The harvest is great, the (female) laborers are few, and the positions for them are even fewer.
Called by God—
What’s a Woman To Do, and What Can We Do To Help Her?
BY DEBORAH MENKEN GILL

She grew up with little godly influence; accepted Christ in a church that limited women’s leadership; was filled with the Holy Spirit and called into ministry at a Pentecostal altar; but sometimes she feels guiltless and even guilty to conclude that she could be called. She remembers a liberal feminist teacher in high school but has seen few righteous female role models in leadership.

What is such a woman’s place? Pastor counsels her that the Assemblies of God ordains women, but she struggles with a couple of confusing Scripture references. She has seen two women preachers on television but has never met one in person. Is it possible that she should engage in such a pursuit? What’s a woman to do? The same thing any person who is called should do—obey God.

Everyone called into the work of the Lord faces challenges in pursuit of God’s will, and the clergywoman has her share. She expects to fight the devil but is disheartened when resistance to her call comes from brothers and sisters in the faith. Destined by God but denied by others. Enabled by the Holy Spirit but disabled by human spirits. Burdened in her heart but blockaded in her path. What’s a woman to do? What any believer should do: Study the Word, counsel with godly people, pray it through, and then—obey God.

From early Pentecostals as prominent as Maria Woodworth-Etter and the charismatic healing evangelist of recent history, Kathryn Kuhlman, to many of our contemporary sisters in full-gospel work today, women’s struggle with the call has been documented. God only knows what loss to the Kingdom were those who were called but foiled by frustrations. Yet history bears record of those who were faithful in carrying out their convictions at great cost. These are the women who evangelized thousands, braved dangerous mission fields, pioneered a great portion of our churches, and left a legacy of lives in God’s kingdom today because of their commitment to the call.

What’s a woman to do? Obey God. It’s just as simple as that; there is no other choice. If she is a disciple, disobedience is not an option.

What can we do to help her? Plenty. Let me challenge you with seven proactive steps you can take to facilitate a woman’s quest to confirm her calling.

ESTABLISH THE LEGITIMACY OF HER CALLING FROM THE WORD.

Understanding the biblical basis of women in ministry empowers her to answer the call. The Bible records that both men and women are created equally in the image of God, both are equally fallen, and both...

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Questions for a Woman of Influence

The question of a woman’s role in leadership will probably never be settled to everyone’s satisfaction. Gretchen Gaebelmen Hull, in Equal To Serve, raises many thought-provoking questions that a woman of influence should seek to answer from the Bible so that she can be true to God and herself:

• What advice does the Bible have for us on our quest for approval?
• Is our tradition scriptural?
• Will you give up your rights to yourself and any entitlement to a certain position and obey His call?
• Will you accept God’s authority?
• In the end, whose approval really matters most to you?

God’s approval matters. That’s why the woman of influence will not circumvent the Bible in order to lead. She will embrace God’s Word to find her unique place of leadership.

Questions that have helped me find my unique place of leadership have included:

• What is the context of this question or this passage of Scripture? What was the culture then and is this a specific command for a specific day and time? or is this a command that crosses cultures and time periods?
• What is the whole counsel of God on this issue? The Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. I want to know from cover to cover what the Bible says rather than looking for one verse just to prove my point.
• Can I gain more insight from a study of this issue by commentators and Bible scholars? historians? the original language?

—From A Woman of Influence by Pam Farrell (InterVarsity Press, 1990), 43. Used by permission.
Christ's treatment of women was revolutionary and resulted in the Early Church's use of women in leadership in remarkable ways. Can be equally redeemed. Contrary to the divine design, the fall into sin has imposed false hierarchical distinctions between the sexes. Jesus' teaching and example confirm that He came to reverse the effects of the Fall, bringing forgiveness of failure and freedom from oppressing others. Christ's treatment of women was revolutionary and resulted in the Early Church's use of women in leadership in remarkable ways. The apostle Paul was a great supporter of ministering women. The only two biblical passages that appear to limit their roles in leadership are not universal prohibitions but address specific local problems that needed correction. In these last days—from Pentecost to the Second Coming—the Holy Spirit is poured out freely on all categories of people, and God intends to use those whom the Spirit equips.

Excellent exegetical resources are available on the women's question. If a person is prejudiced against women's leadership, no amount of evidence will change his or her made-up mind; but if one is open to consider the facts, there is mounting biblical research to confirm that God does call and use women in ministry.

AFFIRM THE AUTHORIZATION OF HER CALLING FROM DENOMINATIONAL STATEMENTS.

Remind yourself, your congregation, and especially your young people that the Assemblies of God sanctions women in ministry. Many are the historical records of endorsement, but the two easiest to access today are the official position paper adopted by the General Council, August 1990: (1) "The Role of Women in Ministry as Described in Holy Scripture" and (2) our Bylaws, Article VII, Section 2.k: Eligibility of women (for ministry).

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INSPIRE THE PURSUIT OF HER CALLING WITH MODELS FROM THE PAST.

The previous generations in our Fellowship's history were blessed with numerous female ministers as role models. Their influence on the subsequent generations was enormous. You can locate stories of these valiant women in denominational publications, especially Mountain Movers and Assemblies of God Heritage.

FACILITATE THE FULFILLMENT OF HER CALLING WITH MENTORS FROM THE PRESENT.

Though female models today may be fewer than in the early years of the
modern Pentecostal movement, we can at least begin to influence coming generations positively by exposing them to exemplary women alive today. Ask your leaders to use female ministers in positions of visibility without distinction of gender; to appoint them to leadership positions on all levels; to invite them to minister in local churches, in college chapels, and at district and national functions.

ARTICULATE YOUR PERSONAL ENDORSEMENT OF HER CALLING BY ENCOURAGEMENT AND EXAMPLE.

Nothing is quite as affirming as a true friend who believes in you. A kind word spoken, a timely call made, a caring message sent—whether by E-mail or snail mail—can be priceless to one in need. Be an example of inclusion in your conversation, teaching, and preaching. Clean up sexist language; be sure to use illustrations of women in a positive light, not just as the brunt of a preacher’s humor.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE REALIZATION OF HER CALLING WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE.

One of the greatest affirmations of one’s call is an invitation to minister. Regularly schedule women into your ministry calendar, not only for the sake of those ministering but for those who are blessed by their ministry and example. Use them in the same roles in which you use men: in all levels of Christian education, youth ministry, music, evangelism, teaching, and preaching.

If existing positions are closed to a woman called to ministry, why not support her efforts as a pioneer—she has great precedents there. Investing your resources in God’s work through her could be a great blessing.

PRAY THAT THE LORD WILL RAISE UP WORKERS, AND BE CAREFUL NOT TO SEND AWAY ANYONE GOD CALLS.

The harvest is great, the laborers are few, and the positions for them are even fewer. This generation has the lowest percentage of female ministers of any in the history of our Fellowship. Why not be a change agent to reverse that trend? Be an armorbearer for women who are faithful to the call.

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ENDNOTES:

1 I am personally committed to be an advocate for women in ministry. Along with these suggested steps, I will foootnote several examples of how I am walking in that direction.

2 I am frequently asked to lecture on this issue and have prepared an audio cassette series on the topic. The following paragraph is a summary of The Biblical Liberated Woman: The Biblical Basis of Women in Ministry and Leadership.

3 I have been involved in the founding and growth of Christians for Biblical Equality, an organization that serves as a clearinghouse for excellent resources on this issue. Contact CBE (P.O. Box 7155, St. Paul, Minn. 55107-0155; telephone 612-224-2416) for a list of books, article reprints, audio- and video cassettes, membership and conference information, and journal subscription.

4 I served as a resource person to the Commission on Doctrinal Purity, for the preparation of that position paper.

5 Women of the Cloth is a network I cofounded in the Minnesota District, which is beginning to spread across the nation. Bringing clergywomen together is one way of facilitating peer mentoring. Perhaps you would like to propose a chapter in your district.

6 Last year at North Central Bible College I assembled a committee to investigate the possibility of offering an academic women’s specialization. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if every one of our educational institutions had curricular support for women called to ministry?

7 Many women are not located near a female minister mentor, but they could read about them. I am writing a series of profiles called Models in Ministry: Assemblies of God Women In Christian Leadership Today.

8 I serve (not as the single female token) on the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary Board of Directors.

9 I appreciate the district superintendents of Nebraska and Minnesota inviting me to minister as morning Bible teacher at their family camps.

"You should have told me you don't like living in glass houses before I accepted this call, Ralph."