



# Challenges of a Woman in Ministry

by Carolyn Burwell

**I**f I knew 27 years ago what I know today, my years of working on an all-male staff would have been much easier. I served for 10 years as the assistant to the Christian education director and was the children's pastor for 17 years. During those years I was the only woman on the primary staff.

Over time I became more confident in my abilities and my place on the pastoral staff, so I no longer personalized all the things that were said and done. Did I still face situations that seemed uncomfortable or unfair? Yes, but I knew God called me to service, and I no longer felt the need to defend my position and place of ministry.

I have been blessed in that I served under senior pastors who highly valued women in the ministry. I was given the same place of respect and pastoral assignments as the men with whom I served. However, I have had to deal with many other issues from male staff members.

During 27 years of ministry, the issues remained the same. As a woman holding credentials with the Assemblies of God, I found I sometimes had to deal with the following attitudes and difficulties:

## **"A woman should not be in the ministry"**

I have worked with only two male staff members who didn't think women should be credentialed. Surprisingly, we became friends. We simply agreed to disagree.



## **Inappropriate jokes and comments**

While they become tiresome, I really do not believe they are always intentional.

## **A feeling that I should be the "secretary"**

Ugh!

## **A lack of respect for my areas of ministry**

A woman's job could not possibly be as important as a man's.

## **A smaller salary**

I must not need as much money because my husband works.

## **Serving double duty**

I am expected to be at pastoral meetings and pastors' wives meetings.

## **A lack of camaraderie**

I can't golf, fish, go to lunch, or meet in an office unless it is with a group.

## **I cost the church more money**

When we have overnight events, I need a separate room.

## **I can't cry or have an emotional day like other women**

As I have matured and allowed my attitude to do the same, I have learned not to let the issues irritate me (at least not all the time). Instead, I have learned some methods that help me deal with the situations.

- ❖ Speak up when appropriate.
- ❖ Change the subject.
- ❖ Have a good friend in whom to confide.
- ❖ Make sure my needs are met.
- ❖ Maintain a close, current relationship with Jesus.

In addition, I look at the woman's perspective I have added to the staff. I speak for the

women and families in our church from a view the men don't have.

Being a woman on an all-male staff can be difficult, but it should never keep anyone from entering the ministry.

One day I went to work with a feeling that I could never accomplish all I had to do. Before long I found myself crying. My senior pastor asked if there was anything he could do. I replied, "Today I just want to be a

woman." He smiled, handed me a box of tissues, and said, "Enjoy your day!"

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### Questions for Further Study—

1. What challenges do you face as a woman in ministry?
2. How do you deal with those challenges?
3. What are some ways you can help change negative attitudes toward women in ministry?

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