



Challenges of a Woman in Ministry

by Carolyn Burwell

If 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.

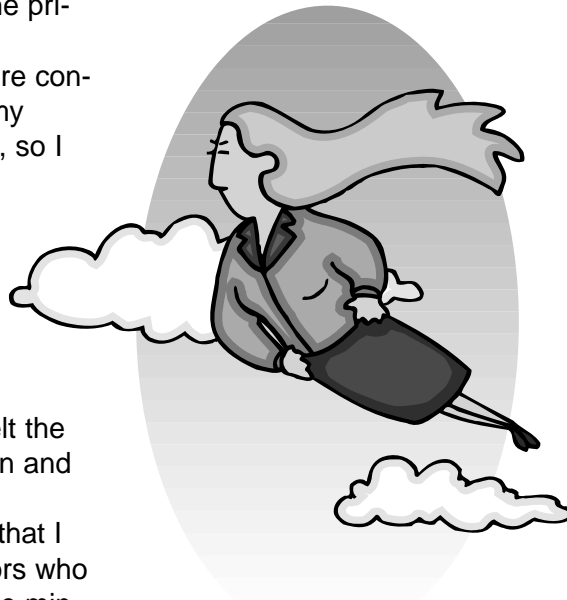
Over time I became more confident in my abilities and my place on the pastoral staff, so I no longer personalized all the things that were said and done. Did I still face situations that seemed uncomfortable or unfair? Yes, but I knew God called me to service, and I no longer felt the need to defend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

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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