



Interim Report of LWF Study Process on Experiences of Women in the Ordained Ministry



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

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PREFACE

“I have seen the Lord!” Mary Magdalene announced on Easter morning, after finding the empty tomb. Jesus spoke to her and sent her out to announce his resurrection. Her witness and voice echoes to this day, encouraging women who are proclaiming the gospel and serving in the ordained ministry.

This interim report marks the completion of the first phase of the Study Process on Experiences of Women in the Ordained Ministry. Originating as a response to resolutions and commitments made during the Twelfth LWF Assembly, the study aims to build knowledge that will guide further engagement in order to remove barriers for the full and meaningful participation of women in the ordained ministry.

The report provides insights into the lived experiences of women throughout the LWF communion within their ministerial roles. It is intended to pave the way for the subsequent stages of the study process,

inspiring and empowering more women to actively engage, share their stories, and realize they are not alone in their journeys. The study underscores the LWF’s commitment to gender justice and the full inclusion of women in all aspects of church life, including the ordained ministry.

May readers of this report draw insights from the quotes and stories shared in this report that highlight the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of women in the ordained ministry. They are an invitation to listen to the voices of women serving in the ordained ministry. They also serve as a powerful tool to engage and connect, remember and believe.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has finalized the first phase of a study to understand the experiences of women's empowerment and challenges in the ordained ministry among the member churches. The learnings of this study will inform strategies to remove barriers, support and strengthen the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

The study was carried out in response to resolutions and commitments made by the Twelfth LWF Assembly, which emphasized the importance of gender justice and the full and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of church life, including the ordained ministry. The study process began in 2021, after facing delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes at the LWF Communion Office. Responses were received until April 2022.

The methodology employed Feminist Participatory Action Research methods, including online forms to collect experiences and stories from women who are ordained, focusing on their empowerment and affirmation, as well as the challenges and struggles they face. The collected material was then analyzed by the LWF Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment program executive and network coordinators, as well as the Women Doing Theology network.

The study acknowledged certain methodological limitations, including an imbalanced response rate across regions, with one region representing a significant majority of the responses. The COVID-19 pandemic and organizational changes also affected the distribution and engagement levels in certain regions. Additionally, limitations related to survey responses, limited internet access, and concerns about recognition or exposure were taken into account.

Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations, such as providing additional translations, involving regional leadership, and validating the findings through Women's Regional Pre-Assemblies prior to the Thirteenth Assembly. Although not all LWF regions were equally represented, the responses received provided valuable insights into the experiences of women in the ordained ministry.

The study's outcomes will serve as a guide for future efforts to address barriers to the full and meaningful participation of women in the ministry. Further analysis of the responses and development of theological content, including papers, methodologies, and materials for reflection, study, support, and discernment, will be completed by 2025.

1. INTRODUCTION

This interim report presents the findings of the Study Process on the Experiences of Women in the Ordained Ministry, aimed to inform strategies to remove barriers, support and strengthen women in the ordained ministry. The process follows from LWF's ongoing commitment to women in ministry, being an area of study, reflection and discernment in the life of the Communion. The report on the 1992 Consultation on the "Ordained Ministry of Women and the Episcopal Ministry," held in Geneva, Switzerland, states:

Lutherans do not have or need to develop a theology of female ministry. Rather we have a theology of ordained ministry developed in relation to an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God and grounded in the Reformation understanding of justification through faith.¹

Resolutions of LWF assemblies, Council statements and strategic programs have regularly called for an inclusive communion and the participation of women in the Ordained Ministry.² The *Gender Justice Policy*, approved in 2013, states, "the participation of women in the ordained ministry is a vital, albeit not only, step toward building an inclusive communion."³ The Gender Justice policy lays out a biblically-rooted framework for the Lutheran global communion of churches to take concrete steps to implement gender justice, including the full and meaningful participation of women in the ordained ministry.

In 2016, a gender baseline assessment on women's participation in the ordained ministry and in leadership functions and decision-making processes was published.⁴ The document brings important insights

to the history of women's ordination among the member churches in the LWF communion, although not all churches answered the survey.

During the Women's Pre-assembly held prior to the Twelfth LWF Assembly in 2017, women initiated a process of storytelling to share experiences, to build solidarity and mutual support as well as listening to the voices of women. Later, the Twelfth LWF Assembly approved two resolutions related to women in the ordained ministry calling for (1) a process to accompany member churches in a dialogue on women in ordained ministry and for (2) a study process to examine women's experiences in ministry and remove barriers to their serving:

- **Resolution on women in the ordained ministry:** The Assembly directs the LWF Communion Office to develop a written process for accompanying member churches in dialogue on women in the ordained ministry. Further, the LWF should establish a mechanism for consultation and discernment over issues regarding women's ordination.
- **Resolution calling for a process to study experiences of women in the ordained ministry:** The Assembly calls upon the LWF Communion Office to organize a process to study experiences of women in the ordained ministry in order to remove barriers and to affirm the way forward. . .

These resolutions reaffirmed LWF's commitment to promoting gender justice and ensuring the full participation of women in all aspects of church leadership and ministry. Furthermore, the *LWF Strategy 2019-*

¹ The Lutheran World Federation, *LWF Studies – Ministry, Women, Bishops*, Geneva, 1993, 12.

² See annex 2: LWF commitments to women in the ordained ministry

³ The Lutheran World Federation, *Gender Justice Policy*, Geneva, 2016, 16. For more see LWF <https://lutheranworld.org/resources/document-lwf-gender-justice-policy>.

⁴ See: https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-wicas_women_ordination.pdf

2024 states: “We will promote the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry”.⁵

In 2019, the network of Women Doing Theology met in Warsaw, Poland to foster gender justice by reflecting on the connection between feminist Lutheran theology, the *LWF Gender Justice Policy*, and the 2017 Assembly resolutions on women in the ordained ministry. However, due to various challenges, such as the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and organizational changes within the LWF Communion Office, adjustments had to be made to the timeline initially proposed. These factors affected the distribution of the online forms and engagement levels in certain regions, leading to variations in response rates. Additionally, limited access to the Internet, as well as concerns about privacy and exposure, can have impacted the willingness and ability of women to share their experiences. The imbalance in responses among the regions also needs to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, concerted efforts were made to ad-

dress these limitations, such as providing additional translations and actively involving regional leadership. Women’s regional pre-assemblies served as platforms to validate the findings of the study process.

The structure of this report is as follows: It presents the methodology, responses to the research, the theological themes that were gathered, and concludes with remarks that will guide next steps in the study process. To ensure authenticity and credibility, direct quotes from women who participated in the study process have been included. To respect the participants’ privacy and confidentiality, all personal information has been omitted. Instead, participants are identified only by their respective regions, allowing for anonymity while still acknowledging the diverse geographical contexts from which the voices emerged. These quotes allow the voices and experiences to be heard directly, providing firsthand perspectives on the affirmation, challenges, and insights they have encountered.

⁵ *With Passion for the Church and for the World -LWF Strategy 2019-2024*, p. 20. (<https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2018/documents/strategy-2019-2024/screen/lwf-strategy-2019-2024-report-en-low.pdf>)

2. METHODOLOGY

The Study process is informed by Feminist Participatory Action Research methods⁶ in the following three phases:

1. Collection of experiences: An online form was created and shared through the Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment network, after member churches had been informed by the General Secretary in October 2021. The form requested participants to agree to participate in the research and provided sections for sharing experiences or stories of empowerment and affirmation, as well as experiences or stories of struggle and challenge. Participants were also given an opportunity to provide additional comments. The initial timeline was October to December 2021, which was extended to April 2022.

2. Harvest of themes and issues: During this phase following the collection of experiences, the Gender

Justice and Women's Empowerment program executive and network coordinators, along with the Women Doing Theology networks, worked with the gathered material. The focus was on harvesting theological and biblical themes, as well as a wide range of issues concerning women in the ordained ministry. The timeline for this phase was March to December 2022.

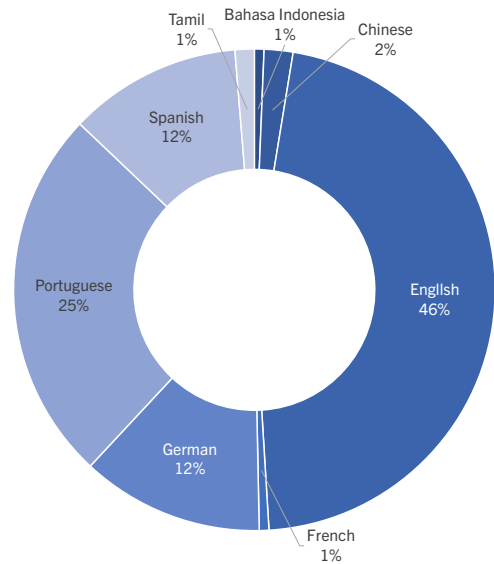
3. Development of theological content: As part of the ongoing process, seminaries, theological institutions, and the Women Doing Theology network are being invited to contribute to the study by writing papers and methodologies based on its outcomes. These contributions aim to provide material for community reflection and study, support for women in the ordained ministry, and resources for discernment and mutual accountability. These materials will be presented at a consultation in 2024 and are expected to be completed by 2025.

⁶ *Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) combines feminist principles, participatory methods and action-oriented goals. It seeks to address power imbalances that affect women's lives, to challenge dominant knowledge systems and promote gender justice. FPAR affirms that lived experiences and personal stories hold valuable knowledge that can inform change efforts. It is built upon Paulo Freire's "conscientization" concept and acknowledges the interconnectedness of various systems of oppression such as race, class, age, sexuality, disability, location in the world. For more information see: <https://apwld.org/feminist-participatory-action-research-fpar/>*

3. PARTICIPATION

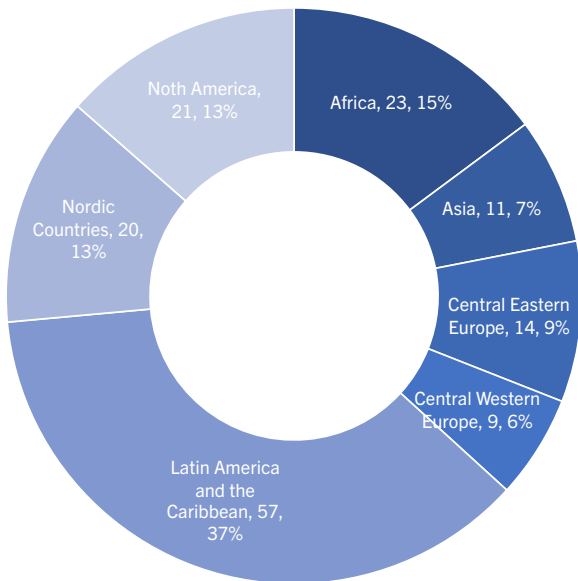
In all the seven LWF regions, 168 women had access to the form. Out of that number, 166 agreed to participate in the study, while 2 did not. Out of those who agreed to participate, 155 were women in the ordained ministry, who proceeded to answer the subsequent questions.

In addition, two of the member churches — the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB)—shared answers from their internal survey. The ELCA contributed 262 additional answers from the “Quality of Call initiative for Women in Ministry”; and the IECLB shared 77 answers from their internal research. The experiences of both member churches have been incorporated into the thematic analysis, but not in the overall quantitative report.



3.1 Participation according to region

Women from all seven LWF regions took part in the research. The participation according to region was:



Languages	Participants	Percentage
Bahasa Indonesia	1	1%
Chinese	3	2%
Engllish	72	46%
French	1	1%
German	19	12%
Portuguese	39	25%
Spanish	18	12%
Tamil	2	1%
Telegu	0	0

3.2 Participation according to language

The form was primarily made available in the four LWF official languages: English, French, German, and Spanish. To overcome language barriers, the form was translated into Chinese, Telugu, Tamil, Bahasa-Indonesian and Portuguese.

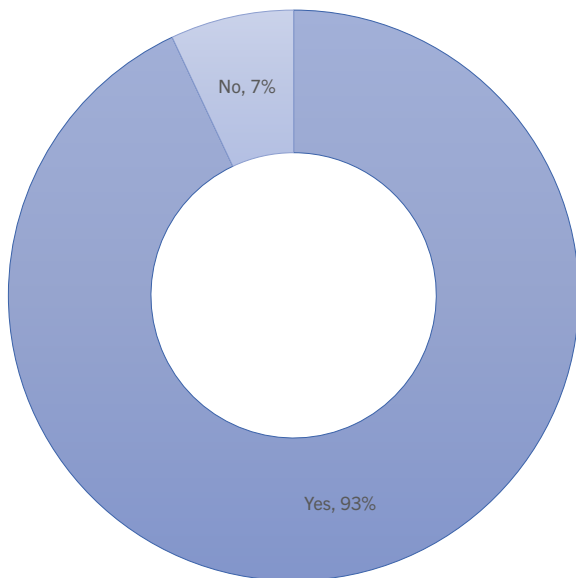
3.3 Participation according to ordained ministry

Across the LWF communion, the general practice of ordination to Word and sacrament relates only to pastors. Some member churches practice ordination of deacons, deaconesses, catechists, missionaries and pastors as special emphasis in the ordained ministry.

In response to the questions:

a) *Are you a woman in the ordained ministry.*

- Yes 155 (93%)
- No 12 (7%)



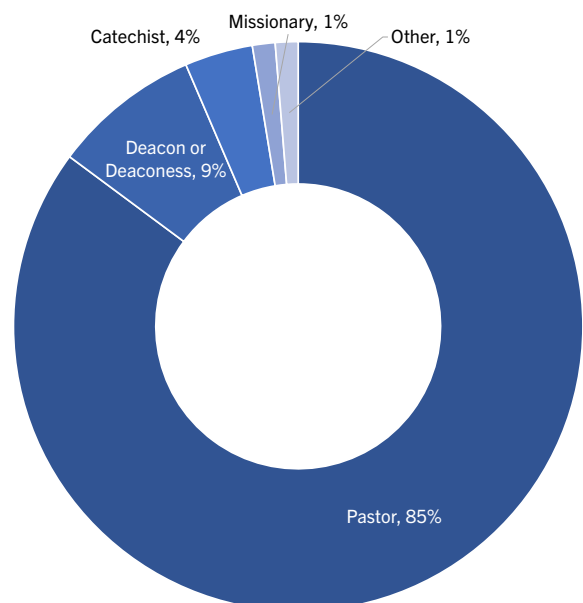
If the answer to the question was “No,” the form would not allow for further response.

A “Yes” response was followed by the question:

b) *Are you ordained as:*

- Pastor: 132 (32%)
- Deacon or Deaconess 13 (9%)
- Catechist 6 (4%)
- Missionary 2 (1%)
- Other 2 (1%)

Regions	Participants (ordained)	Percentage
Africa	23	15%
Asia	11	7%
Central Eastern Europe	14	9%
Central Western Europe	9	6%
Latin America and Caribbean	57	37%
Nordic	20	13%
North America	21	13%
TOTAL	155	100%



4. EXPERIENCES OF EMPOWERMENT OR AFFIRMATION

Being a pastor is my vocation. I never doubted it! (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I have so many experiences of that kind – I do not know where to start. (Nordic)

The comments above from two respondents from differing contexts provide a starting point to our understanding of both the commitment and diversity of experiences expressed in the answers in this study.

The question, “Share an experience or story of empowerment or affirmation in the ordained ministry,” received 144 responses. Participants expressed gratitude for God’s calling and for ongoing strength received. They also highlighted the support received from other women, colleagues, family members, church leadership, congregants, and ecumenical partners. The following 4 respondents gives us a snapshot of the joy, empowerment, and affirmation they experience in ministry:

Being the first and only female pastor among male pastors brings joy in my heart and I understand that God is impartial, and He loves His people unconditionally despite gender, race, finance status etc. I am thankful to God because He strengthens me always and I have proved many people wrong in my context who thought women cannot make it in the ordained ministry. But here I am as a living testimony. (Africa)

Since I have been ordained as a minister in my church, I have enjoyed the work because I feel that my hard work has placed me in a position I dreamed of. Starting with parish work to the academic career. I am actually satisfied in the ministry as a woman. (Africa)

I have felt empowered around female pastors who are older than me. Many of them have

been so encouraging and helped me to gain self-confidence as a theologian who has her own voice and ability to speak out. (Nordic)

Most of my career, I have felt affirmed in the ministry I am called to. As I’m called to Word and service, there is the added challenge of also having to explain what being a deacon is all about. That definitely adds a layer to this topic. Most often, I have felt affirmed in my leadership skills and in the person who I am and what I bring to my work. (North America)

Indeed, women feel empowered to face challenges with faith and confidence, building bridges, opening doors, and creating opportunities to serve God through the ordained ministry, recognizing that ministry does not belong to them but that they are called to participate in God’s work in the world. At the same time, cultural norms are evoked and used for empowerment.

I could say that working with challenges is really God’s ministry. It’s a good experience to move with different ideologies of different congregation members. Every single day is a new learning. It’s a God given work. That is my faith. So, God will guide us. (Asia)

As a woman, being ordained is an open door to what it required to bring the lost sheep to the Lord. Women can easily lead congregations to salvation through their teachings and preaching because they are the mothers, they can influence many people with their faith in Christ. (Africa)

The gift of being present in congregants’ lives, whether in joyful or sorrowful circumstances, is considered

empowering and affirming. In addition, respondents noted that receiving requests for pastoral counseling was a recognition of their gifts and a chance to support others, particularly when it came to discussing subjects that women (and men) would often not talk about with men, as the experiences shared below reveal.

Every baptism, every funeral, and every time I preside over Holy Communion are holy moments in my ministry. Teaching and preaching bring me great joy. These moments give me a strong sense of being an ordained minister in the church. At the same time, they are deeply humbling, and empowering occasions that remind me of God's call to the ministry. (North America)

When I was ordained a pastor and shared my own story of hurt and healing openly, [...] came forward and contacted me again. She said she can trust me now, and she asked for listening and because she knew I would understand her pain and desire to heal. She felt empowered and encouraged because if a woman (me), also an abused woman, could and can stand tall and become a priest and so really make the voice of women heard in our country. (Central Eastern Europe)

Being a woman pastor, I could easily connect with the women's group in my church. Through these women, the whole family could be reached easily. (Asia)

Many families want a female pastor to baptize their children. They feel women are more down-to-earth, sensitive and humane. At funerals, I've been told many times that I gave out extraordinary warmth and empathy. (Nordic)

Women who are vulnerable most of the time feel more comfortable in sharing their personal and family problems with me because I am a woman. That serves an opportunity to use pastoral skills in helping people to help themselves to have fullness of life. (Asia)

a) Related to call to ministry

Responses express the joy and gratitude for the call to ministry, the ongoing learning of what it means and the joy to experience it unfolding.

My long-awaited dream for ordination took place after 18 years of my basic theological education. (Asia)

It is exciting to reflect on how diaconal ministry has become a more significant presence in the church's vision over the past ten years. I am thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit and her patient work and guiding us to where we are today. (North America)

God makes miracles in our everyday life. I feel I am to help people to see, to notice the miraculous way God moves in their lives and to teach them to trust everything in God's hands. This is not something you learn in days or weeks, this is a process of learning your whole life through. (Central Eastern Europe)

I did dedicate my ordination to all women theologians who could not become pastors, and it is hard to see how their competence does not get in full bloom in the way they wish. There is a lot of work to be done – together for change. Ordination as deaconess and pastor have laid a strong foundation where practical and word weave together. Diakonia gives a deep understanding of our society, especially the invisible ones. It has helped to give names to unnamed phenomena and tools to understand life's hardships. (Nordic)

The responses above collectively demonstrate the deep sense of purpose, dedication and commitment among women in the ordained ministry. They reflect the transformative power of God and the desire to bring positive change within church and society as a whole.

b) Related to family:

The responses highlighted the significance of care and support from leadership and parishioners toward

women in ministry and their families, particularly during pregnancy, childbirth, and the care of children. Such support was described as vital for the wellbeing of ministers and their ability to fulfill their calling.

When I became pregnant with my first child, I was worried about how it would be received in my congregation. I informed the church council with trepidation and was delighted to find great support and excitement. My people had a baby shower for us and celebrated when my daughter was born. I had a really 'successful' maternity leave and was welcomed back to the parish. (North America)

I am the seventh child in a family of ten siblings, four sisters and six brothers. Both my parents and my siblings love and support me very well. My peers, community members respected me though they started calling me pastor while I was still a theologian at the seminary. (Africa)

These two examples above in particular reflect the positive impact of such support and emphasize the significance of fostering a nurturing environment within the church community.

c) Related to education and formation

Respondents underscored the importance of education and formation for ministry. They emphasized the necessity of continuous learning, seeking information, and engaging in continuous education to meet the demands of an ever-changing ministry and contextual environment. Seminaries and professors were frequently mentioned as sources of encouragement and support.

I have been fortunate that my ministry has been supported from the start. I was encouraged to enter seminary by two professors who I worked with in the community advocating for social justice. (North America)

Training workshops and consultations from in and outside [...], messages of encouragement and prayers from other women, ordained and nonordained. (Africa)

I have many good mentors who shaped and helped me become everything I am today. (Africa)

The academic training in theology, the hard work through which I was accumulating experience, the concern to always be renewing knowledge, have been ways of empowerment and affirmation in my personal case, for work in the ordained ministry. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

The recognition of the importance of continuous education and the presence of supportive mentors, professors, communities, underscores the personal commitment to effectively serve and lead.

d) Related to ecumenical engagement

The potential for ecumenical engagement through groups, organizations, and events can be inspiring and affirmative, particularly for women who have the opportunity to be in positions and spaces that are predominantly occupied by men in patriarchal societies. However, this engagement is also recognized as a great responsibility.

I have found the ecumenical co-work with other churches inspirational and sharing our faith in action. Human rights week in October, Ecumenical prayer week in January, and other joint events inspire everyday work. Sometimes working as a pastor can be lonely, so when we come together it is a joy. (Nordic)

I work ecumenically. A woman from the other church in one of the communities I work in recently told me that I am the least judgmental person she knows.

Several people who are not part of my parish have recently expressed thanks for my ministry. (North America)

To celebrate in different environments, even outside the walls of the church, where the majority are men, were very significant experiences. There were several times when

I was the only woman to integrate a place of honor, a tribune, a podium, a microphone. Being there is more than just being there, it's having all the women in the world together with me. A responsibility! A delicious experience! A fear! (Latin America and the Caribbean)

These examples reveal how the ecumenical work can be empowering for women in ministry as well as women from diverse faith traditions.

5. EXPERIENCES OR STRUGGLES OR CHALLENGES FACED IN THE ORDAINED MINISTRY

Only one? (Latin America and the Caribbean)

We will not listen to a woman! (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I can't believe [...] is thinking of calling a woman! (North America)

Can you do that as a woman? (Central Western Europe)

The short statements above open this session on experiences of struggles or challenges in ministry. The respondents recounted how their service and leadership in ministry was questioned, challenged, and even opposed. They revealed stories of pain, of being silenced, lack of recognition, and harassment. There were 148 responses received to this question. While some respondents pointed to the time of theological education and path to ordination as the most challenging, others considered it was during the exercise of ministry that they encountered the most challenging experiences as illustrated in the responses below:

I have so many of them, I don't know where to begin. I guess the biggest struggle for me has been accepting the fact that though women are ordained in ministry, the theology they bring to the church is often encountered with suspicion and even rejection [...] Sometimes I wonder whether the expectations toward women is like "be grateful that we, men, granted you this grace, that you have the possibility to be ordained. In your ministry be like a man. Don't be like a woman. And for heaven's sake, leave theology to men." (Nordic)

I was publicly attacked on the Facebook page in the first broadcast of an online service. According to the aggressor's argument "women should not preach." (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I understand that it is convenient for church authorities to have me as a pastor, because it is "politically correct" at an international level. But we are not really in decision-making, we are not helping in a plan for gender justice, official patriarchy weighs heavily, and sometimes I want to leave it all, but I think that if I leave the church, many women will remain without protection. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I found a wall that I naively thought did not exist in the Lutheran church in which I lived for more than 20 years: in my local congregation, a bell of literal traditionalist thinking that focuses on the role of women in all types of roles except exercising the pastoral ministry. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Being a female pastor has no challenge, however the challenge is how you are always perceived as incompetent. (Africa)

These responses reflect the painful experiences and challenges faced by women in ministry. They shed light on the continued struggle for recognition, acceptance, and equal opportunities within the church. The experiences shared also demonstrated the urgent need in addressing gender injustice and creating institutional change also within the context of ministry.

Related to family

The responses from the study revealed contradictory expectations related to families of women in ministry. Sometimes being single, others being married, posed challenges and made it difficult for women to be accepted in certain ministerial calls. Single women faced resistance in some cases, while married women encountered expectations to prioritize their role as caregivers, as we can read below:

Being a first female pastor and single, I found it difficult to be accepted in some areas and it's a big challenge to interact with my fellow pastors and other male members in the presence of their wives. (Africa)

I was not married when I got ordained. There was one of the parish members who refused to have me as a local pastor because I was not married and a female pastor. (Africa)

Participants also highlighted the patriarchal understanding of gender roles, where comments about pregnancy and children were directed only to women. They felt penalized for maternity, facing the risk of losing work opportunities. The stories shared also highlighted the discomfort and biases faced by women in relation to motherhood. Congregants expressed discomfort with seeing their pastor as a mother, leading to restrictions on holding or interacting with their own children during worship.

The congregation also made it clear the youngest (only 2) was not to be picked or held at any point during worship because "it made them uncomfortable to see their pastor as a mother." (North America)

I had an older man once tell me that because of my children and an ailing parent, I should perhaps consider taking some time off. "You know," he said, "just until the kids are grown." My children were ages 1 and 4 at the time. I am certain that none of my male colleagues have ever experienced this. (North America)

Women also faced judgments and expectations related to taking time off due to motherhood, even when

their children were very young, while they felt that their male colleagues did not experience the same criticism.

That Wednesday afternoon, the day of my return from maternity leave, the director of the institution said that I was not missed during my leave. It was stronger than a spanking. He broke me "inside." (Latin America and the Caribbean)

One of the challenges was to continue pastoring and studying in the face of criticism for leaving the daughters alone, even though they were with their father. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I lost my son in 2012. I was deeply disturbed and disappointed by the beliefs of so many congregants who came to share words of comfort with me. For some, it was an experience that I had to endure because my faith was tested, for others it was because I have been bewitched. This caused years of turmoil and grappling with my faith as a pastor and bereaved mother. (Africa)

Challenges related to spouses, divorce, and domestic violence were also shared. Women experienced prejudice and rejection when going through divorce, facing sexist and prejudiced attitudes from church leaders and members. They were judged and gossiped about, despite being victims of abusive relationships. Unmarried or divorced women faced further challenges, with their marital status being used as a basis for exclusion and non-acceptance.

When I got divorced, the very sexist and prejudiced attitudes came strongly from the leaders, who, until the moment they received the news, considered me very competent and dedicated and I was a professional reference in the management and direction of the institution. I suffered a lot. A lot of rejection, gossip, and everything because I, a woman, was ending an abusive relationship, where I was even betrayed, and I was putting an end to that situation. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I am a victim of violence from my home, and now that I have decided to divorce for that reason, they do not accept unmarried or divorced women. So,

with pain in my heart and my vocation ahead, my horizon is waiting for who knows how many more years. Thank you for opening this space, at least I have spoken. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

These snapshots of stories above illustrate the complex challenges faced by women in ministry in relation to family and societal expectations. The experiences shared reflect the need for awareness, greater support, understanding, and equity within the church community. It emphasizes the importance of addressing gender biases and creating spaces and conditions where women can fully embrace their roles as pastors and caregivers, if they so choose, without facing discrimination or contradictory expectations.

Related to body

The shared experiences also revealed how women's bodies, especially the biology of women's bodies, became a source of rejection and judgment. Questions of purity and impurity arose in different regions, leading to discriminatory attitudes and actions. Pregnancy also became a point of rejection by some members.

The first time I was given the opportunity to consecrate the Holy Communion elements, and give communion to all the people, there was a lady who came back from the walk to the altar because she said she would never take communion from a woman, and she left worship. A family also expressed itself very strongly, saying that it was not possible for them to allow a dirty woman with her menstruation to be at the altar and they also left the church. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Another experience was how I was treated while pregnant as an ordained minister. Some of the members refused to receive Holy Communion from me. It was as if my pregnancy had made me less worthy or like I had sinned. (Africa)

In addition to body-related issues, appearance and dress style were used as ways to challenge women in ministry. Respondents faced judgment and criticism for their outfit choices, with their attire being deemed inappropriate for their role as pastors.

There are many! But I did experience being confronted about my outfit, which was judged to be inappropriate for a pastor. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Many comments on appearance (whether the hair is tied back nicely today or not, that women pastors would also become more and more attractive) . . . it could go on forever. (Central Western Europe)

The impact of these challenges was not only psychological but also manifested in physical illness, with participants connecting the suffering experienced with subsequent serious health issues.

I don't know for sure what happened, but I do know that I left the first congregation where I worked with a serious liver problem. There were many moments of suffering. I don't know if those moments, experienced especially in the last year of ministry in that congregation, were responsible for the problem I had. After surgery, I was fine. I don't know if suffering can generate a big physical problem, but for me, the illness represents the pain I went through in that congregation. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

These accounts highlight the unjust treatment and scrutiny that women in ministry endure based on their bodies, clothing, and appearance. The experiences shared reveal the need for reflections and studies on embodiment and what it means to be created in the image of God, as we learn in Genesis 1:27. The psychological and physical toll of these challenges underscores the importance of creating life affirming environments for all within the church community.

Related to colleagues

Responses highlighted common challenges related to experiences with colleagues, both male and female, in the context of ministry. Some expressed disappointment in the lack of support among women in ministry, noting how they have learned not to support each other. This lack of support within their own gender was seen as a significant challenge. The constant need to prove their capabilities

and leadership abilities, as well as sexist stereotypes, were mentioned as exhausting and discouraging factors. Sexist jokes and reinforcing stereotypes about women were also reported, as we read below.

Women can be questioned, men can be supported. (North America)

Sexist jokes from male colleagues, always reinforcing stereotypes of women. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

The challenge I came across in my ministry as a female pastor in most cases comes from female colleagues. (Africa)

Sad that in 2021 there has been little change, even though there are many more women in ministry in this area. I have felt more support and acceptance from my local ecumenical ministry than some of my male Lutheran colleagues. (North America)

First the struggle came from the culture of senior citizens who have narrow perspectives about ministry. We try our best to do the best and show understanding about human equity. Now the culture accepted us, however the struggle nowadays comes from the women. Many women pastors do not support the ministry of women who want to advance. (Asia)

Respondents also shared experiences of not being heard, having their ideas ignored until repeated by a man, or being expected to perform tasks considered feminine and, therefore, culturally less valuable. Condescending remarks, not being taken seriously in council meetings, and being addressed in a disrespectful manner were mentioned as examples of the challenges faced by women in ministry.

Sadly, the struggle in ministry has come from male colleagues who love to hear their own voices but seldom make room for others, unless specifically directed to do so. Suggestions and ideas can be made but are often ignored, only to be brought up later as one of the men's ideas. (North America)

They had the idea that when a woman came to the dialogue table it was to take notes and be [...] assistant or secretary. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

I receive condescending remarks from either, I am not taken seriously in council meetings, or have been left out when decisions need to be made. (North America)

At times I am addressed as madam or aunt by some members and even pastors instead of being addressed as a pastor and yet all male pastors are addressed in the right manner. (Africa)

Being a female pastor has no challenge, however the challenge is how you are always perceived as incompetent. It is difficult for the leaders of the church and other members in a leadership role to elect you or entrust you with top decision-making bodies. (Africa)

These experiences of being undervalued, disregarded, and silenced contribute to a lack of representation and diversity within the body of Christ. Women expressed frustration about not being able to express their views or experiences, feeling the need to constantly validate their work and defend their ministry. The weight of these challenges sometimes leads to a desire to no longer occupy that space of ministry.

Many times, with male colleagues of the pastoral ministry I did not express my views, neither my experiences. I would have had much to say, to contribute to reflection. Does anyone want to hear? (Latin America and the Caribbean)

It seems to me that we are never enough. Sometimes we talk too much, sometimes we talk too little.. At times we are labeled as too sensitive or too fragile. At other times we are branded as inaccessible or too rigid. In many everyday situations and talks we have the feeling that we occupy a place that is not ours. We always seem to have to validate our work and defend the ministry we do. I realize that for us women, sometimes, the path of ministry is so heavy, that it makes you want to not occupy that space anymore. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Respondents shared the difficulties they faced, expressing the sense of being overlooked and unacknowledged by male pastors and church leaders. They emphasized their commitment to being true to themselves, rejecting the expectation to conform to a masculine model of ministry. They highlighted the importance of women taking on leadership roles and leading in their own unique ways, challenging the traditional gender roles assigned to women in the church.

My path toward ordination was hard and my being a female pastor and minister is harder. Mostly as I often haven't and don't sense that the male pastors and church leaders really bother to get to know me, and they really don't seem to care how I am getting by. I am a woman; a mother and I love it. I have no intention to conform to being a man. I see and know that females in our country and in our church are considered the "weaker" gender, good for filling the serving roles – music, children's ministry etc. – and treated accordingly, and patronizingly patted on the head: good girl! [...] Genders, and every person is a unique and valuable creation of God and our country and church needs women to step up and take and choose the roles of leadership and lead like women. And this is very hard. And frustrating. And often seems like fighting giants. Paradigm shift must happen and is happening, and I have stepped into no-woman-land. (Central Eastern Europe)

These accounts shed light on the systemic biases and obstacles that women face within the context of ministry. The lack of support and understanding from both male and female colleagues hinders their ability to fully contribute and be heard. It underscores the need for greater gender justice awareness, mutual support, and validation of the work and perspectives of women in ministry.

Related to ministry

Respondents shared how their choice in ministry, whether as a deacon, deaconess, missionary, or catechist, is often dismissed as not being the "real" ministry, primarily because it is not "pastoral." This

adds an additional layer of challenges and discrimination, beyond gender, to the ministry they exercise.

Some respondents expressed uncertainty about whether they faced dismissal and challenges because of their gender or because they held a particular ministry role. They felt that their role as a deacon or deaconess was not always fully recognized or valued compared to pastoral roles, as expressed in the stories below.

Sometimes, I have felt dismissed but it's difficult to tell if it's because I'm a woman or because I'm a deacon. (North America)

As a catechist minister, I face the issue of inequality between ministries and the fact of being a woman. But I was never directly questioned about my professional preparation or competence, or negatively compared. Where I worked, they ended up recognizing the value of my work, but it's an achievement! And not without constant challenges! (Latin America and Caribbean)

Because of the catechetical emphasis, age and gender, it is recurrent not to be recognized as an ordained minister, regardless of what I say or do. He is pastor so and so and my name always in diminutive, on top of that. (Latin America and Caribbean)

The challenges presented go beyond gender, intersecting with the perception of certain ministries as lesser or not fully legitimate. It underscores the need for reflection on the confessional definition of ministry, a broader recognition and appreciation of the diverse ministries in the church and the need for equal respect and support for all individuals in their chosen roles.

Related to violence

The responses to the study revealed that women in the ordained ministry have also experienced sexual harassment and violence. These incidents can occur in various forms and contexts, often in unexpected times and places. Women shared experiences of inappropriate touching, explicit sexual comments, and advances made by colleagues, parishioners, and seminary professors.

Seminary was a horrible experience. Professors who were not professional and treated us as children or belittled or humiliated us in other ways (publicly). The seminary had very few rules in terms of confidentiality. We even had a professor who was known to be sexually inappropriate with his students and it took years for him to be fired. (North America)

I attended my first synod a few years ago and was extremely distressed because I was harassed by several men who were also attending. I was taken aback at how often a man had to comment on my appearance, my sex life, and tried to find excuses to touch me. I found it disheartening because I felt as though I wasn't being seen as a minister, but only as a woman. I felt as though my office had been cheapened. I have also had times within my own pastors' conferences, circuit events in which male pastors have made inappropriate comments to me during official meetings. (Africa)

Some respondents shared disturbing encounters of inappropriate advances by men. Others mentioned receiving explicit sexual messages during pastoral care conversations or being hit on. These experiences have left women feeling uncomfortable and violated, as they recall in the following quotes:

Over the course of my ministry in that parish, I had two male members grab my breasts, one grab my buttocks and another grab my face and try to kiss me. (North America)

More than one parishioner has used one-on-one pastoral care conversations to share detailed and explicit sexual thoughts with me that have made me very uncomfortable. [...] I have also been hit on more than once. (North America)

I have had experiences of sexual harassment. (Nordic)

The female pastor has never been seen by male pastors as their equals in ministry or as collaborators. They are seen as inferior servants or simply a sexual object. (Africa)

Furthermore, respondents shared stories of moral, verbal, psychological, spiritual, and economic violence, as well as discrimination in terms of payment. Women faced derogatory language and threats from parish leaders, with little intervention or support from colleagues or higher authorities.

... I was hired at the same time as a pastor and he had more rights guaranteed than me. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Much would be done if the necessary strategies and means were intentionally sought to provide fair financial remuneration for pastors, who often serve their faith communities without payment. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

The shared accounts demonstrate the pervasive nature of violence and discrimination faced by women in the ordained ministry. Sexual harassment, along with other forms of mistreatment, undermines the ministry of these women and creates an environment that is detrimental to their well-being.

These stories emphasize the urgent need for stronger measures to address and prevent violence against women in ministry. It is essential to create safe and respectful spaces where women can exercise their ministry without fear of harassment or mistreatment. This requires proactive efforts to educate, raise awareness, and enforce policies that promote a culture of respect and accountability within the church.

It is important to note that while not all regions provided response about experiences of violence and harassment, it does not imply that such incidents do not occur. Cultural, social, and personal factors, such as fear, may influence the willingness or ability of individuals to share their experiences openly. Therefore, it is crucial to approach this issue with sensitivity and recognize that the silence does not negate the reality of violence and discrimination faced by women in the ordained ministry.

Related to biblical interpretation

The patriarchal, fundamentalist, and legalistic interpretations of certain biblical texts have been significant challenges for women in the ordained ministry.

These interpretations often reinforce traditional gender roles, restrict women's participation, and marginalize them within the church.

By selectively focusing on a limited number of biblical passages, these interpretations reinforce the idea that women should be subordinate to men and should not hold leadership positions. This not only limits the opportunities for women to grow professionally and exercise their gifts within the church but also perpetuates gender inequality and discrimination, as we read in the following quote,

The biggest challenge is the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religious and biblical texts, that divide and segregate society and also the church on issues regarding men and women. We live in a country with deep religion history – mostly Catholic. That brings many objections and disadvantages for professional growth and attainment of leadership positions. (Central Eastern Europe)

Lutheran tradition and hermeneutics encourage a critical engagement with biblical texts, taking into account their cultural, historical, and literary contexts. By engaging in biblical hermeneutics, theological reflection, and studying the cultural and historical contexts, we can gain deeper insights into the message of the texts and the principles they convey. This allows us to challenge and question interpretations that perpetuate inequality, injustice and discrimination, particularly regarding women in ministry and leadership.

In this process, it is essential to consider the broader themes of justice, equality, and the empowerment. The Lutheran tradition affirms the priesthood of all believers, emphasizing the equal worth and dignity of all individuals in the sight of God. This understanding provides a foundation for promoting gender justice and dismantling barriers that hinder the full participation of women in the ordained ministry.

Related to age and place of ministry

Respondents shared challenges faced due to their age and placement. Young women were often disregarded or not taken seriously because of their age, while older women may experience exclusion or be forgotten due

to their experience. These biases based on age limit the opportunities for women to fully participate and contribute to ministry roles.

People look at us with distrust and after we've done our work, they come and say things like: When I saw that you were such a young woman as a pastor, I was afraid that you wouldn't be able to handle it, but you surprised me. Another comment: wow, she's small and young, but she speaks so well. Words like that are hard to hear, as people always seem to be suspicious of you. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Furthermore, the inequitable distribution of ministry placements, where women are predominantly assigned to rural areas with long distances and difficult conditions, while men are given preferential treatment in urban areas, is seen as a clear example of gender-based discrimination.

It has not been easy being a single woman in a rural parish. (North America)

I do feel that single women pastors are sent to start missionary ministries far away in the country where we show that we are capable of taking on challenges and doing it well with the guidance of divine wisdom. On the other hand, there are few men or families who go out to develop a mission outside the big cities. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to gender justice and equality within the church. It is essential to recognize and challenge the biases and stereotypes that contribute to the unequal treatment of women based on age and placement. Efforts should be made to provide equal opportunities for women of all ages to serve in diverse ministry contexts, including urban areas, and ensure that their skills and experiences are valued and utilized.

6. ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS, SUGGESTIONS, AND FEELINGS

When offered the opportunity to add thoughts, suggestions and feelings after having participated in the study, 122 participants engaged and continued to reflect about their own experiences and what it meant to share them. For many, this was the first time they had disclosed some of their experiences. There was also an overall gratitude for the opportunity to share and that LWF was providing a platform to hear the stories and experiences.

First, I thank you for the space you offer to be able to report situations that are not right in the churches, and then I share that sometimes I feel very frustrated in these processes, and COVID-19 has made things much more complicated. I still grieve for the times that were hard. I wish that women didn't have to fight so hard to get the same amount of respect as our male colleagues. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

In fact, sharing my story has been a liberating and healing tool. I suggest breaking the silence and the sense of isolation should be avoided by my fellow women in ministry. (Africa)

It's hard revisiting wounds that have never quite healed. Sexism in the Lutheran church is still very real even after all these decades of women's ordination. (North America)

As an Asian woman, it is not easy for women to advance, because there are many things to consider. e.g., family (husband and children), fellow women, courage to move forward and change, etc. (Asia)

I am confident that, despite the challenges and sufferings of the pastoral journey, the Holy Spirit

strengthens and encourages us to the task of empowering other women and men to serve in God's mission. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

It's actually a big challenge: not to give up. (Central Western Europe)

Beyond gratitude, several respondents also mentioned the *LWF Gender Justice Policy*, its contributions and challenges, but also raised questions about implementation and further developments.

I am concerned that behind a gender awareness, women are being relegated again. With the excuse of inclusion, our spaces are getting smaller and smaller. We do not have access to official, institutional spaces, with our activities and productions. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Churches urgently need gender justice policies and codes of conduct. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

*Gender-based violence was and still is a challenge in my ministry because we (the church) are not vocal in fighting against the ill-treatment being committed to or by our people. Gender justice remains an assignment for which we are responsible to take up and educate our people. We talked about the *LWF Gender Justice Policy* as a member church in our leadership meeting, but we do not do much about aiming to change our system. (Africa)*

Organization and dialogue within ecclesial institutions is essential. It's not just about ordaining women. The gender perspective as a cross-cutting issue is very important

for understanding and awareness, not only for local churches but for the leadership of the institutions so as not to violate the ministers. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

We need more feminist theology which supports gender equality and encourages women to participate in ministry and leadership positions. (Asia)

Churches need to educate and teach gender justice at all levels starting with children, continue to educate youth and adults, change

patriarchal church liturgies to be more inclusive. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

These quotes highlight the importance of continuing to create safe spaces and policies that allow for mutual accountability. They also reveal the importance of remaining vigilant, perceiving when language of gender justice is appropriated and distorted. Feminist theology and gender justice are highlighted as necessary areas of study and engagement. Overall, the understanding that gender justice is our shared commitment and needs to involve the people of God as a whole, is evident.

7. HARVESTED THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Several theological themes emerged from the collected stories and experiences of women in the ordained ministry. These themes serve as a basis for developing materials reflection and study by LWF’s member churches. The themes include:

- **Baptism:** Exploring the theological significance of baptism in understanding one’s vocation.
- **Justification by grace through faith:** Examining how the Lutheran principle of justification is experienced in everyday life, particularly in the lives of women.
- **Priesthood of all believers:** Recognizing that all human beings are called into the priesthood as equals, regardless of gender.
- **Ordained ministry:** Reflecting on ministry as described in Article V of the Augsburg Confession, including considerations on the role and practices of the office of bishop.
- **Leadership:** Learning empowering and collaborative models of leadership, connected to vocation, gifts and skills, and not to gender roles.
- **Vocation:** Understanding that God does not make distinctions among human beings and that all are called and sent to bear witness in the world. (Gal 3:28)
- **Biblical hermeneutics:** Exploring how Lutherans read and interpret the Bible, including the hermeneutical principles applied to texts related to women in the Bible and how they are taught and understood.
- **Ecclesiology:** Investigating the nature and identity of the church and what it means to be a church, and the relation between ecclesiology and ordained ministry and eventual misconceptions about this relation.
- **Theological anthropology:** discerning the special relationship among humans and God, what it means to be created in the image of God.
- **Diakonia:** Examining the role of diakonia and the question of hierarchy among ministries, particularly in member churches where deacons are part of the ordained to ministry.

The following scriptural texts and themes were suggested as resources to be developed for study and reflection:

Focus	Biblical text
Creation	Genesis 1-2
Women at the cross and the tomb	Mark 15:33-41, 16:1-11; John 19-30, 20:1-10; Matthew 27:45-56, 28.1-10; Luke 23:44-49, 24:1-12
Woman healed on a Saturday	Luke 13.10-17
Prophetic women	Exodus 15:20, 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Isaiah 8:3
Syrophenician woman	Mark 7:24-30, Luke 18:1-8
Vashti and Esther	Book of Esther
Sarah and Hagar	Genesis 16, 21
Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah	Genesis 29:15-30; 31:42
Women requested to be silent	1 Corinthians 14:34-36
Freedom	Galatians 5:1

8. WAY FORWARD

The study process has provided an opportunity for women to be heard, and valued, affirming their place and contributions in the ordained ministry. It is a step toward creating an inclusive, empowering and just environment for women in the ordained ministry and the whole church. The willingness of participants to share these experiences and stories reflects the significance and the need of these processes. Although it may have been challenging to revisit difficult memories, these conversations are essential for finding meaning and healing, to raise awareness and build solidarity.

Overall, the process of sharing one's stories proved to be a healing experience for many and the LWF realizes the importance of creating similar spaces not only within churches but also between churches. In this section, we will include some preliminary recommendations on the way forward.

The stories shared encompass various themes, such as family, ministerial roles, sacraments, violence, harassment, gender expectations, literal interpretations of biblical passages, surprises, engagement, power, authority, and economic discrepancies. It is evident that the place and full participation of women in the ordained ministry faces challenges across contexts represented in the LWF.

Recommendation: to encourage ongoing support and accompaniment for women in ministry. Ordination is an important step, but equal emphasis must be placed on supporting the lived experiences of those called to serve.

The study has provided insights on the continued influence of patriarchal gender roles on women and their response to life situations. One significant challenge is the difficulty women face in being accepted as ministers, as society often perceives male leadership as the norm. This perception is even stronger within religious and faith communities, often justified by biblical interpretations. As gender remains a factor

that restricts the full and meaningful participation of women in the church and society, true gender justice requires not simply including women in existing structures but transforming systems of power and privilege. This would also mean the participation of men in the process of building alternative models of leadership and questioning privileges they have received in patriarchal societies.

Recommendation: to review and change structures that hinder women in ordained ministry to flourish and grow in leadership roles. While ordination is a shared commitment of the LWF, it is crucial to acknowledge that without changes in structures designed with male experiences as the standard, women's gifts may struggle to be valued and embraced as a blessing to the entire body of Christ.

The study also highlights the importance of collective involvement and a variety of approaches to breaking down barriers for women in ministry. Innovative avenues and the sharing of experiences are essential. Theological discussions around purity, impurity, and other relevant topics should involve the whole communion.

Confessional documents, theological reflection, and biblical hermeneutics play a vital role in understanding ministry. Reclaiming the definition of ministry within the Lutheran tradition empowers women to embrace their roles with confidence and to challenge unjust practices.

Recommendation: Further reflection and the development of materials are necessary in several areas, including confessional matters, theological anthropology, the theology of sacrifice, embodiment, power and authority, gender justice, and on the implementation of policies to prevent and protect women from harassment and violence.

Continuing to work with the stories and experiences shared is crucial. The depth and richness of the material collected cannot be fully conveyed in this report. A consultation will be planned to address issues raised and explore ways to collect stories from regions under-represented in this phase of the study.

Recommendation: Provide ongoing possibilities for sharing and listening, fostering a supportive environment where women feel safe and empowered to express their unique perspectives and contribute to the collective journey toward gender justice and the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

6. CLOSING REMARKS

Embracing the diversity in our communion and providing equal opportunities for all to serve, lead and share their gifts not only enriches women, member churches but also has a positive impact on the entire world. When people are valued for who they are, created in God's image, rather than limited by societal constructs such as gender, culture, ability, class, economic status, education level or location, they can fully contribute to God's work in the world.

By removing barriers and promoting just participation, environments are created where individuals can thrive and make meaningful contributions based on their unique talents and perspectives. This inclusive approach fosters collaboration, innovation, creativity, accountability and understanding, leading to a vibrant and dynamic LWF communion. It recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every person and affirms the belief that everyone has something valuable to offer.

It is essential to also highlight the need for solidarity and respect among people called to serve in ministry themselves, with a shared understanding that all are called to proclaim and serve God's people and being an example of just relationships.

The experiences shared in this study process not only provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by women in the ordained ministry, but also serve as a powerful reminder of their strength, resilience, and dedication. Their stories have the potential to inspire others to answer God's call and mobilize the whole communion to work toward gender justice within the church and beyond.

This interim report presents a snapshot of the complex realities faced by women in ordained ministry through the findings and preliminary reflections which aim to inform the next phase of the study process. In addition, it encourages further research, analysis and reflection for a more comprehensive understanding that would strengthen the commitment of the LWF toward gender justice.

Ultimately, by embracing diversity and promoting equal participation, we create a world where the collective potential of all individuals can be realized, and where justice, dignity, and human flourishing can truly thrive. We end this report by returning to the voices of the women in the ordained ministry, hoping they will encourage us forward, as did the women at the tomb in the early easter morning.

It was a very good decision to be ordained. I was able to have so many valuable and beneficial experiences. The strengthening and support of women in the pastoral ministry is still an issue today and it is particularly important in minority churches. (Central Eastern Europe)

We women must be sure that when we arrive at the ordained ministry, we have been called just like any other person/man, we have to believe in ourselves to begin with, because all the baggage of pre-knowledge that we bring limits us so many times. In summary, women must be sure that we are in the ministry because we were called, chosen, and with the necessary skills. (Latin America and the Caribbean)

APPENDIX 1 – STUDY PROCESS FORM

LWF Study Process on Experiences of Women in the Ordained Ministry

Have you ever had a chance to tell your stories and experiences as a woman in the ordained ministry? We want to listen to you!

This Study Process on Experiences of Women in the Ordained Ministry in the Lutheran Communion is conducted following a resolution of the Twelfth LWF Assembly in Namibia.

We want to learn from both positive and negative experiences of women in the ordained ministry.

The findings of this study will inform our work with member churches to remove barriers, support and strengthen the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

The Study Process will use participatory action research methods in order to:

1. Collect experiences
2. Harvest themes and issues
3. Produce theological content

Important information:

- All stories are anonymous. We do not ask for your personal information or contact.
- In the process, LWF may use your story publicly.
- The choice of what to share is yours. Be careful not to use names or locations.
- It is your choice which experience or story to share. You can tell as many stories and experiences as you like.
- Your participation is voluntary. You may change your mind at any time.

Questions about our privacy policy can be found on LWF website at <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/privacy-policy>.

If you have questions about the study or need pastoral support, please write to Marcia Blasi at marcia.blasi@lutheranworld.org

I read the information and

I agree and consent to participate in the study

I do not agree to participate in the study

1. Are you a woman in the ordained ministry in a LWF Member Church?

Yes

No

2. LWF region:

Africa

Asia

Central Eastern Europe

Central Western Europe

Latin America and the Caribbean

Nordic Countries

North America

3. Share an experience or story of empowerment or affirmation in the ordained ministry:

4. Share an experience or story of struggle or challenge you have faced in ministry:

5. Do you want to share any thought, suggestion, feeling?

Thank You!

God bless you with courage, boldness and strength.

APPENDIX 2 – LWF COMMITMENTS TO WOMEN IN THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: A SUMMARY OF DOCUMENTS

Prepared by Beatrice Bengtsson, Archivist, Administrative Assistant to the Office of the General

1. Assembly resolutions / Council decisions on women's ordination:

1.1. Meeting of officers, 02.1958

Executive Secretary reported that Church of Sweden and Finnish National Committee had inquired about ordination of women

1.2. LWF Seventh Assembly in Budapest, Hungary, 1984

Reference: LWF Report, February 1985 No 18/20 – Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly “In Christ we Hope”

Working group 6: Partnership of women and men (p.227) – since ministry is the service to which the whole people of God are called and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to women and men alike, the working group urged that special attention be given to the ordained ministry of women, which enriches the church.

The Seventh Assembly resolved:

- to urge the LWF member churches that do not ordain women to take specific steps toward an affirmative action;
- to urge the LWF member churches that do ordain women to develop policies that ensure equality in service opportunities and benefits;

1.3. LWF Eighth Assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, 1990

Reference: LWF Report December 1990 No 28/29 – Proceeding of the Eight Assembly “I have heard the cry of my people”

Page 82 (German version page 132):

Efforts to be a sign of an inclusive communion in the world should be intensified. To that end, Assembly participants will work out a clear plan of action in every member church which fully express the equality of men and women within the life of the church and enables the churches to benefit from the potential which women are able to give to all areas of church life. They will undertake, though consultation and cooperation of all member churches and in a climate of mutual respect, practical efforts to open the way for women to enter the ordained ministry of all member churches.

1.4. LWF Council Meeting, 1994

Reference to the “Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone”, by Pope John Paul II, May 22, 1994: issue of ordaining women as a barrier to full communion as shown in this apostolic letter must be pursued in bilateral dialog.

1.5. Council meeting, 1995

Reaffirmation commitment to theological study and ordination for women and call upon churches to facilitate and encourage same.

1.6. LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, China, 1997

Reference: The Lutheran World Federation, Ninth Assembly, Hong Kong 1997, Report p.49.51.64

Assembly participants called to be a living communion: they commit themselves to call on the member churches of the LWF to put into practice the decisions concerning women's ordination of the 1995 LWF Council in Windhoek.

The Assembly recalled the decisions of the Eighth Assembly of the LWF, Curitiba, Brazil (1990), and of the LWF Council meeting in Windhoek, Namibia (1995) and voted:

- to reaffirm the commitment to women's ordination, as an expression of the communion of all baptized in Christ in giving witness to the gospel,
- to support the reflection and dialogue of the member churches on the issue of the ordained ministry in a spirit of love and mutual respect;
- to undertake, through study, consultation and dialogue, practical efforts to open the way for women to enter the ordained ministry of all member churches;
- to work out the implications of the LWF as communion of churches in full fellowship for the ordained ministry; and
- to call upon all member churches to provide and intensify theological education for women and to facilitate the ordination of women.

Assembly participants asked the LWF Council to "ensure that only those theological schools that provide equal access to theological education for women and men receive funds from the LWF" (**reference:** Lutheran World Information 13/97). They further voted to "reaffirm the commitment to women's ordination as an expression of the communion of all the baptized in giving witness to the gospel (...) and study practical methods for women to enter ordained ministry in all member churches" (**reference:** Lutheran World Information 13/97).

1.7. LWF Council meeting, 2000

Surprise expressed that there was no mention of contribution and role of women in president's address; what role can ordination of women play in further dialog in the joint declaration process?

1.8. LWF Council meeting, 2003

Reference: Exhibit 10.4, recommendation 56

Request for a process for understanding diversity of understanding "ministry" including ordination of women.

1.9. LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, 2003

Reference: For the Healing of the World, Official Report, Message, p. 51-52

Many churches still do not ordain women, and/or keep women from participating fully in decision making processes. Often patriarchy plays a dominant role, legitimized by culture and religion.

Assembly participants committed themselves and called on member churches to:

- facilitate dialog within the communion on areas of disagreement, such as understandings and practices of the ministry, involving both men and women, both ordained and lay, in a spirit of mutual respect and in quest of common understandings.
- promote the full inclusion of women and youth in all aspects of our life and work as churches and in our societies.

Reference: Resolution, p. 67

Assembly voted to adopt the resolution on gender mainstreaming and women's ordination, requesting the member churches to undertake a theological study on how to overcome the barriers that hinder gender equity and women's ordination:

Assembly requested the LWF and its member churches to undertake a theological study on how to overcome the barriers that hinder gender mainstreaming (gender equity) and women’s ordination (in churches where women are not ordained)

Issues referred to Council: Village Group 2, par. 112.

While sharing our experiences with the many different aspects of communion among our churches, we touched as well those questions that at times create tension between us. It is apparent that within our communion there are noticeable differences concerning altar and pulpit fellowship. We therefore urge the LWF member churches to engage in (and ask the LWF Secretariat to facilitate) – a process of deepening the dialogue and initiating concrete actions to address the diversity of ways of understanding the Churches’ “ministry” and individual ministry in the Churches as such, as well as the aspects of ordination and the office of oversight (not limited to episcopacy), and the within our communion widely practiced ordination of women. This process should be guided by the hope that, when conducted with mutual respect and understanding, it leads to a wider common understanding of the subjects.

1.10. LWF Council Meeting, 2008

Reference: Program Committee for Theology and Studies. From the communiqué “The ongoing Reformation of the Church: The Witness of Ordained Women Today”

Council members asked to refer to especially to the last three paragraphs of the recommendations which called for specific actions by the churches. The suggestion that the member churches be asked to bring their reports to the Council in 2009 was accepted and the recommendation before the Council was amended accordingly.

On the recommendation of the program committee, the Council voted: to affirm and commend this communiqué to member churches for their attention and the following specific actions, bringing their reports to the Council in 2009: “As we anticipate a new and accessible LWF resource for use in local settings

- we call on member churches to encourage local congregations to engage in educational discussion so that member can understand better the theological grounds for ordaining women – we encourage churches, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be open to hearing and learning from one another of the positive experiences, blessings and impacts ordained women are having on churches within and beyond the Lutheran communion, especially through exchanges and visits
- we call upon leaders of churches that do not ordain women to consider prayerfully the effect that inaction on this matter has on those women who are precluded from exercising their God-given calling because they are women. The pain of their exclusion and loss of their gifts are suffering and loss that are experienced by the whole church
- we urge each member church to bring to the 2010 Assembly a report of what they intended to do with regard to this matter if they do not ordain women already, or, if they do so now, how they are addressing remaining practical obstacles and seeking to further the partnership of women and men in the ministry of the church
- finally, we call for Reformation commemorations in 2017 in which the witness of women pastors and those in oversight positions will especially be raised up as a sign of the church’s ongoing reformation”.

1.11. LWF Women’s Pre-Assembly, Bossey, Switzerland, 27-31 October 2009

Reference: Agenda LWF Eleventh Assembly Stuttgart, Germany 20 to 27 July 2010, Exhibit 4.4, p 3

Pre-Assembly participants strongly affirmed the LWF commitment to the ordination of women made first by the 1984 assembly. They encouraged member churches to set up appropriate legislation and regulations that enable women to take positions of leadership—ordained and lay—and to pursue theological education. They believed that women bring an essential perspective to all types of ministry—ordained and lay—in an increasingly fractured and fractious world.

1.12. LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, 2010

Reference: Report: From Winnipeg to Stuttgart 2003-2010 p. 11.13.30.53: Women's Ordination)

The LWF believes in the equality of women and men and supports the role of women in church life, including their calling to ministry. While the ordination of women continues to be an issue ecumenically and within the Lutheran communion, the LWF encourages local congregations to engage in discussion so their members can better understand the theological reasons for ordaining women. They are also invited to learn from one another about the blessings ordained women offer churches within and beyond the Lutheran communion. A 2008 consultation titled "The Ongoing Reformation of the Church: The Witness of Ordained Women Today", invited churches to see the ordination of women "not primarily as a societal or women's issue but as a matter that goes to the heart of what it means to be the church".

Global Programs: violence against women, women's ordination, and the effects of economic globalization and HIV and AIDS, as well as gender-related water issues have been central themes in the work of the Women in Church and Society (WICAS) desk since the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly. During the reporting period, WICAS noted both progress and resistance to change, with women emphasizing that gender issues need to mobilize the whole church rather than just women's departments.

Economic globalization, HIV and AIDS, violence against women and women's ordination are discussed at a WICAS regional coordinators' meeting in Chennai, India.

A consultation on "The Ongoing Reformation of the Church: The Witness of Ordained Women Today" in Geneva urges churches to see women's ordination "as a matter that goes to the heart of what it means to be the church."

Adopted Resolutions:

The Assembly voted to adopt the resolution regarding gender justice:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6)

In their Pre-Assembly and in meetings prior to regional pre-assemblies, women members of the Lutheran World Federation reflected on issues related to living out the gospel. Now it is time for the full body of Christ, the full communion, to stand together and denounce the sinful effects of pervasive patriarchal culture and to challenge all forms of domination. It is only through men and women working together in this way that the perspectives and gifts of women may be fully embraced in all levels of the church.

Women's leadership in churches and society, human trafficking, and unequal food distribution are the issues in which we all cry out for righteousness. Let us raise our voices, seeking solidarity, respect, companionship and change in order to bring justice.

Consistent with the biblical message of being created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and taking into consideration the previous declarations of the Lutheran World Federation (especially at the Seventh Assembly, 1984, Budapest; the Eighth Assembly, Curitiba, 1990; the communiqué "The ongoing reformation of the church: the witness of ordained women today", Geneva, March 2008; the LWF Council meeting of Oct. 2009, "Resolutions and actions"; and Lutheran World Information 12/2009) we call for change in the world and, in particular, within our own churches.

We lift up the positive contributions in ministry and ecclesiology that women, in ordained ministry, offer. The full integration of ordained women into the life of the church implies shared power and service based on a theological understanding of ministry and the establishment of structures which are accessible and hospitable.

We recognize that the lack of full participation of women in churches and the LWF communion is a theological issue which must be addressed by the communion and its member churches.

1.13 LWF Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, 2017

Women's journey from representation to active participation has been a demanding one. The commitment to women's ordination, reiterated at each assembly

since 1984, has proven pivotal. A survey released in 2016 indicated that LWF member churches continue to move forward in their commitment towards the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region is the fourth of the LWF's seven regions where all member churches now ordain women. Today, 119 (82 percent) LWF member churches ordain women. Discussions are ongoing in

several churches not yet ordaining women and decisions are scheduled to be taken in some of them. Yet, there have also been setbacks. A few churches have reversed earlier decisions and are again restricting the access to the ordained ministry to men, which prompted the LWF Council in 2016 to reaffirm the LWF's commitment. It is my hope that this assembly will reiterate the goal of equal access of women and men to the ordained ministry and also encourage proactive accompaniment in the theological discussions and decision making on this issue.

Nobody in the church refers anymore to Joshua 10:13 to argue the view held for centuries that the earth is the center of the universe. On the brink of a new century of reformation, the time is right to stop referring to. Women's journey from representation to active participation has been a demanding one. The commitment to women's ordination, reiterated at each assembly since 1984, has proven pivotal. A survey released in 2016 indicated that LWF member churches continue to move forward in their commitment towards the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region is the fourth of the LWF's seven regions where all member churches now ordain women. Today, 119 (82 percent) LWF member churches ordain women. Discussions are ongoing in several churches not yet ordaining women and decisions are scheduled to be taken in some of them. Yet, there have also been setbacks. A few churches have reversed earlier decisions and are again restricting the access to the ordained ministry to men, which prompted the LWF Council in 2016 to reaffirm the LWF's commitment. It is my hope that this assembly will reiterate the goal of equal access of women and men to the ordained ministry and also encourage proactive accompaniment in the theological discussions and decision making on this issue.

Resolution calling for a process to study experiences of women in the ordained Ministry

The Assembly calls upon the LWF Communion Office to organize a process to study experiences of women in the ordained ministry in order to remove barriers and to affirm the way forward as adopted at the 2016 Council meeting in Wittenberg: While also acknowledging that not all member churches are at the same point on the journey towards women in ordained ministry—that some member churches are still moving toward full inclusion and participation of women—we are convinced that the scriptural witness, in its breadth and scope, honors the equality of all created in God's image and recognizes the gifts of all in the same Spirit to those baptized into the new creation. . .

In the church, the equality of women and men is expressed and lived out as a sign of God's reign in this world. Therefore, no discrimination of women and men is conceivable in the life of the church. Any kind of discrimination in the way women participate in the ministry of the church (including ordination) harms the fulfillment of the mission of the church in the world as it is contrary to the nature of God's reign. . .

We recall the resolution at our last Assembly in Stuttgart for our member churches to commit "...to genuine, practical, and effective implementation of LWF policies and decisions regarding the full participation of women in the life of the church—and the LWF communion—as well as in society.

The process for this study would follow this suggested timeline:

- An initial consultative group to meet and discuss this matter prior to the end of 2018
- A working group to be appointed and functional by 2019
- The working group to release and publicize an initial report by 2020.

Resolution on the Gender Justice Policy

The Assembly commends the work done on the Gender Justice Policy, celebrates its positive reception and its translation into twenty [1] three languages thus far and urges the member churches to encourage their

parishes to make gender justice a part of their curricula. The Assembly directs the Communion Office to continue its work to support the ongoing implementation and accountability measures included within and associated with the LWF Gender Justice Policy, including conversation about gender roles, education about masculinity and partnership among women and men.

The Assembly calls on all regions and member churches to collaborate with and support the LWF Office for Women in Church and Society (WICAS).

Further, the Assembly urges the Communion Office to continue to support this work through allocation of resources sufficient for these purposes

2018 Council meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 27 June – 2 July 2018 Page 17

With reference to Report to the General Secretary
It is voted:

- that the General Secretary and the Council members continue to strongly support the commitment of the communion toward the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry and the acceptance of women in leadership positions

With reference to Assembly Resolution on the Inclusion of Gender Justice in the LWF Constitution
It is voted:

- to request the General Secretary to prepare a document providing the background.

2019 Council meeting online

The Council voted: to receive the publication “Affirming Women’s Human Rights”

2022 Council meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 9 – 14 June 2022

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The Council is grateful for the role that the LWF member churches have played in responding to COVID-19,

particularly through the Rapid Response Fund, humanitarian and livelihood programs, advocacy as well as theological reflection.

The Council calls on:

- Governments, church leaders and other actors to increase their efforts towards protecting women and girls from gender-based violence in the context of the pandemic and to enable and support pregnant girls and teenage mothers to go back to school.

2. LWF Documentation

2.1. The Lutheran understanding of Ministry (Statement on the basis of an LWF study project, 1983)

Summary:

Explained terminology: ministry / ordained ministry / Episcopal ministry / Episcopal office

The people of God:

- baptism incorporates each believer into the people of God’s new covenant and makes of them a universal priesthood; Christians then are people to whom God has given the gifts of the Holy Spirit to empower their common life and their mission in the world;
- the response of God’s people to the great love revealed in the ministry of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, is worship;
- the ministry of God’s people is a ministry of worship;
- the response of God’s people to the unlimited and unconditional love of their Lord Jesus Christ is service;
- the ministry of God’s people is a ministry of service.

The Ministry:

- the ministry of the people of God is carried out in varying political, social and cultural contexts;

- the ministry of the people of God is actually one ministry and its wholeness must be emphasized;
- ministry is the function of the whole people of God because the foundation of the church's ministry is in the ministry of Christ made present to us in the gospel and the sacraments; the ministry of all people of God becomes real in particular ministries performed either corporately or individually;
- different contexts for ministries: family, job, institutional church, within the Christian communities.

Ordained Ministry of Word and Sacrament:

- a particular instance of the ministry to which all Christians have been called;
- to be ordained means to set apart for the service of the Christian community; ordination inaugurates an authority not of status but of service;
- note on its essential tasks;
- note on its Episcopal expression.

Women in Ministries of the church:

- women and men are equally members of the church;
- gifts or their lack may disqualify women from any ministry – not every member of Christ's body has the same function – but not gender;
- biblical witnesses;
- the question must be: is there any reason why women may not be ordained, i.e. that they may not occupy the pastoral office?

Commissioning and Ordination:

- definition of ordination, its conditions.

Apostolic Succession:

- Lutheran understanding: continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles:

witness of apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the gospel, celebration of baptism and the Eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity, sharing gifts.

2.2. Women in the Ministries of the Church: Report from the LWF Workshop on "Women in the Ministries of the Church", 1983

On women's ordination talk:

- II. Understanding Ministry, p.8 and Lutheran concept of priestly ministry;
- III. Women in the Ministries of the church: Situation Analysis. Why women should be ordained, p. 14;
- IV. Factors which influence practice: theology (church and social structures) p.17-19; socialization, p.20-23; structure, system and values, p.23-25; feminization, p.25-26; the Church as organization and employer, p.26-28; education, p.28-30; ecumenical aspects of unity, p.30-31.

The paper is:

- response to a mandate from 1977 Dar es Salaam Assembly;
- continuation of works after publication of initial document The Ministry of All Baptized Believers (1980);
- published in connection with Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office (LWF Studies, 1983);
- material from these contexts shaped the new form of the LWF ministry statement, published as The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry – Statement on the Basis of an LWF Study Project (LWF Studies 1983).

Notes on terminology:

- **Ministry** – service to which the whole people of God is called, carried out through witness, worship, service to others. Every Christian may be called

minister. Ministry finds concrete expression in a variety of ministries;

- **Ordained ministry** – ministry within the Church within Lutherans have called the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, the Pastoral Office, the Office of Preaching;
- **Episcopal Ministry / Episcopal Office** – the task of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision.

Issues raised:

- Lutheran concept of priestly ministry
- Lutheran concept of pastoral ministry
- problem of ministries of the church

In terms of women in the ministries of the church:

- **variety of positions:** a complete consensus will be impossible to reach, but the experience in most churches is that the range from male ministry to an inclusive one has taken place smoothly. **Experience has shown** that there is no consensus through theological studies and debate, especially in an area where biblical interpretations, traditions and personal belief of a variety of church members from complicated patterns. There is a need for looking at positive experiences with ways of practical implementation of changes. The problems are not always solved by ordination, in the worst cases, women are boycotted by male co-workers or a part of a congregation. As the basic mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel, the church should not exclude any members from discharging this ministry only on the basis of sex. Due to that the question should no longer be asked whether women should be ordained but whether there is any reason why women may not be ordained;
- **factors which influence practice:** there are many different theological approaches, they are connected with interpretation of the Bible, ecclesiology, ministry, anthropology and the relationship between church and society. Different biblical texts carry different values. There are texts which are essential for understanding the gospel and central aspects of the Christian faith, and there are texts which are ethical rules and behavioral

regulations reflecting the social system of the time of the biblical authors. By admitting women to the ordained ministry, the Lutheran churches realized **the “Magna Charta” in Galatians 3,26-28** as far as the question of gender is concerned. But with the admission women to the ordained ministry the discussion on the whole issue of women in the ministries of the church should not be closed. It rather opens new perspectives on many aspects of today’s ministry in general, as for example in ecclesiology, in anthropology, in social ethics.

- **about socialization:** the general tradition and practice in many societies have frequently been discriminatory to women. Too often in the past the church has remained silent or avoided responsibility over issues affecting the oppressed, especially women. But today the churches are increasingly concerned about the partnership of women and men;
- **about authority and power:** authority is not a question of quality but a question of relation, it characterizes not a person but communication among persons. **Historically**, most of Lutheran structures have not actively recruited and trained women for leadership. **Present church leadership** needs to examine structural ways to make full participation possible for women.
- **church as an organization and employer:** considerably more than 50% of church workers are women, but that does not change the fact that major decision-making is in the hands of men. It is possible that those women are not aware of the influences they should be by exercising on their own behalf. It seems the church bodies prefer to employ single women. Frequently, when considering employing a married woman, the church decides for or against her depending on her family situation. This raises an employment issue that is not raised in the case of a man. The church cannot be held responsible for all the situations which exist, but it can be held responsible for speaking out on these issues and being as consistent as possible with which the gospel in its own employment practices;
- **education:** the whole community needs to be reeducated (a change of attitudes towards a more

inclusive participation may be possible then). This education starts within families. Both boys and girls should be encouraged to assume and develop leadership skills. In some countries there is a need for special leadership training programs for women in order to equip them for tasks in church and society. **An important educational impact** may have the demands, often expressed by women, of a special quota for women in church decision-making bodies, at meetings etc. The church should also be attentive that women are given equal opportunities with men for further training, specialization, exchange programs;

- **ecumenical aspects of unity:** the ordination of women raises a number of ecumenical aspects in different contexts, especially with Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Arguments used by the opponents frequently point to the danger of deteriorating ecumenical relations. On this subject, “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” indicates a somewhat different point of view: **Where Christ is present, human barriers are being broken.**

There are also different strategies in terms of theology and culture, authority and power, education, unity and timing.

2.3. The Ordination of Women in Lutheran Churches: Analysis of an LWF Survey, LWF Documentation No. 19, March 1984

Survey initiated by the then LWF Department of Communication in autumn 1980. Out of the 203 questionnaires sent out (95 to LWF member churches, 108 to affiliated churches), 126 answers were received (75% of LWF member churches responded, 44% churches from LWF affiliated churches). The survey revealed that 53 churches were in favor of women’s ordination, 64 were against, 9 had taken no decision.

2.4. Women. A clear Plan of Action, Geneva 1992 (LWF, WICAS Desk)

In this document, the Office of Women in Church and Society in the LWF provides guidelines for use in

implementing the Assembly’s call for a clear plan of action for the achievement of equality between men and women. WICAS is responsible for assisting the member churches to develop these plans of action.

Information about WICAS, its goals and objectives, its brief history.

Six areas of concerns and recommendations for actions:

- **leadership development:** analyze, denounce and transform; identify obstacles; develop concrete plans; seek out community resources and motivate parishioners to take advantage of them; develop creative strategies; create opportunities for women to speak out; organize workshops; enable women to participate and take leadership in different church events; change church policies, document and traditions that exclude women from full participation;
- **justice:** self-examination; personal transformation; survey your community; learn how injustice becomes part of the structure and practice of economic and political life; arrange workshop on justice themes; organize groups of women who are victims; participate in community programs; put pressure on governments; call for reassessment, reconsideration and in some cases cancellation of the foreign debt and structural adjustment policies, support land reform programs; exert influence to change policies that cause harm and lobby for changes; get together with other church groups;
- **social/cultural/economic and political realities:** be more involved; use time for education and information beyond worship activities; information relevant to the needs of parishioners; create forums in which women who are suffering have a chance to speak openly; create appropriate and accessible means of communication with members; if there are scholarships, advocate their use for training in many professional fields; involve professionals; come up with a plan of action for the training of women;
- **violation of women’s rights:** overcoming the conspiracy of silence on question of violence and sexuality; initiating in-depth studies on specific

forms of violence; recognizing that violence against women is a reality; giving sermons to reflect the issues; organizing workshop for men and women; create safe and secure space; enabling victims of violence; forming committees to monitor violence in media and designing methods of protest actions; calling for changes in law;

- **theological studies:** involve women in theological studies; formulate a definite plan of action; encourage women to study; make scholarship available; make proper use of women theologians in job commensurate with their training; rethink placement policies; develop effective models of education; provide opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith learning; publicize information; conscientize church members to become more aware of the importance of women's theological education; incorporate feminist resources; re-organize study schedules;
- **women's perspectives in theology:** be aware that women's entrance into the field of theology has enabled theology to evolve; contribution of women to theology must be recognized as a humanizing force; women's reading of the Bible contains valuable insights; women's call for change in the structures and ministries of the church; make connections between theology and the psychological, social, political, cultural and economic spheres.

Member church responsibility: develop its own clear plan for action; motivate people to change; adopt monitoring and evaluation methods including appropriate performance indicators; designate a person in every church and in every country to serve as liaison to WICAS in fulfilling the church's plan of action.

2.5. LWF Studies, Geneva 1993, Ministry, Women, Bishops (report of an international consultation, 1992)

LWF Council, endorsing the proposal of the Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs (made before Curitiba Assembly) agreed that a follow-up to the 1982/83 consultations is needed to reflect on the discussion, especially its impact on the ordination of women and the nature of episcopacy.

The ordained ministry of women:

- the majority of Lutherans now belong to churches which ordain women;
- Lutherans do not have or need to develop a theology of female ministry. We have a theology of ordained ministry developed in relation to an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God. The question must then be: Is there any basis in our theological understanding of ordained ministry which prevents us from ordaining any baptized person who has the needed gifts and whom we are convinced is called by God?
- the openness of the ordained ministry to both men and women is grounded in the nature of the church as an eschatological reality, all barriers built on differences of race, class, economic status, caste or sex which contradict human community disappear in God's kingdom;
- we find that the contemporary mission of the church requires the gifts of both men and women in the ordained ministry. A church which today limits its ordained ministry to males blurs its nature as eschatological sign;
- the church must challenge cultural presuppositions which prevent the full participation of women in church and society and must work toward more just structures;
- some churches refuse to ordain women because they see it as a serious obstacle to full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and with some conservative evangelical churches, even on the global level, Lutherans have made clear in their ecumenical dialogues that they ordain women;
- if a church considers not ordaining women because that would hinder ecumenical relations with churches which ordain only men, it should recognize that the non-ordination of women would hinder ecumenical relations with the many churches that do;
- the decision to ordain women does not close the question of the position of women in the church,

when they take that step, churches must also develop concrete strategies to assist in the full integration of women into the ordained ministry;

- the particular gifts and talents ordained women bring with them into the collegium of ordained ministers must influence its character so that eventually it will be different from what it had been before; a church which ordains women but neglects such change is not acting with full integrity;

2.6. “Ordination of Women,” in: LWF Documentation No. 39, March 1996, We are Witnesses. Report of LWF International Consultation on Women, Geneva 1995, Dorothy Marple & Musimbi Kanyoro, p. 57-61

Authors proposed that the LWF Secretariat

- identify those churches that do not ordain women and initiate immediately a process of dialogue in accordance with commitments made by the Eight LWF Assembly in 1990 and the LWF council in 1995;
- facilitate an exploratory study on behalf of the member churches of models of ordained ministry which take into account what women contribute to the ordained ministry.

They also proposed that LWF member churches, facilitated by the above exploratory study, seriously engage in reshaping the ordained ministry for the benefit of the church.

- Musimbi Kanyoro (ed.), *In Search of a Round Table. Gender, Theology & Church Leadership*, published for the LWF by WCC publications, Geneva 1997.
- Musimbi Kanyoro, *Women in the Lutheran Communion*, p.120-132
- Datuk Thu En-YU, *Cultural Elements and Women’s Ordination*, p. 139-142
- Musimbi Kanyoro, *The Ordination of Women in Africa*, p. 147-152

- Cuthbert Omari, *Women’s Ordination: A Viewpoint from Tanzania*, p. 153-158. (general sociological background of women’s ordination)

2.7. Churches say “No” to Violence against Women | Action Plan for the Churches, Geneva 2002

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Churches%20Say%20No%20to%20Violence%20against%20Women.pdf>

Chapter III, Transforming church and society, paragraph on androcentrism:

Androcentrism reveals itself in the form of exclusive language, for example, the term mankind is used instead of humankind, chairman instead of chairperson, brethren instead of brothers and sisters. It also sets rules that exclude women from leadership roles, e.g., since all the apostles were men, only men should be ordained.

Chapter III, Transforming church and society, paragraph on tokenism:

This is when for the sake of appearance or in the name of gender representation, a token gesture is made to be politically correct. For example, one woman is ordained in the church or elected to a church body. Most of the time, due to lack of presence or support from other women, the woman tends to be withdrawn, careful rather than challenging, often adapting herself to the male system and even behaving like men to be accepted by them.

Chapter III, Transforming church and society, paragraph on liturgies:

Besides the nature of church structure, theological understandings and teachings that create and validate male supremacy, the church has often been silent over, or kept private, the violence against women issue. Some of the churches unwittingly collude in perpetuating male supremacy whenever they deny equal opportunities to women in leadership, decision-making positions and ordination, although other churches in the communion are promoting women’s leadership

2.8. *Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lund Statement, 26 March 2007, p.8, “Ordained Ministry of Women and Men”*

Authors mentioned that in the history of the church, the role of women had been largely obscured, for example, Junia, whom Paul called an apostle (Rom. 16). They added that in some cases even their names had been forgotten, such as the woman at the well (John 4) and the prophesying daughters of Philip (Acts 21).

For centuries Lutheran churches, like other churches, restricted ordination to men. Today the great majority of Lutherans belong to churches that ordain both women and men. This practice reflects a renewed understanding of the biblical witness.

In their opinion, ordination of women expresses the conviction that the mission of the church requires the gifts of both men and women in the public ministry of Word and sacraments, and that limiting the ordained ministry to men obscures the nature of the church as a sign of our reconciliation and unity in Christ through baptism across the divides of ethnicity, social status and gender (cf. Gal 3:27-28). They recalled that The Lutheran World Federation is committed to the ordination of women. The LWF Eighth Assembly stated: “We thank God for the great and enriching gift to the church discovered by many of our member churches in the ordination of women to the pastoral office, and we pray that all members of the LWF, as well as others throughout the ecumenical family, will come to recognize and embrace God’s gift of women in the ordained ministry and in other leadership responsibilities in Christ’s church”. At that time, in many LWF member churches and in most of the larger Lutheran churches, women are not only ordained as pastors but are also elected to the episcopal ministry. Authors noted that this was consistent with the Lutheran emphasis on the one office of ordained ministry.

2.9. *It will not be so among you. A faith reflection on gender and power, Geneva 2010*

Paragraph on current reality: gender equality is a continuum. Subsequent gender auditing and evalua-

tion, therefore, is necessary to safeguard that we do not come to a standstill. For example, in the ordination of women, attention needs to be sustained as to whether they find their calls in congregations, whether they are paid and valued as much as men

Paragraph on the role of patriarchy as an ideology: the right-wing movement within Christianity supports such notions through aggressive media propaganda, which is increasingly impacting a volatile world. In an interview with Kathryn Joyce, who has been carrying out research on the right-wing Christian pro-fertility sects in the United States of America, Joyce remarked that such movements specifically object to “...acceptance of nontraditional family roles, or the church staying out of family planning decisions; women teaching or leading in church, and especially women’s ordination; acceptance of birth control, and of women working; in some denominations, even women speaking in church at all.” Some of these ideas are manifested in a few churches within the LWF communion where, sometimes, women are not even permitted to read Bible texts at Sunday services.

Paragraph on men’s involvement in the promotion on gender equality: it should be remembered that any proactive policies on gender, any move to include women’s ordination, and their advancement, could not have been brought about without the active collaboration and leadership of men.

Paragraph on shared leadership: it is important, however, to also recognize the difficult writings of Paul and Peter specifying restrictive rules over them. These often have been quoted to define restrictive roles for women, and to deny them ordination. They have to be analyzed in the particular context of their letters specifically addressing local issues, their own socialization in a patriarchal culture, and their primary concern to maintain a certain kind of order which they believed was right.

Paragraph on increasing the visibility and leadership of women: the LWF communion has the highest number of women bishops, regional bishops, and presidents with oversight responsibilities, and yet, about 25 percent of member churches still do not ordain women for diverse reasons. It is an ongoing

diplomatic advocacy of the LWF to entreat and encourage churches to invest in theological education for women and their ordination. But it should be borne in mind that ordained ministry is one of many callings; to concentrate only on that to the exclusion of other ministries would exclude and alienate laypeople from taking up various leadership roles. Such a fixation on ordination would not subscribe either to the doctrinal understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

Paragraph on envisioning transformation: reasons for the lack of welcome are (e.g.): some unconvinced church leaders who act as gatekeepers or fear a split in the church if ordination of women is carried out.

2.10. Gender Justice Policy, Geneva 2013

Authors ask that churches who do not ordain women prayerfully consider the effect that inaction and refusal on this matter has on those who are precluded from exercising their God-given calling because they are women. The pain of exclusion and the loss of God-given gifts are experienced by the whole church.

Embracing the full participation and equitable representation of women and men in leadership is a sign of the continuous reformation and transformation of the church. The ordination of women is one expression of this theological affirmation. Integrating women in the ordained ministry serves as a foundation for building women's citizenship in ecclesial contexts and it is one vital step in implementing gender justice in the churches.

Assemblies and councils, the Communion Office's main decision-making bodies, resolved that the gift of women in the ordained ministry is a distinctive practice to be pursued in the global communion. One aspect is the theological reflection and ecclesiological implications of integrating women in the ordained ministry. It shows how the church understands itself and bears public witness to living and announcing the inclusive gospel. The participation of women in the ordained ministry is a vital, albeit not only, step toward building an inclusive communion.

Information that the percentage of LWF member churches ordaining women is 77 percent.

Information that the percentage of members belonging to LWF member churches ordaining women is 93 percent.

2.11 The participation of women in the ordained ministry and leadership in LWF member churches

A baseline assessment among LWF member churches carried forward in 2016 on the proportion of women in decision-making positions and in the ordained ministry.

The survey, responded by 86 of LWF's 145 member churches, sheds light on the participation of women in the ordained ministry as well as in other instances of church life. It captures the regional trends and illustrates the different dynamics and remaining challenges in this field.

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/document-participation-women-ordained-ministry-and-leadership-lwf-member-churches>

2.12 Women on the move

This book also looks back on the journey undertaken by the LWF as a whole, but more particularly by women in the LWF on their journey towards full inclusion and participation in the life of the church and of society.

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/resources/publication-women-move>

3. More general documents

The Ministry of all Baptized Believers: Resource Materials for the Churches' Study in the Area of Ministry, Geneva, October 1980 (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Geneva 1982)

October 1983. The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry: Statement on the Basis of an LWF Study Project

“We will promote the full inclusion of women
in the ordained ministry.”
– *LWF Strategy 2019-2024*



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