual entrepreneur (or church planter), solid preparation, the right tools, and a willingness to think realistically about key decisions are the difference between success and failure.

Stetzer and Bird conducted in 2015 what may be the most extensive study of church planting in the United States, and estimated new-church failure rates at 32% after four years. This report offers a slightly higher rate of success than the rate for small businesses in general, but the damning statistic for small businesses in general is not what happens in the first four years but what happens in the first ten. According to the Small Business Administration, seventy percent of small businesses that survive for four years have failed by year ten (SBA website). Stetzer's report may fail to run the trajectory out far enough to see the real rate of failure among churches. If there is a general risk to starting new churches, that risk is increased for women (Sovick). In her doctoral research, Mere Tari-Sovick determined that "small businesses owned by women cease operations 11% more often than businesses owned by men. Women, who own over 37% of all businesses in the United States, contribute significantly to the 50% small business failure rate" (Sovick). The Small Business Administration's statistical analysis of small businesses by gender affirms that women start businesses with less capital than men (SBA Gender Differences), and are under-represented in "high-patenting industries" (patenting is a measure of financial performance—SBA Survey).

Again, the assumption is that what is true in the secular world is also true in the church world; to fail to do so is to fall prey to the same unrealistic optimism being

warned against in this study. The upside to this news is that with the right strategies, women can decrease their risk of entrepreneurial failure. Sovick concluded her study by noting that women can decrease the rate of failure by acknowledging constraints to success, then exploring strategies to enhance leadership skills. The prayer for the next generation of planters—and women planters in particular—is that many more will eschew unrealistic optimism for the reality of the work, then learn the strategies that allow them to succeed with style.

I should also mention the happy surprise of finding that each of the ten women interviewed were living in healthy marriages. While several admitted that there were seasons of stress (at least one had gone through counseling to improve the marriage), all of them reported husbands who were supportive of the work and even sacrificial in their willingness to participate in the call to plant. I was also deeply gratified, as I have mentioned, to hear these women share such strong stories of support from men who mentored, coached, discipled and otherwise opened doors for them.

Recommendations

For those who want to build on this study, I would recommend a much heartier national search for women planters in other denominations and traditions. The experience of other traditions can only enhance the understanding of the barriers women face. I especially recommend exploring the work of women in denominations like Foursquare and Pentecostal traditions, where the presence of women in leadership outstrips that of women in the United Methodist Church by several decades. A future study would be made more complete by a broader research sample, especially the addition of planters from faith traditions other than United Methodist.

I also recommend taking this study to other countries and presenting these findings to women doing remarkable work as missionaries, "persons of peace," evangelists and church planters in other areas of the world. As has been noted, in India women are providing that "person of peace" presence in villages and tribal areas, providing the first introduction to the gospel through their presence. Across the continent of Africa, reports are surfacing of women pastors who are doing remarkable work. This study should be extended to them, and it can certainly be further developed by their experiences. A fascinating future study would be global in scope.

Finally, I recommend that a future study would include the input of both laypersons served by women planters, and also male planters. I would also recommend that the findings of this study be extended to laypersons and male pastors who support women in ministry, for the sake of helping those who encourage women leaders to better understand their role as partners in extending the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I recommend three areas of education:

Women planters must become educated about the natural or common barriers that have the potential to hinder their success in their work. They must realistically process the effect these barriers have already had on their lives, so they can get the healing needed to take authority over their call.

Women planters must become strategically oriented to the work of planting. They must get training in the areas of leadership development, financial management, time management, the art of negotiation, and the recruitment of coaches and mentors, so they are adequately equipped for the work to which they are called.

Denominational leaders and coaches must do their own research. Calculate reasonable benchmarks for women planters. Advocate for women planters. Be willing to get creative so their collaborative style can shine. (As Q said, “Our women are doing a great job. They are more innovative, because they have to be.”). Particularly important for women pastors is the need for assessment of the call toward planting. Too often in circles where women are allowed to lead, they are asked to step into positions they may not otherwise prefer, for the sake of fulfilling someone else’s desire to see women in leadership positions. While the invitation to plant may be offered in the spirit of advocacy and empowerment, this move can backfire on everyone.

Finally, the advocacy by men of women in leadership cannot be over-stressed as a value. The greatest gift men can give women is the gift of opening doors, mentoring them, treating them as co-laborers in the gospel and nothing less. Ely and Rhode note that women often have difficulty accessing the same information as their male colleagues (Ely and Rhode 402). Men in general have greater access to inner circles of support. If women who lead do not have access to other successful leaders who are ahead of them on the journey, how will they become better leaders? The right answer is not to place an "invisible burqa" on someone else. The right answer is for mature men to advocate appropriately and responsibly for women, so that as Wesleyans we can work together to raise up an army of spiritual leaders who are equipped and passionate about fulfilling the Great Commission.

Postscript

I owe my sanity in this season of ministry in large part to what I discovered through this study. For fifteen years, I have been engaged in the work of developing a

church. I went into it—as with so many other overly-optimistic spiritual entrepreneurs—with great hopes. I had every expectation that with hard work and a strong vision, I could be the next (female) Andy Stanley. It never once occurred to me to plant a small church, and failure was absolutely not an option.

Church planting turned out to be much more difficult than I expected. I worked sixty-plus hours a week for years on end and banged up against wall after wall. At first, I assumed it was all *me*—that my leadership style or lack of proper training was the problem. After years of compensating by taking every possible training opportunity, I began to suspect that the walls I encountered were something over which I had less control. Yet, when I would mention that maybe the problem was at least partly connected to my gender, I was always met with dismissal. "You're great!" folks would say. "We love you!"

Over time, that frustration bred a kind of quiet insanity that kept me on an anxious edge. I was just sure there was something more to this frustration but without quantitative evidence, all I had was a feeling, and feelings are not (usually) fact. That persistent frustration with what I intuited but did not have facts to support was what led me to this doctoral program. I am absolutely committed to training up another generation of women planters who can stand ably at the intersection of Acts 1:8 and Galatians 3:28, but I have to admit: I was also just plain curious for my own sake. I wanted to know if what I was experiencing was real.

The night I was researching Chapter 2 and came across a statistic that said that women actually feel crazy when they sense bias but have no one to corroborate it was the night my "fever" broke. It was about midnight and I was sitting in my home office

chasing down study after study when I read that statistic. I will admit: I had "church" in that room that night. The relief of finding out I am not alone, of discovering not only that the barriers are real and that people often do not acknowledge them, but that there are reasonable ways around them was such a freeing discovery.

That moment was a catalyst for healing and a renewed sense of call to this work. I can now (with less disappointment, at least) say that God has not called me to be another Andy Stanley, but he has called me to be a voice for those who deeply, earnestly want to press into their calling.

That revelation compels me to continue this journey. I plan to use this material as the foundation for the first book on the subject of how women plant churches. A book will make the information widely accessible both to women and the men who support them as mentors, coaches, directors, district superintendents and bishops. I also expect to develop the three training modules recommended and will offer those as supplements at conferences like New Room as well as in seminary courses.

I also believe this material transcends the church planting world and can be a great source of encouragement, healing and inspiration for all women with the gifts to lead. Already I have had opportunity to share these findings among laywomen who want to better understand their place at the intersection of Acts 1:8 and Galatians 3:28. In the coming year, our church will implement a leadership training program for women who are unemployed and underemployed. The vision of the program is to empower working-class women to move beyond spiritual, financial and relational poverty to a place of confidence and abundance. The material of this study will be used in that program to help women understand the challenges they face as they step into leadership positions in the

secular world. To be able to say among women that, as residents of a fallen world, we all face barriers but that there is hope for leading past them, I want to inspire a generation of women to move both their work and their life toward greatness (Collins 210).

I am grateful for the opportunity to have taken this journey and as I end the research phase here and move into its implementation in my circles of influence, I do so with a deep and fervent prayer that these ideas will help someone else to have "church" not only in their home office, but with great success out in the world, having taken authority over their call to "go and tell the others" (John 20:17).

APPENDIXES

A. Consent Form for Dissertation Research

B. Online Survey Questions for Female Church Planters

C. Expert Review Demographic Data Instrument

D. Phone Interview with Church Planter

E. Conference Call Focus Group with Denominational Leaders

Appendix A: Consent Form for Dissertation Research

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on the barriers faced by women church planters and the strategies needed to lead past those barriers so women can plant effectively. You will be asked to respond to the questions on this survey and may be contacted by phone at a later time to talk further about your experience of planting a church.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately 45 minutes for survey completion, one hour for personal interviews.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal; we do not anticipate any risks to you as a participant in this study, other than those encountered in day-to-day life. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are participation in a project that will result in better training and support models for future women church planters. You will also be given access to the final dissertation narrative. *There are no other tangible benefits.* Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment, appointment or professional status in any way.

PAYMENTS: You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at professional meetings or in classroom settings, or published in a future book. Your name and the name of your church or congregants will never be used in the published documents.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact Ellen L. Marmon, Ph.D., Director, Doctor of Ministry Program (Beeson International Center, Asbury Theological Seminary), 859.858.2054.

Indicate *Yes* or *No*:
(If applicable) I give consent for my survey results to be used for the purpose of writing a dissertation. ___Yes___No

(If applicable) I give consent to be audiotaped during this study. ___Yes___No

I give consent for the transcripts of audio files resulting from this study to be used for dissertation research, development of training materials and development of published materials about women church planters: ___Yes ___No

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____
Print name _____

Appendix B: Online Survey Questions for Female Church Planters

These three research questions form the basis for my research. The actual questionnaire follows these three questions:

Research question #1. What common barriers are faced by women who plant new churches in the United States?

Research question #2. What barriers compromise effectiveness and how can women church planters lead past the barriers they encounter?

Research question #3. Based on these results, what best practices (training and support) will offer the next generation of female church planters the best opportunity for effective ministry?

QUESTIONNAIRE

11. Are you the founding pastor of a church plant or new congregation? yes no

12. Are you currently the lead or primary pastor of that church? yes no

13. How long have you been there?
    - 0-3 years
    - 3-5 years
    - 5-10 years
    - more than 10 years
    - I planted a church but am no longer the lead pastor there.

14. Is your church affiliated with a denomination or network? yes no

15. If yes, which one?

16. If no, then with what theological "camp" do you most resonate?

17. Are you: married single

18. If you are married, is your husband also a pastor or staff person at your church? yes no

19. In ministry, is your gender ever an issue for you or those around you? (sliding scale 1-10)

    never sometimes often

20. How often do you engage in conversation with others who disagree theologically with your position on women in ministry leadership?
    - never
    - 1-2 times a year
    - 4-5 times a year
    - monthly weekly

21. How often do you hear from others about their conversations with family members, co-workers or others who disagree with their choice of church/pastor?
    - never
    - 1-2 times a year
    - 4-5 times a year
    - monthly weekly

22. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being not discouraged at all and 10 being very discouraged), how discouraged are you currently by those who disagree with you theologically about women in ministry leadership?

not discouraged at all somewhat discouraged very discouraged

23. What are the most obvious personal or professional pressures you face as a ministry leader? (there will be a box here, where the respondent can answer)

24. How would you describe your leadership style?
    - collaborative
    - democratic
    - charismatic
    - authoritarian
    - coaching
    - other ____

25. Do you notice a difference between your leadership style and that of your male colleagues? yes no

26. If so, what differences stand out to you?

27. Do you notice a difference in how you are treated as a leader, compared with how your male colleagues are treated? yes no

28. If so, can you name any differences?

29. Have you ever used a professional coach or consultant to help you develop as a leader? yes no

30. If yes, was your coach: male female

31. If yes, was your coaching experience: positive negative neutral

32. If you have never used a professional coach, why?
    - I can't afford it.
    - I haven't found the right coach.
    - I haven't needed a coach.
    - other _____

33. Do you currently have a mentor? yes no

34. If so, is this person male or female? male female

35. If no, have you actively sought out a mentor at any point in your ministry? yes no

36. Have you had the experience of a male colleague helping you to achieve your goals (acting as a "door opener" for you, when you sought a position or opportunity)? yes no

37. Can you describe that situation?

38. How is your church faring financially?
    - It is tight, but we pay our bills.
    - Our congregation is generous; we're doing great.
    - We have really struggled to pay our bills.

39. Have you waived your right to a raise in any year since becoming a church planter? yes no

40. If so, why?
    - We couldn't afford a raise for the pastor.
    - I didn't need the raise so declined it.
    - The church didn't feel I merited a raise.
    - other _____

41. Do you have any sense that your church's financial health is negatively influenced by your role as pastor? yes no

42. If yes, in what way?

43. How would you describe your church's growth?
    - We've grown quickly since we started.
    - We have kept a steady pace of growth.
    - It waxes and wanes (some seasons re great; some not so great)
    - We have not grown quickly.
    - We are currently on a plateau.

44. What word best describes the way you feel right now about your church's growth?
    - energized
    - challenged
    - frustrated
    - worried
    - enthusiastic
    - faithful
    - other ____

45. When you began this work of planting a new church, were you given attendance goals or benchmarks to accomplish? yes no

46. If yes, can you describe the expectations you were given?

47. Did you accomplish them? yes no

48. If you were not given benchmarks to reach, did you set any personal goals or expectations for yourself? yes no

49. If so, what were they?

50. Do you ever compare your church's growth in attendance with that of your male colleagues? yes no

51. Do you ever wonder if others compare your church's growth to that of male pastors? yes no

52. If yes, how does that affect your own sense of competence?

53. How might you benefit (emotionally, practically, spiritually) at this point in your ministry from guidance on how to set reasonable expectations for growth?

54. By what title and/or name are you usually called within your congregation?

55. Has your title (or the name by which you are called) ever been an issue or topic of discussion in your church?

56. How confident are you in the carrying out your ministry?

very somewhat not very

57. How confident are you that you carry the authority of leadership among your people?

very somewhat not very

58. Is your instinct toward nurturing others what you would consider:
- Strong
- average
- weak

59. At what age did you become a church planter?

60. Have you had children at home during your time as a pastor?

61. If yes, how did your role as parent impact your role as pastor?

62. How many hours do you estimate you work per week?
- 20-39
- 40-50
- 50-60
- more than 60

63. How does the number of hours you work compare with the number of hours you estimate your male colleagues work?
- I work more.
- I work the same.
- I work less.

64. Which of the following statements seems most true for you? Check all that apply.
- I feel like I work more hours than most men to accomplish the same results.
- I feel like I work about the same number of hours as my male colleagues, but I get more done.
- I feel like I am always juggling three or four roles in a day—mother, wife, pastor—that my male colleagues don't seem to be juggling.
- I love my role as planter, and I am willing to invest the time it takes to make it work.
- I feel stretched and am wondering how much longer I can do this.
- I'm ready to move on and am waiting for the right opportunity.

65. If you are currently in mid-life, how has the process of emotionally maturing affected your ministry?

66. If you are currently in mid-life, how has the process of physically aging affected your ministry?

67. Health-wise, are you:
- healthy
- pretty healthy, but with a few issues
- dealing with significant health issues

68. Do you exercise regularly?
- 4 or more times per week
- 2-4 times per week
- occasionally
- rarely if ever

69. Are you currently taking any medications for depression or anxiety? Yes No

70. Are you currently seeing a counselor or therapist? Yes No

71. How would you describe your faith in God these days?
- strong
- lukewarm
- faltering
- dry

72. What one word would you use to describe your relationship with Christ?

73. Which sentence best describes you in this season?
    - I know who I am and I know God's purposes for my life.
    - I know I have a purpose but I am struggling to understand that.
    - I am realizing that I may not know myself, and it is affecting my ministry.
    - I am in a crisis of faith right now and am wondering whether I am called to ministry.
    - I am just going through the motions these days. I feel burned out.

74. Scale - How likely is it in your opinion that your ministry is negatively affected by your gender?

Appendix C: Expert Review Demographic Data Instrument

Question #	Needed	Not Needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestion to clarify
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					

10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					
21					

Ques-tion #	**43**	**Not Need-ed**	**Clea r**	**Un-clear**	**Suggestion to clarify**
22					
23					
24					
25					
26					
27					
28					
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					

34					
35					
36					
37					
38					
39					
40					
41					
42					

Question #	**Needed**	**Not Needed**	**Clear**	**Unclear**	**Suggestion to clarify**
43					
44					
45					
46					
47					
48					
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54					
55					
56					

57					
58					
59					
60					
61					
62					
63					

Question #	**Needed**	**Not Needed**	**Clear**	**Unclear**	**Suggestion to clarify**
64					
65					
66					
67					
68					
69					
70					

Review Completed by _____

Signature_____ Date Completed_____

Appendix D: Phone Interview with Church Planter

1. Tell me the story of how you came to plant a church.
2. Tell me more about your congregation.
    1. What is the culture of your church?

2. What kind of people tend to come to your church?

3. What is the focus of your church?

3. How has church planting affected your faith?

4. (if married) How has it affected your marriage?

5. How has it affected your sense of self?

6. What leadership challenges have you had as a pastor?

7. What challenges have you had in recruiting and training other leaders?

8. In your opinion, has your gender contributed positively or negatively to the growth of your church?

9. Can you give one (or more) example of a time when your gender played a role in the development of your church? This can be a positive or a negative story.

10. (if applicable) As a female planter, has your denominational affiliation helped or hurt your ability to plant successfully?

11. What would you say are the three biggest challenges you face as you position for future growth in your church?

12. What reflections do you have about the survey questions?

13. What topics within the survey resonated with you?

14. What questions do you have for me?

Appendix E: Conference Call Focus Group with Denominational Leaders

1. How long have you served in your current position?

2. How do you interact with church planters?

3. How welcoming is your denomination/ network/ region to women in leadership positions?

4. How many women planters have you interacted with in your current position?

5. What is your most prevalent personal observation when working with women planters?

6. What do you see as the biggest challenge for women who choose to plant churches?
7. What barriers, if any, have you witnessed women facing as planters?
8. What resources would you be most interested in seeing developed for women planters?
9. What resources do you sense would be most useful for women preparing to plant?
10. What questions do you have for me?

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