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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: EXPERIENCES OF THE CHURCH OF  
GOD IN CHRIST WOMEN AND THE POWER OF  
RESILIENCE

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Debra Wylene Martin

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ (COGIC), who hold senior leadership missionary roles, and the power of resilience they appear to possess. Previous studies (Starr-Parker, 2012) regarding women in the COGIC discuss barriers for women in leadership; however, there is a gap in the literature that explores the perceived tenacity of women who hold senior leadership missionary roles. The researcher did not aim to criticize the Church of God In Christ doctrine but to examine the perceived experiences of Black women in that church who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. Black women from the eastern part of the country who belong to COGIC were selected to describe their experiences by responding to three questions: What, if any, factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership missionary roles as a female of the COGIC? What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain in leadership in COGIC? What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC? This study was fortified by the researcher analyzing collected data through the thematic lens of women made in God's Image, Complementarian versus Egalitarian theory, and gender inequity in COGIC.

*Keywords:* Black women, COGIC, leadership, resilience, ministry

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## **Dedication**

I want to dedicate this work to my mother, who rests now in heaven, who planted a seed of love for education into her two girls as little children and stressed the importance of reading. A mother kept her preteen children in the house and made them watch Jeopardy rather than go out and play. Although we did not know the answers, we learned from the television show that there was a wealth of knowledge globally, and it stimulated the growth of the seed she had planted. As we grew up, she no longer had to make us stay inside to watch Jeopardy; we looked forward to it, hoping there would be a topic we had read about and could yell out the answers.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my children, who love and have honored me with their constant care and support. Both my son and daughter have been an anchor of strength since I lost my husband, and he would be proud of who they have become. Last, I would like to dedicate this work to all women who serve in ministry in Pentecostal churches and all denominations.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Church of God In Christ (COGIC)

Image of God (*Imago Dei*)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Liberty University (L.U.)

NVivo (2023)

Research Questions (RQ)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

Historical stereotyping and gender inequality exist within secular societies and religious denominations. In 2023, secular societies and religious denominations have seen a more significant push for equality within leadership roles for men and women. A recent study by Gianetti & Wang documented that public attention has been heightened on gender equality issues and is associated with increased broader gender diversity (Gianette & Wang, 2023, p. 147). When gender equality is met, women and men should benefit equally from the same resources and opportunities (Iqbal et al., 2022). The authors noted:

Gender gaps remain in employment, wages, career successes, and religious organizations. Gender bias occurs in all areas and walks of life, regardless of race, education, socioeconomic status, or financial status. In some cases, Feminist Movements such as the “Me Too” Movement have brought sexual or gender-based abuse to the forefront. Activist Tarana Burke created the phrase in 2006 as a Twitter posting asking others who may be abused to hashtag the words. It caught on and resulted in over 1.7 million tweets within ten days, spreading to eighty-five countries (Iqbal et al., 2022, p. 1).

Two years after the #MeToo Movement (#MeToo, 2017), other reckonings began in all social segments, including religious organizations. The #MeToo Movement, according to Coldwell & Johnson (2020), exploded on the social media site Twitter when written on October 15, 2017, and stated:

When actress Alyssa Milano posted, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted, write ‘me too ‘ as a reply to this tweet.” When Milano has received a great deal of credit. The phrase originated in 2006 with activist Tarana Burke, and this survey begins by considering Burke’s work first. Burke began a grassroots Me Too Movement in 2006 to support sexual assault herself. Burke describes the Movement as a response to the lack of empathy given to sexual assault survivors. When a survivor discloses an experience of sexual violence to another woman, the hearer is likely to have had her own experience of sexual harassment or assault and may be overwhelmed by her past trauma (Coldwell & Johnson, 2020, p. 184).

The authors state that Burke's work with Me Too focused on changing the conversation by inviting women to share their experiences. The hashtag #ChurchToo became an offshoot of the #MeToo Movement and brought to the forefront not only sexual abuse but also the teachings regarding women's submissions to their husbands. Many religious organizations began to take steps to train in sexism and promote gender-inclusiveness in ministry and pay (Colwell & Johnson, 2020, p. 184).

However, gender is a social, cultural, and religious construct. According to Musvota (2021), gender is the "Differences between women and men based on socially defined ideas and beliefs of what it means to be a woman or a man" (Musvota, 2021, p. 2). Gender inequity in the church is a hotly debated issue and touches many denominations.

Tensions are prevalent in religious organizations, including gender inequality, not only in the United States but in other countries as well. Ahmed and Brasted (2021) state that tensions are more prevalent in developing worlds where gender rights are raised and often fought for. The authors go on to write that religious unrest and instability come when it is perceived that gender rights are violated. To reduce these tensions, there are some instances where religious organizations have attempted to address the issues and allow women into some leadership roles, with limitations (Ahmed & Brasted, 2021, p. 1). The biblical story of the creation of mankind in the book of Genesis 1:27 has been used as the basis for some beliefs about why women should not hold senior leadership roles, such as serving as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops.

In the "Report on the Findings and Statements on the Question of the Ordination of Women," author McKenna (2021) refers to the Church of God in Christ Official Manual. The Church of God in Christ Official Manual is an informative doctrinal and disciplinary handbook that gives guidelines for conduct and attire for ministry and laity. The manual states that the

Church of God in Christ does not accept Bible Scriptures requiring women to be ordained in their organization. The manual also stated no mandate to ordain women as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops (p. 146). Women in senior leadership ministry are referred to in the COGIC as missionaries rather than as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops, as they cannot hold positions of authority over men. Women are considered the significant influencers of COGIC as they serve in service and education areas. The church division consists of various boards, committees, and auxiliaries to provide the necessary teachings, training, and guidance to other women, young people, and children (COGIC, 2019).

However, women are not ordained into Pastor, Elder, or Bishop positions. According to Osei-Bonsu and Dakio (2013), ordination has many definitions. The researcher's study will use Burton's definition (1996), which asserts that ordination is a public recognition that a person possesses the necessary spiritual gifts for leadership ministry (Osei-Bonsu & Dakio, 2013, p. 118).

Historically, in the United States, gender roles and assignments are taught in early childhood. Girls play with dolls, and boys play with trucks (Boe & Woods, 2018). Girls tend not to act in ways that are considered unaccepted behaviors, such as playing sports like football, which men dominate, and boys do not cry. Societal beliefs regarding women's roles can be seen in all walks of life, whether secular or religious. The debate on gender roles has been argued even at the Supreme Court level. According to (Civillico, 2023), Attorney Ginsburg described the effect of societal structure on working women:

The indignity of being treated differently (Ginsburg quoted in *Frontiero v. Richardson* Oral 1973,19). She offered examples of previous relevant Supreme Court rulings, such as *Goesaert v. Cleary* (1948), which completely excluded women from jobs deemed only appropriate for men, and *Hoyt v. Florida* (1961), which restricted women from jury duty, claiming they were too occupied in the home to be bothered with civic responsibilities. (Civillico, 2023, p. 89).

Disparities can also be seen in healthcare with discussions regarding policy gaps and research involving women's outcomes. Consequently, women have higher morbidity and mortality rates in many conditions with high public health significance (Samaei et al., 2022, p. 1). The authors present a critical point:

For a long time, there have been no policies mandating the study of biological sex and sociocultural gender. Finally, health professionals are trained to recognize symptoms that are “typical” of men. One example of the conditions that remain understudied, underdiagnosed, and under-treated in women is cardiovascular disease (CVD). Medical textbooks define cardiovascular disease based on research performed predominantly on male participants. Students learn about symptoms of chest discomfort as typical, atypical, and noncardiac, according to its relation to exertion, rest, or emotional stress, but these definitions lead to underdiagnosis and undertreatment of CVD in women, especially in those younger than 65 years (Samaei et al., 2022, p. 1).

In the most recent report by the Barna Group Research 2017 (*What Americans Think About Women in Power*, Stone, 2017). Stone mentions that these cultural realities are also crucial for the church. She states:

As evidenced by the research, the issue of women in leadership is a complicated one for many evangelicals. There is a long history among evangelicals of emphasizing motherhood and family and family as a woman’s primary calling. While the broader culture and much of the Christian church has shifted away from this, evangelicals seem more reluctant to do so (Barna Group, Stone, 2017).

The United States elected a Black Woman, Kamala Harris, to the office of Vice-President (2020), indicating to some that times and attitudes toward women in leadership are changing. In The COGIC, Pastors, Elders, and Bishops in 2023 have an opportunity to take note of how societal boundaries are lifting.

Gender-based exclusion in 2023 (Deshpande et al., 2023) is an issue that is trending in all phases of society and the church. The inequities that are present can continue to create an environment of exclusion, injustice, and oppression for women. Women in the climate of the church face the same challenges as when accepting the call of ministry. The church is perceived



as a place where all have access to the word of God and freedom from oppression. Korhonen (2024) states that women comprise the most significant part of all religious denominations. Statista's survey revealed that women made up 58% of Black Protestants compared to men at 42% at the time of the study. COGIC is a part of this study, and its women play an integral part in the church's success and growth, one that does not ordain women into roles of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop. While it is true that the researcher was aware of the disparity in the COGIC, she was surprised at the percentages presented in this survey that exposed the makeup of Black Protestants. However, not all women may agree that women should hold ordained positions of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop in COGIC.

Black Women's experiences in senior leadership roles in COGIC were explored in this study and the power of resilience they appear to possess. Further, this study examined whether there is a significance to women of COGIC being ordained or not through their lived experiences and if those experiences are influenced in any way by a possible self-hindering belief of a woman's role in the church. Self-hindering is defined in this study as hampering progress toward conscious goals (Lyll, 2020, p. 8). This study sought to explore if the women of COGIC were holding themselves back from senior leadership roles because of their own beliefs about their self-worth.

The research subjects were interviewed following a protocol questionnaire that asked questions that stemmed from three research questions. What, if any, factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership missionary roles as a female of the COGIC? What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain in leadership in COGIC? What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC? The

participants' cultural backgrounds share how their family upbringing, marital status, and internal knowledge of themselves affect their ministry in COGIC. How do the women of COGIC persevere, and what drives them to continue against what some would see as little support or recognition?

According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), diverse cultures have different construals of self and others and the interdependence of the two. "These construals can influence or determine the nature of an individual's experience, including emotion and motivation" (Markus & Kitayama, 1996, p. 224). Women represent 56% of COGIC's population (Pew Research, 2014), and 58%, according to the most recent Pew Research Landscape data from 2017, indicated that women play an integral part in the church's success in its growth (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Although the women in this research study stated they were aware of how important women are to the COGIC, they expressed that no one had ever asked about their feelings regarding COGIC's foundational belief regarding accepting them into roles of Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. The passion for this research study is found in the research. The experiences shared by the interview participants give a voice and new insights into the resilience of women in COGIC who serve in senior leadership. The women who contributed to this study describe what resilience means to them and why their calling from God is used in COGIC.

## **Background to the Problem**

### **Theological Literature**

Theological debates occur about women's roles in ministry, and the interconnection of each central biblical interpretation of Scripture supports or strengthens each argument. Both arguments for and against women in authority can reflect the many passions of a theological conviction. The question of women in the pulpit is one that theologians and Church

denominations have debated for decades. Mark Chaves' *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (1997), Vashti McKenzie's *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African America Women in Ministry* (1996), and Norma Everest's *Ordinary Ministry, Extraordinary Challenge Women, and the Roles of Ministry* (2000) provide studies that reflect those differing views on the biblical teaching of woman preachers and those in senior leadership. Further, Shercliff (2019) discusses the patriarchy and sexism in the church when she states:

When God's revelation is warped by exclusion or dismembered by suppression, all people suffer. The fullness of God's presence in our lives needs God's activity in both women and men to be manifest; otherwise, both excluded women and exalted men suffer (Shercliff, 2019, p. 168).

Bauman (2023) points out the Protestant church culture, its theologies, and values as it relates to women negatively and positively. COGIC identifies with the protestant faith, whose foundation is based on Greek and Roman cultural patriarchal norms. Bauman states that those who are in power, such as Pastors, Elders, and Deacons, can share their experiences from the pulpit, but the marginalized, such as women, are not allowed to do so. The author refers to behavior such as this as sexism and states that male leaders sometimes do not address the issue of sexism (Bauman, 2023).

Marginalized people are defined in this study as anyone oppressed by a system of power (Liang et al., 2021). Marginalization can be referred to as how a person perceives their experiences and identity in the world. Experiences that affect one's identity can change, perhaps for women who sometimes accept their environment rather than fight against those in power over them (SAAM) (2024). The history of slavery shows that after 1831, slaves were not allowed to read books or go to school. Slaves were marginalized people who were bound by chains on their limbs and their minds. People in power denied slaves education to keep them oppressed

(Anderson, 2023). However, the longing within them reached for what had been denied. An unknown percentage of Black people came out of slavery with a desire and firm belief that learning to read and write was a way in their thinking to remove the chains from not only their legs but also their minds.

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p .88).

Therefore, by examining the resilience of the women of COGIC, the researcher filled the gap in the existing literature by bringing new information regarding oppression in ministry where women freely express what could be perceived as marginalization.

According to Schussler (2014), women were entering seminaries in large numbers in the 1970s and were theologically trained in opposing previous decisions by Roman Catholic Churches not to ordain women. Schussler discussed that women's ministry was not examined in the New Testament because the writers did not question if there was a problem with them being in ministry (Schussler, 2014, p. 3). Works (2020) provides a biblical perspective using Galatians 3:28, which states, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you, are all one in Christ Jesus" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Works write that Galatians 3:28 has an equalizing factor in making both genders equal before God. He quotes Soulen (1996), who writes:

What the church rejects is not the difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female, but rather the idea that these differences essentially entail curse, opposition, and antithesis. Understood this way, the church is the social embodiment of the doctrine of justification, for justification is its social dimension, which means the reconciliation of the different kinds of people. Reconciliation does not mean the imposition of sameness but the unity of reciprocal blessings (Works, 2020, p. 85).

Some biblical scholars, such as Reed (2018), argue that Genesis 2:15 establishes that the woman should be subordinate to the man because she was created after him and as a helper.

Some theologians, such as Sandage (2017), believe that Genesis Chapter Two is the model of what the church should look like when it comes to dominance and submission in leadership.

Biblical Scriptures, such as 1 Corinthians 14:34, "Women should remain silent in the Churches," are also used to establish that a woman should be subordinate to a man. However, the researcher notes that the Jewish tradition regarding women in Paul's times may have been part of the reasoning behind this request. Frankel (2000) reports that under Jewish tradition, women and men were not permitted to be together in settings outside of the home.

Further, under the Jewish tradition, any man who was in regular contact with women who were not their wives could not be alone with them (Labovitz, 2003). There is a distinct difference between men and women according to the Rabbinical laws. The woman's primary function is dictated by the man who acquired her in marriage and is the one who would initiate divorce.

According to Frankel:

Men possess greater rights and privileges than women in all matters of communal leadership and authority. They are the official heads of their families and normally the sole inheritors in property law. Not only are women not the intended audience, but halakhic stipulations being generally excluded from the public or communal area, in practice, they have also no official part to play in the legislative and interpretive process (Frankel, 2000, p. 6).

The Rabbinical law states that women are not allowed to speak, but by submission, and Paul the Apostle's Epistle to the church in Ephesians 5:22-24 directs, "Wives, submit yourselves to your

husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, wives should also submit to their husbands in everything" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). The interpretation of these Scriptures is argued by those on both sides of the debate, pointing out that Eve was created as an equal, not separate from Adam or to be subordinate to him. Both man and woman were created in God's Image, had a commonality, and were equal to share in what God provided. Belleville writes:

Adam is a gender-inclusive term, which is evident from the repeated reference to Adam as 'they' and 'them' (vv. 26, 27; 5:1–2). Alternately, using these same Scriptures, the question of hierarchy comes into play. Genesis 2:18–20 notes that Eve was created as a 'help' for Adam, and opponents in the argument argue that the word 'helper' means 'submissive assistance' and that the one that is getting the help is the one with authority over the other (Belleville, 2015, p. 27).

Women who continue to face structural barriers are driven, because of their calling, to obtain leadership roles despite pushback from denominational rules (Davis, 2020, p. 1). The history of COGIC being reported by Ware and Hall (2003) informs:

It is a Protestant Christian denomination, founded in 1897 as a Holiness church and reestablished in 1907, under the leadership of C.H. Mason, as a Pentecostal church after Mason's baptism in the Holy Spirit with the experience of tongue-speaking. The denomination is predominantly but not exclusively African American. Because of its rich and varied history, COGIC is known by other names, such as "Holiness church," "Sanctified Church," and "Pentecostal church." COGIC embraces traditional Protestant beliefs but, from its perspective on Scripture, gives special emphasis to belief in original sin, atonement, conversion, entire sanctification (holiness) in this life, baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues (glossolalia), Christ's second coming (premillennialism), miracles, and divine healing (Ware & Hall, 2003, p .2).

COGIC's Pentecostal doctrine supports the concept that biblical Scripture validates that women are not to be ordained as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops (COGIC, 2019). COGIC has taken a firm policy stand against the full ordination of women as clergy. Murphy (2000) writes that the COGIC Official Manual (2019) argues that their denomination does not ordain women as Elders,

Bishops, or Pastors based on Scripture as the COGIC interprets it. Women are not allowed to preach from the pulpit in their churches.

### **Historical Literature**

The Pentecostal Church name has its biblical foundation drawn from the book of Acts. and is from the Jewish holy day called Pentecost. Scripture records:

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly, there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (*King James Bible*, 1769/ 2009, Acts 2:1–4).

The researcher notes that women attended this event with men without debate according to Acts 1:14, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978 /2023). The founding of the Pentecostal Church has been attributed to events during a church service in Topeka, Kansas, in the 1900s, including speaking in tongues as recorded in the Book of Acts, igniting the Pentecostalism Movement emphasizing having the Spirit of God. The Pentecostalism Movement is characterized by several unique doctrines and practices, including water baptism by submersion, Christian conversion, speaking in tongues as evidence of spiritual baptism, and using spiritual gifts (Alexander, 2018).

According to Johnson (2020), the World Christian Encyclopedia, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. reports that 644 million Pentecostals/Charismatics are worldwide. The encyclopedia counts 230 million in Africa, 195 million in Latin America, 125 million in Asia, 68 million in North America, 21 million in Europe, and 4.5 million in Australia and Oceania. Further, the encyclopedia records that one in twelve people is Pentecostal or Charismatic Christian, as recorded in the Pentecostals Charismatics - World Christian Database (Johnson & Zurlo, 2016). The Pentecostal Movement

was founded by William Seymour, a Black man raised by former slave parents (Harris, 2019). Initially, the Pentecostal Movement was thought to be the cure for a racially divided country as large numbers of Whites were a part of the Pentecostal Movement alongside Black people, who were socially underprivileged.

Harris (2019) writes that the Church of God was considered the authentic Pentecostal Movement; however, it was divided because of race. When the Whites congregants left the Movement, they took what they had learned from William Seymour's experiences of being Spirit and water baptized and vibrant worship (Harris, 2019, p. 202). Kurian & Day (2017) note that this separation caused the churches to identify with denominations such as Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and Pentecostal. The major historically Black denominations include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Church of God in Christ, National Baptist Convention of America International, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International. The Church of God in Christ is the largest major historically Black denomination, which is Pentecostal (Kurian & Day, 2017, p. 313).

The history of women in leadership in the COGIC reports that at the pinnacle of the 1906 Azusa Street Revival, the Holy Spirit had been poured out to the men and women who were present, and gender roles were suspended (Butler, 2007). The women were supported, and the revival leader William Seymour allowed women and men to hold administrative positions and lead services. Women were called co-workers in the ministry and included in Pentecostalism's preaching aspects. Butler (2007) cites Seymour's justification of the women's right to preach and responded this way:

Before Pentecost, the woman could only go into the "court of women" and not into the inner court. The anointing oil was never poured on a woman's head but only on the head



of kings, prophets, and priests. But when our Lord poured out Pentecost, he bought out all those faithful women with the other disciples into the upper room, and God baptized them all in the same room and made no difference. All the women received the anointed oil of the Holy Ghost and were able to preach the same as the men (Butler, 2007, p. 13).

Butler writes that the ‘Spirit’ was moving beyond the previous barriers, and doing a new thing, whether male or female, meant the spiritual empowerment of both genders. The argument, however, did not translate into the traditions of Pentecostalism, which did not consider women's preaching synonymous with ordination (Butler, 2007, p. 14). Butler refers to Mark Chaves’ *Ordaining Women: Conflict in Religious Organizations (1997, March 15)*, who stated the initial early distrust between William Seymour and the Pentecostal organization when they began to establish rules on gender policies. Women were allowed to do any role that ordained men supported. Preaching was not one of the roles that ordained men supported (Butler, 2007, p. 16).

However, churches within the Pentecostal denomination had varying opinions regarding women in the pulpit. Pentecostal denominations had a different opinion regarding women in the pulpit from the Assemblies of God, which was also Pentecostal. Although the Assemblies of God was a Pentecostal church whose congregants were primarily White, there were no limitations on women in ministry. Denominations such as The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America allowed women's ordination; some were ordained Bishops (Butler, 2007, p. 15). Nevertheless, although COGIC’s bylaws did not mention gender prohibitions on ordination, the unwritten rule was that women were not to be ordained (Butler, 2007, p. 16). COGIC, in 2024, maintains that a woman’s role is not to be ordained.

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

Further, in this study, the researcher discussed whether there are perceptions of gender inequity in the COGIC and if intersectionality could also be self-hindering. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that looks at the experiences of marginalized people who belong to one or more social categories, such as race or gender (Gopaldas, 2013). Women in senior leadership roles may face barriers like these and feel denied simply because they are women (Lacy-Hunt, 2006, p. 132). Although studies exist (Harris, 2019) exploring why women are not ordained in COGIC, the researcher's study uncovers the perceived resilience of women who remain in a denomination where they cannot be ordained in ministry.

In 2022, the presiding Bishop Sheard of COGIC was quoted responding to the question as to why women were not ordained in COGIC and said (Ajanaku, 2022):

I mean, that's why I think it's more it's more (sic) from the outside that people are complaining about women being ordained or whatnot. And that's a very slippery slope because, as I talk to some of the women in our Church, they're not bothered by that issue. That's just people outside that want to make it an issue for us... Like I say, there are some improvements, and we are working at them, but there's no time for a rebellious activity or anything. That's not in our Church (Ajanaku, 2022).

A question can be raised as to whether the women referred to in Bishop Sheard's response were speaking for all women of COGIC. The researcher considered if the women of COGIC, whom the Bishop spoke of in 2022, had hidden their true beliefs about a woman's role in the church based on a fear of retaliation, fear of change, or concern about voicing feelings regarding male dominance. This study explores if COGIC women share the belief the Bishop expressed or if some women have different experiences related to the COGIC's stance on ordination. If so, how are women influenced, and what is the source of their resilience that causes the women to remain

in ministry within COGIC? The factors that the research subjects shared in their experiences open a dialogue of discussion for evaluation about reasons for their resilience can be discussed and evaluated. The factors the research subjects talked about cannot only be of value to the women, but their voices could also bring new revelations to COGIC regarding their belief that women should not be ordained as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops.

### **Sociological Literature**

The term “glass ceiling” refers to the invisible obstacles to achievement that many females come up against in their occupations, according to Marilyn Loden, credited with coining the phrase in 1978 (Naseer et al., 2020, p. 1123). The term glass ceiling refers to the barriers women face that keep them from promotions to upper-level management or leadership positions in the business world (Boyd, 2012). A Duke University study (Chavez, 1997) revealed that glass ceilings for women still exist, although churches were more ethnically diverse. The Duke study showed that women still held a minority of leadership positions in American congregations. Reasons for the lack of more women in senior leadership included fewer women seeking senior leadership positions, congregants who did not feel a woman should be in a senior leadership role and denominations that did not allow women to hold pastoral roles.

Chisale (2020) reports that while research shows that churches have strong stances on equality and justice for humankind, complexities of practices involving gender and religious discrimination exist. Both note that while there is exclusion, oppression, and discrimination, these factors can also be a vital source of motivation and mobilization in struggles for equality.

In 2023, the researcher aimed to fill the literature gap addressing COGIC women's ministry resilience. The researcher chose her thesis because it addresses the reason for the COGIC women's resilience in COGIC. Ferrero (2015) reports that debates about a woman's

identity and purpose in the church are at the forefront of Black churches because, historically, Black churches support social change. The issue is the lack of support for Black women in the COGIC regarding their ordination. One would presume that if the COGIC are predominantly Blacks and against racial injustice, why would they not be against gender injustice?

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was about more than only the rights of Black Americans. The law prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (*Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964, U.S. Department of Labor, 2023/1964*). However, it ended the Jim Crow laws, which stated that separate but equal was constitutional. Black people were directly affected by this law, and it allowed them to obtain the pursuit of life, liberty, and justice. The Black church's commitment to social and racial justice issues has been the foundation of freedom for all people of color. Yet, although Black churches participated in social activism, they did not necessarily support women in senior leadership missionary positions. Findings such as these illuminate why women, the majority in the COGIC Black congregation, do not hold senior leadership missionary roles such as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops as men (Pew Research, 2019).

### **Theoretical Literature**

Research and theories such as Harris (2019) and Chisale (2020) related to the perception of Black women in the COGIC were examined regarding senior leadership missionary roles, such as Pastors, Elders, and Bishops. Several theories were discussed to describe the theoretical foundation of the research subjects' experiences with gender inequity. The doctrine of the Image of God was explored, and how it affects women in leadership roles and their Complementarian, Egalitarian, and Feminist views.

The Image of God is translated from the Latin word *Imago Dei*, with biblical Scripture

found in Genesis 1:26–28, where God makes people in His Image. The researcher sought to examine the biblical foundation of being created in God's Image and to explore through Scripture what authority women have in senior leadership roles such as Pastors, Elders, and Bishops.

Complementarians believe that males and females were God's created equals but have distinctive roles, with the male giving the responsibility and authority over the female. Further, they believe that women should not exert authority over men in church roles (Sandage, 2017, p. 18).

Egalitarians believe that women and men are equal in all aspects of life, including leadership.

Mustafa and Almazrouei state, regarding the beliefs of Egalitarians, that “gender stereotyping is the root cause of women's disadvantages” (Mustafa & Almazrouei, 2020, p. 181).

In this study, the researcher examined the Feminist Theory of women in senior leadership roles in religious organizations. A Feminist perspective, according to Allen (2023), is about understanding and critiquing the uses and abuse of power to create a more equitable society.

Feminists believe that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. The Feminist view of the same rights and opportunities would include a woman who can do the same things as a man, such as play football or wrestle in a ring. The researcher examined the Feminist theory because the theory argues that women in religious organizations have a reality of patriarchal theological interpretations presented primarily from a man's point of view. As such, some women could perceive their experience as gender-biased (Langford, 2017).

Although the theory of feminism has helped the progression of women worldwide in leadership roles, and in some Christian denominations, women are ordained and hold senior leadership roles, other women within specific denominations continue to be subjected to what could be perceived as male bias (Pew Research Group, 2021). Therefore, this study examined

whether this same progressiveness was experienced by the women in COGIC in 2023 regarding women in senior leadership missionary roles, such as ordained Pastors, Elders, and Bishops.

### **Theoretical Foundation Gender Studies**

The Image of God and the Feminist view are not the only theories explored in this study. The lived experiences of the study participants give a human perspective in seeking to understand how women are resilient in the COGIC. The researcher included human behavior in her study and examined social constructs and gender discussions within her research population. Punt (2020) notes that “theoretical tension between gender and sex is palpable and sustains untenable binaries ”(Punt, 2020, p. 4).

In 2023 discussions on gender in biblical texts continue to increase. However, among biblical scholars such as Punt, there continues to be an exploration into the theoretical and methodological approaches to gender. According to Punt (2020), who states:

Biblical studies can benefit much from cross-disciplinary theoretical work on gender, especially from the ancient Hellenistic and Roman contexts, as well as gender-critical appropriation informed by modern sociological and anthropological work. Accountable gender theory and related responsible methodologies engender responsible engagements with complexities involved in gender-critical biblical studies. The argument that gender theory matters in biblical interpretation is briefly demonstrated with references to 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (Punt, 2020, p. 1).

The Bible and gender studies contain biblical texts regarding the roles of men and women. Bible focus in gender studies focuses on human life to help make sense of gender complexity and intersections throughout history. The experiences of the research subjects are human life experiences that shed light on why women are resilient in the COGIC.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research regarding women in senior leadership roles has generated a conversation to examine women's experiences in the COGIC denomination related to gender bias. The researcher notes Mitchell's statement that Black congregants say their houses of worship support men in leadership roles rather than women (Mitchell, 2021, p. 1). Additionally, Smarr's (2018) qualitative study explores Black clergywomen's experiences regarding their leadership challenges.

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) supports that Black women were less than one percent (93%) of the total number of Pastors (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The Black church has championed equality and justice. However, the researcher sought to identify if support exists regarding equality related to women in the pulpit in COGIC.

Although, historically and socially, one can identify areas of progress that have been made with women being ordained into senior leadership roles, women continue to be subjected to perceived gender bias despite the church's growth. Clergy in Protestant denominations such as Pentecostals have increased progressively over ten years (Pew Research Group, 2021). Therefore, this study examined whether this same progressiveness is seen in 2023 within the COGIC regarding women in senior leadership missionary roles such as ordained Pastors, Elders, and Bishops.

### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

The theories guiding this study explore the Image of God, Complementarian versus Egalitarian, and what role, if any, gender inequity contributes to the power of resilience the women of COGIC appear to possess. This research used a phenomenological method to build on the participants' experiences, concluding with a rich, detailed description of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2017).

### **Research Questions**

The researcher used existing studies that suggest that perceived experiences may play a role in the women who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess by using open-ended interview questions. The following research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What, if any, factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership roles as a missionary as a female of the COGIC?

**RQ2.** What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain in leadership in COGIC?

**RQ3.** What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC?

The researcher chose this set of questions for this phenomenological study to investigate the real-life experiences of the women of COGIC who serve in leadership in the COGIC senior leadership missionary roles, to get their perspective regarding any perceived gender inequities in COGIC, and to examine their power of resilience.



## **Assumptions and Delimitations**

Assumptions and delimitations structure this study by providing the foundation for conducting this study. According to Creswell (2017), establishing a framework for a phenomenological approach so that exceptions outside of the context of the study can be identified and omitted. The added value of identifying assumptions and delimitations assists the researcher in creating unbiased research as it relates to the perceived experiences of Black women in the COGIC who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess.

### ***Research Assumptions***

Assumptions are what a person takes for granted about a study (Roberts, 2010). The researcher assumes that everyone has implicit bias, even those who may feel marginalized or mistreated. Biases can be based on an individual's environment and experiences and created by family background, culture, or education.

The researcher's study assumes that women in senior leadership in the COGIC can generally face both perceptions of gender inequality and intersectionality. Smarr (2019) writes, "Despite the increase of seminary training, Black clergywomen continuously undergo subjugation, degradation, and humiliation in ministry leadership due to gender and race bias by clergymen" (Smarr, 2019, p. 1). In addition, the researcher assumes that the women interviewed who may be subjected to barriers to ordination within COGIC answered the open-ended questions as openly and honestly as they could as they described their own experiences in senior leadership missionary roles within the COGIC and what, if any, influence those experiences have on their power of resilience.

The researcher further assumes that the information gathered from the women of COGIC will promote continued research into COGIC women and their resilience in senior leadership missionary roles and if there is a perception of gender inequity that could also be self-hindering. The researcher assumes that the study participants provided open, honest communication regarding their unique experiences as senior leadership missionary roles in COGIC, which does not ordain women to the roles of Pastor, Bishops, or Elders.

### ***Delimitations of the Research Design***

Delimitations provide a researcher with a controlled map of the research process.

According to Coker (2022), who quotes Simon & Goes states:

The delimitations of a study are those characteristics that arise from the limitations in the scope of the study (defining the boundaries) and by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made during the development of the study plan. Simon and Goes Delimitations result from specific choices by the researcher (Coker, 2022, p. 144).

The study is delimited because it is a qualitative phenomenological study that relies on data from only Black women in COGIC. Thus, it does not include women of other races or denominations who may have perceived inequity regarding women in senior leadership roles and perceived barriers in different denominations. Further, the research is delimited as it does not consider social, economic status, educational level, or marital status when performing in senior leadership missionary roles. Personal bias also delimits the study, as the researcher's background has a similar demographic quality (i.e., race, gender, and denomination affiliation) to that of the participants in the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Bishops:*** A bishop (overseer) must be blameless (I Tim. 3:1–2). When we come to the Ignition epistles written between A.D. 110–117, there is no question that the Bishop is supreme (Ford (2012) notes, "We can, therefore, conclude that those who hold the office of Bishop in our Church are equivalent to the New Testament Apostle in that both offices are administrative (1 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:5), spiritual (Eph. 4:11) and ethical (II Tim. 3:1–4) (Ford, 2012, p. 141).

**Black Race:** A person who is a member of a race of people with dark skin with African ancestral origins (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learner's Dictionaries | Find Meanings and Definitions of Words*, 2024).

**Church:** The Church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 1:18), the dwelling place of his Spirit (Romans 8:9, 11, 16; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, 6:11), the chief instrument for glorifying God in the world and for bringing the gospel to the nations and to redeem humanity (Revelation 5:9). The word church is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “a called-out assembly” or “a called-out congregation.” The word church refers to the gathering or assembly of believers, the “visible community in which Christians come together for worship, prayer, communal sharing, instruction, reflection, and mission (Suwabe, 2022).

**Church of God in Christ:** The largest Pentecostal Christian denomination in the United States, with a predominantly Black membership (COGIC, 2019).

**Elder:** That "Elders" (*presbuteroi*), that is, the older ones, and Bishops (*episkopoi*) "overseers" were in the apostolic and sub-apostolic times the same. An elder has the authority to preach, to conduct worship services, to administer ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Baptism, and to perform marriage ceremonies (Ford, 2012, p. 140).

**Gender Inequality:** is the social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantageously, under similar circumstances, based on gender (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learner's Dictionaries | Find Meanings and Definitions of Words*, 2024).

**Intersectionality:**-A theoretical framework that looks at the experiences of marginalized people who belong to one or more social categories, such as race or gender (Gopaldas, 2013). Women in senior leadership roles may face barriers like these and feel denied simply because they are women (Lacy-Hunt, 2006, p. 132).

**Marginalized People:** Anyone who is oppressed by a system of power (Liang et al., 2021).

**Missionaries:** Women in ministry in the COGIC are known as missionaries and are designated in two categories— Deaconess senior leadership and evangelist senior leadership. The women in COGIC are licensed to teach instead of preach the gospel (COGIC, 2019).

**Ordained:** "The word 'ordained' used in the A. V. (Acts 1:22) by the laying on of hands mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 13:3; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6; Acts 14:26, 15:40) seems to point to the communication of a spiritual gift or to its invocation" (Ford, 2012, p. 146).

**Pentecostal:** Pentecostals identify with a segment of Protestant experience in general and share with many conservative Protestants a 'high' view of Scripture; the Bible is God's authoritative, reliable, and inspired ('God-breathed') word. Pentecostals view the ultimate purpose of the Bible as Christian formation (Nel, 2021, p. 2).

**Power:** Dunamis Greek means “might, might, might, might ... ability, ability.” It refers to the raw force required to accomplish an action. Authority. The second word, Greek exousia, can refer to ability, strength, strength, ability, too, but when used with the dunami, it emphasizes “authority, absolute power, assurance (Andrian,2021, p. 8).

**Resilience:** For other ministers, resilience included understanding their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ. Personally, I think a lot has to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus, and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

**Self-hindering:** Hampering progress toward conscious goals (Lyll, 2020, p. 8).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is the increased knowledge and understanding it brings to all religious denominations where women may perceive barriers such as gender bias but remain resilient in their faith and leadership roles in denominations like COGIC. Studies about social awareness, biases against women, and gender inequity have functioned as a catalyst for exploring what, if any, impact they have on COGIC women in senior leadership missionary leadership roles. The study also aimed to uncover what, if any, influence gender has on COGIC women in senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to have.

Understanding the foundation of the COGIC doctrine regarding ordaining women will assist all women in their pursuit of leadership positions in religious organizations. Understanding the foundation of COGIC’s doctrine regarding women in senior leadership roles will also give others insight into the structural organization of COGIC as a Pentecostal denomination where women are the majority under predominantly male leadership. The study’s objective was to add to the current literature by filling a gap and identifying women’s increased awareness of what they perceived to be their strength in ministry. This study opens a door for extended conversation regarding any improvements or modifications that can be made to the stance of women being ordained in COGIC.

While similar studies on issues and concerns about Black women's leadership exist (Barna, 2017) (Shercliff, 2019) (Bauman, 2023), the researcher aims to fill a gap in the existing literature, specifically to Black women who hold senior leadership missionaries in the COGIC. The researcher recognizes that both men and women of all races and denominations are subjected to gender bias because of the fallen world of which the Church is a part, but for this study, the researcher focuses on the perceived resilience of women of COGIC in leadership. Research indicates that clergy is one of the occupations that continue to face gender bias with the attitude of men toward women in senior leadership roles. Smarr (2018) states that male controlled policies continue to restrict the authority of women. Smarr goes on to quote Hamman (2010) and writes:

Many church denominations are insistent on negating women's equality in pastoring and preaching in ministry leadership. The prejudice against clergywomen in church leadership and criticism against women in clergy leadership have been recorded by secular researchers and religious scholars from the perspectives of theology, sociology, psychology, politics, and economics (Smarr, 2018, p. 2).

The literature gap was addressed by exploring if these perspectives from other researchers positively or negatively influence the resilience of COGIC women in senior leadership missionary roles. Women are not appointed to the roles of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop in the COGIC. The researcher's study examined why women remain and continue to serve in senior missionary roles in this denomination and if they viewed the COGIC stance as gender biased or if their gender provided them with any unique advantage in their call to ministry. Identifying the experiences of the women of COGIC serving as missionaries brings exposure to their perception of any gender inequity within the COGIC. A platform for a needed conversation with the existing literature was given to allow research subjects to discuss what they perceive as the power of their resilience in serving through their ministry gifts.

### **Summary of the Design**

The researcher used a descriptive phenomenological design to ask research questions that explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the COGIC and how their perceptions affect their leadership roles and power of resilience. This phenomenological design method was appropriate for the researcher to help understand what her research subjects experienced in specific situation or lives and their perceptions of their experiences. The researcher's study included an extensive literature review, a Delphi Method to develop an unbiased protocol questionnaire, interviews with semi-structured questions, qualitative data analysis, and consultation with a vetted statistician. Questions were semi-structured and open-ended to allow the women to express themselves in a safe, confidential environment. The participants were Black women 21 years old or older in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC. The researcher collected the data, which Statistical Solutions then analyzed, and a report was presented with its findings.

COGIC is the largest Black church in the Pentecostal denomination, and the researcher was able to select possible participants based on the potential congregate population pool. The researcher understood that challenges would exist because of the strong tendency toward privacy in the chosen denomination of the study. Therefore, the researcher created confidentiality by coding the research subjects' names to keep them safe.

Women comprise most of their congregation and are credited with the church's continued growth. However, senior leadership roles are held primarily by men, as women are not ordained into those positions. COGIC uses Christian Scriptures based on church doctrine to justify not placing a woman in authority over a man. Therefore, this study explored if there is a perception by Black women in the COGIC that not ordaining women creates experiences within the

denomination that disallow women to fulfill their God-given gifts as Christian leaders in COGIC leadership roles. Black women have been referred to as superwomen because they are seen as resilient and strong. According to Chance (2022):

The results of this study reveal that women use adversity as fuel, thus helping them develop the necessary skills to prepare them for leadership. Their strength through adversity is driven by resilience, which has manifested as motivation factors such as family and relationships, mentorship, and sponsorship, as well as the support of cultural identity and diversity. The current findings support the notion that adversity shapes Black women into leaders (Chance, 2022, p. 1).

The Black women in COGIC face adversity and barriers that have been the fuel that propelled them into the heart of great discipleship. The Black women of COGIC expressed in this study a willingness to serve and to accept the call into ministry, knowing that COGIC would not ordain them. Nevertheless, God strengthened the Black women to fulfill the call into ministry. The researcher cannot refer to them as superwomen but acknowledges that the women of COGIC have what can be perceived as a superpower that the research subjects identified as the power of God that has enabled the women of COGIC to be resilient.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

This literature review provided a theological foundation on which the study was based and a theoretical framework created using existing literature to examine its importance to the research problem. In this chapter, the researcher explored the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess.

### **Leadership Qualification**

Whether secular or religious, effective leadership is essential to any organization's success. Dr. Bredfeldt shares on this topic and writes:

Authors like Peter Senge from a business perspective and Eddie Gibbs from a church perspective are challenging the very foundations of our thinking about leadership. Immersed in the currents of contemporary culture, these authors call leaders to a postmodern approach to the task of leadership where leaders no longer have the answers but instead create a climate where followers are empowered, collaborative, and freed to pursue shared goals in their own way (Bredfeldt, 2006, p. 14).

Although Dr. Bredfeldt's statement was written in 2006, the view of what leadership is still applied in 2023's social, political, and religious environments. Twentieth-Century leadership research has emphasized a leader's structure, authority, and leadership style (Dhiman & Marques, 2020). Author Northouse (2001) defines leadership as:

A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. He contends that leadership has several components: it is a process that involves influence, has a goal, and occurs within a group context. He points out several studies that have been conducted comparing leadership of genders and says that research on women leaders and managers has addressed the hot question: Can women be leaders? Do men and women differ in their behavior and leadership style (Northouse, 2001, p. 3)?

A leadership style refers to how a leader's behavior is used in managing employees in an organization. A leader's style can motivate, guide, and inspire followers to reach personal and



business goals. Leaders need to know their leadership style because their style of leadership has sociological, spiritual, and psychological influences that impact and influence their followers. Other common leadership styles are Democratic, Transformational, and Servant Leadership (Goleman, 2017).

Servant Leadership is a style of leadership based on the leader's desire to serve by putting the needs of their followers above theirs. By placing other's needs first, leaders have empowered their followers to perform best. Whether male or female, servant leadership is the style many believe God calls leaders to perform. Howell (2004), the author of *Servants of the Servant*, writes:

Countries, companies, and churches rise or fall with their leadership quality. Over the past twenty-five years in vocational Christian ministry, primarily as a church planter and theological educator, this writer has encountered numerous examples of both constructive and unhealthy patterns of leadership. What has stood out is that effective leadership is critical to the success of any organization or group in accomplishing its mission (Howell, 2004, p. vii).

The author defines biblical leadership as "focusing on God's agenda: evangelizing the lost, edifying the saved, and building up God's kingdom on this earth" (Howell, 2004, p .1).

Regardless of what denomination or gender the leader is, a strong biblical foundation is needed for successful leadership. To further ensure success, effective leaders look inward at who they are in Christ and make sure their motives and agendas for God's people are right. Howell goes on to add that an examination of one's character is essential to good leadership. A character can be defined as a person's moral constitution embedded in a set of values. A leader possesses a good character to have staying power and impact for leadership (Howell, 2004, p. 297).

Throughout the Bible Old and New Testaments, Howell (2004) refers to leaders such as Deborah, Joseph, Samuel, and Solomon. The reader finds a woman among the examples of

leaders who displayed Godly character and led God's people. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul establishes a set of criteria for Elders and Deacons centered around moral virtues involved with the evidence of Godly character (1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9). "Paul's instruction on leadership philosophy is character-grounded rather than designed around personality, role, temperament, or gifts" (Howell, 2004, p. 297). Paul's spiritual instruction had a foundation built on character and not just their gifts, personalities, or roles.

By revealing God's character biblically in Christ Jesus, God has given the Christian believer standards for leadership, whether male or female. God's character depicts how a leader and a follower embrace biblical truth and inspire others to lead with excellence, which honors God. One of the qualities of God's character is that he is a loving father who leads believers in a loving manner, not overbearing. One's service to God should be intentional in advancing the Kingdom. One should not be so concerned about our notoriety; as Howell (2004) notes, "A heart in pursuit of God's glory and the spiritual welfare of God's people nurtures resilience because God's glory releases one from being inflated by triumphs or dismayed by setbacks" (Howell, 2004, p. 248). God requires a pure heart from the leaders, a heart that is free of evil deeds or ways. Whether male or female, church leaders reflect God's love and motivate them to be resilient.

### **Theological Framework for the Study**

In this chapter, the researcher explored what barriers Black women face through their lived experiences in the Pentecostal Church. The intent was to understand how their lived experiences relate to the perception of whether there could be gender inequity in the COGIC church, a Pentecostal denomination. Therefore, several theologies were examined.

Research theologies relate to views, beliefs, biblical worldviews, and support of topics concerning the Complementarian, Egalitarian, and Feminist opinions, specifically as they relate to women in leadership roles in the Pentecostal denomination. The researcher notes that in this study, some theoretical and theological theories meld about the Pentecostal denomination. Additionally, the researcher examined and reviewed other denominations and the treatment of women and ordination.

The theological framework explored the Doctrine of the Image of God and how the Doctrine relates to the lived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ, a Pentecostal Denomination. Black women in the Church of God in Christ may perceive barriers exist, including gender inequity, to becoming senior leaders. A biblical foundation was discussed to respond to the concern.

### **Image of God**

The Doctrine of the Image of God, or *Imago Dei*, has been widely discussed and debated by theologians throughout history. Okesson (2004) advises that the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei* determines the fate of every theology. *Imago Dei* is a Latin word translated to English as "Image of God." The Doctrine of the *Imago Dei* is defined as the metaphysical expression associated uniquely with humans, signifying God and humanity's symbolic connection. So, God created mankind in his Image, in the Image of God he created them; male and female he created them" Genesis 1:27 (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Okesson (2004) states that the Image of God defines what we know as humanity. Biblically, when God created humanity, He gave Adam the woman as a helpmate to have dominion over the earth. Both, being Image-bearers, have the responsibility of caring for God's people.

Theologians use the study of Scripture to understand the Image of God. A contextual

analysis of relevant Old and New Testament passages helps understand the Doctrine of the Image of God and accurately applies the truth. The Doctrine of the Image of God is discussed by Choi (2021) as he writes about theologian Herman Bavinck (Bavinck, 2010). Choi stated that the Image of God, as described in Scripture, marks the origin of humanity (Choi, 2021). Choi goes on to state that according to Bavinck, biblical Scripture attests that God created humanity as the Image and likeness of God. The Image of God is integral to the very being of humanity, and man does not just bear His Image, but He is the Image of God (p. 147).

### **Image of God in Biblical Context: Old and New Testaments**

The theme of the Image of God appears in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament text, we see it referenced in Genesis 5:1-2 and 9:6. These two Scriptures reveal that the first man, Adam, who was created in God's Image, had a son in his likeness and consequences of being Image-bearers as such dominion was given to mankind through the promises of God. There are as many as twenty verses throughout the New Testament; in five of those, a direct relationship to man as the Image of God can be seen in Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 11:7, 15:49; 2, Corinthians 3:18; and Colossians 3:20. Old and New Testament Scriptures provide the knowledge about the importance of knowing that mankind was created in God's Image.

### **Image of God and Mankind**

The historical aspect of the Doctrine of the Image of God states that mankind is created in the "Imago Dei". According to author Dominic Robinson (2011/2016), "At this time in the history of theology, this message is being proclaimed more powerfully through a doctrine of human identity which is rooted firmly in Christ and his new creation, humanity made in his Image and given new life through his infinite redeeming love" (Robinson, 2016, p. 1).

One of the foundational Scriptures used in teaching the concept of God's Image is Genesis 1:27 (Althouse, 2012, p. 151). The Bible passages that address God's Image may not be large in number, but they require attention. Gladd (2019) writes, "Since we are made in the divine Image, we have incredible significance and meaning. The fall certainly perverted how we think and act, but it did not lessen our worth" (Gladd, 2019, p. 6).

### **The Image of God in Church Leadership**

Church leaders can become lost in their visions and fail to remember that God has a divine agenda for his people. The reason that one leads is to bring God glory. Historically the church debates over leadership styles and gender roles, but the leader with a servant's heart will focus on the example set for God's people. Leadership in the Biblical worldview is the outward expression of how the vessel serves God with a pure heart and the right motive. In this study, the heart of the COGIC women was explored in senior leadership missionaries by examining their experiences, exposing the motives behind their ministry, and resilience where there may be a perception of gender inequity.

In the 21st Century, gender is addressed when the role of women in senior leadership positions is debated. Davis (2020), *Women in Ministry Leadership: A Spirit-Empowered Framework*, discusses the issue and points out that there are a variety of views regarding Church traditions and to what level women can lead (Davis, 2020, p. viii). Davis writes that for some Pentecostals, women can only sometimes assume they will be accepted in leadership because of various interpretations of rules and regulations. Some churches ordain women as clergy, while others do not allow women to teach if they are not ordained (Pew Research, 2014).

Davis shares an example of a woman's lived experience related to leadership who wanted to find "healing from the wounds of rejection" (p. viii). The woman wanted a safe environment to use her leadership skills and practice her ministry gift. Davis shares the story the woman tells:

Lisa accepted God's "call" to vocational ministry while studying in college. She was, however, in a Pentecostal denomination that was inconsistent in its promotion of female leaders. Women could function in certain forms of leadership deemed "allowable" by the denomination (pastoral care, pulpit ministry, etc.) but were not permitted to hold organizational leadership roles. Even though she had a natural gift for leadership and had led in many ways permitted by her denomination, Lisa was not included in formal opportunities for spiritual and leadership development and was often overlooked in strategic conversations. Much of her training came through personal experiences and opportunities outside of her Church. Though drawn to Pentecostal spirituality, she found little within her faith tradition to inform her leadership growth. Navigating a ministry minefield of varying theological beliefs and inconsistent policies and procedures has left Lisa less than confident as she seeks to express a sense of calling (Davis, 2020, p. viii).

The question of godly leadership requires us to know who God is and what his nature says to the Church regarding leadership. The nature of God should be the foundation for all forms of leadership in the church. Understanding that we are Image-bearers should be at the center of our church leadership to glorify God. Everything one does as an Image-bearer reflects who God is and how he leads. Okeeson (2004) adds, "While the word 'leader' (or its derivatives) only occurs 290 times in the Bible, other titles and or verbs (expressive of influence or authority) account for another 491 uses" (p. 27). Okeeson goes on to write:

In as much as God gives his Image to humanity, that Image comes with his identity; likewise, fundamental to the character of leadership is a character of identity. As leaders, where do we derive our identity? From skills? From positions or titles? From our followers? Each of these has its value, but unless the Christian leader understands himself right before the Lord, true identity is not possible. This must be the starting point for any theology of leadership (Okeeson, 2004, p. 27).

Okeeson argues that one's character follows from one's Image, and the two correspond. He points out that leadership is not a possession but a gift that comes from the identity of Christ (Okeeson, 2004, p. 30). Hebrews 1:3 reminds the researcher that the "Son is the radiance of God's

glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023, Hebrew 1:3). The Image of God was explored in this study, and what, if any, influence the perception of the Image of God in church leadership has on the COGIC women in senior leadership missionary roles and if the women perceive their ministry as a gift from God.

### **The Image of God and Women**

The Bible is clear that women were created in the Image of God; however, the interpretation of certain Scriptures such as Ephesians 5:22-24, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, and 1 Corinthians 11:31, to name a few, support the idea that women should not be in leadership roles. Yet, women in senior leadership roles have been among the hottest debates in the religious world. Arguments and questions that exist are whether gender or sexual bias prevents women from being in leadership roles in the church.

In the 1980s, one of the most well-known controversial stances was widely publicized (Finn, 2020), involving the Southern Baptist and the role of women in the pulpit. While there was evidence of some women being ordained (Saldanha, 2021), there were some who belonged to the denominations who were excommunicated because of their decision. The Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution entitled *On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry*. The resolution said women should be excluded from pastoral leadership to "preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and woman was first in the Edenic fall." (Shaw, 2021, par. 12) Women face this kind of challenge not only in the Baptist denomination but also in others, such as the Pentecostal. Author Wallace (2016) in an article called *The Image of God* points out:

In Genesis 1, Adam and Eve are created in God's Image and given equal responsibility of stewardship of creation. Though it is different, the woman is not a separate creation; she is made from the same material as the man. Both embody the fundamental qualities and capacities of being human while at the same time having the added dimensions of sex and gender (Wallace, 2016, para. 4).

One cannot dispute that Adam was the patriarch of the human race; however, the establishment of the patriarch, according to Nolls, does not mean that woman has no part to play in the history of mankind (Nolls, 2015, p. 198). The creation of man and his being given dominion over the earth was not God's final plan for him. We find in Genesis 2:18, "And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmeet." (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, Genesis 2:18). Interestingly, God did not seek a helper from all of the animals he had made, and that Adam had named. The author Mascrenge argues that God himself made a woman be a man's helper. Women were a part of mankind, taken from Adam to be his companion and helper of what God had created (Mascrenge, 2021, p. 215).

### **Image of God and Women in Leadership Roles in Scripture**

Although women are marginalized in parts of the Bible, they stood out in major leadership roles. The most recognized women in the Old and New Testament biblical leadership are women like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Esther in the Old Testament and Mary, the Mother of Christ, and Mary Magdalen in the New Testament (Bosterud, 2021). Old Testament matriarchs that made noticeable impressions, such as Sarah, who was married to Abraham, played a visible role in quite enigmatic events, like giving birth at 90 years old, fulfilling the promise that God would make Abraham the father of many nations (Genesis 17:16). Tamar (Genesis 38:6-30), a widow, was promised a husband among Jacobs's sons. When Jacob did not keep the promise, Tamar was wise enough to devise a plan that forced him to take care of her. One of Tamar's sons was Perez, who was in the lineage of Boaz and Ruth, leading to the greatest King of Israel, David (Ruth 4:18) (Bosterud, 2021).



Few matriarchs in the Bible were leaders and performed leadership tasks that were of vital importance to their families, their people, and the survival of a nation. Though debated among theologians biblically, women were made in God's Image; however, theological views influence how women are perceived as it relates to gender inequities, but the Complementarian, Egalitarian, and Feminist views also play a role.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

#### **Complementarian View of Clergy Women in Leadership**

One does not find the words Complementarian or Egalitarian in the Bible; they are used in Christian debates regarding women's leadership roles (Dizon, 2014). According to Dizon, those who use the Complementarian or Egalitarian theory to support their beliefs interpret the Scriptural text regarding women in leadership roles to align with their beliefs. Debates regarding gender roles in the church and family cut across denominational boundaries and led to the creation of a literature that addresses the concern; according to Dizon, and he writes:

What it means for a wife to "submit" to her husband, as well as whether it is acceptable to ordain women as clergy. Within conservative Evangelical Protestant traditions, in particular, the ongoing debate has led Evangelicals to be divided into two camps. The first camp is Egalitarianism, which takes a more Constructivist view of gender roles. Complementarianism, the second camp within Evangelical Protestantism, takes a strongly Essentialist view of gender roles (Dizon, 2014, p. 1).

#### **Complementarian History & Beliefs**

Dizon writes that Complementarians believe that "hierarchical" gender roles were established by God at the beginning of creation and do not allow women in the church to be placed over men. In contrast, the Egalitarians argue against the "hierarchical" gender roles, stating that the redemptive work of Christ means that all roles were eliminated for the Christian Church. Those who use the Complementarian or Egalitarian theory to support their beliefs interpret the Scriptural text regarding women in leadership roles differently. "The support or

opposition of one or the other by Theologians, Pastors, and Christians has caused division and separation throughout churches and denominations” (Dizon, 2014, p. 1). In another view,

Sandage (2014) writes:

Complementarians believe that males and females are God's creation and are equal in dignity, value, essence, and human nature. Still, they each have a distinct role, with the male being given the responsibility and authority over the female. The female was to offer herself willingly and submit to the man. This submission, they say, comes as the husband submits himself to Christ and that women are not to exercise authoritative roles of teaching in the church over a man. The female was to offer herself willingly and submit to the man. This submission comes as the husband submits himself to Christ, and women are not to exercise authoritative roles of teaching in the church over a man (Sandage, 2017, p. 17).

### **Biblical Foundation for Complementarianism**

One of the foundations of what Complementarians use to support their Biblical beliefs is in Genesis 2:18, God tells Adam, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper for him" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Theologians believe that Scripture shows the first differentiation of gender roles, highlighting Eve as a helper. Reed (2017) writes:

Genesis 1-3: God's Good Design God in goodness (Gen 1:4; Jas 1:17) and wisdom (Prov 8:22-31) created the world, making "man in [His] Image" and "likeness" (Gen 1:26) His Imago Dei was intended to represent His nature and provide nurture for the earth in the dual form: male and female. God blessed this dichotomy and gender diversity as His design. The first tenet is that both are "equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood" (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18). Second, God created men and women equally and together as dominion keepers: "Let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds" (Gen 3:26). Third, God created men and women equally and together as life-givers (1:28). All of these roles are equal and complementary (Reed, 2017, p. 15).

Yet even within the COGIC, which belongs to the Pentecostal denomination, Scriptures are entered into the debate on whether or not women have the authority to preach. Originally, at the start of the Pentecostal Movement, women played a significant role in ministry and preaching, and its founder, William Seymour, supported them in ministry (Smith, 2021, p. 49).

## Proponents of Complementarian Views

Pew Research (2014) reports, "Many of the nation's largest denominations, including Roman Catholics, Mormons (Latter-day Saints), Orthodox Church in America and Southern Baptists do not ordain women or allow them to lead congregations" (Pew Research, 2014, para. 2). The Complementarian view is also shared among religious groups like Judaism and Islam. One of the most publicized proponents' debates has involved the Southern Baptist denomination. According to Finn (2020), the Southern Baptist Convention is a Complementarian denomination. Finn goes on to say:

The Southern Baptist Convention clarified their Complementarian conviction with a resolution opposing women's ordination in 1984, an amendment to the Baptist Faith and Message on familial roles in 1998, and a revision to that same confession in 2000 that affirmed a male-only pastorate (Finn, 2020).

Biblical Scriptures that are used regarding women may support Complementarian beliefs include the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's Image, equal before God as persons, and distinct in their manhood and womanhood. (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18) God ordains the distinction between masculine and feminine roles (Gen 2:18).
2. God ordains the distinction between masculine and feminine roles (Gen.2:18 Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the fall and was not a sin (Gen. 2:6-18, 21-24, 3:1-13, 1 Cor 11: 7-9).
3. The headship of the family and the wife is her husband.
4. Women are permitted to use their spiritual gifts if they do not rule over a man.
5. The Old and New Testaments lay out the roles of men and women in Scriptures such as Gen 1:26 27, 2:18, and Galatians 3:28. The male's headship is affirmed in Gen. 2:18, Eph 5:21-33, Col 3:18-19, and 1 Tim 2:11-15.

### **Opponents of Complementarian**

Author Giles (2018) indicates that the Complementarians believe that they are correct in their interpretation of the Scripture: "There is no ambiguity, God has given to husbands power over their wives, Pastors over their congregation, and ideally men over women in society" (Giles, 2018, p.19). Giles writes on six occasions; however, Jesus contradicts the Complementarian's perception and points to six Scriptures where Jesus stated that those who lead his community were servants, not rulers (Matt 20:26-28, 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43-45; Luke 9:48; 22:24-27). Further, Giles states that Jesus valued and supported women in ministry, and as Christians, from a Biblical worldview, the same value and support is present. The value and support of women also aligns with the Egalitarian beliefs regarding gender, specifically women's roles (Giles, 2018, p. 19).

### **Egalitarian History & Beliefs**

The Cambridge English Dictionary's definition of the word Egalitarian records "believes that all people are equally important and should have the same rights and opportunities in life." (*EGALITARIAN / Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary, 2024*). Historically, theologians have researched and debated this term and its theory for decades. As Egalitarian theory relates to women in the church, Scripture interpretation by Egalitarians is based on the view that it does not limit women's roles and makes considerable contributions to any area, including the church. Egalitarians believe children of God are grounded in the view of creation as reflecting the Image of God (Dizon, 2014).

### **Egalitarian View of Clergy in Leadership Roles**

Gender- stereotyping contributes to the limits women experience in their career progression where there are low gender-egalitarian societies. Generally, what is shared is that women and men are equal and deals with gender stereotyping as the root cause of disadvantage

to women. Especially those women who want to excel in leadership roles, according to Mustafa & Almazrouei (2020). Therefore, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature on the Egalitarian theory viewpoint that influences women's resilience in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC.

### **Biblical Support of the Egalitarian View**

The Egalitarian view is based on many of the Complementarians' use of Old Testament Scriptures to support the Complementarian's view that both man and woman are created in the Image of God, sharing in the dominion God has given over the earth. The Scriptures referred to most often are Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, and 5:1-2. The New Testament Scriptures, such as Galatians 3:28, state, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you, are all one in Christ Jesus" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023).

However, Egalitarian theologians say that hierarchical gender roles were not a part of God's original plan for humanity. Egalitarians believe this was introduced due to the fall of Adam and Eve. Emphasizing Genesis Chapter 3:15, "yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Based on this verse, theologians argue that Adam and woman were equal before the fall of man. Their point is that sin changed the natural order through Jesus Christ and abolished that on the cross. Therefore, theologians stand on Galatians 3:28 as one of the Biblical supports for Egalitarianism for women in leadership in the church (Dizon, 2014, p. 1). Christian proponents of the Egalitarian theory say that sometimes the issue with accepting Egalitarianism comes from being unable to embrace the headship concept. The foundation of this inability appears to be that most have been trained in headship and that there should be a hierarchy (Tysick, 2021, p. 13).

## **Denominations and Egalitarian's View**

The roots of the Egalitarians' beliefs are found in the history of ancient Israel, where one sees examples of women leading God's people as Prophets, Apostles, Deacons, and house church leaders. Historically and Biblically, women have made many contributions to Christianity, while in the 20th and 21st Centuries, denominations have observed social and political influences being brought to the forefront. Pew Research (2021) includes in his published article in Christian Century that a 2020 survey reveals "women comprised only 13.4% of Pastoral positions compared to 82.4% of men". Yet women are largely silenced in "most denominations" or can only preach with limitations that the men are not restricted by while denominations ordained women, there were still women in less ordained roles than men (Pew Research, 2021).

In 2021, Pew Research studies revealed that many of the Nation's largest denominations, including Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists, Mormons, and the Orthodox Church in America, do not ordain women or allow them to lead congregations (Weber & Lee, 2021). Pentecostal groups have differed on the roles that women fill. Women have contributed to the growth and development of the Pentecostal denomination, especially in the world mission. For instance, in the COGIC, women are not appointed to the roles of Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. (COGIC, 2019). According to Pew Research (2021), the historically Black Protestant denomination, which the Pentecostal Church is a part of, shows a composition of 59% of their congregations that are women (Pew Research, 2021). Pentecostals generally have not been more liberal (challenging the tradition of patriarchy as related to ministry) than conservative (maintaining that females should be silent in the church and subject to male authority) regarding females in ministry (Archer & Archer, 2017).

## **Pentecostalism and Egalitarianism**

*Sarah's Sinfulness Egalitarianism, Denied Difference, and Gender in Pentecostal Christianity*, a study by Eriksen (2014), examines gender relations in Pentecostalism in a Latin American church. The author reports that Pentecostalism is the most elaborate form of individualist and Egalitarian religion (p. 268). Gender relations, he states, are "often analyzed as power relations defined as access to leadership and public roles" (Eriksen, 2014, p. 262).

Although women were more dominant in the church, women were not represented in leadership offices. Eriksen points out that in earlier studies concerning gender inequities, the focus has been on gender identities and access to leadership and public roles. However, he argues that the perspective could be about more than just gender. Eriksen writes:

Woodhead (2007) has argued that the study of gender in religion always includes the study of relations of power. In anthropological and sociological studies of Pentecostalism and gender, this power perspective has indeed been the dominant one, and the focus has been primarily on men's and women's negotiations of power and leadership. A specific focus on equality/inequality has led us to privilege a perspective on power in studies of gender in Pentecostalism (Eriksen, 2014, p. 262).

When one looks at Egalitarianism's focus, everyone is equal in the presence of God and has a personal relationship with God. However, Eriksen states that gendered hierarchy can be found in Pentecostalism worldwide. Additional research conducted focuses on women and Pentecostalism and the emerging literature on masculinities and Pentecostalism (Eves, 2010; Gooren, 2010; VanKlinken, 2011, 2012) (Eriksen, 2014, p. 262). These studies all followed the same pattern in determining how to access male leadership and how to notice gender identity. Eriksen's study was different in that instead of looking at the roles of men and women; he argued that the focus should be on the specific idea of Egalitarianism that this form of Christianity brings about and shapes how differences are articulated. Eriksen questioned if, rather than gender inequity being solely about hierarchy, it could sometimes be about one's ability to assert their

power of authority over another (p. 262). When examining research regarding Pentecostals and the perceived hierarchy in the COGIC, the researcher investigated the experiences of the women who hold senior leadership missionary roles and explored if this perception influences their power of resilience.

### **Complementarian versus Egalitarian Biblical Worldview**

Egalitarianism both have Biblical worldviews. One's biblical and theoretical views influence his or her thoughts and perceptions. Niles (2022) conducted a study, *Women and Their Roles In The Church*, where disagreements in which Niles described disagreements regarding what role a woman should hold led to members leaving the church (Niles, 2022, p. iv). Niles addressed both views of Complementarianism and Egalitarianism and concluded the following:

After the research concluded, the participants agreed that the culture and context of the Scriptures must be paid attention to before forming an opinion on a Biblical matter. They voiced that Biblical matters and individual pieces of Scripture cannot be the sole basis of creating an opinion without considering these items (Niles, 2022, p. 123).

When looking at both the Complementarian and Egalitarian theories related to women in leadership, both use the Bible to support their positions, however, with different interpretations of Scripture. Theologians understand that no one theory or concept regarding women's roles or perspectives will answer the debate about rights. However, a gap exists, and there is a need for a dialogue in the Church regarding how women are regarded in leadership roles. Difficulties exist for either side of the Complementarian or Egalitarian views to argue that women do not experience barriers to leadership in the Church. While the Complementarian and Egalitarian opinions are the most widely discussed (Warner & Warner, 2005), (Morss, 2022), there is a Feminist view (Commons, 2021, p. 18) that speaks to the issue of women's equality in the Church.



## **Feminist Women in Church Leadership**

Oxford Advanced Learner's Online Dictionary describes Feminists as having or based on the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men gender (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learner's Dictionaries | Find Meanings and Definitions of Words*, 2024). According to Common (2021), "Historically, the church history has failed to recognize Feminist women for a host of reasons for their views on leadership. One of which could be that it was felt that they were not worthy of historical attention" (Common, 2021, p. 18). Historically and sociologically, women in the Christian Church have a long history of patriarchal theological interpretations that have depicted God as a dominant male figure, subjecting women to male hierarchies as a subordinate. As such, women are discriminated against in leadership positions in the church. Common (2021) presents her research results in her dissertation, examines Feminist Ecclesiology, and writes:

Feminist theologians from different cultural perspectives around the globe have critiqued oppressive patriarchal histories, practices, institutionalized church forms, and the Theologies that tacitly support them. The study intended to bring the lived experiences of women in this Movement who were facing barriers to acceptance in the church (Common, 2021, p. 34).

Stephenson (2011) adds that Feminist theology has valuable insights into women's societal and Church issues. Feminist theology is distinguished by being "committed to highlighting women's lives and theologizing for their liberation from oppression" (Stephenson, 2011, p. 4). Feminist women understand that it is important to the Christian faith to embrace this freedom because this theory brings conscious expressions of significance to women and value to the church.

### **Related Literature**

In this part of the literature review, the researcher explores related research to her thesis and examines inequalities involving women in leadership roles; these inequities can be found in all areas of leadership, including gender bias. The researcher examined what could be recognized as a disparity in the COGIC and a gap in existing literature relating to the resilience of Black women who are not ordained into roles of Pastors, Elders, or Bishops in the COGIC and what, if any, influence existing literature has on their ministries.

### **Perceptions**

How one perceives oneself could directly impact their behaviors and influence decision-making processes. Perceptions shape our identity and affect those around us (Barnham, 2015).

Barnham adds:

Our experience of the world is unified – everything that we perceive is a connection to everything else. This transforms the nature of perceptions – they are mentally "picked out" of the perceptual continuum after they have been experienced instead of entering our minds as already fragmented units (Barnham, 2015, p. 845).

To understand Black women's perceptions in the COGIC, the researcher examined any perceptions they may have experienced regarding gender inequity and, if so, whether they could be self-hindering. As Barnham describes, perception can be transformative, which means things can be seen as a reality and may not be.

Barnham proposes in his writings the importance for women to know how men perceive their roles, and with that understanding, women could benefit those who serve in leadership. Gender role perception is essential to gain insight into attitudes, history, ideas, and even preferences of men that women may serve with or have leadership authority over. With knowledge of men's perceptions, women can be equipped to serve their calling better. The researcher explored whether Women of COGIC who understand men's dispositions can better

biblically progress in the body of Christ. Understanding gender differences could help men and women remember that both were made in God's Image.

### **Gender Inequities**

Studies involving Women in Leadership roles (Pew Research, 2018) showed that most Americans believed that women and men are equally capable and have the same important qualities and behaviors to be in leadership positions. Pew Research further indicated that Americans also thought that both men and women could lead in areas of politics and business. The Pew Research Survey (2018) analyzed data revealing that women in leadership held only a small share of top leadership jobs in the political arena. In Congress, there were 24 female senators, 21 of whom were White, one was Hispanic, and two were Asian. In 2018 at the time of the study, no Black women were serving in the Senate. Nancy Pelosi was the only woman to have ever served as speaker for the House of Representatives, with 118 women serving as voting members. In the business world, Fortune 500 companies reported that there were no Black or Hispanic women CEOs (Pew Research Center, 2018). In addition, the survey Gender Differences in Partisan Identification and Presidential Performance Ratings reported by the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University stated that a gender gap, existed between women and men when rating presidential performance. The survey identified that women were less likely than men to receive the favorable job performance of Republican presidents but more likely to receive the favorable job performance of Democratic Presidents (Rutgers-New Brunswick, 2024).

### **Racial Inequities**

Ince (2022) reports that racial inequities still exist in churches, although there is a widespread commitment to racial diversity within churches. Ince asserted that because churches

are just like other organizations, their social and cultural beliefs affect the effort of equity and that the effort to integrate churches does not change white racial attitudes. "In some cases, this reconciliation attempt shines a brighter light on what some see as white hegemony and that they avoid looking and sounding too Black to retain their White members" (Ince, 2022, p. 26).

However, the attempt to reconcile individuals of different races or backgrounds is not a new challenge, as seen in Scripture. Apostle Paul writes to a multiracial, multiclass church of Jews and Gentiles, enslaved and free people (1 Cor. 12:13). Who was a diverse congregation and, in some ways, more varied than what we see in 2023 in our Churches (Rhodes, 2021). Race can also be seen as a barrier to Black women in the church and could be a part of their perception of intersectionality in senior leadership roles.

Chaney (2021) presents research that indicates women of color are stigmatized not only for their race but also for their gender identities. Research indicates (Chaney, 2021, para. 1) that the experiences of discrimination and prejudice have a large impact on people of color.

Individuals with stigmatized identities can recognize both external factors and internal factors of prejudice or negative attitudes. In this study, the Black women in senior missionary roles may experience both gender and racial identity stigmatization. One can see both external stigmatization of Black women in society and internal stigmatization in COGIC. Chaney's research study goes on to say:

Intersectionality, defined as an approach that involves the contextualization of one social identity by the other social identities an individual possesses (Crenshaw, 1989; Warner, 2008), allows for a nuanced and thorough examination of the experiences of individuals who hold one or more stigmatized identities (Sanchez, 2018).

They go on to say that although it is accepted that the women of color's experiences are shaped by both the color aspect as well as their gender, there is less understanding of how these two identities shape their lives (Chaney, 2021, para. 8).

## **Religious Inequities**

According to Pew Research (2019), only one woman leads one of the 100 largest churches in the United States, mainly because leadership is patriarchal. Women are striving for gender equity within their religious traditions. Women in leadership who have impacted religious tradition in this area included Bishop Vashti McKenzie, the first woman to head the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Rabbi Sally Jane Priesand, the first woman in the United States to be ordained as a Rabbi (Pew Research, 2019).

Historically, Black women live with multiple experiences of inequality and know firsthand how inequality affects their well-being, families, communities, and religious organizations. The church historically has been essential to their ability to cope with these struggles, although with great sacrifice of emotional distress, alienation, and doubts of self-worth. Herbin (2019) adds that when it comes to Black mainstream churches, women occupy many positions, but not in the senior levels of leadership (Herbin, 2019). Herbin suggests that in the Black church, some women perceive that they are subjected to the male leaders' dictates, causing an ongoing debate about whether women can hold leadership positions. The barriers that Black women can face are often called the “glass ceiling” and restrict opportunities for women to be ordained as pastors.

A substantial amount of existing literature is relevant to Black women in leadership roles within the Pentecostal Denomination. According to Pew Research (2019) Pastor Demographics and Statistics indicate that 73% of all Pastors in the United States are white, while African Americans make up only 10.6%. The trend between 2010-2019 among Pastors showed that African Americans grew only by 1% for this period. Gender percentages indicated that the role of Male Senior Pastors was at 87% of Female Senior Pastors, which was 8% (Pew Research, 2019).

The Pew Study (2019) reports that the Pentecostal denomination formed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and, during the first decades of the Movement, granted women the right to preach, which was part of its roots (Alexander, 2021). One hundred years later, from when the Pentecostal Movement began in 1924, women's place in leadership changed, and research shows that in the Assemblies of God in the United States, only 17.4% of clergy were females, and only 3.64% were senior pastors. The Pew Study (2019) also indicated that the same denomination in Canada ordained women in 1984, and women made up 21% of the clergy, but only 2% were senior pastors.

In Australia, the Movement, a ministry called Spirit-Filled Pentecostals, began with the spirituality of missionary Sarah Jane Lancaster and her sisters, evangelists like Mina Ross, Brawner, Minnie Abrams, and Winnie Andrews. Clifton (2009) notes that Barry Chant pointed out:

Over half of the Pentecostal congregations functioned by 1930 and were led by women. In the United States, the Pentecostal revival's roots can be traced back to the origin of Agnes Ozman and Aimee Semple McPherson, who were the public Movement's faces. Yet, research has shown that women continue to be the subject of social-cultural and theological forces restricting their ministry. Part of the restriction comes from the formal rules of the Pentecostal denomination (Clifton, 2009, p. 171).

### **Inequities within the Church**

All religions identify with their communities, and through formal and informal channels, messages are sent by members as well as leaders about what acceptable beliefs and behaviors are. When discussing whether women should be silent in the church, the decision is made among authority figures. Wide-spread support, when received in a stance against women taking senior roles, becomes an acceptable part of that community belief system. Understanding the lived experiences of women affected by these beliefs is essential so that measures can be taken to correct the perception of inequity (Yancey & Kim, 2008).

These lived experiences of women who perceive gender bias in the church are at the core of continued debates about equity. There are currently debates about how women cope with these experiences strategically, emotionally, and psychologically with the church's conservative stance on women (Cazarin & Grier, 2018). Pentecostalism's global growth has put religion at the center of debates around the perceived inequalities in the church. Researchers (Cazarin & Grier, 2018) noted in their study:

Gender and religious leadership studies have explored the socio-historical and political struggles of women in leadership positions in Pentecostal congregations that are mostly occupied by men (Alexander and Yong 2009; Stephenson 2011; Mapuranga 2013). The disproportion evidenced by scholars fostered a number of 'expectations' that considered that once women were equally represented in positions of institutional power, the churches would exhibit a more 'egalitarian' approach to gender matters. Likewise, feminist theologians point out that such an approach will be achieved through a change of paradigm in Pentecostal hermeneutics that tends to favor men over and above women' (Stephenson 2011; Mapuranga 2013) (Cazarin & Grier, 2018, p. 458).

Authors Cazarin & Grier state, "In our view, these perspectives have encapsulated the debate so that the final assessment of the capacity (or lack thereof) of Pentecostal churches to empower women socially dominated the discussion socially" (p. 458). Cazarin & Grier's study found that women Pastors claimed the existence of inherent gender justice within the spiritual realm related to the performance of their Bible knowledge, faith, and gifts. The acknowledgment and acceptance by the Pentecostal denomination was a struggle for recognition and equitable leadership positions.

### **Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature**

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the COGIC who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

This study used a phenomenological method to build on the participants' experiences, concluding with a rich, detailed description of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2017).

Although there is some existing literature, such as Harris (2019) and Laughinghouse (2015), this research is being submitted to provide more current information regarding Black women who have faced challenges related to senior leadership roles in the COGIC and their resilience in ministry. The Harris (2019) and Laughinghouse (2015) studies are similar to this study as they point out issues or concerns related to women's leadership roles in other religious organizations. Research such as Harris (2019) and Laughinghouse (2015) is significant because it adds to the current research by giving voice to Black women's lived experiences in a denomination that does not ordain women into roles of Pastors, Elders, or Bishops; however, they serve in ministry with resilience. Therefore, to fill the gap in the existing literature, the researchers focus is on the COGIC Pentecostal denomination and how the women of COGIC remain willing to serve. In 2023, the researcher aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature on women's concerns in leadership roles in religious organizations, specifically the experiences in perceived resilience in Black women in leadership in COGIC.

The study conducted by the researcher is also significant because the Pentecostal Movement continues to be one of the world's fastest-growing religious groups of Christians. Pew Research Forum's (2021) analysis estimates from the Study of Global Christianity that there are about 279 million Pentecostal Christians, and 305 million charismatic Christians worldwide participate in Pentecostal worship. The study focuses on this growing and understudied population and explores where the Pentecostal denomination stands in 2023 regarding women's ordination in COGIC.



## **God created Man and Woman**

Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created man and woman in his Image, although there are debates over this Scripture and whether they are equal in their ability to hold senior leadership roles. Fuller & Jasper write that God did not give man dominion over the female (Fuller & Jasper, 2021). The argument is that men and women were made in God's Image as equals. Christians may argue as well that humanity in Christ knows no distinction between Jew and Greek (Gentile), slave and free, male and female based on Galatians 3:28, which reads, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (*New International Version*, 1978/2023).

## **Women's Role Affected by the Consequence of Sin**

Whether or not the woman's sin reduced her to being a servant to the man is also debated in the discussion of women's authority in the church. Both Adam and Eve sinned against God by eating the fruit, and punishment of a curse was given to both of them. The man's punishment was that he would have to work off the dirt he came from to eat. For Eve, her punishment would be painful childbirth, and the husband would rule over her (Gen. 3:16). However, Jenks (2023) argues:

1 Timothy 2:15 in light of the Genesis story. Holding to the view that women of the church, like Eve, are saved by fulfilling their function as child bearers and mothers has problems if one evaluates this role and function as somehow inferior to the role of the male gender. This is not just a class problem or one of discrimination or culture; it is a textual and theological issue. Paul elsewhere has clearly argued and promoted that his gospel eliminates distinctions that would promote discrimination (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-18).

## **Women are Listed as Great Leaders in Scripture**

In 2023, in some religious denominational circles, the debate continues that focuses on whether or not women can be leaders of congregations. The discussion includes the stance that if God did not want women to lead, why would there be so many examples of female leaders in the

Bible? Miriam was a leader that God used first to save her brother Moses from death at the hands of Pharaoh. Later, she leads right beside Moses; Micah 6:4 writes, "I sent Moses to lead you, as well as Aaron and Miriam" leads (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Deborah, the powerful warrior, leader, prophetess, and judge of Israel. She was a prophetess, a wife, and a judge holding court under the Palm Tree.

Women leaders were noted in the New Testament, such as Phoebe, a deacon in the church (Rom.16:1). The word deacon refers to Christian leaders who serve as overseers or elders in the church. (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8,12). Women also were apostles, and one was Junia, whom Paul himself acknowledges in Rom.16:7 and said, "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles and were in Christ before I was" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023).

### **God Gifts Women to Lead**

God made woman, according to Scripture, with the ability to lead in all walks of life. Proverbs 31:10-12 declares, "A capable, intelligent, *and* [a]virtuous woman—who is he who can find her? She is far more precious than jewels, *and* her value is far above rubies *or* pearls" (*Amplified Bible*, 1954/1987, Prov.31:16-17;20-21;31:25 & 36). Proverbs is called the book of wisdom and outlines that God has given women many gifts and the ability to lead.

According to an article by Kulkarni & Mishra (2022), women in lead continues to be a major topic in discussions in all areas of society. The authors conclude that women are unique in a particular way and add a unique value to their work. Kulkarni & Mishra (2022) cite Stanford et al. (1995) and state:

“However, women are different in a particular way and provide unique value addition through their work. These characteristics are known as feminine attributes, such as strong communication skills and empathy toward others” (Stanford et al., 1995) (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022, p. 10).

Kulkarni & Mishra further reference a study (Chandler, 2011) that used a Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends Survey (Pew Research, 2019), suggesting that women are superior to men in honesty, intelligence, compassion, outgoing nature, and creativity (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022, p. 21). Coleman adds to this discussion and states:

Pentecostals justify the development of their spiritual gifts as a vocational call from God. Spiritual gifts are given to believers that empower them to minister in various ways that help promote the ministry and build the Kingdom of God. Spiritual leadership in the church is God's responsibility, not men. He is sovereign and can choose men and women for his gifts. It is through the Holy Spirit that they are empowered to lead. Joel 2:28 says, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Prophecy in this Scripture includes preaching (Coleman, 2021, p. 35).

Although substantial research exists as it relates to women in senior leadership roles in the church, there is a gap in the literature regarding Black women in COGIC. There are barriers for Black women that exist not only in the religious world but also in society. Cultural differences, racial bias, and continued injustices remain decades and are a part of the perceived barriers to women of COGIC. Yet, the women of COGIC continue to serve the Pentecostal denomination, although not acknowledged as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. This study explores what causes the women of COGIC to remain committed to the ministry.

## **Resilience**

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in COGIC who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living

relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

Resilience appears to play a prominent role in the performance of COGIC women's ministry in an environment that can be perceived as gender biased as COGIC does not ordain women to the positions of Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. Although the women are given the role of Missionary and have specific duties within the COGIC, they do not hold positions of authority over men. In this study, what causes the women of COGIC to serve under the doctrine guidelines within the church, and what, if any, barriers do the women of COGIC experience in their own words? The researcher in this study sought to understand if perceived resilience sustains the women of COGIC.

Although several definitions exist for the word resilience, the Cambridge English Dictionary defines resilience “as the ability of a substance to return to its usual shape after being bent, stretched, or pressed” (RESILIENCE |*Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary*, 2024). Sielaff et al. (2021) define resilience as "a process of growth in the midst of adversity that results in long-term increased well-being" (Sielaff et al., 2021, p. 309). The authors go on to state that resilience for a clergyman or woman is vital to the resilience of their congregations and that when a clergyperson is struggling, their congregation struggles. In turn, the entire community is affected (para. 2). The Sielaff et al. study (2021) discusses several components of McKenna's definition of resilience, which are further explored below.

In this study, the researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in (iii) Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

McKenna's definition was given by women who gave three reasons for what they believed was their sustaining power in ministry. The researcher would argue that having an understanding of one's relationship with God is the foundation of what McKenna's definition describes as resilience.

### **A Relationship with God**

Biblically, a relationship with God, regardless of gender, is essential to leadership. Researchers (Laurin et al., 2014) discuss that scholarly attention has been given to the idea that people have what they perceive as a relationship with God. Laurin et al. (2014) refer to scholars who have added to the literature:

For example, some have argued that God plays a role resembling that of the parent in the parent-child relationship and that God meets the criteria that define attachment (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). And that a relationship with God can make people feel supported and guided through life and increase their well-being (Gall, 2004; Levin, 2002; Mackenzie et al., 2000) (Laurin et al., 2014).

Laurin et al. (2014) point out a broader meaning of a transactional connection between two people that involves mutual affection and intimacy. Baumeister & Leary (1995) add that being in a relationship causes one to feel connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Baumeister and Leary also argue that by having a relationship with God, one gains a closeness that can give them a sense of secureness in their struggle. This researcher explored what the source could be for the COGIC women that empowered them to remain in ministry under perceived inequities to senior roles of Pastor, Elder or Bishop.

### **Strong Sense of Calling – You Are Where Jesus Wants You To Be**

When examining what women in McKenna's study gave a strong sense of calling and of knowing that you are where Jesus wants you to be as a part of their definition of resilience, one looks closer at what this statement could mean. Jesus valued women highly, and he recognized their value as people. Borland (1991) writes:

For Christ, women have an intrinsic value equal to that of men. Jesus said, "...at the beginning, the Creator made them male and female (Matthew 19:4; cf. Genesis 1:27). Women are created in the Image of God just as men are. Like men, they have self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions (Borland, 1991, p. 106).

Numerous examples of how Jesus treated women can be seen in the Scriptures. John 4:27 records how Jesus directly addressed women in public, which was not customary for a man. The disciples were shocked to see him talking to the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-26). He spoke to them in a caring manner, using words such as "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). Borland writes that Jesus demonstrated his high value on women by "according to them dignity in his ministry" (Borland, 1991, p. 108). Borland goes on to point out three ways by which this was done: (1) by using them in his teaching, (2) by teaching women theological truths, and finally, by having them as a part of his life and ministry (Borland, 1991, p. 108).

Women's contributions are seen in the Old and the New Testaments. Women were placed where God wanted them to be for the Kingdom's purpose; for example, Moses and three women played an essential role in God's purpose. First was Moses' mother, Jochebed, who trusted God enough to put her baby in a basket and send him down the river; then Moses' sister, Miriam, who was wise enough to watch what would happen to him and offered a quick solution for the care of the baby to Pharaoh's daughter Bithiah who had found him (Exodus 2:1-8).

Not only do Biblical Old Testament examples exist of women positioned by God, but examples are also present in the New Testament. Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Luke 1:35, is told by an angel that "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Further, there was Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus sent to carry a word, the good news, the Gospel (John 20: 16-18). Both women were right where God wanted them to be, as he called on them to promote the Kingdom. The Scriptures, such as Galatians 1:10 and Acts 5:29, remind all Christians that obeying God rather than man is better. This study explored if the women of COGIC see their ministry contributions as gifts from God and if they are positioned in the place where God has called them to be. Women with resilience have a strong sense of the calling on their lives and know without a doubt that God called them and not men; many feel they must obey.

### **Understanding True Identity In Christ**

The last concept the women stated was to define resilience as understanding their identity in Christ. Self-awareness is a key component of resilience, as noted in a 5-year qualitative study involving clergy (Sielaff et al., 2021). Sielaff et al. (2021) also mention that clergy learning more about self-awareness impacts congregations, supervisors, and denominations. Practitioners and researchers have seen self-awareness as both a primary means of alleviating psychological distress and the path of self-development (Sutton, A., 2016). Sutton quotes Fenigstein et al. and increased awareness of the self is both a tool and a goal" (p. 522). Sutton writes that self-awareness goes beyond well-being and mental health but contributes greatly to everyday functionality. Further, Sutton informs that it has important effects on performance, with reflection and mindfulness encouraging. Persistence with tasks despite performance-related

stress (Feldman et al. 2014) (Brinker et al. 2014) and rumination related to interpersonal difficulties (Sutton, 2016, p. 522).

In biblical Scripture, the Christian is instructed to "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (*New International Version*, 1978/2023, 2 Corinthians 13:5). How one sees or defines oneself is important in life's successes and failures. Biblically, there are right and wrong ways of defining who a person is, and those definitions can come from many diverse sources. One may define their identity based on their ethnicity or what school they went to, even by their marital status, political affiliations, or how much money is in the bank. Christian identity can be defined by a role of authority or longevity in the Church.

Women in the church are sometimes subjected to doctrinal beliefs that dictate who they are and what role they should play in the church. According to Cummings & Latta (2010), women whom God has called to carry his word have had their voices silenced by church doctrines, rules and regulations, and cultural beliefs. Cummings and Latta state that the debate of whether or not a woman could occupy what was considered the sacred space reserved only for men was perceived to be "God's anointed bearers of the word of God" (p. 665). Cumming and Latta (2010) inform that in 1990 two congregates, Lincoln and Mamiya," told stories about women who were forced to preach the word or deliver sermons from the floor of the church sanctuary rather than the pulpit" (p. 668). Freeman (2022) adds:

Baptist Black women have adopted the attitudes and beliefs of their oppressors in the church. Black Women have adopted a submissive/less than/unempowered mentality, a result of the constant reminder from Baptist traditions within the church that they are supposed to be quiet in accordance with Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, as well as other influences. They have had to adjust their identities and the work God has called them to do in ministry (p. 30).

Baptist Black women appear to have pressed on in their calling, perhaps reminded of James 1:2-4 which informs, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of



many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything"

*(New International Version Bible, 1978/ 2023)*. Campbell (2016) writes:

Resilience, rooted by confidence in Christ, develops by suffering. In the midst of suffering, the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into receptive hearts (Rom. 5:3-5). Through resilience, the mature character of Christ develops within (Jas. 1:3-4). While suffering, the believers the wisdom of Christ (1:5-8). Christ provides strength to the believer by his Spirit (Heb.11:27). During this process, the believer's eyes are fixed upon Christ, who is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (12:2) (Campbell, 2016, p. 35).

Biblically, women who suffered in ministry focused on Christ because they saw themselves as Christ saw them. Biblically, women are valuable to Him and the work He has called them to do in the Kingdom. Women do not see through a distorted view from the lens of denomination, cultural, or societal beliefs but through the word of God. Women are no longer bound to an identity based on what they do or a title but on the acceptance of God, who has forgiven, redeemed, and called them daughters.

This study examined if women in ministry who know their true identity could be resilient and content in their calling. Do the women rely on their own strength or ability? Maylin (2019) writes about the Apostle Paul and the Scripture Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" (*New International Version Bible, 1978/2023*). Maylin informs that Paul was not referring to his own abilities, that he was able to gain strength, but that he had learned that no matter the circumstance, he had a greater God to sustain him. Maylin reports that not only does God give strength, but the Christian is encouraged by Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed but not driven to despair. We are hunted down but never abandoned by God. We may get knocked down, but we are not destroyed" (*New International Version Bible, 1978/2023*). For

the women in ministry who face innumerable obstacles and barriers, Paul's letter to the Corinthian church could be the foundation of their resilience.

Historically, COGIC women in senior leadership missionary roles have faced perceived barriers to ordination into roles of Pastors, Elders, and Bishops. Yet, the women continue to use their gift of ministry in this denomination. The researcher explored what motivation, if any, sustains the COGIC women and what influence resilience has on their decision to remain in COGIC.

### **Obstacles to Female Leadership**

According to Elias (2018), although all women face obstacles in seeking leadership roles, Black women may find it even harder to obtain them. Elias writes:

A March 2016 report from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) identified that from corporate boardrooms to the halls of Congress, from universities to the courts, from religious institutions to philanthropic organizations, men are simply much more likely than women to be leaders (Elias, 2018, para. 15).

Further, Elias cites and identifies the American Association of University Women 2016 report, "Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership" ([aauw.org/research/barriers-bias](http://aauw.org/research/barriers-bias), 2016), which identified that factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age make for unique experiences for any woman who tries to rise to leadership (Elias, 2018, para. 15).

Pew Research (2015) reports that the majority of Americans felt that women were just as capable as men to be good political leaders. The Pew 2015 report also pointed out that the group of Americans surveyed felt that women also had the ability to dominate leadership roles in the corporate world. This same Pew Research 2015 report also stated through survey results that:

Most Americans find women indistinguishable from men on key leadership traits such as intelligence and the capacity for innovation, with many saying they're stronger than men in terms of being compassionate and organized leaders (Pew Research, 2015, para. 1)

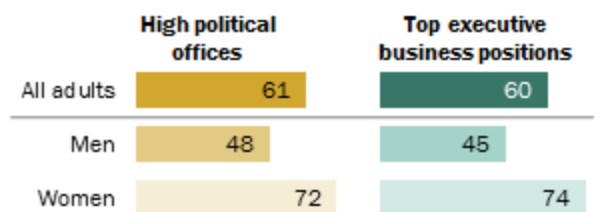
The Pew Research (2015) study asks, “So why, then, are women in short supply at the top of government and business in the United States” (Pew Research, 2015, para. 1) ? The researcher examined the reason for “short supply” by reviewing additional data from 2018 about women in leadership to determine if there had been any change in the perspective regarding a possible disparity between men and women in leadership.

In the analysis of the findings from Pew Research 2018, shown in Table 1 below, data reflects has been minor change in the perspective of women in leadership barriers. Pew (2018) states that Americans believe men are more likely to obtain leadership positions in business and politics, although the majority believe men and women are equally good leaders. Additional research regarding women in leadership argues that gender stereotyping threats can be experienced while performing a role at senior levels with congruent characteristics (Chen & Houser, 2019; Coffman, 2014). Gender composition in the workplace could influence one's gender identity and the respective gender stereotype (Chen & Houser, 2019; Cohen & Swim, 1995; Cota & Dion, 1986; Hoyt et al., 2010) (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022, p. 18).

Reviewing studies regarding women in leadership, Pew Research (2018) reports that a majority of Americans would like to see more women in leadership positions in both business and politics. However, many are skeptical that gender parity will ever be achieved in these positions. The results of the gender and partisan gaps are shown below in Table 1.

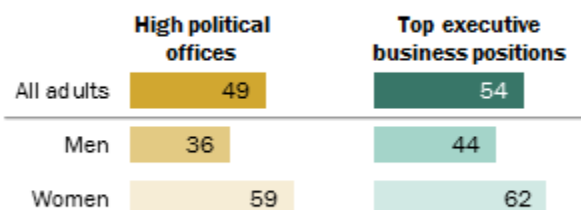
**Table 1**

*Wide gender and partisan gaps in views on women in leadership*



*% saying gender discrimination is a major reason why there aren't more women in ...*

*% saying gender discrimination is a major reason why there aren't more women in ...*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 19-July 2, 2018. "Women and Leadership 2018"

Note: Best Copy available. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 19-July 2, 2018. "Women and Leadership 2018" Pew Research Center (Pew Research, 2018)

### Barriers to Female Leadership

Pew Research (2018) reports that women are more likely than men to see benefits to female leadership. Further, the Pew report reveals that a large majority of men (71%) and women (82%) say that having more women in top leadership in business and government would improve the quality of life for women. However, while two-thirds of women see a more positive impact for men, only a smaller number of men (47%) do. The impact of a growing number of women in leadership positions on Americans: the study showed 78% of women say it would have at least some positive impacts, compared to 59% of men who did not agree with the women's view (Pew Research, 2018, para. 3).

The Pew Study (2018) also identified many factors that are perceived as barriers to women not being equally represented in leadership. Among women is the barrier of sexual stereotyping, where women are considered difficult to work for. Pew reports that women are

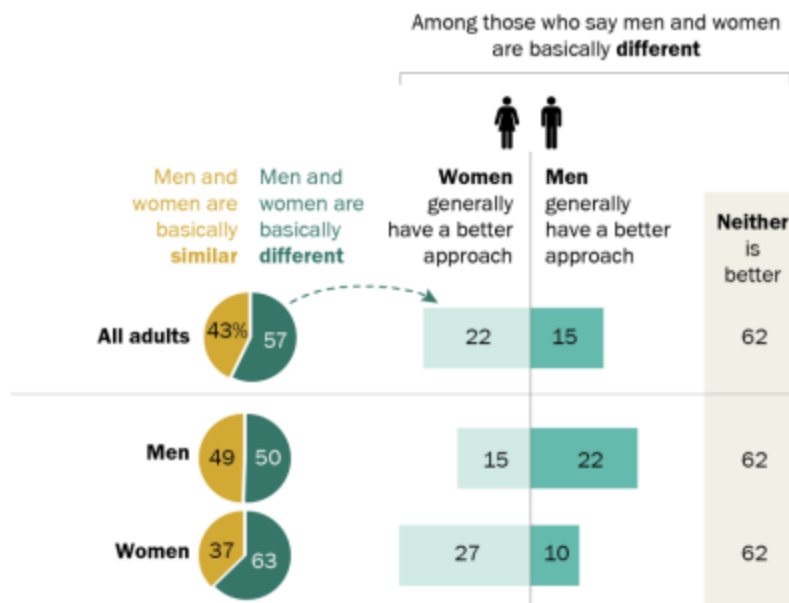
thought to be pushy, overly ambitious, or aggressive. Another factor that could be a barrier is that women have a leadership style that only satisfies their goal of reaching the top and helping others get there. Women are also considered to lack social capital, where they are free to entertain clients because of home or family commitments. In business, a lack of agreement exists on the major barriers to female business leaders (para.4).

Gender discrimination in the Pew Study (2018) revealed that there was a difference in the ages of women who were more likely to see gender discrimination as a barrier for women into leadership positions. Among women who were 18- 49 years old, 68% of them felt that gender was a factor in women holding leadership positions, while only 50% of women 50 years and older agreed that gender was a barrier to women in leadership positions. In Pew's study, men's views did not differ as much by age; younger men are no more likely than older men to say that there are too few women in top leadership positions in business or politics and that discrimination was a barrier that held women back (Pew Research, 2018, para.15). Pew Research study (2018) showed that 57% of Americans think men and women have different leadership styles; 43% said that they are basically the same. Americans did see a difference between men and women regarding leadership style; 62% stated they did not think either gender was better, 22% said women have a better approach, and 15% said men do (Pew Research, 2018, p. 11). Women were more likely than men to have a better approach to see a gender difference in leadership styles (63% vs. 50%), according to the Pew Study (2018) shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Men and women who see a gender gap in styles of leadership differ on who has a better approach.*

*% saying that when it comes to the leadership styles of people in top positions in business and politics ...*



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 19-July 2, 2018.  
 "Women and Leadership 2018"

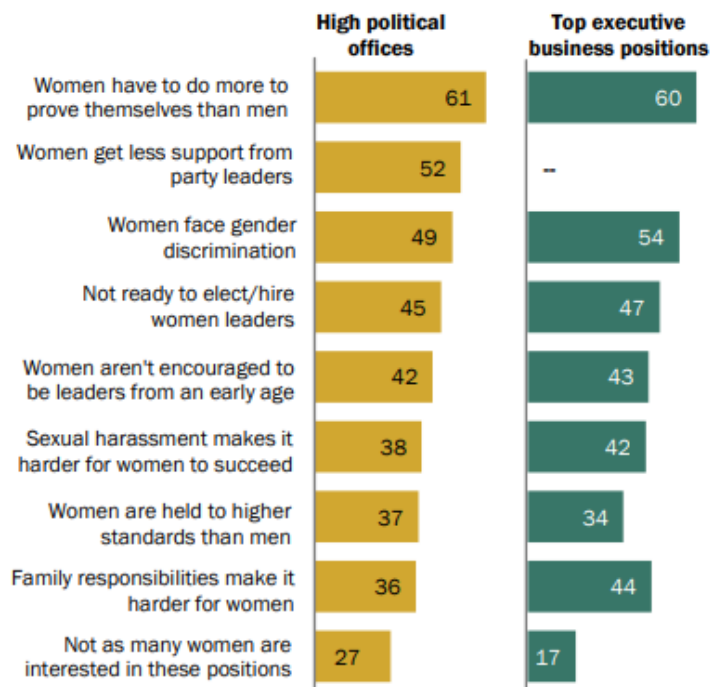
Note: Best Copy Available. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 19-July 2, 2018. "Women and Leadership 2018" Pew Research Center (Pew Research, 2018)

In Table 2, the Pew Research study revealed that among those who say men and women are basically different, the question of a woman's ability to lead was not noted as a difference. Rather, the expectations are uneven, and companies have not changed their corporate approach to promoting women (Pew Research, 2018). Table 3 below reveals some of the obstacles that the Pew Study (2018) presented.

### **Table 3**

*Many see uneven expectations and gender discrimination as major obstacles for women seeking leadership roles.*

% saying each is a major reason why there aren't more women in ...

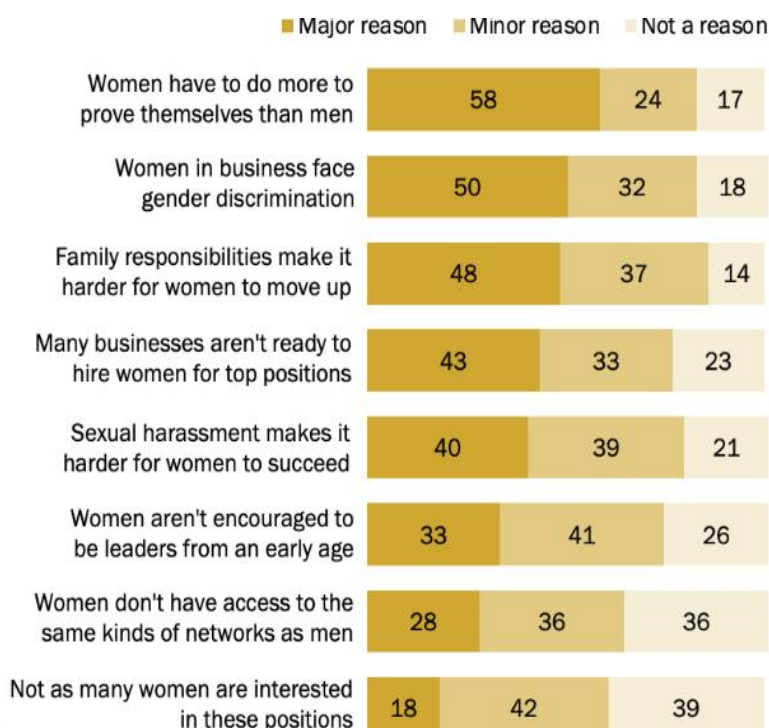


Note: Best Copy Available. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 19-July 2, 2018. “Women and Leadership 2018 “ Pew Research Center (Pew Research, 2018)

In comparison, the most recent study conducted by Pew Research (2023) shows that the percentage of women who feel they have to do more to prove themselves to men has decreased from the 2018 figures reported 60% to 58% in 2023, as shown in Table 4 below (Pew Research, 2018).

#### **Table 4**

*58% of Americans say women having to do more to prove themselves is a major obstacle for those seeking top leadership positions in business.*



Note: Best Copy Available. Shares of respondents who did not offer an answer are not shown.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 17-23, 2023. (Pew Research, 2023)

Studies such as Pew's survey above indicate that research shows that there are barriers as well as obstacles that women face in obtaining leadership roles. However, another concept that may affect women trying to accept leadership roles is unconscious bias (Pew Research, 2018).

### Women in Leadership and Unconscious Bias

One definition of unconscious bias is "... an unfair belief about a group of people you are unaware of that affects your behavior and decisions" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learners' Dictionaries | Find Meanings and Definitions of Words, 2024). (Noon, 2018) reports that everyone possesses deeply ingrained biases that influence attitudes and behaviors and can be quantified ( Noon, 2018, p. 199). Noon goes on to write:

Notwithstanding the criticism so far, let us assume that awareness of bias by individuals can lead to a change in their actions or, at the very least, can have a consciousness-raising effect that might start the process of change. In other words, even if an individual is motivated to act, the actual impact on a wide range of his or her behavior is likely to be limited (Noon, 2018, p. 203).



The impact of unconscious bias, as reported by Evans & Maley (2021), is included in research that seeks to explain the slow progress of advancing women into senior leadership roles. Evans & Maley state the popular phrase “lean in” was coined by Facebook’s Chief Operating Officer, Sandberg (2013), suggesting that women need to do the right things to get ahead. However, the statement could be seen as ignoring the systemic gender bias in organizations. A systematic gender bias reflects women who have been exposed to a lifetime of stereotypes in the workplace. Evans & Marley (2021), in discussing the dramatic impact of unconscious bias referring to an Australian survey by Egon Zehnder (2017), found that women's ambitions, which start similar to men’s over time due to exposure to the ‘glass ceiling effect’, when reality sets in about the challenges, they face in attaining senior leadership roles’’(Evans & Maley, 2021, para. 9). Therefore, this study explored what, if any, were the experiences of the COGIC women that were perceived as obstacles and whether unconscious bias could play a role in their resilience.

### **Profile of the Current Study**

In summary, the researcher’s aim for the study was to help all women, not just Black women in ministry, who face perceived barriers to serving as pastors, elders, or bishops in the Pentecostal denomination. By filling the literature gap through theological, theoretical, and thematic resources, current information can be added regarding the perceived experiences of Black women serving in senior leadership missionary roles in COGIC and their resilience in ministry.

The researcher chose the Church of God in Christ for this study because it is the largest lack Pentecostal organization in the world (Pew, 2021) and can be perceived as a major influencer in the body of Christ by some Christian believers. This research study explores with a positive lens the perception of Black women in senior leadership and the source of their

resilience in ministry. Existing literature, such as authors such as Laughinghouse (2015), explores what was called womanist tendencies and reports the following:

I continue to posit that COGIC is consistent with missing opportunities that omit the oppressive structural relationship between racism and sexism. The total exclusion of women from important leadership roles points to the gap between theory and practice. The practice of allowing women to operate as leaders without recognizing their authority as leaders is proof that even with modified power, patriarchy still wins (Laughinghouse, 2015, p. 19).

Based on Laughinghouse's statement, the COGIC gap exists between theory and practice as it relates to women in important leadership Roles. However, this research is not intended to criticize the doctrine of COGIC. This study aimed to shed light through the shared experiences of Black Women who have shown their commitment to ministry that despite existing principles regarding women as Pastors, Elders, and Bishops, COGIC women maintain their resilience.

### CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in ist COGIC who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by Mckenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject, 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

The researcher aimed to fill the literature gap regarding the problem through a coded interview process and data analysis that revealed themes and patterns. Previous studies regarding Black women of COGIC and their inability to hold roles such as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops appear not to have examined whether there was a positive aspect of the women's experiences.

The study of the power of resilience in the purposive population helps fill a literature gap by addressing a positive response of resilience to Black women in senior leadership roles of COGIC. According to the research subjects' interview analysis, the resilience of strength in God was the concluded foundation. The researcher chose to fill the literature gap regarding the Black women in COGIC who held the role of senior missionary by revealing their experiences of resilience not only to the women of COGIC but to all religious organizations.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses her research methodology, including the research subjects' responses to the research questions revealed new revelations regarding their strength and endurance in ministry. In addition to the research questions, the research design population, sampling, and data analysis were used for this study. The need for confidentiality,

credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness, as required in a qualitative phenomenological study, will also be discussed.

### **Research Design Synopsis**

#### ***The Problem***

A problem exists about whether or not women should have positions of authority in churches. Alminana writes, "The debate on women in ministry in Pentecostal circles is an ongoing issue with people on both sides arguing that their position is biblical" (Alminana, 2016, p. 24). Alminana quotes Apostle Paul, who writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023, 1 Tim 2:12).

The Pentecostal denomination of COGIC maintains the biblical Scripture, such as 1 Timothy 2:12, which mandates excluding women from having authority over men (COGIC, 2019). Women of COGIC perceive that the doctrine uses Scripture such as these to justify not ordaining women as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. In the hierarchy of the Pentecostal denomination, Bishops provide the administrative supervision of Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and Missionaries. The Bishops also provide theological guidance and maintain the moral foundation of the Pentecostal doctrine (COGIC, 2019). This researcher addressed significant implications that merit further study and presented a practical concern from the COGIC women about how the Pentecostal denomination addresses roles of authority over men.

In this study, gender refers to the characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed and include behaviors and roles associated with being a man or a woman. The World Health Organization (Gender Euro, 2024) defines gender as being hierarchical, which can produce inequalities that intersect with social and economic disparities. Gender-based discrimination can intersect with other types of discrimination, such as ethnicity, disability, age,

socioeconomic status, gender identity, and sexual orientation, to name a few, and is referred to as intersectionality (Gender and Health, 2024). Intersectionality could be a part of some Black women's perception of gender inequity, which may include the Black women of COGIC.

Pentecostalism was established in 1906 during the expansion of Jim Crow segregation in America. Black people as a race were subjected to barriers and challenges of discrimination in all areas of society, even religious organizations. Gender-based discrimination was seen in the Pentecostal denominations, and women have been subjected to struggles and denied opportunities to advance in ministry (Gabaitse, 2015). The intersectionality of gender-based discrimination is a perception within the Pentecostal denomination and other religious sects. It is believed that religious practices influence people and shape the culture within society.

According to Ogbujah (2017), gender greatly impacts religious ethics and practices, especially when these roles are discussed in leadership discussions. Spiritual involvement often entails the differential bestowal of opportunities and privileges by gender. Ogbujah also writes that in religion, opportunities and privileges are given to predominantly males. In addition, Barkowski (2014) argues that gender inequalities have contexts; gender inequality manifests through gender ideologies, institutions, interactions, and identities (p. 172).

The impact of gender socialization is seen throughout all social classes and can affect how women are viewed as leaders. Gender equality is an issue that can be discussed in every country of the world. Girls and women have less access to education and healthcare, do not have the same economic opportunities as men, and are under-represented regarding decision-making levels of society (Nations, 2023).

### *Purpose Statement*

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

Throughout the research process, gender inequity was generally defined as not being treated equally because of gender. COGIC women may have felt that they were not being treated the same as men who are ordained into roles such as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. The research methodology guiding this study is phenomenological, as it builds on the participants' experiences and concludes with a detailed description of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

According to Daniels (2022), Pentecostals have been gendering inclusive since the beginning of the Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Important early Pentecostal leaders such as Pandita Ramabai Saravati (Muki Mission), Florence Crawford (Apostolic Faith Mission) and Aimee Semple McPherson (International Church of the Foursquare Gospel) greatly influenced and continue to influence the global Spirit-centered community (Daniels, 2022, para. 5).

Daniels continues to inform that the history of Pentecostalism indicated an inequitable history; Pentecostals continue to debate the role of women with ongoing discussions of Egalitarianism and Complementarianism. However, gender norms may also contribute to the perceived inequity in the Pentecostal Church. Connell and Pearse (2020) write:

Gender norms are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society. They are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction.

They play a role in shaping women's and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power, and sense of self (Connell and Pearse, 2020, p. 415)

In 2023, the traditional gender norms are still held by many Pentecostals who claim that men are called to “headship,” not only in the family but in the Church as well. COGIC follows traditional gender norms as well as their belief that women should not be in roles such as Pastors, Elders, or Bishops, which would cause women to be in authority over men. While COGIC appears to agree with the Scripture Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023), in part, the doctrine of COGIC appears to reject the gender portion. Daniels addressed this issue by stating:

Theologically speaking, then, is one to assume that Paul meant that these distinct identities he lists are ontologically real, but the hierarchy assigned to them is not? Is the point that some people are inherently “slaves” to another's “free?” Is the message of Jesus that ethnic divisions, although now given equal sway, remain theologically intact? If not, then “male” and “female” should likewise avoid permanent distinction. Distinction *is* divisive, and the story of Jesus, according to Galatians 3:28, is about oneness in Christ. The tightrope egalitarian-minded Pentecostals walk, championing indeterminant leadership structures through determinant gender norms, is unnecessary because, as the verse declares, all find oneness in Christ Jesus (Daniels, 2022, para. 11).

In a qualitative study, investigators place signposts to guide the reader through a study plan. The researcher established the first signpost and stated a purpose statement. The second signpost is the research questions that narrow the purpose statement to predictions about what is learned by the questions being answered in the study (Creswell, J. & Creswell, J.D., 2017, p. 133).

### ***Research Questions***

The research questions that guide this phenomenological study are as follows:

RQ1. What, if any, factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership missionary roles as a female of the COGIC?

RQ2. What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain COGIC?

RQ3. What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC?

### ***Research Design and Methodology***

In this study section, the researcher identifies design and detailed methods. The rationale for the design is phenomenological. This approach was used for this study as it allowed the researcher to better understand how human beings by recording their experiences. The researcher sought to examine an insider's perspective on the phenomenon being investigated, using transcripts of interviews to analyze verbatim excerpts that expressed the research subjects' experiences in their voices (Reid et al., 2005). Devroop (2022) states:

Phenomenology as an activity is presented in an undistorted way, showing its availability, and is illustrated with examples of the thinking of important 20th-century figures. It suggests, finally, that the most fruitful relationship between phenomenology and education would be a tool to orient and possibly change what defines the current situation (Devroop, 2022, p. 1)

The personal and authentic narratives of the research subjects were captured and explained through the data analysis processes. Helfrick (2019) reminds the researcher that “a detailed explanation of how the researcher engages in the mapping of various data points works to provide credibility to qualitative research” (p. 98).

Along with credibility, the researcher's design process helps to add validity to the study, provides the reader with a context of the study, and helps with understanding-data-interpretation. Further, the researcher was transparent and open, ensuring that the information gathered was detailed, analyzed, and interpreted in a manner that builds credibility. The researcher used Statistics Solutions (2023) services, specializing in qualitative data analysis, to organize the data collection and assist in the study's analysis. Statistics Solutions (2023) provided data for the



analysis in the form of transcripts with pseudonyms already established for data analysis through NVivo software. The data analysis produced prominent codes and themes, grouped into categories for the researcher to review.

The organization of themes and patterns, according to Saldana (2021), is described as the pre-coding of the primary raw data, interview transcripts, notes, and memos. Further, as recommended by Saldana, this researcher took the next steps after the first coding cycle and discovered and identified patterns closely line-by-line. The researcher reviewed any handwritten notes before and after the data collection to check for accuracy against the recorded transcripts.

The research subjects' direct quotes were connected by NVivo (2023) coding from the interview transcripts that brought insight into the trends of the data. (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2021). Emotion coding was also added to the NVivo (2023) process (in order to convey the impactful experiences of the research subjects (Miles et al., 2014). The research subjects expressed their experiences in a passionate manner as their visible emotions were observed.

The researcher captured the COGIC women's smiles and laughter and the sadness that appeared on 95% of the women's faces as they recounted experiences where they had been treated differently than a male in the pulpit. Evaluation coding was employed along with emotion coding in order to assign discernment about the importance of these experiences with the COGIC as senior missionaries (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). In addition, provisional coding was used to code the collected data and assign categories based on the literature review and the theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). Cross-analyses of the data generated different patterns and themes to interpret the research subject's significance and meanings.

NVivo (2023), as Helfrick (2019) described, was used as a software to identify patterns between

emergent themes. After the prominent codes were grouped into categories and themes, the researcher reviewed the significant results of the data-storying.

### **Setting**

The setting for all interviews was selected based on the convenience of the research subjects' availability and conformability. In this qualitative phenomenological interview study, the research subjects were given the opportunity to choose their setting. All of the research subjects chose to be interviewed virtually. Each of the research subjects set their date and time for the interview. The decision to allow the research subjects to decide when and where their interview would take place was an important part of the interview process. The setting matters because the researcher understood she was interviewing human subjects and was mindful of protecting the research subjects' comfort and confidentiality and reducing any perceived risk.

For example, one of the research subjects asked if she could leave her video camera off during the interview. According to Karnieli-Miller et al., (2009), allowing the research subjects to choose their dates, times, and settings for the interview gave them a message of dignity and acknowledgment of their equal right to contribute and share their experiences. The researcher intended to ensure the research subjects were comfortable and to express her appreciation for their willingness to take part in this study. The researcher received prior permission from the research subjects to have the interview recorded and advised the research subjects that she would take notes, if necessary, throughout the interview. The research subjects were also advised that their experience would be transcribed in their own words as it would best reflect their stories and experiences. All interviewees were assigned two-syllable pseudonyms. The researcher listed the pseudonyms using the English Alphabet letters chosen by the researcher. This method created a confidential data collection tool, and the research subjects' names, locations, or church

affiliations would not be identifiable. No one but the researcher and the interviewee know their real name. The recordings and transcripts were labeled by the assigned pseudonym used for each research subject on the thumb drive numerically as Transcripts 1, 2, and 3.

All interviews were held virtually using Zoom software; the interviewer did not meet any of the research subjects face to face, only virtually. All of the research subjects stated they were comfortable using the technology of the Zoom meeting platform, and none expressed any difficulty in logging in from their computers. Settings ranged from the research subjects' homes, offices, and employment locations. The researcher's files are password-secured, and all data is backed up using a thumb drive of the interviews. The thumb drive of the interview, as well as the researcher's codebook, is locked in a safe in her home.

## **Participants**

### **Research Population**

The research subjects for this study were Black women in senior missionary leadership roles over the age of 21 and members of the Church of God in Christ located in North Carolina. The initial intended participant pool included South Carolina; however, based on nonresponses and several potential participants dropping out of the study, only North Carolina participants were used.

### **Research Sample(s) and Sampling Technique**

The researcher chose to use purposive sampling for this study because, according to Yin (2011), purposive sampling is “the goal or purpose for selecting the specific units to have those that yielded the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study, specifically in a qualitative study” (p. 88). The researcher chose Black women over 21 years and older who were in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC supporting phenomenological studies when participants represent an individual who has experienced a particular phenomenon.

An application for approval of the selection group and screening questionnaire survey was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to review and ensure the safety of the research subjects. Once the IRB approved the study of the purposive population data collection and analysis methods, the researcher began the recruitment process (Creswell & Plano, 2017).

Several steps were taken in the recruitment process, beginning with telephone calls and emails sent to the COGIC Church administrators requesting names and contact information for possible participants. Once potential participants' names were received with contact information, an invitation to participate in the study was sent by email to the potential participants, asking for a response within ten business days. Upon receiving a response from the potential participants, the researcher used Survey Monkey, a secure web-based online survey tool that helps gather the survey results. Potential participants were directed to access this site to complete the screening survey questionnaire to determine eligibility for the study. Each potential participant was sent a secure passcode to access Survey Monkey's website to take the questionnaire (see Appendix F). The criteria for participation required that the respondents be Black women over 21 years old who held a senior missionary leadership role in the COGIC in North Carolina and South Carolina and were senior missionaries.

Survey Monkey emailed the researcher after each potential participant completed the screening questionnaire survey. The researcher reviewed the screening questionnaire for eligible participants and used random purposive sampling to select ten potential participants by analyzing the survey results. Each participant was sent an email notifying them of acceptance into the study and a recruitment letter with a consent form to sign (see Appendices B and D ) by email. The potential participants were contacted by telephone and email to set the interview date, time, and location. The researcher advised the participants that the interviews would be confidential, that

pseudonyms would be used to protect their confidentiality, and that their legal names and location or church affiliation would not be used. However, four of the researcher's initial participants dropped out of the study prior to the interview process. Two of the women stopped responding to emails; one called the researcher and stated she had changed her mind, and the fourth one stated she had other commitments that would prevent her from taking part in the study. Although four of the potential participants dropped out of the study, the researcher was able to recruit six additional potential participants using the snowball sampling method.

The researcher was able to obtain this sample of participants through what Leedy and Ormrod (2019) referred to as snowball sampling, “a method of identifying participants that involves asking existing participants to refer or recruit other individuals (e.g., colleagues or acquaintances) who also have experiences and knowledge relevant to the topic under study” (p. 420). The researcher was able to recruit six additional participants, ending with twelve research subjects with recommendations and referrals from the remaining participants selected. The individuals who suggested the potential participants did not know who accepted the researcher’s invitation to participate in the study.

Each of the potential participants chose a date, time, and location for their interview within three weeks of the researcher receiving their consent e-mail response and confirmation that they would be interviewed virtually in a recorded Zoom platform. Before the interview recording began, each participant was informed that only her pseudonym would be used in her interview proceedings to ensure safety.

The researcher used theories and themes in the analysis of the data as they allowed the researcher to explain behaviors and attitudes that were revealed through the interview subjects as the women shared their experiences with the phenomenon of resilience. Qualitative research involves open-ended questions and allows the researcher to use a perspective or interpretive lens to get a broader view of the experiences with sub-questions. The sub-questions used in this study influenced the data collection and analysis process all stemming from the RQ's. Roberts (2010) writes, "theoretical framework provides the boundaries, or scaffolding, for the research study" (p. 147). The questions and subset questions on the questionnaire were compiled using the Delphi Method panel of experts review to demonstrate no bias on the researcher's part.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, the researcher acted as an instrument. As an instrument, the researcher's major concern was the safety of the participants who would participate in the study. "Qualitative research can help researchers access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, enabling the development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences" (Sutton, 2015). The researcher's role in the study involved conducting interviews of purposive participants, compiling data from a survey, and interpreting the data through qualitative analysis. In qualitative studies, the level of the researcher's involvement in the study is unique because the researcher acts as an instrument for data collection.

The researcher is a Black woman in the COGIC and understands the need for confidentiality and took every precaution to keep research subjects safe. The researcher's goal was to ensure credibility and trustworthiness for her research. The researcher was tasked with identifying any personal biases, values, background experiences, or expectations that could influence the analysis of the study. Creswell & Plano (2018) state that "The researcher's training

and experiences also influence the choice of approach... individuals who enjoy writing in a literary way or conducting personal interviews make up-close observations” (p. 20).

The researcher acted as an instrument; as an interviewer, she did not offer her personal experience during interviews to maintain the authenticity of the data gleaned from the research subjects. Leery and Ormond (2019) describe this intentional act as “bracketing or epoche” (p. 233). To minimize the possibility of biases and presuppositions within the study, a means of validating the process of data bracketing was used. According to Gearing (2004), bracketing is used to validate. It is beneficial because it helps set aside or suspend the researcher's presuppositions around the phenomenon being studied and focuses on its essence. The researcher used one of the suggested methods of bracketing by writing memos to reflect on any ideas or assumptions that could interfere with the interviews in data collection. The researcher kept a journal to write down reactions from the research subjects that may influence the study.

The researcher's role involved creating settings for the subjects that stayed within the purpose of the research, which allowed for detailed documentation of all interactions and feedback within the research process. The confidentiality of the subjects was secured from the initial contacts by not identifying personal information about the subjects or which COGIC church the women were members of and by creating confidential pseudonyms (codes) for each participant.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The National Research Act of 1974 (Civil Rights Act 1964, Pub.L.No.88-342, 78 Stat.241, 1964) was created by Congress and charged with identifying basic ethical principles that should underlie the conduct of biomedical and behavioral research. When involving human subjects, guidelines were developed to ensure that research is conducted according to the

principles of the Tuskegee Study (Tuskegee Study-Research Implications- CDC-OS, 2022).

According to Leedy, "most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy and honesty with professional colleagues "(Leedy, 2018, p. 111). Liberty University is concerned with the safety of human subjects used in research studies and uses the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to review research studies to ensure ethical compliance. The IRB was established out of the National Research Act of 1974 and is a committee housed within a university that conducts and reviews research proposals.

Human behavioral science researchers care about human ethics and are attentive to any ethical issues when dealing with human subjects. According to Creswell (2014), ethical issues command more attention than ever, including any study with human participants that must receive prior approval from IRB. The IRB reviewed the researcher's proposals before conducting the study to determine if the research follows the ethical principles and federal guidelines for protecting human subjects. The IRB has the authority to approve, disapprove, or require modifications of the submitted projects. IRB decides if there is a benefit to the submitted research and that there is minimal risk to the human subjects (Kim, 2012).

The researcher's study complied with Liberty University's guidelines and procedures and the Institutional Review Board's mandates. Regarding ethical research, the researcher completed the CITI's basic social and behavioral education course on July 3, 2021, and is certified through July 4, 2024. The CITI certificate is on file with the Liberty University Review Board and was submitted to the IRB as an application to conduct this research (see Appendix G). The application process included submitting permission requests through letters, recruitment material such as flyers, verbal/phone scripts, emails, announcements, and follow-up documents. The



researcher included consent and debriefing forms. All instruments used in the study, such as survey screening questionnaires, interview questions, or any other test/assessment material, were submitted as a part of the application process (Liberty University, IRB, 2023). Ethical considerations and assurances were planned throughout this research process, and before and during conducting research.

The researcher minimized any discomfort experienced by the participants as much as possible by using care and consideration for their right to privacy. The researcher made every effort to shield the participant's identity using a coding and labeling system developed through the analytical program used for the study, NVivo. Participants were interviewed in a safe, secure environment via Zoom, told the nature of the study, and given a choice of whether to participate. The researcher explained to each research subject that she had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequences, and all evidence of her participation would be immediately destroyed. The researcher was honest and forthcoming regarding her motivation for the study. The participants were advised that the research findings would not be misrepresented or intentionally mislead anyone. All data was securely stored on the researcher's computer in a cloud-based storage.

IRB H.2.C. requires no personal conflict of interest, including any existing relationships with persons or entities involved in the research, participants, or the research sites (Liberty, 2023, IRB). The researcher has no known conflicts of interest and did not seek any financial gain regarding this qualitative study. Participants were given the research purpose, and an informed consent form was provided for their signature. The participants were not blind to the research intent to examine resilience in the women in COGIC and no identifiable information was collected to be used in the study.

The researcher had no vested relationships between the selected institutions or participants that benefited the researcher or influenced the study's outcome. A systematic sample was used to select purposive subjects for the interviews. Subjects participated willingly and at no cost to take part in the study. The researcher enforced various ethical issues before research began, as Creswell & Poth (2018) reminded:

Examine professional association standards, seek IRB approval, gain local permissions from site participants, select a site without a vested interest in the study, and negotiate the interviewee's authorship rites and publication interest. Ethical consideration includes "giving credit for work done on the project" (p. 89).

The researcher applied all of the above considerations and identified the research problem for the subjects' benefit. All research-protected results located on computer files will be kept safely for three years. Physical reports and all related documents, such as handwritten notes, were locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home office and will be destroyed after three years.

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

Beginning with the study's IRB approval, the researcher used the qualitative phenomenological method for data collection. The next steps involved canvassing purposive participants, sending screening survey questionnaires, reviewing survey results provided by Survey Monkey, and sending recruitment and consent letters to the participants who met the research criteria. Once the potential research subjects agreed to the study, interviews were scheduled for data collection using a recorded Zoom platform. Statistics Solutions was used for the data analysis with the assistance of NVivo. NVivo, an electronic coding software, was used to assist in categorizing and analyzing interview subject responses. The process of collecting data included a set of specific questions linked to the research questions, using handwritten, electronic notes, audio and video recordings, and a virtual meeting. The data was password-secured with vetted NVivo (2023) software. The researcher used a locked home safe to store hard copies of

handwritten or typed material and a second backup of a thumb drive device. The interviews were recorded using audio and video-vetted Zoom and secured on the researcher's home computer, which is password protected.

All research subjects' documentation involving the interviews, hard copies of written and typed transcriptions, and thumb drives are locked and stored in a safe in the researcher's home for three years after dissertation publication. After three years, all documentation, including computer files, hard copies of transcriptions, any handwritten notes, journals, or thumb drives, will be erased, deleted, shredded, burned, or smashed with a hammer.

The researcher relied on responses from the semi-structured research questions to examine the source of the resilience of the Black women in the Church of God in Christ who may perceive that gender inequities prevent them from becoming Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. Research questions allowed the researcher to gather data from the target audience by asking open-ended semi-structured questions, which were used to analyze the responses from the research subjects. Interviews were utilized in this research to give valuable insight into the research subjects' experiences and perceptions.

### ***Collection Methods***

Once the IRB application was approved, the researcher began canvassing purposive participants, sending a survey questionnaire to determine eligibility through Survey Monkey, compiling survey results, and sending recruitment and consent letters to the participants who met the research criteria. Upon receiving the potential participants' agreement to participate in the research study, interviews were scheduled for data collection. As a human instrument in this qualitative study, the researcher aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in COGIC who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to

possess. The researcher's study is qualitative research that used Zoom, a vetted "collaborative, videoconferencing service that is cloud-based and offers online meetings for group messaging and secure recording sessions" (Archibald et al., 2019).

The recruitment process began by canvassing potential participants for the study through email and telephone contact to COGIC locations in North Carolina and South Carolina. Once contact information was received from the Church administrator; the researcher used Survey Monkey to send a survey questionnaire to the names provided by the administration to determine eligibility criteria. The research participants were emailed a survey link to access the survey questionnaire. The researcher received an email notification from Survey Monkey once the study participant completed the survey questionnaire. The researcher reviewed the survey results to determine the potential participants that met the research criteria and then randomly chose ten potential research participants for the study. An email request was sent to the ten potential research participants asking them to participate in the study and a consent letter. Once the potential research subjects agreed to the study, interviews were scheduled for data collection.

The researcher used interviews to collect data in this phenomenological study. As explained by Marshall and Rossman (2006), phenomenological interviews have a purpose to "describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share and are labor-intensive" (pp. 104-105). Therefore, the researcher conducted an in-depth, detailed, semi-structured, 30–45-minute interview with research subjects to identify themes and patterns regarding their perceived experiences in the COGIC as senior leadership missionaries. The interviewer used open-ended semi-structured interview questions to obtain responses from the research subjects. According to Yin (2011), the research questions guided the interviewer through the interview protocol "with a subset of topics relevant to the interview" to collect data

from the interviewee (p. 139).

The research subjects' interviews consisted of 30- 45-minute open-ended semi-structured questions (Smith et al., 2012). A rapport was established with the research subjects to help them feel comfortable and talk about their experiences in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC. The open-ended semi-structured interview questions allowed the interviewer to interpret the interviewees' responses and allowed encouragement to speak at whatever length was comfortable to them (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2012). The semi-structured interview method allowed the research subjects to be fluid in their responses. When it was appropriate, the researcher adjusted the order of the questions in order to maintain the flow of the dialogue (Smith et al., 2012). The research subjects were not restricted or cut off when they were speaking but were allowed to speak at their own pace and length. Obtaining thoughtful, authentic responses about the experiences of the women in senior leadership missionary roles of COGIC was the main goal of the researcher using the interview method.

Interviews were conducted virtually and were digitally recorded and transcribed by Zoom recording. The recordings were maintained for security and accuracy using a recording audio/video device. The researcher changed the names on the transcripts, and the interviewees were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality. The recordings were transcribed immediately after the completion of the interview, and the recordings were used in conjunction with the transcripts.

### ***Instruments and Protocols***

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological interview process with the interviewer as the instrument, an open-ended semi-structured, and an expert panel to focus the questions in a manner that would create an unbiased protocol. The researcher obtained approval to use the Delphi Method to create a screening questionnaire survey from her Dissertation

Supervisor. The researcher followed the Liberty University Christian Leadership Handbook (2022-2023), which states, "Any outside contact used in the Prospectus or Dissertation process, including consultation with outside academics or professionals, must be approved by the Dissertation Supervisor or the Program Director" (Liberty Christian Handbook, 2023, p. 53).

Once the Dissertation Supervisor approved the use of a Delphi Method Panel, the researcher developed a list of experts in the field of this study who were willing to assist in forming a professionally structured unbiased screening questionnaire survey using an initial protocol questionnaire provided by the researcher. Upon approval from the Dissertation Supervisor of any suggestions or critiques of the completed screening questionnaire survey using the Delphi Method, the researcher used Survey Monkey to distribute the screening questionnaire survey through an online password-protected website. The researcher was notified by Survey Monkey through email when the potential participant had completed the screening questionnaire survey. The researcher reviewed the survey results to determine the potential participants that met the research criteria and then randomly chose ten potential research participants for the study. An email request was sent to the ten potential research participants asking them to participate in the study with a recruitment letter and consent form. Once the potential research subjects agreed to the study, interviews were scheduled for data collection.

The interview platform consisted of semi-structured open-ended questions via Zoom software that were recorded for later review and transcription. Since the internet transmits Zoom, the researcher elected to have a backup source for the interviews and also used an iPhone 14 to record. Both electronic sources were digitally backed up using the iCloud storage system for safekeeping and retrieval. A backup entails copying the physical and virtual files to a secondary location for preservation in case of equipment or power failure during the interview.

The interview took place at the convenience of each participant. The protocol included an audio announcement with the date, place, interviewer, and interviewee and an introductory greeting that thanked the participant for agreeing to participate in the study. The researcher explained the set of interview questions. The research subjects were thanked for their time (Creswell, 2014, p. 194). The participants were informed that they could take a break and were welcome to bring water or something to eat or drink if they would like. Participants were also told they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable and that the interview would be stopped. Any material obtained that is related to them would be destroyed.

Semi-structured questions were asked of the interviewees to allow them to elaborate on the questions regarding their own experiences. Using qualitative interviews, the participants could share their experiences in their own words. The researcher listened as intently as possible while documenting and recording the interviewee's verbal and non-verbal responses from the interviewee. The researcher did not need to follow up with any of the research subjects for clarity of their transcripts.

The researcher collected handwritten and electronic interview notes with password-protected audio from the computer and vetted Zoom video recordings. Password-protected security for the data analysis was used with the vetted NVivo software. The hard copies of the handwritten and typed notes were stored in the researcher's locked home safe. All documents associated with the study of the participants' interviews, including hard copies of handwritten or typed transcriptions, were stored in a password-protected home computer in the researcher's home in a locked safe for three years after the date of the dissertation. After three years, all data collected, including documents, computer files, and transcript hard copies, will be permanently destroyed by erasing, deleting, shredding, burning, or smashing with a hammer if needed.

## *Interviews*

Interviews in qualitative research are normally standardized, with everyone being asked the same questions. The interviewer may elect to ask two types of questions: structured, where the researcher asks specific questions and nothing more, or semi-structured interviews, where the researcher may tailor questions to clarify the reasoning behind an answer (Leedy, 2019; Guest et al., 2017) state that "an effective in-depth interview instrument begins with a review of the project's research objectives since the nature of the data one is trying to capture will influence the format and content of the instrument and the questions within it" (p. 16). The researcher took the suggestion of Leedy and Ormord (2019), who stated, "Novice researchers typically have greater success when they prepare their general open-ended interview questions in advance, as part of the interview guide" (p. 245). Further, Jamshed (2014), in describing the importance of having a guide for interviews, writes, "To be precise, unstructured interview resembles a conversation more than an interview and is always thought to be a 'controlled conversation' which is skewed toward the interest of the interviewer" (para. 4). The researcher used semi-structured interviews because it allows the participants to tell their experiences comfortably.

The researcher used the Zoom platform to set appointment dates and times with the interviewees' advice on what would be best for their schedule. Once confirmed, the researcher sent a meeting link invitation to participants via Zoom and began by introducing herself, explaining the interview process, and that their safety and confidentiality are paramount. The interviewees were assigned a two-digit alphabet letter such as "AB," the second a "BC" until the last interviewee. The researcher kept a separate log with their identities and identifiers locked in her safe so that only she could access their names and confidential identifier connection. These



alphabet letters have no relationship or association with any participants and were randomly chosen.

The interview was divided into six phases, as Creswell & Poth (2018) recommended. In the first phase, the researcher explained basic information about the interview, introduced the study, and explained how the questions were presented and their content. Participants were also told there may be additional probing questions for clarification and were told how the interview ended. Although the interview was recorded on Zoom, handwritten notes were also made for further examination. The participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the interview at any time; at that time, the interview would stop, and any material obtained that related to them would be destroyed.

In phase two of the interview, the researcher stated basic information, such as the time and date of the interview. Any questions or concerns were addressed before the beginning of the interview. The third phase of the interview was used for informal introductions (Creswell, 2018), which included a casual conversation about one's family and encouraging the participant to do the same thing to ensure a safe and comfortable rapport. At this stage of the interview process, the researcher discussed the purpose of the study as she detailed the semi-structured outline. The researcher verified that the participants understood the nature of the interview questions and how they were designed to encourage in-depth responses (Creswell, 2018, p. 191).

In the fourth phase of the interview protocol, the participants were asked questions that allowed the research subjects to talk about themselves, including their level of involvement in the church. Once a level of comfort was perceived, the researcher asked the three research questions that guided the study: What, if any, factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership roles as a missionary as a female of the COGIC? What, if any, are the

experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain in leadership in COGIC? What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC?

The fifth interview phase asked probing follow-up questions such as, "Tell me more, or could you give me a little more detail about what you just said?" The researcher intended to encourage the participants to describe their experiences related to gender inequity in the Church of God In Christ. The final and sixth interview phase involved the researcher thanking the research subjects for their time and reassuring them of their responses' confidentiality. The researcher kept the interview process to 30-45 minutes (Leavy, 2017; Creswell, 2018).

### *Surveys/Questionnaires*

The researcher contacted COGIC locations in North Carolina and South Carolina by email and telephone to obtain the names of potential participants in the study. Once the names were received, the potential participants were emailed a letter inviting potential participants to participate in the study. Upon receiving a response from the potential participants, the researcher sent them an email link to Survey Monkey, an online survey site with a unique passcode to take the screening survey questionnaire to determine eligibility for the study.

A screening survey questionnaire (see Appendix F) was used to gather a sample group of potential respondents for the study. Using surveys is a common method for research because they are flexible enough to collect data. The survey process involves creating questions that can measure experiences, behaviors, and opinions. The questions were open-ended, clear, and specific so the respondents could answer them. Screening questions were pulled directly from the participant criteria; participants must be in a senior leadership missionary role: (a) Black women, (b) over 21 years and older, and (c) members of the COGIC. Survey Monkey was used to gather

and organize the responses to the screening questionnaire survey. The researcher was notified through email by Survey Monkey when the potential participant had completed the survey. The results were reviewed, and ten potential participants who met the study criteria were randomly selected and sent emails inviting them to participate in the study.

### ***Document Analysis***

Leedy and Ormond (2019) state that qualitative research is flexible and can change in different studies; with that understanding, the researcher used the study research acquired to present the best themes and principles that explore the perceived experiences of Black women in COGIC, who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess.

In the analysis stage of the phenomenological study, the researcher funneled her data to glean meaningful concepts that reflect various experiences (p. 258). The researcher established procedures to analyze the data using Creswell's (2007) suggestion that "prepare, organize, and code to 'condense codes' and represent data in figures" (p.148). The analysis included procedures and methods to establish the study's trustworthiness.

### ***Procedures***

The researcher outlines and lists the procedures she followed to reproduce this study and satisfy this qualitative research's trustworthiness. A qualitative study using a phenomenological method helped the researcher to explore the perception of the Black Women who were senior missionaries in the Church of God In Christ and better understand the resilience they appear to possess. The study dealt with human subjects; therefore, ethical regulations established by the IRB allowed the researcher to adhere to ethical approved guidelines. Before the recruitment and participation of anyone in the study, the following guidelines were followed:

IRB application was submitted, and after receiving approval, contact was made with Church administrators by telephone and email.

The researcher selected churches from the COGIC headquarters website, which lists all their locations by State (COGIC, 2019). COGIC with a membership of between 100 and 300 members. The researcher contacted Church administrators were contacted to determine contact information for potential participants in the study. The researcher received 50 possible participants' contact information. A purposive sample of Black women over 21 years of age who are members of the COGIC and hold senior leadership roles as missionaries in North Carolina and South Carolina churches was used for the study.

The researcher selected potential participants based on the information received from the Church administrators and an email with the Survey Monkey website link and password to take the screening survey questionnaire. The researcher used Survey Monkey to gather and organize the responses to the screening questionnaire survey. Survey Monkey notified the researcher when the potential participant had completed the survey. The results were reviewed, and ten potential participants who met the study criteria were randomly selected and sent emails inviting them to participate in the study.

The researcher randomly selected ten respondents from the responses by selecting every fifth respondent for the study until ten possible participants were reached. The researcher emailed the respondents a notification that they were selected for the study. The researcher asked the respondents for the best interview date and time, advising the respondents that all interviews were confidential. The researcher discussed the care and safety of the respondents, and the vetted video recording conferencing of Zoom was used. A private password-protected access code

meeting was set up through the vetted Zoom software for each respondent to access their specific interview.

The approved research questions from IRB were the interview's focus: (1) What, if any, factors enhanced their decision to accept the call into senior leadership missionary as a female member of the COGIC? (2) What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain COGIC? (3) What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC?

The interviewer followed interview protocol to ensure confidentiality as recommended by Creswell & Poth (2018), which includes introductions, restating what the study is about, going over the research questions, explaining that the interview was recorded via Zoom and the expected period of 30-45 minutes, advising the participant that there may be probing questions reiterating that there was no identifiable information recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

Leedy and Ormrod (2019) state that qualitative research is flexible and can change depending on the study, and “In the analysis stage of the phenomenological study, the researcher must search for meaningful concepts that reflect various aspects of the experience” (p. 258). Therefore, this study reflects themes and theories that guide the researcher concerning the best way to analyze data. After the researcher collected the data to identify the perceived experiences of the research subjects, the researcher developed a procedure to analyze the data. Following the suggestions of Creswell (2007) to “prepare, organize, ‘code to condense codes ‘and represent data in figures” (p. 148).

The data analysis included using the instruments throughout the research to "make sense of the data and interpret it appropriately, not to mislead readers" (Creswell, 2014, p. 38). This

section of the study explains the data analysis research and how the researcher organized and analyzed the data. The researcher analyzed the collected data using the research software NVivo, where it was sorted and used to define themes and frameworks.

### ***Analysis Methods***

The analysis of data in a phenomenological design, according to Yin (2011), involves a comparison of the researcher's interpretations alongside the participant's words. The interpretation of the data by the researcher involves several procedures, according to Creswell (2018), “which are summarizing the overall findings, comparing the findings to the literature, discussing a personal view of the findings, and stating limitations and future research” (p. 198). The qualitative method requires that the researcher collect and analyze data. The researcher chose to collect and winnow the data using a thematic analysis to refine her analysis of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). The interviewer received information from the research subject by listening intently and, with discernment, filtering out unnecessary data, which is the purpose of the winnowing data strategy (Lewis, 2020).

The researcher developed a plan detailing the study's qualitative research and phenomenological method. The detailed analysis procedures included organizing the data, transcribing, validating, developing, applying codes, identifying themes, and summarizing the data. The interview protocols were reviewed to ensure IRB guidelines were followed because the participants were human subjects. NVivo was used to analyze the interview video text file. The researcher compared the Zoom interview to what is presented in the transcription from NVivo for accuracy.

The NVivo software categorized the data through the interview transcription analysis and presented codes and themes, which were later reviewed to determine their merit to the study. The

NVivo system coded the material into nodes, breaking down the collected data and the themes that emerged from the analysis. Next, the analyzed data was summarized using the information from NVivo with charts and graphs. The researcher used triangulation to test the validity of the data and help the researcher gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

### ***Trustworthiness***

The researcher established trustworthiness, which is how researchers help readers accept their findings as valid (Nowell, 2017). Creswell (2014) points out that trustworthiness is based on validity and reliability in a qualitative study, highlighting validity strategies that can be used in qualitative research. The researcher used the Delphi Method to assist in creating a screening questionnaire survey with the assistance of an expert panel to minimize interview bias during the screening questionnaire preparation. The researcher aimed to present an accurate data collection for analysis of the interviewee's responses in the interview.

The researcher checked all transcripts for accuracy to ensure no further information was required to validate the trustworthiness of the transcriptions. The researcher described the possible beliefs, expectations, and cultural values that may have predisposed her interpretation of the data. The researcher disclosed that she is a Black woman who is a lifelong member of the Pentecostal denomination; however, stressed that her background in this church denomination would not overly influence her.

### ***Credibility***

The researcher used the definition of credibility as defined by Leedy and Ormrod (2019) as “A characteristic of a research study, the study’s overall quality as judged by other scholars; includes the use of appropriate designs and methods, believable findings, and plausible interpretations” (p. 413). The researcher established credibility by using the triangulation theory

to gather the data. The Delphi Method, handwritten notes, recorded interviews, and a third-party consultant in the form of vetted Statistics Solutions. The triangulation theory uses different theories to help analyze and interpret data. In this study, the researcher incorporated different theories to assist the researcher in supporting or refuting (Carter, 2014). The researcher used contradicting theories to present a credible finding in the study. Information from the interview was used to demonstrate that the data was credible using audio recordings, handwritten materials, and the use of a thumb drive. Although the researcher employed multiple data sources to ensure the findings' credibility and dependability, she did not rely solely on the participants for data regarding the research subjects' experiences. Leedy points out that participants "may tell you what they (a) believe to be true, (b) wish was true, or (c) think you want to hear" (Leedy, 2019, p. 356). The researcher looked for exceptions and contradictions between the samples taken and the collected data. The researcher examined all collected data until all categories reached saturation. The concept of data saturation is defined by Braun & Clarke (2021) as "information redundancy" or the point at which no new themes or codes "emerge" from data. Saturation is widely referenced in thematic analysis research.

### ***Dependability***

The researcher included the concept of dependability, which is the extent to which other researchers can repeat the study with consistent findings (Delange, 2020). Dependability establishes that the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The researcher kept a handwritten journal and reviewed her methods extensively so that other researchers could conduct her research step by step. Readers can better judge the process after examining it. Documentation of the data analysis procedure was logged, including all lists of codes, how it was selected, how it was identified, and if any modifications took place



for final coding. From the transcripts, the researcher logged and documented the data to ensure no conflicts of interest with the research subjects or any predisposed bias that could affect the data's credibility existed. Dependability depends on the actions of the researcher to account for changes and conditions. Therefore, the research methods, instruments, and analyses were clearly documented so that other researchers could replicate the study.

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability is described by Cope (2014) as the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represented the participant's response and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints (p.89). The researcher has to show that the study is reliable to the "extent to which the results are repeatable; if someone else repeated the study, would they obtain the same result" (Grossoehme, 2014, p. 3). The researcher documented the actual data and described the collection and analysis processes in detail, and the information was not skewed (Statistics Solutions, 2023). Therefore, other researchers can find similar conclusions through replication of her study processes. An audit trail with any written records of research was documented to enhance the credibility of this qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019, p. 412).

The researcher used a journal to record every process and procedure throughout the study, which was locked in a safe in her home. The journal contains the dates, times, respondents' coded names (which protect their identity), the analysis process, the location of the transcription documents, the study's interpretations, and results. A journal written in electronic format and a copy saved to an iCloud storage system can be presented for any researcher to view to meet the conformability required for the research.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is defined by Leedy and Ormrod (2019) as the “Extent to which a research study’s findings might be similar or applicable to other individuals, settings, and context, most by qualitative researchers” (p. 421). The study's research must be transferable to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups (Elo et al., 2014). “The research must also have meaning to other people who may not be involved in the study, but readers can associate the study results with their own experiences” (Cope, 2014, p. 89). The data collected in this study was documented to ensure it was transferrable for use in other studies about Black women for application by other nationalities of women and religious organizations.

The researcher employed detailed descriptions were employed of the study's details, settings, participants, notes, transcription files, and the study journal. By providing enough description of the study to future readers and researchers who can determine if this study is transferable for their purposes. The study can purposefully be applied to women in COGIC or any church or denomination where gender biases are perceived. The settings for the research subjects for this phenomenological research were not delimited to a location; therefore, it is stable for transferability.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlines the researcher's methods and procedures, including a detailed qualitative phenomenological research structure that other researchers can replicate (Achuff, 2018). The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological research method to explore and identify the perceived experiences of the Black Women of COCIC and their resilience in ministry. The researcher created a detailed protocol and database that would allow other researchers to replicate the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 201).

The theory guiding this study is phenomenological as it builds on the participants' experiences, concluding with a detailed description of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The research methodology for the study was provided in this chapter and included a research design synopsis. The problem has been stated that the COGIC does not ordain women to the roles of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop. This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

In this study research subjects were given the following research questions: (1) What, if any, factors enhanced their decision to accept the call into senior leadership missionary as a female member of the COGIC? (2) What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain COGIC? And (3) What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC?

In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology were explained by introducing the setting and participant data that was gathered. The role of the researcher and ethical considerations were given, as well as the collection methods, instruments, and protocols. The researcher gave a detailed description of the procedures used and concluded this chapter with the analysis methods and the importance of trustworthy research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ (COGIC) who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

Themes were developed from the data set and are explained and communicated in detail about the research subjects' experiences. Furthermore, the qualitative phenomenological method was used with recordings that were confidential and transparent, taken from the research subjects' interviews. Transcripts results from the interview gave this study an unbiased platform of trustworthiness, validity, reliability, credibility, authenticity, and transferability. The research design for the study and its purpose were explained, as well as the data from the research subjects' interviews who shared their experiences as Black women in senior leadership missionary roles in COGIC.

### **Compilation Protocol and Measures**

#### **Delphi Method**

The researcher created a draft protocol questionnaire with interview questions, main questions, follow-up questions, and a closing statement. Next, the researcher reached out to a total of three experts, who were each sent an email with the protocol questionnaire attached for their review. Each expert reviewed the questions and emailed their critiqued format back to the

researcher with any suggestions. The researcher made several revisions to the final questionnaire document, incorporating some of the suggestions from the expert panelists. The Delphi Method was used in the researcher's study to minimize bias in the protocol questionnaire that would be used to interview research subjects. The Delphi Method was an instrument designed for validation and used in the study of twelve research subjects. Using the Delphi Method as the instrument method assisted the researcher in creating a professional environment in which the questions stemming from the RQs were asked of the research subjects. The use of the Delphi Method in the interview process reduced the researcher's potential to insert her perspectives into the questionnaire protocol. By remaining as unbiased as possible, the researcher was able to build a trusting rapport with the research subjects. The researcher explained to the research subjects prior to the interview that the researcher's demeanor would be straightforward. The researcher went on to explain to the research subjects that her straightforwardness was not because she was uninterested in the topic but because it was the sharing of their experiences that would be most valuable to the study.

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

For this study, the researcher's demographic was represented by research subjects who were Black women over 21 years old and held senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC located in North Carolina and South Carolina. The number of research subjects used was reviewed with a qualitative approach, following guidelines given by Creswell & Creswell (2017) and Creswell & Poth (2018); qualitative phenomenological interviews consist of 3-10 research subjects.

The researcher recruited ten possible respondents to be interviewed who met the inclusion criteria; however, four dropped out of the study before the interview. Two of the

women stopped responding to emails; one called the researcher and stated she had changed her mind, and the other one stated she had other commitments that would prevent her from taking part in the study. Therefore, the researcher used the snowballing sampling method, which is a clinical term for asking recruits for other recruits. Naderifar et al. (2017) define snowballing as a convenient sampling method that can be applied when it is difficult to obtain research subjects. In this method, the existing research subjects could assist the researcher in obtaining additional subjects among their acquaintances (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2). The researcher received referrals and recommendations from the remaining recruits to obtain the population sample of twelve participants. The study did have location delimitations of North Carolina and South Carolina; however, because of nonresponses and participants that dropped out of the study, only North Carolina participants were used in the study. Furthermore, additional delimitations involved race, gender, age, roles, and denomination, as only Black women over the age of 21 years who were in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC were interviewed.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The researcher began the data analysis after all the interviews were conducted, read, and transcribed into a Word document. A Word file was created for each of the research subjects. NVivo, a software program designed to assist qualitative researchers with organizing textual data sets like those generated in phenomenological studies, was used to assist the researcher in the data analysis.

Once the twelve interview transcripts had been reviewed for accuracy, the researcher uploaded the data into NVivo for data management and to aid in thematic analysis. The process began when the researcher immersed herself in the data, reading the transcripts three times while

making and highlighting notes on interesting statements and repeated ideas that may be important and relevant to the RQs in the analysis.

Subsequently, the process involved formulating initial codes marking data segments that held potential significance or conveyed similar ideas. A systematic approach was used in this phase, where patterns were recognized, and codes were assigned. The initial phase of coding produced 53 codes. Afterward, the generated codes were collated and reviewed, aiming to ensure consistency and coherence. Through the iterative process, the researcher refined the codes, noting that some codes, initially kept as separate statements, had similar content and could thus be grouped. After completing the coding process, a final total of 50 codes emerged before the researcher began grouping the codes into larger categories to form the themes.

Next, the researcher began grouping the codes into larger categories or themes. The researcher examined the content of the excerpts coded to determine the similarity of content in order to group the data into larger categories. For example, coded excerpts that spoke on discouragement, self-doubt, and not believing in oneself were grouped as "Emotional Self-Hindrances," as their excerpts described participants' internal, emotional feelings arising from specific events that they perceived as potentially self-hindering. Like coding, creating categories is an iterative process where larger categories are reviewed and revised to assess their relevance, consistency, and depth. The thorough review necessitated a critical examination of each theme's coherence and alignment with the dataset. Themes were refined, redefined, or merged to capture the essence of the data accurately. The relationships between themes were also scrutinized, ensuring a clear and robust thematic map reflecting the data's complexity and nuances.

As the analysis proceeded, the researcher consolidated the refined themes, seeking to generate a comprehensive and coherent narrative that encapsulated the essence of the dataset. A

delicate balance was required in this phase of extracting the overarching themes and maintaining the richness and diversity of the original data. After the final refinement, six themes emerged.

The themes were then grouped by each research question they responded to. The alignment among the RQs, themes, and codes is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5

*Analysis of Findings*

Alignment between RQs, Themes, and Codes					
RQ	Theme	Category	Code	Interviews	References
RQ1	1. While the Divine Calling Was the Primary Deciding Factor, Participants Reported Family, Community, and Internal Drives Also Played a Role in Deciding to Pursue Ministry	Divine Calling	Continuous Call by God	12	13
			Family and Community	Father	1
		Grew Up in a Christian Home		1	1
		Church Leadership		1	2
		Internal	By Default	1	1
			Hunger and Thirst	1	1
	Needed to Help Others		1	2	
	2. Participants Reported Opposition from the Church and in their Personal Life as Factoring into their Decision to Pursue Ministry	Opposition from Church	Different Rules for Women in Ministry	1	1
			Gender Discrimination at MDiv Program	1	1
		Opposition in Personal Life	Lack of Acceptance by Others	1	1
			Others in the Church	7	9
			Stereotype Women in Church	2	3
			Did not want to Embarrass God	1	1
			Personal Struggle	1	1
Fought Against the Call			2	2	
Introvert	1	1			
Perception of Lacking Abilities	1	1			
Weariness	1	1			
Family Obstacles	6	9			
Illness	1	1			



RQ2	3. Participants Describe Diverse Factors of Faith and Support Contributing to Resiliency in Ministry	Diverse Factors of Faith	All Things Through Christ	1	1
			Feminine Desire to Help	2	2
			Keep Focus on God	4	4
			Let God Take Control	1	1
			Power of Faith	1	1
	Support Contributing to Resiliency	Support Came from Elders	1	1	
		Faithfulness	1	1	
		History of Women in Black Church	1	1	
		Spirit of God	1	1	
		4. Participants Reported Lack of Support and Opposition from Men and Women within the Church as Negatively Impacting Resiliency	Lack of Support	Opposition from Men and Women	Mostly Men Some Women Opposed
Not Supported Enough	1				1
Women Can Be Mean and Jealous	1				1
Women in Ministry Work to Outdo Other	1				1
RQ3	5. Participants Reported Emotional, Social, and Spiritual Factors They Perceived as Self-Hindering to Women in Ministry				Emotional Factors
		Self-Doubt	1	1	
		Some Women Don't Believe in Self	1	1	
		Family	2	2	
		Intimidated by Other Women	1	1	
		Social Factors	Lack of Faith	1	1
			No Doubt but Got Weary	1	1
		Self-Hindering	Temptations	1	1
			The World	1	1
		6. Participants Offered Words of Encouragement	Words of Encouragement to Other Women Discouraged in their Ministry	God Will Keep You Lifted	1
Stand in God Still I Rise	2			2	

In the next to the last step, the researcher finalized the themes, ensuring their alignment with the original data and overall research objectives. In order to verify the themes accurately that represented the dataset, possessed internal coherence, and reflected the intricacies of the information conducted. The resulting themes were defined and named, providing a clear structure that synthesized the essence of the data storying within the research context.

### **Themes Linkage to Research Questions**

The thematic analysis concluded decisively with the researcher documenting the theme's linkage, including a detailed narrative of the themes and supporting evidence from the data. Comprehensive documentation provided a transparent and systematic account of the analytical journey, ensuring the reliability and validity of the research findings. The findings are presented below, arranged by the RQs.

### ***Research Question 1***

RQ1 asked: "What factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership missionary roles as a female of the COGIC?"

#### **Theme 1: While the Divine Calling was the Primary Deciding Factor, Research Subjects Reported that Family Community and Internal Drives also Played a Role in Deciding to Pursue Senior Leadership Roles.**

The first emergent theme described the positive factors contributing to the research subjects' acceptance of the call to senior leadership missionary roles. The research subjects' responses were divided into three categories. The most mentioned category describes God's continuous call. The research subjects also described how family (7%), community (42%), and their internal drives (50%) help others factor into the decision.

All research subjects stated that they felt God called them to serve in this capacity and described that call as continuous. Subject 10HM said, "What caused me to accept the call into ministry was that it was a continuous calling by God. He continued to call me. He would not let me rest." Subject 10HM offered a more descriptive explanation, saying:

It was like the feeling that I got straight from God, with the over-sharpening of the Holy Ghost. Because I've always been behind the scenes, you know, working, but it would seem like it was just. It was a calling. I've got more for you today to do. And just different confirmations from sometimes we go through life, and there are things that we're not even thinking about doing, but it's the Holy Ghost that leads you and says yes to the call of God to minister.

In addition to the divine call, one-third of all research subjects described how family and the church community positively impacted their decision to accept the ministerial call. Subject 12BK spoke about how her father predicted it when she was a singer and began to tell this story:

Well, this is a strange story. Initially, I was a songstress, but my father told me I would carry the gospel one day. I thought that was strange because I was a singer, not a preacher. But it made me start and think of the bible story of how the angel came to

Mary, the mother of Jesus and proclaimed she would have the Christ child. So, then I said be it unto me, like she did. But still, God continued to call me into ministry. And door after door would open for me to go and minister, and then, at some point, it hit me. That is when I accepted the call to the ministry. Ironically, it was many years later before I received my first assignment and spoke publicly, and it was to an audience of over 2,500 women.

All research subjects offered some variant of the belief that God called them continuously to this role.

Subject 11DC spoke of her entire family and her upbringing within the church as playing a role in the decision:

I was raised in a Christian home, parents, my parents. My father was a deacon in the church, and my mother and father were avid Sunday School Sunday school teachers, so my course or destiny, so to speak, I think, had always been charted to be a minister.

If the family is broadened to the church family, others in the research subject's lives are factored into the decision. 11DC went on to describe how her church family played a role in her decision to accept the call into ministry and said:

I also received an open rebuke from an Elder in the church who literally told me that the devil was pleased with me for not accepting the call into ministry. Her exact words were, "You know what God has told you to do." I didn't want to accept the call, but God continually spoke to me and told me I should be in ministry.

While the church Elder's statement could be perceived as unfavorable, being told that Satan was pleased with someone for not obeying God was accepted by this research subject as a positive indication that she should accept the call into ministry. When the researcher was growing up in the Black church, the roles and positions of Elders were held with high esteem and respect by everyone. Research subject 11DC expressed her respect for the counsel that was given possibly because of not only the role the person had but because she was also a woman. The researcher would argue that receiving counsel from a woman who no doubt had experienced her own

barriers in her role as an Elder was accepted as a positive encouragement to research subject 11DC to follow God's call.

The final category of responses is described as internal drives, a motivating factor mentioned by two research subjects. Subject 7DM spoke of her desire to help others as a deciding factor. "And I knew that being an Afro-American woman and that it was needed and that I needed to be able to help other Afro-American women." Subject 3GW described a more spiritual desire, one of hunger and thirst, saying:

I'll say within the last 15 to 20 years, there's been a hunger and thirst for more of God's Word. I've read the Bible many times, but the hunger and thirst caused me to want to study and not just read it.

The researcher heard a passion not only in the voices of research subjects 7DM and 3GW as they described what motivated them to accept the call into ministry but in 100% of the research subjects. A servant's heart can be seen and heard in their shared experiences. Displaying a call to leadership with love for God's people, especially those who face the same social, cultural, and religious barriers as the women of COGIC do.

**Theme 2: Research Subjects Reported Opposition from the church and their Personal Life as Factoring into their Decision to Pursue Ministry.**

The second emergent theme described the oppositional factors the research subjects mentioned as contributing to their decision to pursue ministry. All Research subjects felt they faced opposition, but the division came when seeking the source of that opposition. Two primary areas of opposition emerged: opposition from within the church (92%) and opposition from personal life factors (77%).

The most mentioned type of opposition emerged from within the church. All but one research subject mentioned opposition from others within their congregation and the broader

church community. Subject 11DC said the opposition came from both men and women because "they don't believe a woman should preach or lead a congregation. Some will not refer to me or a woman as a Pastor. They still call me Sister. Minister or Missionary." Subject 5CC offered similar sentiments:

But I saw right quick that women in the ministry are not all accepted. They are rejected as pastors or leaders, and a lot of people still do not think women can pastor a church. But my belief is that if women stop running the church, then the church will stop running. Men just are not as strong as women in the church. Especially the Black church, but yet and still, they don't want the women to be leaders.

Subject 11DC, who professed to a lengthy career in ministry, described how this opposition from within the church extended all the way to a "renowned school of divinity." 11DC said:

I went to a Master's program at a renowned school of Divinity, and I value that part of my journey because I felt having a master's would open more doors for me in ministry. What I found is that it did not necessarily do so because I am a woman. What I did find is that all women, no matter their ethnicity, face gender discrimination in all denominations. They have the same problems—acceptance, rejection, alienation, low self-esteem when it comes to being a woman in ministry. And although I have been ministering a long time now, I still face these things so it doesn't matter how long you have been doing it. It's hard at times.

All but one research subject experienced negativity from someone that factored into their decision to pursue senior leadership missionary ministry roles. The participants experienced negativity in the seminary and the local church.

However, other obstacles emerged within the research subjects' personal lives that may have hindered them. Responses fell into three categories. Research subjects spoke of emotional obstacles, family obstacles, and personal illness (subject 6EK alone) as hindering their decision to accept the divine calling.

The most mentioned of these categories was family obstacles, with 50% of subjects reporting how their family played a negative role in their journey to accept the call of the ministry. Subject 5CC said, "I've had disappointment with family, you know, not wanting to hear

me, not wanting to receive me. It's been all kinds of rejection. It's been all kinds of stumbling blocks."

Subject 4KL offered more details on both the strength of a woman and the struggles with family in accepting her call:

I had a family that I had to consider. You know, and you have to take care of family, you know you have to, you can't just forget that you have responsibilities. And I think that's one of the things that as women are strong about us women; we get the fact that we stand on the shoulders of our mothers and other women in ministry. But we would have to take our home serious and do what we are supposed to do. And for me, it was the greatest challenge I faced. I had to learn how to put things in order—family, the spouse's family, and church.

For three of the women, 6EK, 5CC, and 4KL, the specific family issues revolved around their husbands. As subject 7DM said:

But when it came to the pulpit to preach, that's where the resistance came in, and I won't say all of the males were against it, but a lot of them were and still are. And I think it all starts in the home. So, if your husband did not believe that you were called to the ministry or didn't want you to have anything to do with the preaching, you didn't do it.

7DM's statement, while it could be surprising to some, is in line with the discussion of this study's theoretical framework concerning the history and beliefs of proponents and opponents of a woman's role not only in the home but also in churches. Others, like Research subjects 2JB and 3GW, had to contend with the call coming while their husband battled cancer, adding the struggle of caring for a sick spouse to wrestling with the divine call.

In addition to family detractors, emotional factors played an oppositional role in accepting the divine call. Subject 10HM worried if they accepted the call, they would embarrass God. She said, "Well, for me, I did not want to embarrass God, and I had to be sure it was him telling me to preach and not myself or others." Subject 11DC worried her abilities to speak in front of others would cause them to doubt the calling:

I struggled with putting words together and with my thoughts and preparation. I struggled with whether or not I was going to be accepted as a woman preacher. I struggled with whether my friends and family, even my church, would accept that I was called into ministry.

Subject 1DS had similar thoughts, saying:

Also, he gave me particular Scriptures, so I had to be reassured that it was God because I saw so many people in ministry, and I felt like I didn't have the talents you see in a ministry. I cannot sing. I didn't have any.

For 1DS and 11DC, the fear that they did not have the needed abilities or that they would embarrass God were negative factors they weighed when choosing to accept the call. Related literature is discussed in Chapter Two regarding perceptions of how women ministers of the gospel perceive their relationship with God.

The perception of unworthiness, the researcher believes, is a tool that Satan uses against all believers, specifically those who have been called to lead God's people. Scripture text in Matthew 4:1-11 shows us that Satan sought to discourage, deceive, distort, and tempt even Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. The researcher knows firsthand that Satan will attempt to bring discouragement and a perception of unworthiness when one is called to lead in ministry. The research subjects 1DS and 11DC shared that their perception of unworthiness was because they were not talented enough or could not speak well enough to be in leadership. However, the Scripture reminds us in Romans 8:30, "And those whom He thus foreordained, He called, He also justified (acquitted, made righteous, putting them into right standing with Himself). And those whom He justified, He also glorified (raising them to a heavenly dignity and condition or state of being)" (*Amplified Bible*, 1954/1987). Believers and those in leadership can be reassured that if we know that God has called us, we are worthy to operate in that calling to serve.

## ***Research Question 2***

RQ2 asked: What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain in leadership in COGIC?

The second research question explored the experiences that influenced the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain COGIC. Two themes emerged to describe subject experiences that led to their resiliency in ministry after they accepted the call. Theme 3 described the positive experiences, and Theme 4 described more negative experiences/lack of support received.

### **Theme 3: Subjects Describe Diverse Factors of Faith and Support Contributing to Resiliency in Ministry.**

The third emergent theme described how faith and support positively contributed to resilience in ministry. Subjects spoke on the importance of faith, elders' support, and other reasons to remain in the ministry. All subjects mentioned the impact that faith played. One subject mentioned receiving meaningful support from church elders. And three mentioned other reasons to remain in the ministry.

The most mentioned factor that supported the research subjects' resiliency was their faith. All research subjects spoke on this topic in one form or another. Research subject 9AM said:

It means to me that I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me. It means to have faith in God and stand on his Word. It means you don't quit; you don't give up or stop. For me personally, he means I have to do the work I have been called to do whether or not I want to or have problems. It's my calling. Knowing my place in the ministry. You know I'm here to help, but I thank God for the opportunities.

For subject 10HM, the aspect of faith came from trusting in the power of God to direct and place them:

Well, I love the Word resilience. I'm always telling that to my children because it's the ability to get up after being knocked down, and it's the it is that it is that inertia, that in it,



that inner inertia that keeps you from staying down, that you don't get down, but that you can get back up. I think women and the ministry have demonstrated that resilience. I know it's the Holy Spirit that guides and instructs us. Resilience is knowing you are in the right place that God has called you to be. And having the confidence that he will sustain you in everything. Through the power of God that is inside of us, he reminds us to go forth and do the will of God.

Subject 1DS spoke on the support from the Spirit of God:

In my opinion, what has caused me to stay in ministry is the grounding root of receiving the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit keeps me and helps me. Praying and fasting and, reading my Bible, and believing God has helped me. I stay to help those struggling, those who don't know God. People who need to be helped are saved. I cannot stop now. I am here for the people, and if I quit, they may be lost. And I cannot do that. I could be the lifeline they need a beam of light. I want to be in ministry to help people stand no matter what they are going through with struggles, especially women.

Regardless of the specific phrasing, 100% of the research subjects suggested that the divine spirit that called them to this role also provided strength and support to enhance their resiliency.

Subject 1DS also spoke about the support she received from a church elder, bolstering her resilience to remain in ministry. She said:

I remember asking an older Mother in the church why be saved or in the church if you are treated so badly by those who said they loved God. And she made a statement that kept me through a lot of trials. That all of the suffering that I went through, she said, because with Jesus, you are not alone, and you have someone to help you. So that's where a lot of my support came from. I didn't deal with people like my peers more. When it came to ministry. I dealt with the elders more. And that's where a lot of my strength came from. The wisdom of the elders, of mothers and elders in leadership. That's what got me through. That is where my resilience came from.

Though research subject 1DS was not the only person who mentioned a supportive Elder, the connection between the Elder's support and the power of faith was made clear by saying, "...with Jesus, you are not alone, and you have someone to help you."

2JB, 1DS, and 10HM research subjects mentioned other factors as bolstering their resilience. 9AM and 4KL research subjects spoke of a woman's drive to help others; one

described women's history in the church as empowering her to press on. Speaking on a woman's desire to help others, subject 4KL said:

You want to help women. You can almost look in their eyes, and you can always sense some things, and a lot of times, because what you've gone, you've been on the road yourself. You see the need, and you feel the pain. I love the idea of knowing that we have instilled other women to do what I'll call us to do.

For 4KL, the desire to help others, particularly other women, gave her a sense of resiliency. For Subject 2JB, the long tradition of women in the Black church provided empowerment to aid in resiliency:

First of all, I think it goes way back to the Thomas Slavery. where Black women had a vital role in instituting the church. And these Black women knew that when they had to labor in the fields when, they realized they were being beaten and bound and tortured, and when they realized that this was inevitable. They had to come, find some comfort, some refuge, some satisfaction. And so, while in the fields. And this is interesting in some of the research I've done on Blacks and slavery that they sang. They begin to sing songs that want them to overcome songs, like trouble won't last always, and then it goes on, and when they began to sing these little melodies, that's when to me I felt in my spirit when the church began. And that's when they realized that the only way we're gonna endure this, our strength and our resilience is gonna come from God. That's where women's resilience in ministry began in my opinion.

Though different types of motivation, these two excerpts from the research subjects both spoke to a desire to help, a desire to alleviate the suffering of others, as providing empowerment that led the research subjects to become resilient in their ministry.

#### **Theme 4: Subjects Reported Lack of Support and Opposition from Men and Women Within the Church as Negatively Impacting Resiliency in Ministry.**

The second theme addressing research question 2, Theme 4, described the lack of support and the opposition research subjects received from men and women within the church and its relationship to their resiliency. Half (%50) of the research subjects spoke specifically about this topic. Of that half, there was an even split between whether more men or more women were the source of their opposition. Three research subjects, 7DM, 2JB, and 10HM, said they received

more opposition from men. Research subject 10HM said that it was mostly "men who may think a woman should not be in ministry." She further added:

Okay, now in the church, they were raised not to believe in women preachers, and you know some of them still feel that way. But It was a woman that was leading and carrying the church. And some of the men thought that that female couldn't do it. Then the male jumped up and was out in the leadership, and some could not lead as well as a woman, but they were looking at her gender. But a majority of men felt like that. This was not a woman's place. You know, in the ministry.

Research subject 7DM additionally connected the opposition to a traditional belief that a woman's work in the church could not interfere with her duties at home:

They [African American women] were, you know, at housewives, and often they was married to a man that thought that a woman's place was at home; if she did anything in church, it was it could not interfere with her duties at home. That was a big thing. You could be on the Usher board. You definitely could sing in the choir. But when it came to, like, on Sunday cooking, 99% of the women that in was in the kitchen. And could not even do those things. So long as you stay in those rooms you could get your missionary license.

However, three research subjects also spoke about receiving more opposition from women than from men. Research Subject 1DS said:

Women can be mean and jealous of your calling. And I learned later that my husband said was the reason he did not want me to be a preacher in the ministry because he knew that I would be treated badly. Sometimes, I cried at night over it. The persecution and the hurt that you receive, and he just didn't want me to go through that type of hurt.

While research subject 1DS described women being jealous of her calling, subject 6EK said her opposition came from other women in the ministry:

Women in Ministry when it comes to being with other women in ministry, a lot of times, they would try to outdo you. Try to, again, make you feel that you are not called or they were better. But I always relied on the Spirit of God. And so, I really didn't have to compete. I really knew who I was and who I was in God.

1DS and 7DM mentioned negative experiences and lack of support from within the church as impacting their resiliency; the research subjects were split evenly on whether more men or more women were oppositional.

Much of the opposition from men, as these quotes suggest, was connected to traditional roles and beliefs about a woman's "place" in both the church and the home. Chapter Two of the literature review discusses the role of women as applied by the Complementarian theory. COGIC members of the Pentecostal denomination follow the theory of Complementarian and use biblical Scripture such as 1 Tim 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be quiet" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978 /2023).

The researcher notes that some believe that 1 Tim 2:12 is a difficult Scripture to properly apply to women who hold positions of senior leadership over men. However, the question is whether Complementarian or Egalitarian in one's beliefs is the Scripture being properly applied as it relates to women in ministry. The book of 1 Timothy, written by Apostle Paul, called one of the Pastoral letters to Timothy regarding church order. One could choose to consider the role of the woman in first-century biblical settings and that Apostle Paul's instruction to be silent in the church perhaps was related to the submission that was expected of women in that cultural setting of the church. However, the question remains; does the instruction given by Apostle Paul mean that God does not permit a woman to preach?

### ***Research Question 3***

RQ3 asked: What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC?

The third research question explored the experiences of research subjects perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in the ministry of the COGIC. Two themes emerged from the research subject responses. Theme 5 described the attitudes and experiences research subjects believed could be, or were, self-hindering for women in leadership missionary roles. Theme 6 described words of advice offered to other women in ministry.

**Theme 5: Subjects Reported Emotional, Social, and Spiritual Factors They Perceived as Self-Hindering to Women in Ministry.**

The fifth emergent theme described behaviors and attitudes subjects perceived as self-hindering to women in ministry. All but two research subjects mentioned some experience, attitude, or thought pattern that could be described as self-hindering.

The first category of responses included emotional factors that the research subjects believed could be self-hindering. These responses often centered around feelings of doubt regarding one's abilities, knowledge, and education. Research Subject 8LW linked this self-doubt to a fear of rejection, saying:

They talk themselves out of ministry for all different reasons like they are not good enough, or they don't have the knowledge or education, or that they know they will not be accepted. Some just don't want to go through the rejection that is always there with women in ministry.

Research subject 10HM described how this self-doubt, or lack of confidence, was often paired with others talking the woman out of serving as a minister:

Yes, I have come across women who don't believe in themselves and let other people talk them out of being in ministry. They let what other people say stop them. They are okay doing jobs in the church, like cleaning, cooking, and helping the little children. They don't get any resistance with that.

As a result of self-doubt, fear, and the words of others, some women hinder themselves and talk themselves out of serving.

Three research subjects, 10HM, 7DM, and 5CC, spoke on social factors. Of the three research subjects who spoke on social factors such as self-hindering, two mentioned family (spouse), and one mentioned other women within the church. Research subject 7DM's words on family were particularly illuminating. She said, "A lot of them will be outspoken with their beliefs, and others will not say anything because they know they have to go home to that

husband." While she provided no specific details, the use of the phrase *that husband* suggested at least a belief in her experience and shared understanding of a typical husband's response.

Research subject 7DM also mentioned how feeling intimidated by other women in the church could have an effect when she mentioned, in brief, "those who felt intimidated by other women, especially if that woman was anointed of God, they couldn't see the spiritual side of seeing God." Family, particularly spouses, and intimidation by other women were the social factors that could be self-hindering, as perceived by the subjects. The largest category of responses was spiritual factors perceived as self-hindering. Research subject 5CC mentioned the many "temptations out here in this world" and spoke on the dangers of losing strength, saying:

...losing strength, don't have the faith to believe that God can pull them out. And I've been through some things that sometimes I felt like giving up. But the spirit on the inside lets me know, don't give up. Keep going; it's gonna be all right. Just keep going. Press forward.

Research subject 6EK denied doubting her calling but mentioned becoming spiritually weary.

I've gotten weary. As for some of the things, some of the trials, and tribulations things that I went through. It did not make me say I wouldn't have done it. But probably if I knew that all the things that I had to endure, you know, I would I, I, I'd say I didn't sign up for it. But I've never felt in my spirit that, Oh, no, this wasn't what I needed to be doing.

Lack of faith, loss of strength, temptation, and weariness were common spiritual factors research subjects felt could be self-hindering to women in ministry.

### **Theme 6: Subjects Offered Words of Encouragement to Other Women Discouraged in their Ministry.**

The final emergent theme contained the encouraging words three of the subjects offered to other women who were discouraged in their ministry. Subject 2JB said:

I would like to tell them, as Maya Angelos stated in her poem. You may break me down. You may hold me back. Broken or not. I'm still going to rise. You can endure; you can prevail if you stand in God. Remember in whom you serve and whom you believe, which is Jesus Christ. Resilience in ministry comes from knowing your God and yourself. Then it don't matter what others think or say, you have a confidence that you will stand.

Research subject 8LW said women in ministry need to trust in "God. That's it. Him alone. He is our strength and our guide. Our sustainer. You got to have a relationship with him. He will help you to survive in ministry." Research subject 1DS offered the following words of encouragement, "Stay encouraged, read your Bible, let the Spirit of God lead you. God will keep you lifted up and in the ministry that he has called you into." These words call back to several other themes where faith in God and the calling were common talking points among research subjects.

Figures 1-2 present a transcription of screenshots of the list that was later considered for categorization.

### **Figure 1**

#### *Themes 1-3 Coding in NVivo*

##### -Theme 1- Divine Calling Primary Deciding Factor

- Family, Community
- Internal Drive
- Church leadership
- Needed to help others

##### Theme 2- Opposition from the church

- Personal life
- Different Rules for Women in Ministry
- Gender discrimination at MDiv
- Stereotype Women in Church

##### Theme 3- Diverse Factors of Faith

- Support contributing to Resiliency in Ministry
- Feminine desire to help
- Power of Faith
- Spirit of God

### **Figure 2**

#### *Themes 4-6 Coding in NVivo*

##### Theme 4 - Lack of Support

- Opposition from Men and Women

- Negatively Impacting Resiliency
- Women can be mean and Jealous
- Women in Ministry Work to Outdo others

#### Theme 5- Coding in NVivo

- Emotional, Social, and Spiritual Factors
- Perception of Self-Hindering to Women Ministry
- Discouragement
- Self- Doubt

#### Theme 6- Coding in NVivo

- Words of Encouragement to other Women discouraged in Ministry
- God will keep you lifted
- Stand in God Still I Rise

### **Evaluation of the Research Design**

This qualitative phenomenological design was appropriate for this study as it focused on describing the lived experiences of individuals about a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the lived experience phenomenon is that of Black women over 21 years old who hold a senior missionary leadership role in COGIC. The phenomenological design was appropriate because it provided the researcher with a candid, in-depth interview process that used the data from the research subject's perceived experiences directly related to the research questions. The use of qualitative phenomenological design was met for this study as a phenomenological approach was followed. Creswell (2014) states, "A phenomenological design culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals, who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 14).

The researcher was able to obtain accurate, authentic data experience from detailed interviews with research subjects of COGIC, who were Black women 21 and older who held senior leadership missionary roles and their power of resilience. Thus, obtaining direct accounts of the experiences of Black women in senior leadership missionary roles and their power of



resilience in ministry is a valuable means to bring understanding not only to Black women in religious organizations but to all women in every walk of life.

The researcher was honored to interview, as objectively as possible, twelve research subjects who were Black women 21 and older and held senior leadership missionary roles who provided pertinent data related to a phenomenological design and their experience in that population. Beneficial insights and themes associated with the research subjects sharing their experience emerged from this study. Each interview was unique as each of the research subjects shared their experience in COGIC as a senior leadership missionary and their power of resilience in ministry.

The major themes of the study emerged once the data was coded and identified through the analysis process and data storying for trustworthiness. As a result of using a phenomenological design, the researcher now has a broader understanding and respect for Black women in senior leadership missionary roles in COGIC and their power of resilience.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four provides a detailed overview of the analysis and findings of this qualitative phenomenological study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was discussed using the Compilation Protocol and Measures, Demographics and Sample Data, Data Analysis and Findings, and ending with the Evaluation of the Research Design.

The first step of the Compilation Protocol and Measures detailed the interview protocol, beginning with the use of the Delphi Method to create a protocol questionnaire. The Delphi Method was an instrument designed for validation and assisted the researcher in minimizing bias

in the protocol questionnaire used to interview research subjects. The second step explained in Chapter Four was the demographics and sample data used for the study.

The researcher's demographics and sample data were represented by research subjects who were Black women over the age of 21 years old and who held senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC located in North Carolina and South Carolina. The number of research subjects followed the guidelines of the qualitative approach. After contacting church administrators by email and telephone, the researcher received potential participants' names for recruitment for the study. A total of ten participants qualified for the study; however, four dropped out. Therefore, the researcher used the snowballing sample method to obtain twelve research subjects. The snowballing sample method can be used to obtain research subjects by using existing recruits to recommend acquaintances and referrals for the study.

The Data analysis and findings were discussed next after the demographics and sample data were explained. The researcher began the analysis of the data received from the research subject's interviews. NVivo, a software program designed to assist qualitative researchers with organizing textual data sets, was used to assist the researcher in the data analysis. The process of analysis involved formulating initial codes that were used to provide themes and patterns for analyzation of the research subjects' interviews. The findings produced a theme linkage to the research questions, which enabled the researcher to synthesize the essence of the data within the research context.

Lastly, Chapter Four evaluates the Research Design of this qualitative phenomenological design. The study focused on the lived experiences of individuals about a given phenomenon.

This study examined the lived experiences of Black women over 21 years old who hold senior missionary leadership roles in the COGIC and the power of resilience.

The researcher obtained accurate, authentic data experiences from detailed interviews with the COGIC research subjects. The direct accounts of the senior missionary women in leadership of COGIC provided valuable insight into the power of resilience they appear to possess in the face of perceived obstacles and barriers. The major themes that emerged from the data will be further discussed in Chapter Five and include the Research Purpose, Research Questions, Research Conclusions, Implications and Applications, Research Limitations, and Further Research.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

### Overview

Chapter Five communicates the conclusions, implications, and applications of the findings from this qualitative phenomenological study. The significant conclusions, implications, and applications are arranged by the research questions used to guide the study. The study engaged Black women who held senior leadership missionary roles in the Church of God In Christ. As discussed in Chapter Four, patterns, observations, and themes related to the study emerged as coded data, and personal experiences provided rich context and layers.

The researcher explains the limitations of the study and suggestions are provided for future research that can be conducted as a result of the findings. The researcher gives attention to the core data category discovered in the coding process.

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceived experiences of Black women in the Church of God In Christ who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they appear to possess. The researcher used the definition of resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna,2021, p. 88).

The theological framework that guided this study explored the Doctrine of the Image of God and how the Doctrine related to the lived experiences of the Black women in the Church of God as it related to their resilience in ministry. The gap in existing literature was filled by adding 2023-

2024 data through the interviews of the research subjects' lived experiences regarding their strength to endure hardship in ministry. The study was fortified by the researcher analyzing data through the thematic lens of Women made in the Image of God, Complementarian versus Egalitarian Theory, and Gender inequity in COGIC. A phenomenological method was used to build on the participants' experiences, concluding with a rich, detailed description of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2017).

### **Research Questions**

The researcher used existing studies that suggest that perceived experiences contributed to the role of women who hold senior leadership missionary roles and the power of resilience they possess by using open-ended interview questions. The following research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What, if any, factors enhanced your decision to accept the call into senior leadership roles as a missionary as a female of the COGIC?

**RQ2.** What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership missionary roles to remain in leadership in COGIC?

**RQ3.** What experiences could be perceived as self-hindering for women in senior leadership missionary roles in ministry in the COGIC?

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

#### **Conclusions**

The researcher answered the three research questions that guided this study based on the data and themes that emerged by analyzing the data. The Black women who held senior leadership roles in COGIC revealed that they are resilient in ministry because of their divine calling from God, their faith in God that he will strengthen them, and the power of the Holy Spirit that guides them.

## **Implications**

### ***Experiences of the Church of God In Christ Women and the Power of Resilience***

The theme that arose from and answered RQ1 is that the research subjects' live experiences identified a divine calling from God as the primary deciding factor that enhanced the research subjects' decision to accept the call into a senior leadership missionary role in COGIC. The research subjects also stated that family, community, and internal drives played a deciding factor in pursuing ministry. Further, the research subjects revealed through their experiences that there was opposition from church leadership and in their personal life that impacted the acceptance of the call into ministry.

The study revealed that the Black women in senior leadership missionary roles of COGIC passionately stated that they believed that God had called them each into ministry. The first theme from the research subjects' responses to question one presented positive factors influencing their decision to become ministers. The most mentioned category for the themes as a primary factor in accepting a senior leadership role was that they all spoke of being continually called by God. All twelve of the research subjects explained in this study that being "called" by God meant hearing what they believed to be his voice, telling them he wanted them to be in ministry. Each of the twelve research subjects spoke of having a relationship with God and knew it was the voice of God that was speaking to them. John 10:27 reminds us, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me " (*New International Version Bible, 1978 /2023*).

The research subjects felt they were being called to serve and wanted to help others, especially women who had undergone rejection by others, pain, and hurt in their walk with Christ. The research subjects were resilient and exhibited strength, which was a key factor in the

research subjects' ability to put aside their personal hurts as well as the perceived rejection into senior leadership roles from COGIC and minister to other hurting women.

Author Howell (2004) stated, "A heart in pursuit of God's glory and the spiritual welfare of God's people nurtures resilience because it releases one from being inflated by triumphs or dismayed by setbacks " (p. 35). The call into ministry for the women of COGIC demonstrates a heart in pursuit of God's glory and a desire to help other women in ministry. The call of God into the ministry was expressed with jubilation by 100% of the research subjects in this study.

However, the women in the study also revealed that opposition from church leaders and, in some instances, family members also played a role in the factors that influenced the women to accept the call into ministry. While the opposition factor could be seen as a discouraging or defeating factor, the women of COGIC persevered in spite of being rejected as ministers or made to feel as if they were not worthy of the calling. The women of COGIC did not allow the opposition to prevent them from answering the call into ministry despite not having the support of the church; their self-worth had been revealed to them by God, their maker.

Research subjects in this study stood on the foundation of the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit and were assured that they could do all things through Christ, who gave them strength. Strength to prevail, strength to help others, strength to teach, strength to preach. Against overwhelming odds and under difficult circumstances, the women continue to spread the gospel, whether from behind a pulpit or standing in front of congregates on the church floor. Regardless of being accepted by the men or women that they minister to, they are resilient.

The researcher argues that 1 Peter 5:10 sums up the experiences shared by the women in this study and reports, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and

steadfast” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Therefore, this study answers RQ1 that the women of COGIC in senior leadership missionary roles proclaim that divine calling from God, their faith in God, and the power of the Holy Spirit cause them to be resilient in ministry.

***Diverse Factors of Faith and Support Contributing to Resiliency in Ministry***

The theme that arose from and answered the research question RQ2 was the experiences that influenced the resilience of women in senior leadership roles that caused them to remain in COGIC. The research subjects spoke strongly about their faith in God as contributing to their ministry resilience. Faith in God contributed to their ability to remain resilient, which was repeated more than once in this study’s findings. Vine's Expository Dictionary defines it as a "firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing” (*Vine et. al., (1985) Vine’s expository dictionary of biblical words*). The Bible tells us in Romans 10:17 that "faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God." The research subjects in this study were women who heard, believed, and followed God's words regarding their calling. Their strong belief in God and the Great Commission given by his son Jesus Christ causes them to be resilient for the kingdom of God.

The meaning of the word resilience for this study quoted from a Female Research Subject, 40-49 years of age came from (McKenna, 2021), who stated that it included a relationship with Jesus Christ, a strong sense of a call from God, and an understanding like the original Apostles that society and culture may not be supportive of their decision to minister the gospel. When asked what resilience meant to them, the subjects all had a common response centered around knowing your God and yourself. All of the research subjects displayed self-confidence and showed that God had called them into ministry.



The research subjects in this study expressed the importance of how faith impacted their decision to accept the call into ministry. In the Christian community, faith is often defined by Romans 10:17, which reads in part, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God," has given the research subjects their faith, and having a relationship with him has sustained them in ministry. McKenna's definition of resilience (p. 58), used in this study, noted that women found having a relationship with God to be one of the most important factors that impacted their resilience.

Faith in God was a key factor in the resilience of the research subjects in this study, and all of the research subjects spoke of trusting God. Research subject 9AM shared that her faith had sustained her in ministry because she believed the Scripture that said I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me. Research subject 9AM was strongly convinced that God called her and accepted the call as his authority to preach. 9AM said she also accepted that it wasn't going to be easy. People objecting to her being a woman preacher was hard to deal with, but quitting the ministry was not an option. 9AM's faith in God told her to trust that God would open doors for her to go into so she could minister. 9AM shared that opportunities began to open up for her, and she received invitations to preach at different churches without asking them for a program time to speak.

The researcher remembered how exciting the research subject 9AM got when sharing this experience. She leaned back in her chair and said, child, the Lord said your gift will make room for you. Referring to Proverbs 18:16 reads, "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (*New International Version Bible, 1978 /2023*). Research subject 9AM believed that her faith in God had given her opportunities to receive invitations to use her gift in ministry.

The women of this study displayed complete trust and confidence in God, and all of the research subjects believed that faith sustains them. In another interview with research subject 1DS explaining her strong faith in God, she looked sternly at the researcher and said, “You know God can do anything! I just believe him like that he did not bring me this far to leave me now!” The stories that the research subjects shared about their resiliency and the role that faith plays in resiliency reminded the researcher of the lyrics of an old Black hymn that she heard sung in the church that refers to coming through trials and tribulations by having faith in God. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 11:16, "But without faith, it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him" (*New International Version Bible, 1978/2023*).

The study reveals that the women of COGIC strongly desire to answer God's call and please him. The research subjects are committed to serving in ministry through opposition, as all of the research subjects (100%) interviewed expressed that they trusted God and his promise to strengthen and care for them.

To maintain resilience in ministry, 100% of the women of COGIC in this study spoke about having faith. However, the women were also very honest about, at times, becoming weary, disappointed, and discouraged in their roles as senior leadership missionaries. The research subjects were transparent when they shared how not having the support of family members or husbands affected their ability to stay focused on their assignment to minister. The research subjects had a strong belief in God and his ability to strengthen them through the power of the Holy Spirit, and it was Him that they relied on in times of despair.

The largest opposition (100%) the research subjects identified came from the COGIC church doctrine that did not allow women to hold the roles of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop. The

COGIC itself is not known to be accepting of the women who answered the call into ministry and used theological arguments as its basis to treat women differently from men in ministry. The male hierarchy governed the church and all its functions, including setting women's roles although men are the minority within the denomination. Research subject 11DC shared that some will not refer to me or any woman as a Pastor. They call me sister, minister, or missionary.

Research subject 5CC also shared her interview experience with rejection in ministry. According to research subject 5CC, this rejection has always stayed with her, and although she has been ministering for some years, she still remembers how those who opposed her ministry made her feel inadequate. She talked about an occasion when she had accepted an invitation to preach at a particular church. Upon her arrival, she was led to the church secretary's office rather than the Pastor's office to wait for the church service to begin. What was disturbing for research subject 5CC was that she knew the protocol was to invite the visiting minister to the Pastor's office. 5CC said she knew this because her Pastor, a man, and several other male ministers who had ministered there had always been led to the Pastor's office to wait before taking the pulpit. She was not. However, she kept silent about how she was treated, just as other women in COGIC have done.

In this study, research subject 7DM stated that some women "do not say anything because they know they have to go home to that husband." 7DM went on to share that "if your husband did not believe that you were called to the ministry or didn't want you to have anything to do with preaching, you didn't do it." The belief regarding the influence of a woman's husband on whether or not she could be a minister plays a role of opposition to women who would desire to be ministers in COGIC. Research subject 7DM went on to say, "It is not that they do not care whether they are in the position of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop.. they just know not to say nothing

about it.” The possible fear of retaliation from the spouse of women who accepted the call into ministry or even the members of the church.

The Elias (2018) report was previously discussed (p. 62), stating in particular that Black women may find it harder than other women to obtain leadership roles. Further, Elias's reports (p. 63) identified other factors, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age, which could also contribute to the opposition. Black women, as a marginalized population, experience rejection, exclusion, and racism in every segment of society. In general, Black women, in conversation with other Black women, discuss the acts of inequities, rejection, or exclusions in the workplace and work together to find a solution. Often a federal law is brought up in the conversation that prohibits the act perceived injustice as being unlawful. However, in all of the twelve interviews the researcher conducted, not one research subject shared that she has brought up the acts of rejection or exclusion to any official of the church. Could it be because the governing authority in the COGIC are all men?

The researcher filled the gap in Chapter Two literature and answered the RQs by uncovering and documenting the women of COGIC's resilience in ministry, which had not been previously documented from the experiences of the women in senior leadership missionary roles of COGIC. As noted in this study (p.14), McKenna (2021) reports that COGIC's official manual mandates that women cannot hold authority over men. COGIC's doctrine allows women to hold only a senior office of missionary, but they are prohibited from holding roles of Pastor, Elder, or Bishop. Further data from the study (p. 22) reports that the current presiding Bishop of COGIC follows the doctrine guidelines. In addition to the report noting COGIC stance on women in the pulpit, the current presiding Bishop of COGIC was quoted (June 2022) responding to this question and said:

I mean, that's why I think it's more it's more from the outside that people are complaining about women being ordained or whatnot. And that's a very slippery slope because, as I talk to some of the women in our Church, they're not bothered by that issue. That's just people outside that want to make it an issue for us... Like I say, there are some improvements, and we are working at them, but there's no time for a rebellious activity or anything. That's not in our Church (Ajanaku, 2022).

The presiding Bishop stated that there was no time for rebellious activity. Although this study is not intended to be critical of COGIC and its doctrine regarding women in senior leadership roles, the researcher finds the use of words such as “rebellious activity” related to women of COGIC questioning why they could not be in positions of authority over a man was found to be offensive. Factors such as fear of retaliation or concern about voicing their feelings regarding male dominance could be the reason that research subjects do not voice their concerns. The culture of COGIC in the past has been to accept the guidelines without raising any opposition to remain in compliance with the Church.

This study uncovers statements such as the one that the Bishop made have a negative impact on women in ministry, but as this study shows through the women of COGIC sharing their experiences, the negative impact does not stop them. Women within the COGIC are affected adversely by the doctrine regulation restricting women from holding senior leadership roles other than missionary. Yet, through the women’s faith and trust in God, they are able to minister under what some would call inequitable conditions. The researcher’s study brought light to these types of perceived oppositions so that a better understanding of COGIC Black women's resilience in ministry would be able to use their voices without fear of being seen as rebellious. The research subjects whom the researcher interviewed have committed not to allow the doctrine guidelines to prevent them from obeying what they believe is the call of God to minister as a woman.

The belief in God continues to sustain the women of COGIC who serve in roles of senior leadership missionaries as they gain support from each other. Laboring in the vineyard of Christ with fellow believers encourages one to continue the ministry. The COGIC research subjects spoke of how they encouraged each other not to give up. The women encouraged each other through the word of God, sharing Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 4:8, which reads:

We are pressured in every way [hedged in], but not crushed; perplexed [unsure of finding a way out], but not driven to despair; hunted down and persecuted, but not deserted [to stand alone]; struck down, but never destroyed; always carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the [resurrection] life of Jesus also may be shown in our body (*Amplified Bible*, 1954/1987).

### ***Women Encouraging Women in Ministry***

This study uncovered the importance of women being helpful to other women in ministry. COGIC women stated they needed to hear the voices of support from other women because it is encouraging and gives them hope that they can be resilient in their ministry. The COGIC women in this research study have chosen to view adversity or barriers through a positive lens when they could be very bitter and negative about being marginalized. Yielding themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit, faith in God, and encouraging themselves and others in the ministry is their testimony.

This researcher was inspired by the testimonies of the COGIC women who shared their experiences and testimonies of encouragement. 11DC and 1DS both talked about the value of the counsel from an older woman and a Church mother who had encouraged them in ministry.

A platform for women through this study was offered so that they could express not only their struggles and frustrations in ministry but also have the opportunity to reveal the root of their resilience. Many of them gave words of encouragement to other women who may have faced

similar opposition. Women like research subject 8LW admonished women to trust in God and him alone as he was their strength and their guide in ministry. Practical advice was given by research subject 1DS, who advised women to study the word of God by reading their Bible. The subjects all encouraged women to support each other in ministry as there would be obstacles but assured the women that they could remain resilient through the power of the Holy Spirit and their faith in God.

The research subjects in this study expressed a commitment to ministry, acknowledging the challenges to their ministry; however, they remained encouraged. Each subject in this study had encouraging words for other women in ministry. Although some research subjects had experienced rejection or opposition from women in their congregations, they all shared the belief that that type of behavior was not of God. Women, like research subject 11DC, talked about an older woman in the church who had counseled and encouraged her, and research subject 1DS referred to the church's mothers praying and teaching them in ministry.

The research subjects found it both necessary and helpful that women in ministry hear the voices of support from other women because it gives them hope that they can be resilient in their ministries. The research subjects chose to look through a positive lens when viewing the opposition they faced. The data analysis persuades the researcher of the interview transcripts that the research subjects were aware of the opposition to their ministry yet made the decision and choice to endure the perceived inequities. The research subjects did not express bitterness or anger in their interview, although they could have, yet not one of the twelve expressed those feelings to the researcher. Thus, the RQ2 question was answered in this study, as the research subjects stated that their faith in God and support from other women who stood with the research subjects were contributing factors to why they remained in COGIC and resilient in ministry.

### *Emotional, Social, and Spiritual Factors Perceived as Self-Hindering*

The theme that arose from and answered RQ3 revealed that the research subjects experienced emotional, social, and spiritual factors that contributed to their self-hindering perceptions in their call into the ministry. The study defines self-hindering as making it difficult for someone to do or make something happen; one could feel hindered or even held back by one's actions. The theme described the behaviors and attitudes of the subjects; all but two mentioned some experience attitude or thought pattern that could be self-hindering. Three categories came into focus, and one of them was emotions.

The data in this study presented research subjects' experiences and revealed how their emotions impacted their resiliency. Emotions are a key component in every aspect of our lives (Adachi, 2022), and the experiences of the COGIC women showed they impact their resiliency as well. Emotions came into play with the feelings of discouragement, self-doubt, and listening to their self-talk as they questioned if they were worthy of being called by God.

Although the church as a religious organization acknowledges the necessity of recognizing and helping congregates cope with their emotions based on education and training, there are instances of intersectionality with Black women in religious organizations that are not addressed. Black women's experiences of intersectionality are a factor in their overall well-being, and they are emotionally affected by feelings of discouragement, self-doubt and their own self-talk. Research subjects in this study expressed that they had been hurt by the actions of spouses, family, coworkers, and the leadership in the church. If, of all places, research subjects would feel protected from hurt from the perceived rejection of spouses, family, coworkers and church leadership emotional trauma, it ought to be the church. Herbin (2019) points out, "When Black women are emotionally cared for by the church, it impacts families, communities, and the church



itself.” The researcher chose this study to bring attention to the perceived self-hindering factors that influence the research subjects in ministry.

Fear, anger, and sadness were also part of the negative emotions the research subjects in this study experienced, as well as shame and feeling unworthy, as expressed by research subject 11DC, who made the statement that she did not want to embarrass God. When acknowledging these emotions, they cannot be denied, but the research subjects state they believe the power of the Holy Spirit strengthens them and allows them to be resilient in their ministry. The women of COGIC stated that they relied heavily on Biblical Scriptures that specifically speak to their emotional state, such as John 14:27, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”, and Deuteronomy 3:16, “Do not fear, God is with you wherever you go” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023).

The research subjects also shared that they experienced discouragement while fulfilling the call to ministry. Discouragement is a feeling that you no longer have the confidence or enthusiasm to do something (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries | Find Definitions, Translations, and Grammar Explanations at Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, 2024). Depression can result from not feeling supported or having a lack of confidence in yourself. Research subjects 11DC and 2JB expressed discouragement over the lack of support in ministry from COGIC. Discouragement also came from the family, community, and even themselves regarding the call of God to minister. When sharing her call into the ministry, research subject 12BK stated that she felt discouraged within herself to become a minister because she knew her gift was as a singer.

However, 12BK’s father said she would preach the gospel, and she stated that his words opened her ears to hear from God and that she was encouraged to do so after speaking to her father. Research subject 12BK believed that God had allowed her father first to put the thought

of ministry into her mind, making her more receptive to hearing from God himself. What she had not understood, she said, was the large degree of opposition from others, mainly men, to her becoming a preacher. When she began to experience a lack of support from others, although she expected it to some degree, she still experienced some discouragement because of the lack of support. 12BK even questioned if God really had called her. Yet she said that she received what she believed was a confirmation of God's calling through repeated invitations to minister in the United States and abroad. Research subject 12BK felt it was a sign from God that he did call her to minister, and she could do so with discouragement and without support. The answer she gave to her discouragement and lack of support was her faith in God and that he would always be with her.

Another example of the self-hindering factor of discouragement identified in the study was expressed by research subject 5CC, who stated her discouragement came from within the church. Research subject 5CC shared that, at one point, she felt like giving up the call into ministry. 5CC explained that there were rejections from not only men but also women who did not believe 5CC had been called into ministry. Instances of women not supporting other women, 5CC said, were very discouraging and difficult for her to go through because of a lot of jealousy of each other's gift. The most hurtful instance 5CC stated was when she was not included in a particular group of other women preachers because they said 5CC was not on their level. The woman in the Church who denied her into their group is what research subject 5CC referred to as causing Church hurt that she says she has never quite gotten over. Research subject 5CC said that although she still remembers the incident, she did not let it stop her from ministering because she knew God had called her. The heaviness of discouragement affected all of the

research subjects of this study, yet the power of God and reliance on the word of God sustained them.

The study also revealed through the research subjects sharing their experiences with discouragement that they had learned to encourage themselves. Research subjects 2JB, 7DM, and 1DS expressed that not only did they encourage themselves but also other women in the ministry who may face obstacles to acceptance. Research subject 2JB quoted author Maya Angelo (2019) with excerpts from her poem “Still, I Rise”, which reads, "You may break me down, and hold me back, broken, but I am still going to rise." Music and poetry increased inspiration and resilience to persevere in 50% of the women of the research subjects. The research subjects in this study expressed a commitment to ministry that allowed them to push past their challenges and to lift other women as they remained resilient, steadfast, and unmovable in their faith to encourage others to be resilient in ministry. Just as other women in the ministry had prayed for and lifted them in ministry.

The last theme that was revealed in the research study data regarding self-hindering factors that influenced research subjects was self-talk. Negative self-talk is an area in this study that some of the research subjects shared that had hindered them and influenced their resiliency in ministry. Self-talk is something that we all experience at some point. Thoughts that are developed in our minds can sometimes dictate our actions either positively or negatively. The research subjects shared that their negative self-talk had been a hindrance to their call into ministry.

The researcher heard research subjects like 7DM and 3GW talk about internal drives, which were both positive and negative. The negative drivers were the self-talk they had listened

to as women in ministry. Talk that said they were not worthy or that God did not call a woman to preach. When faced with opposition from the church, family, and friends, it can be difficult not to accept what they are saying rather than what one believes God has said to them regarding the call of ministry.

Although acknowledged by research subjects 7DM and 3GW that they had experienced self-talk, they relied on Scriptures to strengthen themselves as to who they were in Christ. The women reminded themselves that they were created in the Image of God and chosen by him to preach the gospel. Jesus showed through his actions and teaching that women were important to the body of Christ and God's kingdom. He not only regarded the men but showed the worth and dignity of women and valued the unique gifts that they possessed in ministry. The researcher heard from the research subjects through their experiences that a woman's worth was not determined by society but by God and God alone.

The research subjects cast down the self-talk in their heads by replacing them with the word of God. Scripture such as Psalms 139:4 reads, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; I know that full well" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). Research subjects affirmed themselves through the word of God and stressed that having a relationship with him was key to overcoming the self-hindering talk of unworthiness they dealt with.

Defeating thoughts will come to mind because the devil does not want the kingdom of God to advance. But the COGIC women said they read and believed the Scriptures, such as 2 Cor 10:4: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have the divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it

obedient to Christ” (New International Version Bible, 1978/2023). The resiliency that the research subjects possess includes their ability to dispel negative self-hindering talk that does not align with the word of God regarding their calling. Therefore, RQ3 has been answered as to what, if any, influence self-hindering plays regarding the resilience of the women in COGIC who hold the roles in senior leadership as missionaries.

### ***Women Encouraging Women with Positive Talk***

The researcher found that although the shared experiences of the research subjects had revealed a perception of negative self-talk there was also evidence of positive talk by the COGIC women. Research subjects like 11DC, who talked about an older woman in her church who had counseled and encouraged her, and research subject 1DS, referred to the church mothers praying and teaching women in ministry as one of the factors that have enabled her to remain in COGIC ministry. Research subject 1DS offered positive talk to other women about the importance of studying the word of GOD, and by doing so, they could gain strength in ministry. The Bible tells us that we are to encourage one another (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023, Heb.3:13), and the women of COGIC obeyed this exhortation by encouraging themselves and others in the Lord by sharing their real-life experiences. The researcher found these positive words to be of encouragement to her as she conducted this study and believes the inspiring words of the COGIC women will reach across denominational lines and touch all women in ministry.

### ***Experiences of the Church of God In Christ Women and the Power of Resilience***

The researcher found the research subjects to be open and transparent during the interview process and willing to share their experiences, not only what was on their minds but also in their heart. Each COGIC woman spoke with conviction about the power of the Holy

Spirit and how he made it possible for her to share the gospel. The research subjects represented various churches, but 100% had in common the commitment to serve God and his people. Although each research subject shared their experience in different ways, they all faced similar challenges and barriers to being accepted as ministers. The manner in which they shared their stories ranged from moments of sternness when speaking about how they had been rejected for leadership roles to sadness when they talked about how they were made to *feel* by the exclusion from these roles.

However, joy was the predominant expression when the research subjects shared their experiences of being a minister. Interview conversations with the research subjects that may have begun a little cautiously quickly turned into honest, open conversations that allowed the researcher to listen to what the COGIC women were saying and hear them. The women of COGIC were given a platform through interviews where they could share their experiences in ministry and reveal where they believed their resilience came from, which was the Holy Spirit.

### **Applications**

Future researchers can use this study to explore the major themes revealed in the data analysis. The research subjects' strongest factors for the resilience they possess include the divine calling of God, faith in God, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The three factors were repeated 100% of the time from each of the twelve research subjects.

The first factor revealed in this study was the divine call of God, which the research subjects stated was a major factor in their resilience. The women of COGIC stated they heard the voice of God that spoke to them, calling them into ministry. However, the meaning of a divine call of God can mean different things to different people. Further research into what a divine call

means to women versus men or different denominations, demographic locations, and even population sizes could render different meanings.

The second factor that was revealed in this study and the resilience of the women of COGIC was faith in God. The research subjects said that faith in God meant knowing Him and believing He was their strength in ministry. Biblically, faith is described in Hebrews 11:1 as confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023). This study revealed through the research subject's interviews that 100% of the women of COGIC expressed faith in God. As the Scripture notes, the researcher would point out that faith is confidence and assurance about what we do not see. The question can be raised as to what gives one the confidence to hope for what is not visible and how, theoretically, can this be done?

Lastly, the third factor that was revealed in this study and the resilience of the women of COGIC was the power of the Holy Spirit that strengthened them in their resilience to minister. This study defined power as strength, a raw force required to accomplish an action (Andrian, 2021, p. 8). In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is described as God in the form of a Spirit, also referred to as the Holy Ghost (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxford Learner's Dictionaries | Find Meanings and Definitions of Words*, 2024). All twelve (100%) of the women of COGIC in this study said that it was the power of the Holy Spirit that enabled them to be resilient in ministry. Further research could examine how one obtains the Holy Spirit that is said to be of God and what theologically is His purpose as viewed in Christianity.

The COGIC women in this study (80%) stated how happy they were to have been given the opportunity to share their experiences in ministry and that they had told other women that such a study was being done. The researcher believes that the twelve COGIC women in this

study, being encouraged by the opportunity to share their lived experiences, will share with others spreading the gospel of good news and their resilience in ministry.

### **Relationship of Conclusions to Literature**

One of the significant contentions made in existing literature regarding COGIC and its doctrinal stance on women holding positions of authority over men is that it is quite often written from a negative perspective. However, this study is unique and fills the gap in existing literature because it concentrates on the resilience of women in COGIC and the positive aspects of their attitudes despite their denomination's stance on women in leadership. The literature gap regarding Black women in senior leadership missionary roles in the COGIC has been filled by uncovering through the experiences of the Black women in senior leadership roles what they perceived as the factors that influence their resilience in COGIC. The researcher defines resilience as reported by McKenna (2021) and as quoted from a Female Research Subject of 40-49 years of age as:

For other ministers, resilience included an understanding of their identity, which incorporated a relationship with Jesus Christ: Personally, I think a lot is to do with (i) a strong sense of call-knowing you are where God means you to be, (ii) a living relationship with the Lord Jesus and an understanding of our true identity in Christ (McKenna, 2021, p. 88).

The prominent theme that surfaced from RQ1 was a divine calling from God as the primary deciding factor that enhanced the research subjects' decision to accept the call into a senior leadership missionary role in COGIC. All twelve of the research subjects stated with jubilation that they were glad that they accepted the call into ministry despite the challenges and barriers they faced. The prominent theme surfacing from RQ2 was that the research subjects stated that their faith in God, their relationship with Christ, and the support of other women were reasons they remained in COGIC and resilient to the ministry. Finally, the prominent theme that



surfaced in RQ3 was that feelings of unworthiness through self-hindering thoughts played a role in their ministry, however by reaffirming through the word of God that they were made in the Image of Christ, therefore worthy to carry the gospel, they stand resilient in their calling. The research subjects identified these three main experiences as factors to their resilience in serving in the roles of senior leadership missionaries attributed to their resilience in COGIC.

### **Further Implications and Applications**

The further implications and applications of the experiences of the Church of God In Christ Women and the Power of Resilience are not limited to Black women of COGIC but can be applied to any woman of any denomination who perceives gender inequity as it relates to senior leadership roles. The experiences shared by the research subjects revealed resiliency in spite of challenges, barriers, and even self-hindering perceptions of unworthiness.

Through this study, the research subjects were able to share their experiences, but more importantly, they were given a platform to not only be seen but heard. COGIC and its historical doctrine of not allowing women to become Pastors, Elders, or Bishops has been written about for decades. However, this study focused not on the doctrine but on the women who are affected by it and how they chose resiliency in spite of the doctrine barriers. Yet, the research subjects interviewed did not make any demands for entry into this leadership level within their denomination. Based on this study's findings and the research subjects' experiences, the researcher believes there could be more discussion within COGIC and interdenominationally regarding what demands, if any, should exist for entry and prohibition into leadership ministry.

Additional implications and applications of this study are that the results could help women of every race or denomination understand that they can prevail in ministry if they are committed to the calling of God, have faith that he will strengthen them through his word, and

allow the power of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them. The resiliency that the research subjects possess is obtainable to all through the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by might or own our power but by the spirit of God (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023, *Zech 4:6*).

The findings of this study can be used to create additional platforms of dialogue where marginalized individuals would have an opportunity to share their thoughts, beliefs, and aspirations. Although research often refers to a glass ceiling when discussing barriers that women may face in the business world, there are no glass ceilings or barriers in Christ as it relates to who can preach his word. Jesus, through his redemptive sacrifice, removed all of the limitations that man attempts to put up. The veil was torn at the top of the temple at Jesus's crucifixion as a symbol of the shedding of his blood and because of his sacrifice, giving access into his presence for both the Jew and the Gentile, both men and women (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2023, *Matt.27:51-54*, *Gal. 3:28-29*). He removed the barriers that prevented all from coming freely to the throne of grace. Men and women both have access to Him and His gifts. The gift of ministry is a call from God, as the research subjects shared, and not from man.

### **Research Limitations**

Limitations were represented in this study because of the small number of twelve purposive research subjects who were Black women in senior leadership missionary roles in COGIC. Four of the initial research subjects left the study because the women felt too vulnerable, fearful, or untrusting to participate. The researcher did not include other races of women or denominations. The researcher met none of the participants physically face-to-face, only virtually. The demographics of the samples were only from North Carolina, which limited the number of potential research subjects. The researcher's interview responses from the research

subjects were limited because the researcher asked specific questions and sub-questions that stemmed from the qualitative RQs.

### **Further Research**

Further research could provide an examination into COGIC women and their additional experiences in ministry not identified in this study. In addition, the age demographics of the study subjects could be grouped into different levels to determine if there would be different responses to the core questions asked. Several options for how this study can be replicated include broadening the sample size, age range, population, and demographic area.

In a future study, a mixed methods approach could yield an increased breadth and depth of understanding about the experiences of a broader population of research subjects through both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Although the Church of God In Christ is the largest Black Pentecostal Denomination in the world, Assemblies of God is the largest predominantly White Pentecostal organization and could also be used as a comparison to the doctrine of allowing women to become Pastors, Elders, or Bishops. The Assemblies of God Church does ordain women as Pastors. Similarities may or may not exist among other denominations that are not Pentecostal in their stance on ordaining women, and a study could be conducted to explore how they perceive women in ministry.

### **Summary**

The researcher chose this study as her thesis because of her own divine calling at eighteen years old by God to fulfill the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:19-20, which reads:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [help the people to learn of Me, believe in Me, and obey My words], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you; and

lo, I am with you always [remaining with you perpetually—regardless of circumstance, and on every occasion], even to the end of the age” (*Amplified Bible*, 1954/1987).

Part of the researcher's assignment was to become a Christian educator and to lead others to Christ through teaching his word. Although faced with the same obstacles to ministry within COGIC, she saw a need and a value in exploring from a positive perspective why COGIC women accepted the call into ministry and remained in the Pentecostal denomination.

Through the interviews with the COGIC women, the researcher gained valuable insight and new revelations on the necessity of creating more platforms for women to speak and share their power of resilience in ministry. This research understood and expected going into this study that there would be a challenge in getting participants to share their experiences because of the culture of COGIC as it relates to discussing its stance on ordaining women into roles of Pastor, Elders, or Bishops, which is not to talk about what some perceive as gender inequity in the denomination.

The revelation received but not expected from this research was the willingness, honesty, and openness with which the research subjects shared their experiences regarding the power of resilience possessed in the COGIC ministry. The women of COGIC were unapologetic in declaring that they would continue to minister with or without the support of the Church, Family, or even other women standing on the word of God and being strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The researcher was encouraged because of the COGIC women's power of resilience to continue to educate and equip themselves through the word of God to proclaim the gospel through teaching and preaching in the COGIC Pentecostal denomination.

Moving forward, this study will affect not only the women in this study, but all COGIC women and other women of different denominations who may feel that they are marginalized in ministry. The research subjects (100%) who shared their lived experiences regarding their

resilience in ministry stated that they were given what they perceived as an invaluable opportunity to express what resilience meant to them. The research subjects were transparent about their obstacles and honest about how the existing COGIC leadership interpretation of Scripture regarding women in leadership roles made them feel.

The women of COGIC remain committed to staying the course of serving God and others as their assignment given by God. Many of the research subjects (80%) expressed to the researcher that there was a need for this kind of study as it gave women like themselves an opportunity to be heard on a platform that other women could benefit from by being encouraged to be resilient and walk in the calling given by God for ministry. All of the research subjects (100%) stated that they had never been asked by anyone on a collective level to share their experience.

The first message of good news that Christ had risen from the dead was given to a woman to share (Matthew 28: 5-7). All women of any skin color have been given the authority to continue to carry the good news of the kingdom and help bring salvation to the lost. This study highlights Black women's challenges, struggles, and barriers in COGIC and the power of resilience that allows them to serve God and his people. However, more importantly, the study reveals to the world that there remain women in ministry carrying the good news in this denomination who are resilient, steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the call of ministry.

This research study can possibly change the thinking of those who would be willing to use a different lens when viewing the role of a woman in ministry. Thus, acceptance, acknowledgment, and appreciation of the gifts that women uniquely bring to the ministry have proven necessary not just for fundraising, ushering, or missions but also for their gift of

preaching and teaching the word of God to everyone. The shared experiences of the research subjects of this study represent a beckon of hope to other women.

The women of COGIC interviewed in this study revealed a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His kingdom in the world. The desire for the researcher was to open a door of opportunity to use a larger platform for all women in ministry to be able to share their experiences. Through the voices of the participating women in COGIC, the researcher not only heard their pain of discouragement but rejoiced at their passion and zeal for the work of the kingdom of God. The women of COGIC's resilience stirred up the gift of ministry in the researcher, and she is confident that their shared experiences will encourage other women of all ethnic backgrounds, denominations, and all walks of life to rise up and continue to teach and preach this gospel of Christ! Proclaiming Jesus is Lord because they, too, are resilient through Him!

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval Research

Per 45 CFR 46.111, the following criteria are to be met for a research project to be approved by the IRB: Risks to participants are minimized: (i) by using procedures that are consistent with sound research design and which do not unnecessarily expose participants to risk, and (ii) whenever appropriate, by using procedures already being performed on the participants for diagnostic or treatment purposes. Risks to participants are reasonable concerning anticipated benefits, if any, to participants and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result. In evaluating risks and benefits, the IRB considers only those risks and benefits that may result from the research (as distinguished from risks and benefits of therapies participants would receive even if not participating in the research). The IRB should not consider the possible long-range effects of applying knowledge gained in the research (for example, the possible effects of the research on public policy) as among those research risks that fall within the purview of its responsibility. The selection of participants is equitable. In making this assessment, the IRB takes into account the purposes of the research and the setting in which the research will be conducted and is particularly cognizant of the particular problems of research involving Liberty University Institutional Review Board vulnerable participants, such as children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons. Informed consent will be sought from each prospective subject or the subject's legally authorized representative, per 45 CFR 46.116. Informed consent will be appropriately documented, per 45 CFR 46.117. The research plan makes adequate provision for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of participants. There are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of participants and to maintain the confidentiality of data. Further, when some or all of the participants are likely to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, such as children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons, additional safeguards have been included in the study to protect the rights and welfare of these participants (LUO, 2021a).

## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment Template

Dear Potential Participant,

As a Doctoral Candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Christian education leadership with a focus on ministry. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of Church of God In Christ (COGIC) Black Women serving in senior leadership (Missionary) roles and the power of resilience they possess. This study is about the resilience of the participants and their experiences in leadership and how they are resilient.

Participants must be a Black woman over the age of 18 years old or older holding a position of senior leadership (Missionary) and active members of COGIC, located in either North or South Carolina. A Consent form will be emailed to you after you complete a brief survey to determine eligibility to participate in the study. Participants will be given a Survey Tool weblink and asked to log in anonymously and take a short survey to gather information needed to determine eligibility for the study. Those meeting the criteria will be randomly selected and contacted by the researcher through email to set up a video-recorded interview. You will be asked to email the researcher with a choice of a date and time within three weeks of the email to participate in a one-hour interview, which will be confirmed with the date, time, and meeting invitation instructions.

On your interview date and time, you will log in electronically for a video/audio interview for a total of one hour using Zoom or a similar, vetted online meeting instrument. In the interview, you will answer ten open-ended questions about your experiences, if any, as a Black woman in senior leadership (Missionary) and the power of resilience in their ministry life. The first 15 minutes will be an unrecorded greeting time, and the recorded interview will follow for 30-45 minutes. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected. Participant responses will be confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me at [REDACTED]. Please confirm that you meet the criteria for the study by email when you return the consent document attachment signed, dated, and have checked the “permission box.”

A consent document will be emailed to you after the survey results are processed and eligibility for the study is confirmed. The consent document contains additional information about my research. The survey link you will access online will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria one week after your signed consent is received. After you have read the consent form, please click the box below; doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Sincerely,



Debra Wylene Martin  
Doctoral Candidate



## APPENDIX C

### Follow- Up Recruitment

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Educational Leadership Department in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Christian educational leadership with a focus on ministry. [Last week/two weeks ago/etc.] an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to please respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants, if willing, will be asked to choose a date and time within three weeks of signed consent to participate and engage in an approximately one-hour virtual, audio, and video recorded private interview; using Zoom or a similar vetted audio/video recording instrument. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. If upon completion of the interview a short recall interview is necessary, it will pertain only to clarification of a specific answer or question.

In order to participate, please contact me [REDACTED]. Please confirm that you meet the criteria for the study by email when you return the consent document attachment signed and dated and have checked the “permission box.”

Once you agree to participate and complete the online survey needed to determine eligibility, a consent document will be emailed to you. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate and are randomly selected from the results of the brief survey, you will need to sign and date the consent document and return it to me by email as an attachment before scheduling an interview. A permission box and a secure electronic signature and date box are available on the consent form, with instructions.

Sincerely,

Debra Wylene Martin  
Doctoral Candidate  
[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX D

### Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** A Phenomenological Study of the Church of God In Christ Women and the Power of Resilience

**Principal Investigator:** Debra Wylene Martin, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University Online

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study through digital transmission. To participate, you must be a Black woman 18 years and older, holding a position of senior missionary leadership role and active members of COGIC, located in either North or South Carolina. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of COGIC Black Women serving in senior leadership (Missionary) roles and the power of resilience they possess. This study is about the resilience of the participants and their experiences in leadership and how they are resilient.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. You will be assigned a pseudonym based totally on the English alphabet and use that pseudonym throughout the study.
2. You will e-mail the researcher with a choice of a date and time within three weeks for a total of a one-hour interview, which will be confirmed.
3. On your interview date and time, you will log in electronically for a video/audio interview for a total of one hour using Zoom or a similar, vetted online meeting instrument. In the interview, you will answer ten open-ended questions about your experiences, if any, as a Black woman in senior leadership (Missionary) and the power of resilience in their ministry life. The first 15 minutes will be an unrecorded greeting time, and the recorded interview will follow for 30-45 minutes.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Benefits to society include the increased knowledge and understanding it will bring to all religious denominations where women may perceive barriers associated with race or gender but remain steadfast in their calling to serve in ministry.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be confidential. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. In the researcher's home office.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be audio and video recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years after completing the study and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or John W. Rawlings School of Divinity. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Debra Wylene Martin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the above information. In order to participate, please contact me [REDACTED]. Please confirm that you meet the criteria for the study when you return the signed consent document.

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

[Double click in the box and choose "checked" for permission, and the box will be checked, and press "OK."]

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video record me as part of my participation in this study.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Protocol/Open-Ended Interview Questions Example

Institution: (pseudonym)

Interviewee: (pseudonym)

Interviewer: Debra Wylene Martin, Doctoral Candidate

Research Question: What, if any, are the experiences that influence the resilience of women in senior leadership (Missionary) to remain COGIC?

Interview Protocol

#### **Part I: Introductory Session**

Hello. I am going to read you an interview introduction: You have been purposely selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who holds a role of senior leadership (Missionary) in the Church of God In Christ and has an experience regarding resilience in ministry. I want to understand your experiences and the value they may bring to other women in leadership. This research will provide Christian educational leaders like you with a platform to share insights about your resilience in ministry.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? I will also be taking written notes to promote accuracy and cross-referencing. Please be advised that participating in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue it at any time. You can say "stop" or put your hand up. All personal details will be kept confidential, and your assigned pseudonym will be used. If you choose to leave the interview, no part of your recording will be kept. I will be the only individual privy to the recordings, and all tapes will be destroyed after three years of the study's publishing. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used? Are you comfortable? Feel free to get water or anything if you need to.

This interview is designed to last approximately 45 minutes. We will start with a few questions about your background.

Part II:

- (1) How long have you been a Church of God In Christ member?
- (2) How long have you been in leadership in the Church of God In Christ?
- (3) Describe an experience of what you perceive as good leadership.

Part III: Main Questions

Thank you so much for answering those questions, as they help me understand more about your Christian walk. We will now begin with the focus of the study.

Q1. What motivates you to serve in the Church of God In Christ?

Q2. How has your title or assignment in the Church of God in Christ impacted your experience?

Q3. Do you believe you have a call on your life to serve in leadership? Indicate your reason for your response.

Q4. What has been your greatest influence to serve in leadership?

Q5. Describe an experience from which you have served under a male in leadership and how did it influence your ability to minister?

Q6. Were your expectations met or challenged in your experience with male leadership?

Q7. Do you believe your experience would have been different with a woman? Describe how?

Q8. Do you believe that women should have authority over men in leadership? Indicate the reason for the response.

Q9. What does the word resilience mean to you?

Q10. How are you influenced by the Church of God In Christ's doctrine regarding women in leadership?

### **Closing**

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your views with me today. It has been a privilege to have this time to listen to your experiences. May I have permission to contact you with subsequent questions to provide clarity for accuracy, if necessary? Please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have. Once again, it has been a privilege to include you in my study (pseudonym).



**APPENDIX F**

## Screening Survey

1. Which of the following best describes you? Please choose only one.

Black or African American

White or Caucasian

Hispanic or Latino

2. Are you a member of the Church of God In Christ Church?

3. What State do you live in? Please choose only one.

North Carolina

South Carolina

4. Which of the following best describes your age?

18-20

21-45

46-50

Over 50 years old

5. Which of the following genders best describes you?

Male

Female

Rather not say

6. Do you hold one of the following senior leadership roles in the Church of God In Christ?



Pastor

Elder

Bishop

Missionary

## APPENDIX G



Completion Date 04-Jul-2021  
Expiration Date 03-Jul-2024  
Record ID 43427911

This is to certify that:

**Debra Martin**


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher**  
(Curriculum Group)  
**Social & Behavioral Researchers**  
(Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course**  
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Liberty University**

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w3cf6f36d-c5e4-49b0-99d8-eab006ede415-43427911](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w3cf6f36d-c5e4-49b0-99d8-eab006ede415-43427911)