

Liberty University

**Understanding Millennial Women Worship Leaders' Perceptions of Full-Time Ministry  
through Their Lived Experiences**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of the School of Music  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Worship

by

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## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
Contents .....	iii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction .....	1
Research Title .....	2
Background to the Study .....	2
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Overarching Problem .....	4
Millennial Women in Worship Ministry .....	5
Mental Health for Women .....	6
Women Who Have Gone Before .....	7
Theoretical or Conceptual Framework .....	9
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Research Questions .....	11
Significance of the Study .....	12
Definition of Key Terms .....	13
Qualifications of the Researcher .....	14
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Introduction .....	16
Who Are Millennials? .....	16
Millennials in the Workplace .....	18
Millennials and Mental Health .....	28

The Contemporary Woman .....	34
Women at Work .....	35
Women in Ministry .....	39
Conclusion .....	48
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>50</b>
Overview .....	50
Research Questions .....	51
Research Design and Instrumentation .....	51
Research Ethics .....	52
Population and Sample .....	53
Data Collection Procedures .....	54
Data Analysis .....	55
Assumptions of the Study .....	56
Delimitations of Proposed Research .....	56
Delimitations of Samples as a result of the Sampling Technique .....	57
Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings .....	58
<b>Chapter 4: Findings .....</b>	<b>59</b>
Introduction .....	59
General Information .....	60
Survey Participant Age .....	60
Table 1 .....	60
Survey Church and Staff Demographics Etc. ....	61
Table 2 .....	62

Table 3 .....	62
Table 4 .....	64
Table 5 .....	65
Table 6 .....	65
Table 7 .....	67
Interview Participant Demographics .....	67
Table 8 .....	67
Interview Participant Backgrounds .....	69
Tonya .....	69
Grace .....	69
Charlotte .....	69
Viv .....	70
Laura .....	70
Willow .....	71
Selah .....	71
Eleanor .....	72
Brittany .....	72
Emily .....	72
Themes .....	73
Q1 .....	73
Calling .....	73
Lack of desire to continue .....	74
Q1a .....	74

Education/Life Experience .....	74
Mental Health Resources .....	75
Employer Benefits .....	75
Maternity .....	75
Time off .....	76
Spiritual Resources .....	77
Relational Support .....	77
Mentorship .....	77
Pastoral Care .....	78
Practical Tools .....	79
No Benefits .....	80
Conclusion .....	80
Q1b .....	81
Gender .....	81
Glass ceiling .....	81
Chauvinism .....	83
Women in leadership .....	83
Gaining Respect .....	86
Intentionality .....	86
Musically .....	87
Denominationally .....	87
Job Prospects .....	88
Self-Confidence and Personality .....	90

Relational Challenges .....	92
Pastoral relationships .....	92
Lack of communication and care .....	92
Staff interactions .....	96
Male/female dynamics .....	98
Relationships with women .....	101
Financial Discrepancies .....	102
Motherhood .....	103
Childless .....	103
Family Responsibilities .....	103
Physical Differences .....	104
Maternity Needs .....	105
Work-life balance .....	107
Burnout .....	110
Mental Health .....	111
No Unique Hardships .....	112
Conclusion .....	112
Q1c .....	114
Stress Inducers .....	114
Counseling/Mental Health Wellness .....	114
Trusted Relationships .....	116
Rest .....	117
Spiritual Disciplines .....	117



Stewarding Family Time .....	118
Stewarding Personal Time .....	118
Healthy Disciplines .....	119
Prioritization .....	119
Boundaries .....	120
Conclusion .....	121
Q1d .....	122
Relational Support .....	122
Mentorship .....	122
Pastoral Support .....	126
Relationships with Male Counterparts .....	128
Relationships with Women Counterparts .....	129
Congregational Impact .....	130
Encouragement .....	130
Opportunities for Growth and Development .....	132
Empowerment .....	133
Perceptions of other women in worship ministry .....	134
Finding women role models .....	135
Financial and Practical Support .....	137
Flexibility .....	137
Women-Oriented Support .....	138
Where we've been and where we're going .....	139
Self-advocacy .....	140

Invited to the table .....	141
Support for mothers .....	142
Support from females .....	143
Pace and Rest .....	143
Other Areas of Support .....	144
Interview Participants' "Why's" Etc. ....	146
Nature of women .....	146
Being an example .....	147
Stepping into calling .....	148
Love to and from people .....	149
Conclusion .....	149
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Overview .....	151
Summary of Findings .....	151
Q1a .....	151
Q1b .....	152
Q1c .....	154
Q1d .....	155
Discussion of Findings .....	157
Implications .....	161
Limitations .....	163
Recommendations for Future Research .....	163
Conclusion .....	164

Bibliography .....	165
Appendix A .....	169
Appendix B .....	171
Appendix C .....	172

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

Women have been participating in ministry for ages, even since biblical times. This is seen through the stories and lives of countless women in Scripture, such as Miriam as she leads the people in worship of God after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15, English Standard Version), Deborah as she judges the people and prophesies victory while bravely entering into battle alongside Barak (Judges 4), Queen Esther as she risks her life to tell the King about Haman's evil plot to destroy the Jewish people (Esther 5), and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as they are the first to see Jesus' empty tomb and become the first evangelists spreading the good news about Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28), to name a few. While this reiterates that women have been leaders in faith for centuries, this has not come without its challenges and a long and arduous fight surrounding the concept of women in ministry. Yet, amid this centuries-long predicament, women have thrived in their own way in ministry. Before World War II, women were championed in Evangelical Christianity.

...It is well established in studies of American culture generally that the 1950s was a decade in which there were strong social and cultural pressures to restrict the roles of women. The decades prior to World War II were ones that could make space for women who wanted to achieve in a wide variety of areas. Likewise, World War II itself led to women working in numerous occupations. Men came back from the war, however, wanting to set up what they deemed to be an "ideal" domestic life – one with a full-time housewife. Postwar prosperity allowed for this vision to be realized for many. The "baby boom" synchronized a whole generation of married women as mothers of young children. A general cultural mood was created in which women belonged in the private sphere. The churches were also subjected to this social pressure. Moreover, fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism were by then well-established movements. It was no longer good enough to train people for ministry at Bible schools, but theological seminaries were now desirable, and like the older mainline and liberal seminaries that they aspired to imitate, evangelical seminaries would often exclude women. Many longed for the

evangelical Christian ministry to be seen as just as much a respectable profession as the mainline ministry, and women were deemed to undercut this professional image.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in a post-Industrial Revolution society and a new millennium, women have, in large numbers, entered back into the workforce and, specifically, have entered back into ministry vocationally. While this has, in many ways, become a new norm for women, there have still been unique hurdles and hardships for women to overcome. This is true for all ministry areas, especially for those women in worship ministry. Likewise, while many generations of women continue to face unique challenges in vocational ministry, the largest generation of women vocationally working is the Millennial.<sup>2</sup> Understanding Millennial women worship leaders' lived experiences becomes vital in retaining and promoting healthy ministry practices that enable long-term vocational success.

### **Research Title**

Understanding Millennial Women Worship Leaders' Perceptions of Full-Time Ministry through Their Lived Experiences.

### **Background to the Study**

Even though much has been said about Millennial women, women in the workforce, and women in ministry, society is at a unique and pivotal moment. It has already been stated that Millennials make up the largest generation in the workforce, however, attrition is beginning to affect women specifically in the workforce. Women's participation in the workforce peaked in

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Larsen, "Evangelicalism's Strong History of Women in Ministry," *Reformed Journal*, Last modified August 31, 2017, <https://reformedjournal.com/evangelicalisms-strong-history-women-ministry/>.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Marzullo, "Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers: The 4 Leading Generations in the Workplace," *Workest*, Last modified October 10, 2019, <https://www.zenefits.com/workest/gen-z-millennials-gen-x-baby-boomer-the-4-leading-generations-in-the-workplace/>.

1999 and has been steadily declining ever since, with women ages 15/16 and older falling from 58.6% to 56.7% as of 2015.<sup>3</sup> Even more concerning:

A study conducted by Maximiliano Dvorkin and Hannah Shell for the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis found a decrease in labor force participation among women in their “prime age” – between 25 and 54. The U.S. used to have one of the highest labor force participation rates among women in this age group, but now it has one of the lowest rates compared with eight developed countries in this study. It is impossible to define one single underlying reason why women are opting out of work. But this slow, steady exodus certainly calls into question the appeal of U.S. workplaces and what they provide for women.<sup>4</sup>

Many potential reasons for this include a lack of flexibility, more focus on family and children, gender pay gaps, an increasingly concerning economy, outdated company policies, and more. So, what does this mean for the Millennial woman in vocational ministry?

The Church at large has, in many ways, honored women in leadership according to a Barna Research study, with 84% of women feeling “...their church is either ‘totally open’ or ‘mostly open’ to women fulfilling their leadership potential within the church’s existing ministries. And, despite the small number of women in pastoral staff roles, the majority of women also claim leadership roles in their church are open to women.”<sup>5</sup> There is a bit of a dichotomy here, however, since:

More than one third of women (37%) say their church would have more effective ministry if women were given more opportunities to lead. Only half of women (47%) say male leaders in their church are willing to change the rules and structures to give women more leadership opportunities. Reflecting on some of the challenges women experience

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<sup>3</sup> Rep, *Women in America: Work and Life Well-Lived*. Gallup, 2016, Accessed May 25, 2023, file:///Users/katie.lenehan/Downloads/Women\_in\_America\_Work\_and\_Life\_Well-Lived\_Gallup\_Report.pdf.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Christian Women Today, Part 1 of 4: What Women Think of Faith, Leadership and Their Role in the Church,” *Barna Group*, Last modified August 13, 2012, <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-women-today-part-1-of-4-what-women-think-of-faith-leadership-and-their-role-in-the-church/>.

in churches, 41% of women say they have more opportunities to lead outside their church than within their church.<sup>6</sup>

While this reveals much about women's experiences within the church system, understanding women in vocational ministry adds more complexity.

This topic necessitates study because the decline of women vocationally affects the number of women in ministry and, even more so, the experiences of those vocationally in ministry when they are underrepresented. This holds true for those women who work and lead within worship ministry, an already male-dominated arena. By understanding the real, lived experiences of Millennial women in this arena, churches can proactively ensure women have valuable and appropriate support systems and resources, enabling them to remain in ministry for years to come and remain an example for rising generations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

#### Overarching Problem

Overall, while women are taking ground in worship ministry and becoming a force for much good, there remains a lack of resources, support, and examples for these women as they uniquely trailblaze for generations to come. In the midst of this, there becomes a requirement to understand the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical challenges uniquely facing the Millennial woman worship leader, for these challenges are not new but certainly are unique in ferocity and how they present themselves to the Millennial woman. Little to no research has been done that specifically caters to these challenges for women in worship, which becomes wildly

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<sup>6</sup> “Christian Women Today, Part 1 of 4: What Women Think of Faith, Leadership and Their Role in the Church,” *Barna Group*.

essential to explore and quantify. A better understanding of Millennial women in worship ministry, and even more generally, the mental health of women and the nature of the Millennial generation as a whole, is necessary.

### **Millennial Women in Worship Ministry**

The topic of women in ministry has been explored well, as has the Millennial generation. Yet, amid an influx of information, there remains a gap. This gap necessitates exploration specifically involving Millennial women in vocational worship ministry, for this generation is currently active in vocational ministry and has the most women in vocational ministry of all time.<sup>7</sup> According to Eileen R. Campbell-Reed:

“Fifty years ago there were virtually no women leading congregations as pastors in America except in a few Pentecostal and a handful of mainline churches,” Campbell-Reed wrote in the report. “In the decade of the 1970s growth in women’s ordination exploded and continued to rise steadily through the next four decades.”<sup>8</sup>

Much research has been dedicated to various aspects of women in ministry. Yet, little research has been done specifically about women in worship ministry and the idea of longevity for those pursuing worship ministry as a career. Areas of exploration have included ideas regarding women experiencing burnout, the place and value of women vocationally as pastors, work-life balance and family spillover, and even Millennial women as leaders, but there is still a significant gap involving studies regarding Millennial women worship leaders in professional ministry.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Fry, Ruth Igielnik, and Eileen Patten, “How Millennials Today Compare with Their Grandparents 50 Years Ago,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified March 16, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Report Details Trends for U.S. Women Clergy,” *The Christian Century*, Last modified November 7, 2018, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/news/report-details-trends-us-women-clergy>.



It is essential to understand the Millennial generation and how they differ from those that have gone before. While women have been in ministry for generations, this study contends that the Millennial generation has seen an unprecedented number of women entering worship ministry vocationally and seeks to explore the implications of such an influx. Today, around half of church denominations give full clergy rights to women—a stark contrast from the mere 7% in 1890.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, there could arguably be implications for women, including generational dynamics, mentorships, mental health, and how leadership and ministry are approached. The provided research will help determine how these areas could specifically impact Millennial women's perspectives and lived experiences, hopefully better clarifying the importance of identifying barriers to longevity and understanding why longevity in ministry is vital for this demographic.

### **Mental Health for Women**

There is a need to address the mental health and wellness of women in worship ministry, for while mental health has been a long-discussed and debated topic, a gap remains. According to Barna Research:

Many women today are just busy. Really, really busy...72% of women feel stressed out, 58% are tired and 48% say they are overcommitted. The percentages are even higher among moms with kids at home. Nearly nine in ten women (88%) say they want to improve in at least one area of life—and what is the area they cite most, over work, family and friends? Church.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Steeves, "Experiencing a Call to Ministry: Changing Trajectories, Re-Structuring Life Stories," *Qualitative Sociology Review* 13, no. 4 (2017): 50.

<sup>10</sup> "Five Factors Changing Women's Relationship with Churches." *Barna Group*. Last modified June 25, 2015. <https://www.barna.com/research/five-factors-changing-womens-relationship-with-churches/>.

This reiterates that the mental load that women carry, specifically within the church, needs to be addressed. It could be argued that this mental weight is larger and more unique than generations of the past due to the influx of technology, the inundation of the women's liberation movement, and the need and want for women to work and prioritize careers often over family. As women try to achieve it all, they still face varying degrees of glass ceilings, the pressures of balancing a career while starting and maintaining healthy families, increased financial stressors and constraints, less time for personal and physical wellness, and so on. Among the Millennial generation:

Females are 27% more likely than males to report everything feels like an effort...Females are 36% more likely than males to report feeling worthless...Females are 40% more likely than males to report feeling hopeless...Females are 16% more likely than males to report feeling restless...Females are 48% more likely than males to report feeling nervousness...[and] Females are 40% more likely than males to report nonspecific psychological distress.<sup>11</sup>

For Millennial women whose career revolves around worship within the confines and statutes of the church, it becomes more complex and challenging to disentangle work from what should be their place of spiritual and mental refuge. Therefore, a potential barrier to pursuing and achieving mental wellness arises.

### **Women Who Have Gone Before**

Because Millennial women are the largest generation within the workforce of all time, and because this is especially true for those in vocational worship ministry, there is a lack of tenured and experienced women mentors who have trailblazed for the Millennial woman worship

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<sup>11</sup> Julie E. Lucero et al., "Mental Health Risk among Members of the Millennial Population Cohort: A Concern for Public Health." *American Journal of Health Promotion* (2021): 268–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117120945089>.

leader. While there are most definitely women from older generations in vocational ministry, the pool is much slimmer within the vocational church world simply because women have not often pursued ministry vocationally in large numbers until very recently in church history. Many denominations still do not fully let or encourage women to have leadership within worship ministry. Finding older women within the same work realm can be quite challenging for those where this is encouraged and supported. Yet it is imperative for women to find such mentorships because it drastically improves the quality of one's experience, the long-term success and well-being of said women, and the overall wellness of both the mentor and the mentee:

Mentoring is a relationship between an experienced individual and a (usually) more junior person seeking “assistance, guidance and support for their career, personal and professional development.” Mentoring is supposed to serve the dual purpose of assisting the mentee in relation to career (sponsorship, coaching, guidance, etc.) and psychosocial functions (role modeling, friendship, confirmation, etc.) As a two-way reciprocal relationship, mentoring has been found to bring benefits to mentors as well as mentees. Mentees experience improved career outcomes, such as pay, promotion and recognition, while mentors improve leadership skills, stay up to date with processes and experience satisfaction in developing another. Mentoring thus has potential to empower women as both mentees and mentors within masculine organizational contexts. However, although women may benefit from involvement in mentoring, there is wide evidence to suggest that women struggle to access mentoring networks much more than men do. Mentoring can be formal and informal, but women have less access to informal mentors due to gender patterns within organizations.<sup>12</sup>

Understanding women's mentoring relationships in this study will reveal where women feel unsupported and how these relationships can be better developed and stewarded, especially when they may not always exist or be easy to cultivate for many Millennial women. The truth is that the majority of women in ministry answer to the leadership of men. Therefore, it is imperative

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<sup>12</sup> Katherine Dashper. “Challenging the Gendered Rhetoric of Success? The Limitations of Women-Only Mentoring for Tackling Gender Inequality in the Workplace.” *Gender Work & Organization* (2019): 544, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12262>.

for women to be able to seek out mentoring relationships from other women while also learning how to have healthy and appropriate mentorship relationships with the male leadership in their ministry contexts.

### Theoretical Framework

This study explores research from a phenomenological framework, as described by Martin Heidegger. Phenomenology can be described as the following:

The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. This field of philosophy is then to be distinguished from, and related to, the other main fields of philosophy: ontology (the study of being or what is), epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of valid reasoning), ethics (the study of right and wrong action), etc.<sup>13</sup>

Heidegger sees phenomena not simply as things of the world but how things, or someone’s being, relate to the world and things in the world. As David Woodruff Smith describes:

We must distinguish beings from their being, and we begin our investigation of the meaning of being in our own case, examining our own existence in the activity of ‘Dasein’ (that being whose being is in each case my own)...Heidegger held that our more basic ways of relating to things are in practical activities like hammering, where the phenomenology reveals our situation in a context of equipment and in being-with-others.<sup>14</sup>

What Woodruff describes from Heidegger’s philosophy, with the definition of “dasein” meaning existence and how humans relate to the world around them, is that the context of a person’s world is significant in understanding who they are. Per this study, understanding how Millennial

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<sup>13</sup> David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, December 16, 2013, Last modified December 16, 2013, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

women worship pastors relate to the world, specifically their individual church contexts, will reveal much about their lived experiences. Specifically, through interviewing and surveying, an understanding of these women's sense of being will become apparent, even in relation to this researcher.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine what perceptions Millennial women worship leaders have regarding their role in full-time ministry and how these perceptions impact their long-term viability and success as worship leaders. One main research question and four supporting research questions have been curated specifically around this topic. This is explored in the methodology below.

Primarily, understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of opportunities for long-term success from the chosen demographic reveals their current state of ministry health. The support questions help to identify influencing forces on this perceived state of health, revealing known barriers to vocational health, available resources that aid in this health, paths to long-term success, and support systems to aid women as they seek to thrive in full-time ministry. Each of these areas is significant for the Millennial woman. According to Burns et al., resiliency in ministry can be accomplished in five areas: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management.<sup>15</sup> Understanding each of these areas as they relate to Millennial women in ministry will reveal areas that are spurring long-term success for female worship leaders and areas where support and resources are greatly lacking. Surveying and conducting guided interviews with women in this chosen demographic

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<sup>15</sup> Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 18.

will hopefully pinpoint accurately the state of vocational worship ministry in the contemporary church. As both the nourished and undernourished areas are identified, appropriate strategies can be employed with Millennial woman worship leaders in vocational ministry to improve the health of areas such as spiritual health, self-care, family dynamics, leadership opportunities, and support systems.

Women have a unique and valuable voice in the body of Christ, and it is for the betterment of ministries and society at large that reflection be possible through data collection in this research project. Likewise, as women are able to vocalize their perceptions and lived realities within their vocational ministry space, healing, encouragement, and resilience become more visible and attainable. Understanding the experiences of Millennial women in vocational ministry will reveal much and pave the way for more women to obtain and remain in their giftings and God-given calling.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to determine what perceptions Millennial women worship leaders have regarding their role in full-time ministry and how these perceptions impact their long-term viability and success as worship leaders. Research questions have been curated around this thesis, specifically regarding areas of experience, opportunities, resources, hardships, and relationships.

The following questions include the main research question and sub-questions aimed towards identifying what perceptions women worship leaders have regarding their role in full-time ministry and how these perceptions impact their long-term viability and success as worship leaders.

1. How do Millennial women who serve as worship leaders perceive their opportunities to be successful in a full-time ministry role?
  - a. What resources do female worship leaders have available to them to aid in their success?
  - b. What unique hardships are women in full-time ministry confronted with?
  - c. How do female worship leaders navigate hardships, family dynamics, and stress while in full-time ministry?
  - d. What support do female worship leaders feel they need in order to be successful?

### **Significance of the Study**

As a Millennial woman worship pastor, this researcher is incredibly passionate about understanding the barriers and limitations around this specific generation in worship ministry, hoping to pinpoint tangible ways to assist this demographic in achieving longevity in vocational ministry. It will be vital for the health of many churches and ministries to identify the current experiences of their Millennial women worship leaders with the intent of celebrating achievements and applying feedback to assist these women in their vocational endeavors. This study is necessary because the health of both worship ministries and women leaders in contemporary churches is mainly at stake. Women are a vital voice in the church realm and play a huge role in contemporary churches. This is specifically true in worship ministry, where more and more women are stepping into their God-given calling to lead congregations vocationally in worship. Yet even while this is happening, women worship leaders, and specifically Millennials, still experience unique challenges and obstacles that can so often hinder their long-term success. It is vital to survey and identify the experience of a variety of women under this category to positively impact their vocational experiences and leave a replicable example of how to approach

healthy ministry for generations to come. This future study can then be used as a launchpad for numerous other areas of note.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Worship Leader** – This study defines a worship leader as someone responsible for overseeing the worship culture, understanding, methodology, and experience within a Christian church, specifically related to music ministry and expression. They create and lead the worship experience within a church and oversee many other musical and artistic endeavors of the church. The worship leader is accountable to the pastor of a church and could potentially hold the office of a worship pastor. Another description of a worship leader is derived from biblical times:

By looking back, we see that Worship Leading has evolved from the biblical days throughout the church's history. For instance, according to the Bible we would have called *Worship Leaders* priests or Levites.<sup>16</sup> So these Levites were to lead people in a time of worship. Later they became minstrels or musicians, and eventually developed into a minister of music. Today, this is what we consider a traditional choir director or orchestra conductor. Meanwhile, in contemporary music we began to see the title of Worship Leader popularized. A Worship Leader is someone who leads God's people to adore, praise, give thanks, help express how they feel and repent during a time and place of worship.<sup>17</sup>

Scripture affirms the concept of worship and a worship leader through numerous verses:

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that the Levites were only to be males at least 30 years of age: "So the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood. And with you bring your brothers also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may join you and minister to you while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. They shall keep guard over you and over the whole tent, but shall not come near to the vessels of the sanctuary or to the altar lest they, and you, die. They shall join you and keep guard over the tent of meeting for all the service of the tent, and no outsider shall come near you. And you shall keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel. And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the LORD, to do the service of the tent of meeting. And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death (Numbers 18:1-7)."

<sup>17</sup> "The Ministry of a Worship Leader - A Holistic Look at the Ministry of a Worship Leader." *Visible Music College*. Accessed June 3, 2023. <https://visible.edu/worship-leader-ministry-overview/>.



Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:16-17).

Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him (Psalm 68:4)!

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name (Psalm 30:4).

Ascribe to the LORD, the glory due His name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness (Psalm 29:2).

He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD (Psalm 40:3).

Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea” (Exodus 20-21).

**Millennial** – As defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, a Millennial is “of, relating to, or belonging to the generation of people born in the 1980s or 1990s,” or, “a person born in the 1980s or 1990s.”<sup>18</sup> Per this study, Millennial is defined as anyone born between 1980–2000.

**Vocation(al)** – As defined by Merriam-Webster, “the work in which a person is employed.”<sup>19</sup>

### Qualifications of the Researcher

This researcher is qualified to conduct this research because she herself is a Millennial woman worship pastor in full-time ministry who has been in worship ministry in various capacities for over ten years. Along with having a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and a

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<sup>18</sup> “Millennial,” *Merriam-Webster*, Accessed June 3, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/millennial>.

<sup>19</sup> “Vocation,” *Merriam-Webster*, Accessed June 3, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vocation>.

Master of Arts in Worship Music, this researcher has also completed coursework related to research methodology and qualitative studies and is well-equipped to explore data related to the experiences of Millennial women in worship ministry.

This researcher is compelled to pursue this study because of her lived experiences within ministry. Some of these experiences include becoming a mom and navigating work/life balance with raising a child, gender dynamics with pastoral staff and congregants, lack of resourced mentorship from other women who have gone before, and the need to develop and maintain rhythms of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. While this researcher has been fortunate in working within churches that seek to empower and equip women, many are not as fortunate. Even while growing and developing within these churches, unique challenges have remained. There is much that can still be accomplished for the working Millennial women worship leader who desires to not only remain but thrive in vocational ministry. This is why this researcher is passionate about this topic.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This study seeks to identify and interpret the lived experiences of Millennial female worship leaders in full-time ministry with the intent of understanding their perceived opportunities of achieving long-term success in vocational worship ministry. In order to obtain and analyze data pertaining to this topic, it is first imperative to understand the relevant literature that exists pertaining to the primary and secondary research questions in this study.

A review of the current literature reveals information about Millennials, women at work, and women in ministry. More specific themes will be explored, such as leadership, mental health, and family dynamics. Considering that much research exists around these topics, this Literature Review will be selective in highlighting a portion of the relevant literature. The chosen literature will comprehensively summarize the existing research while highlighting the gap that remains specifically for Millennial women worship leaders in full-time ministry.

### Who Are Millennials?

A look at Pew Research Center reveals much about the Millennial generation. For one, the Millennial generation is the largest living generation with roughly 72 million people.<sup>20</sup> While there is a discrepancy around which birth years make up the Millennial generation, a range between 1981–1996 is generally accurate.<sup>21</sup> Considering that there is a variance of anywhere

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Fry, “Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America’s Largest Generation,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified April 28, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation/>.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” *Pew Research Center*, last modified January 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

between 1980-2004 with no officially defined start or end date, this study will consider those born between 1980-2000 as referenced in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.<sup>22</sup> This date range is not arbitrary, and it reveals that those born into the Millennial generation have witnessed much in their coming of age, such as 9/11, the economic recession and housing crisis of 2008, the United States of America's election of the first black president, continued wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the rapid evolution of advanced technology through things such as the iPhone and social media.<sup>23</sup> These experiences have shaped how Millennials view and approach the world around them, especially regarding the workforce. Millennials are the largest generation currently in the workforce, making up roughly 35% of the labor force population.<sup>24</sup>

There are many things that differentiate Millennials from previous generations. Millennials are better educated, and women are achieving greater academic success and higher education.<sup>25</sup> Millennial women have entered the workforce in greater numbers than ever before<sup>26</sup> They are marrying less,<sup>27</sup> experiencing more poverty than other generations, and renting more than owning.<sup>28</sup> The Millennial generation also hosts the most single mothers, and they have

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<sup>22</sup> "Definition of MILLENNIAL," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, last modified May 30, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/millennial>.

<sup>23</sup> Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins."

<sup>24</sup> Richard Fry, "Millennials Are the Largest Generation in the U.S. Labor Force," *Pew Research Center*, last modified April 11, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/04/11/millennials-largest-generation-us-labor-force/>.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Fry, Ruth Igielnik, and Eileen Patten, "How Millennials Today Compare with Their Grandparents 50 Years Ago," *Pew Research Center*, last modified March 16, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Richard Fry, "5 Facts About Millennial Households," *Pew Research Center*, last modified September 6, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/09/06/5-facts-about-millennial-households/>.

become the most racially diverse generation.<sup>29</sup> These data points reveal the environments and circumstances experienced by Millennials, impacting their sense of leadership in the workplace, mental health, experiences as women, and experiences with ministry.

### Millennials in the Workplace

Millennials experience different drives and motivators in the workplace compared to past generations. Research by Jeanine Stewart et al. concisely explores the empirical research data of Millennial retail workers with the goal of identifying how generational differences are not merely challenges to work through but opportunities to cultivate relationships. Whereas older generations find meaning and commitment to their place of work depending on the workplace culture, Jeanine Stewart et al. find that Millennials are not swayed in the same way.<sup>30</sup> Rather, Millennials hold a different set of values and are motivated by outside needs and desires. They are “the only generational group that does not conceptually link organizational commitment with workplace culture.”<sup>31</sup> Stewart et al. define Millennials as those born between 1981–1995 (the current study considers Millennials born between 1980–2000), making up 23% of the total population with over 73 million members.<sup>32</sup> This research article begins to identify the negative assumptions placed upon Millennials when reality describes Millennials holding a different set of values as compared with generations of the past. An example of this revolves around workplace

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<sup>29</sup> Fry, “5 Facts About Millennial Households.”

<sup>30</sup> Jeanine S. Stewart, Elizabeth Goad Oliver, Karen S. Cravens, and Shigehiro Oishi, “Managing Millennials: Embracing Generational Differences,” *Business Horizons* 60 (2017): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2016.08.011>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

commitment. Millennials do not correlate job satisfaction to commitment, but they do correlate job satisfaction to a positive work environment.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, their commitment to their workplace does not falter based on how healthy the environment is, but their satisfaction at the job is impacted by the environment. This study does not reveal the impact of this value upon Millennials in ministry, specifically women in ministry. Considering that the work environment does not deter a Millennial from committing to the job, when the job is in ministry, this could create unhealthy environments where women feel trapped and unsatisfied with the opportunities presented to them. Stewart et al. also identify that key motivators vary drastically between Millennials and older generations. For instance, Millennials view themselves as distinct based on technology use (24%), music/pop culture (11%), liberal/tolerant (7%), smarter (6%), and clothes (5%). In contrast, older generations share perceived distinctions of work ethic, respect, and values/morals.<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that each generation perceives itself to be smarter than other generations. This shows that Millennials perceive themselves and their abilities tied highly to skill and taste/opinion. They feel as though they have technological skills, cultural awareness, and a desire for good taste. They are often viewed, however, through the lens of “seeming lazy, defensiveness, lack of initiative, unwillingness to commit fully to work, disrespect of authority, lack of focus, distractedness, lack of preparation for the workplace, neediness, indifference, lack of etiquette, arrogance, abrasiveness, impatience, self-absorption, and entitlement.”<sup>35</sup> Reframing thinking around Millennials can drastically improve generational interactions and relationships.

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<sup>33</sup> Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, and Oishi, “Managing Millennials: Embracing Generational Differences,” 47.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

There is a gap in understanding perceived generational defining attributes in the church environment and how this impacts women's experience with leadership, staff, and congregants. This research also fails to expose gendered influences on these perceptions, how many men and women were surveyed, and whether or not perceptions were placed equally upon both genders from the Millennial generation.

Wendy Campione builds upon the research of Stewart et al. by exploring how to retain Millennials and identifying that they hold more family-centric values and strongly desire work-life balance with flexibility and leisure.<sup>36</sup> Almost presenting a dichotomy, Stewart et al. claim that Millennials are commitment-oriented regardless of job, while Campione argues that businesses are experiencing low retention rates with Millennials due to their unique motivations. This does not hinder their ability to be successful at work, but they do not desire to pursue a career at the cost of a healthy family and work-life balance. Considering this to be the case, one could assume this would uniquely impact women in childbearing years compared with men. Millennials, as described during the period of this study as ages 24–34, face a lack of job satisfaction, considering satisfaction is directly tied to retention.<sup>37</sup> This is correlated to poor mental health outcomes for the generation that finds more value individualistically than in team-based environments.<sup>38</sup> There becomes an apparent tension between the last study and this current study, as two different outcomes have been identified. The first claims that commitment influences job satisfaction but does not demand it, whereas this study highlights the need for job

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<sup>36</sup> Wendy A. Campione, "Corporate Offerings: Why Aren't Millennials Staying?" *The Journal of Applied Business and Economics* 17, no. 4 (December, 2015): 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

satisfaction to retain Millennials. A differing view of values between both studies also becomes apparent. Stewart et al. find that Millennials value their skill and opinions, and Campione identifies Millennials as caring less about working hard or extra (even though they often still do both), valuing more work-life balance and family, having less of a desire to advance, and a need to find meaning in their work.<sup>39</sup> One of the most apparent differences arises as Stewart et al.'s research finds that Millennials do not define themselves highly as valuing respect. In contrast, Campione highlights research claiming that “extrinsic work values, status, respect, and money, are more important to Millennials than to previous generations.”<sup>40</sup> The two studies do, however, converge around the idea of self-esteem and value in opinion/taste, for “this increased self-esteem and assertiveness supports their belief in the right of individuals to succeed and contribute in the workplace regardless of their background (such as years of experience on the job) and to treat people as individuals rather than members of groups.”<sup>41</sup>

Campione utilizes a “cross-sectional sample of one thousand, four hundred 25 year old employees (not including self-employed) drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 97 (NLSY97) for the year 2007. This year’s data includes information on all traditional correlates of job satisfaction.”<sup>42</sup> Unlike Stewart et al., this study is split evenly between genders, with 49% being male.<sup>43</sup> The ordered logistic regression model is used, with job satisfaction being the variable used to measure global satisfaction (other variables are also factored in, such as

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<sup>39</sup> Campione, "Corporate Offerings: Why Aren't Millennials Staying?" 62.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



compensation).<sup>44</sup> While the results show many variables to perceived satisfaction, what impacts Millennials most “are those that negatively impact satisfaction, those that push Millennials out rather than positive factors that lure them in. And although employers have become quite creative in some of their offerings to recruit Millennials, they have often failed to retain them.”<sup>45</sup>

While Campione surveys men and women nearly evenly, it is not clear how the gendered responses impact the conclusion. Questions remain regarding how these values and retention issues directly correlate to women, especially those working full-time while managing a family and trying to find work-life balance.

Karen Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani identify Millennials as those born between 1979–1994 and highlight negative stereotypes surrounding this generation in the workplace.<sup>46</sup> This study highlights how Pew Research describes Millennials “as the ‘Look at Me’ generation, implying that they are overly self-confident and self-absorbed.”<sup>47</sup> Through understanding membership negotiation, it becomes clearer how Millennials fit in and interact with other generations in the workplace. While perceptions show Millennials as not being easily accepted or not putting in their dues,<sup>48</sup> the reality echoes what Campione found in that Millennials value

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<sup>44</sup> Campione, "Corporate Offerings: Why Aren't Millennials Staying?" 63.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Karen K. Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani, “Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials’ Organizational Relationships and Performance,” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 225.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Cam Marston, *Motivating the “What’s in it for me?” Workforce: Manage Across the Generational Divide and Increase Profits*, (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley & Sons, 2007).

work-life balance, which impacts how they interact with others and are perceived at work.<sup>49</sup> Research from Stewart et al. coalesces with Myers and Sadaghiani, finding that Millennials seek many things, such as open communication with supervisors, as a precursor to long-term success with a company.<sup>50</sup> They need to be seen as a valuable contributor early on and often, and their ease at working with teams is somewhat at odds with what Campione (Kowske et al., 2010) identified as a preference for individualism rather than team-building.<sup>51</sup> This study does, however, acknowledge the importance of individualism and self-assuredness to the Millennial.<sup>52</sup> Another area that Myers and Sadaghiani more heavily explore is technology. Millennials are the first generation to have been completely enveloped in technology.<sup>53</sup> Considering Stewart et al. affirm Millennials' perceptions of themselves differing from other generations through technology, this is a point where they can offer much insight and influence. This article reveals the value systems of Millennials, but it also reiterates the lack of clarity about who the Millennial is. While many studies are referenced in this piece, and many ideas converge, the Millennial is still a unique demographic fighting workplace stereotypes. Perhaps a more positive critique of Millennials in the workplace can be summed up in this sentiment from Andrea Hershatter and Molly Epstein:

Millennials' trust in institutions assumes and relies upon an equitable system, one that assures that industriousness and accomplishment will be rewarded with acknowledgment, encouragement, and access. They have always felt loved and wanted by their doting

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<sup>49</sup> Myers and Sadaghiani, "Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials' Organizational Relationships and Performance," 227.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

parents, guided and cared for by teachers whose training included the importance of building self-esteem, and, at least before 2009, desired by corporate recruiters. Members of other generations, especially Gen X, who are acutely aware that life is rarely played on a level playing field, may describe them as entitled, but Millennials view themselves as pressured and high achieving and have grown accustomed to supportive, nurturing environments that provide them with every opportunity to succeed.<sup>54</sup>

Brenda J. Kowske, Rena Rasch, and Jack Wiley explore how “Millennials’ work attitudes differ from prior generations” through data collection of 115,044 employees “obtained from 18 years of repeated administrations of the Kenexa WorkTrends employee opinion survey.”<sup>55</sup> Through a “hierarchical age-period-cohort regression model,” they were able to find that “Millennials reported higher levels of overall company and job satisfaction, satisfaction with job security, recognition, and career development and advancement, but reported similar levels of satisfaction with pay and benefits and the work itself, and turnover intentions.”<sup>56</sup> Through understanding generational theory, Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley reference studies by Mannheim (1952) and Ryder (1965) to determine that the concept of a generation somewhat varies and is more established by age groups experiencing the same historical events.<sup>57</sup> People do not get to choose their generation, but they are influenced by the societal, cultural, and economic forces in which they are born. Surveying in this study employs full-time employees (over 32 hours a week) who are involved in organizations of over 100 people, with a nearly even split between

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<sup>54</sup> Andrea Hershatter and Molly Epstein, "Millennials and the World of Work: An Organization and Management Perspective," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25, no. 2 (June 2010): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9160-y>.

<sup>55</sup> Brenda J. Kowske, Rena Rasch, and Jack Wiley, “Millennials’ (Lack of) Attitude Problem: An Empirical Examination of Generational Effects on Work Attitudes,” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25, (2010): 265. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9171-8>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 266.

genders (51.3% male, 48.7% female), various occupations, and a variety of generations.<sup>58</sup> Some findings revealed that “Millennials were substantially higher than average in terms of satisfaction with career development and advancement when compared to prior generations.” Still, overall, “The consensus from our review of the empirical literature is that generations are more similar than different at work.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, while this study purports that Millennials are experiencing job satisfaction, Stewart et al. claim that the health of the work environment highly determines Millennials’ perceptions of job satisfaction. According to this study, Millennials differ from previous generations in overall higher job satisfaction and opportunities to advance in their career.<sup>60</sup> There are four significant limitations to this study: at the time of this study, less than half of Millennials are eligible to be working full time with time still needed to determine how historical events will shape them, participants in the surveys are volunteering their information resulting in some level of bias, the study has limited generalizability as the sample size only considers workplaces with over 100 employees, and “the selection of criterion variables and their measurement was limited.”<sup>61</sup> Overall, what is lacking through this research is determined gender breakdowns of job satisfaction, as well as potential differences between older and younger generations as more Millennials have entered the workforce since this study was completed.

To provide a more holistic and updated view of perspectives on Millennials, it is relevant to look at a study conducted within the last year (2023). One such study is conducted by Mélia

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<sup>58</sup> Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley, “Millennials’ (Lack of) Attitude Problem: An Empirical Examination of Generational Effects on Work Attitudes,” 269.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 274.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 275-276.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 277.

Arras-Djabi, Laura Cottard, and Sakura Shimada as they explore how generational stereotypes of Millennials are formed through a study of a French railway company. While Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley argue that generational differences exist within a slim margin, this study purports that “the ‘elders’ differentiate themselves from the new organizational generation to enhance the appearance of their skills, knowledge, and values, thus maintaining a balance of power that is favorable to them.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore, a power dynamic against younger generations is revealed, impacting the experiences of Millennials in the workplace. Mélia Arras-Djabi, Laura Cottard, and Sakura Shimada reference numerous previous studies that highlight stereotypes around Millennials, involving the following: Millennials do not have good work ethic or people skills and are entitled (Deyoe and Fox 2011), they are experienced with technology but yet inexperienced and unmotivated (Finkelstein et al. 2013), they are technologically smart and require a lot of positive reinforcement (Lester et al. 2012), they are entitled and narcissistic, lacking work ethic that previous generations supposedly had (Lyons and Schweitzer 2017), they are progressive and unskilled at communicating (Urick et al. 2016), they are goal-oriented and innovative even while inexperienced, desiring work-life balance and are not committed to the workplace (Van Rossem 2019), and they are more cautious regarding recognition, loyal to themselves over organizations, and they desire more respect and supervision/guidance (Zopiatis et al. 2012).<sup>63</sup> This reveals common themes and yet blatant discrepancies about who Millennials are. Therefore, Mélia Arras-Djabi, Laura Cottard, and Sakura Shimada employ a qualitative case study with an interpretive and inductive approach from a purposeful sample of 30 semi-

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<sup>62</sup> Mélia Arras-Djabi, Laura Cottard, and Sakura Shimada, “Understanding the Stereotypes of Millennials in the Workplace,” *European Management Review* (2023): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12559>.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

structured interviews “of the drivers, as well as interviews with training and recruitment managers and with those higher up the hierarchical chain, to better situate the drivers in the sociomaterial environment in which they work. We did not try to identify a priori a ‘young’ or ‘Millennial’ category, as our interest lies in the social categorization of individuals.”<sup>64</sup> Overall, the study reveals “two generational categories of RATP subway drivers: negatively stereotyped “youngsters” and positively stereotyped “elders.”<sup>65</sup> Examples of this include the older generations viewing younger generations as not as technically skilled or not as rooted in the real world. Confirming the individualistic narrative of Campione’s research, this study agrees that “Younger drivers are often criticized for their supposedly individualistic nature, for being submissive to their supervisors and for refusing to take part in collective endeavors, unlike their elders, who are described as displaying more solidarity with their peers—a representation that is often associated with Millennials or the “Me Generation.”<sup>66</sup> While this study only analyzes how generations perceive others through stereotyping, it reveals that power dynamics are most definitely created as older generations harbor more negatively toned perceptions of younger generations, specifically Millennials. The conclusion reiterates that:

The stereotypes attributed to the “youngsters” mostly reflect their generational imprint resulting from the introduction of new organizational rules and the transformation of a profession. Moreover, the critical and disparaging register of these stereotypes is explained by a discourse strategy of the “elders” who differentiate themselves from the “youngsters” to bolster their skills, knowledge, and values and thus maintain a balance of power that is favorable to them. In addition, stereotypes play a role in creating the collective memory of a professional identity, in which the experience of all generations is

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<sup>64</sup> Arras-Djabi, Cottard, and Shimada, “Understanding the Stereotypes of Millennials in the Workplace,” 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

combined. This explains why the younger generation accepts some of the negative stereotypes attributed to them by their elders.<sup>67</sup>

Considering that 23 males were interviewed versus seven females and only one female is at an instructor level (no females are leaders), there is a clear gap in understanding how negative perceptions of these Millennial employees could be exacerbated for the females specifically and even the females in leadership.<sup>68</sup> What is intriguing to note, however, is that of the seven females, 3 are Millennials (including the instructor). Therefore, perceptions of generational power dynamics from the Millennial female perspective are lacking. Likewise, understanding how these negative perceptions are internalized and processed by the Millennial, and even the Millennial female, is not considered, for there could be adverse mental and emotional effects on individuals and organizations.

### Millennials and Mental Health

Mental health issues often arise in adolescence and can present an ever-increasing problem if not addressed appropriately. This is important to explore, considering Millennials are the largest living generation<sup>69</sup>, and therefore, are the largest generation at risk for mental health issues. This is explored by Julie Lucero et al. as they highlight that Millennials are experiencing a downturn in mental health outcomes compared with generations of the past through a study of a Millennial sample population of 7303 young adults ages 19 to 36 (birth year 1980–1998) split

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<sup>67</sup> Arras-Djabi, Cottard, and Shimada, “Understanding the Stereotypes of Millennials in the Workplace,” 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Julie E. Lucero, Amber D. Emerson, Teysha Bowser, and Brandon Koch, “Mental Health Risk among Members of the Millennial Population Cohort: A Concern for Public Health,” *American Journal of Health Promotion* 35, no. 2 (2021): 266, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117120945089>.

between emerging adults (18–26 years old) and young adults (ages 27–36 years old).<sup>70</sup> This study reveals that there has been an increase in “mood disorders and suicide-related outcomes disproportionately impact[ing] 18- to 25-year-olds, females, and those of wealthier circumstances.”<sup>71</sup> Many things contribute to these outcomes, such as “poverty, economic hardships, social media, and social isolation.”<sup>72</sup> Overall, females report experiencing an increased amount of worthlessness, hopelessness, restlessness, nervousness, and psychological distress.<sup>73</sup> This is created by multiple things compounding, such as “economic uncertainty and loneliness created by technology,” the stress of school and the workplace, the influx of women in higher education, and the climb of women in higher-level positions at work.<sup>74</sup> More specifically, emerging adults were found to report more overall psychological distress, and “female respondents experienced higher distress than males.”<sup>75</sup> While this study does consider many logical reasons and self-reported reasons for females experiencing such mental health outcomes, it cannot realistically explore or consider every reason that contributes to the results. Likewise, self-reporting has limitations, considering a person may not fully understand holistically their situation, nor may they report or disclose their current state of mental health. It is also impossible to identify whether females feel more willing to share than their male counterparts, perhaps

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<sup>70</sup> Lucero, Emerson, Bowser, and Koch, “Mental Health Risk among Members of the Millennial Population Cohort: A Concern for Public Health,” 267.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*



resulting from societal constructs and gender norms. What this study does factor in, however, is the impact of race on mental health, especially with women, revealing that “white, non-Hispanic, and multiracial women are at an increased risk for nonspecific psychological distress.”<sup>76</sup>

Jake Najman et al. expound upon this through a study of pregnant women before age 30 during 1981–1983.<sup>77</sup> The goal of this study is to determine if mental health disorders are increasing from mothers to daughters with each incoming generation. The idea proposes that mental health is declining due to “fundamental demographic changes in family and work life,” “a shift from communal aspirations towards individual goals emphasizing wealth, appearance, status and personal attainment,” more recent generations being more “(electronically) connected, but possibly more physically isolated from social networks than ever before, and the delaying of “previously important developmental milestones such as employment, marriage, having children and buying a home.”<sup>78</sup> The daughters in this study are comprised of Millennials born between 1977–2001, and “most of the women in this generation are in the workforce and aspire to achievement.”<sup>79</sup> “6753 mothers giving birth to 7223 children over the period 1981–1983 were recruited on the basis they were consecutive women attending an antenatal clinic service for their first obstetric assessment at a major public hospital in Brisbane, Australia.”<sup>80</sup> They were interviewed at a 27-year follow-up, and their children were given the Composite International

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<sup>76</sup> Lucero, Emerson, Bowser, and Koch, “Mental Health Risk among Members of the Millennial Population Cohort: A Concern for Public Health,” 269.

<sup>77</sup> Jake M. Najman, William Bor, Gail M. Williams, Christel M. Middeldorp, Abdullah A. Mamun, Alexandra M. Clavarino, and James G. Scott, “Does the Millennial Generation of Women Experience More Mental Illness Than Their Mothers?” *BMC Psychiatry* 21, no. 359 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03361-5>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

Diagnostic Interview at the 30-year follow-up.<sup>81</sup> Mental health disorders were only considered as they arose before the age of 30. Interestingly, while this study concludes that younger generations of women “only experience somewhat higher rates of persistent anxiety disorders,” the younger generations are more apt to report mental health issues and do seem to experience “higher rates of a number of more transient mood and anxiety disorders.”<sup>82</sup> Significantly, it is suggested that “the mental health of daughters may be more closely tied to their employment and workforce participation than was the case for their mothers.”<sup>83</sup> This reiterates the study of Lucero et al. by suggesting that employment directly impacts the mental health of Millennial women. Still, this study does not provide significant guidance on whether the same potential societal, familial, or employment triggers affect the younger female generations differently than male generations. This study also does not suggest there is a strong link between societal pressures and mental health, differing from Lucero et al., which claims a link between technology, socioeconomic status, social media, etc., and mental health. Postpartum considerations need also be explored to determine their influence on women in the workplace and mental health.

Mary Blehar and Gwendolyn Keita affirm that Millennial women experience increased adverse mental health, considering women experience depression 2:1 times greater than men.<sup>84</sup> This conclusion derives from the “APA’s sponsorship of an October 2000 Summit on Women and Depression,” which highlights the opinions and conclusions of 40 internationally recognized

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<sup>81</sup> Najman, Bor, Williams, Middeldorp, Mamun, Clavarino, and Scott, “Does the Millennial Generation of Women Experience More Mental Illness Than Their Mothers?” 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Mary C. Blehar and Gwendolyn P. Keita, “Women and Depression: A Millennial Perspective,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 74 (2003): 2.

mental health experts.<sup>85</sup> The mental health of women perhaps requires more consideration as these women are, at the time of this report, in childbearing years, and mental health impacts the entire family unit. While this is reported from a summit in 2000, the significance of understanding how childbearing years impact mental health can be translated to the Millennial woman who currently resides within the childbearing demographic. With depression expressing itself in “early onset, recurrence, chronicity and comorbidity...reducing disease burden in women may be one of the most effective means available of reducing disease burden in children.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, recognizing mental health in Millennial women as an urgent cause to be addressed will significantly impact the occurrence and influence of mental health outcomes on generations to come. One of the papers that is derived from the summit (Kessler) claims that “women with depression are more likely than men to report a prior history of an anxiety disorder; men on the other hand are more likely to report substance abuse or conduct disorder. These differences suggest the need for gender-specific strategies for early intervention and prevention in adolescent samples.”<sup>87</sup> This reiterates one of the limitations of Lucero et al.’s research, revealing that self-reporting presents a bias, potentially more so for men, as the research can only identify and analyze mental health as the individual reports it, and gendered differences can drastically impact how said individual processes mental health. Another paper by Birnbaum and colleagues discovers that “on average, women employees with depression cost the company more than men employees with depression in terms of days absent from work.

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<sup>85</sup> Blehar and Keita, “Women and Depression: A Millennial Perspective,” 1.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 2.

However, depressed men had higher medical costs than depressed women.”<sup>88</sup> This suggests, yet again, that women are more forthright with their employers about their mental health status and needs. In contrast, men may either not need to be as forthright or may not desire to reveal their mental health status and needs to their employer, perhaps opting to seek medical intervention outside of the interpersonal dynamic that women desire. Pyne and colleagues reveal that “enhanced care intervention was beneficial for women but not for men, who did better with care as usual.”<sup>89</sup> The limitations of this conclusion, though, leave room for interpretation, for this reveals that either women truly need enhanced care compared with men, or it reveals that men do not desire to seek such care even when in need. Hammen claims that interpersonal treatment makes a significant difference in women’s mental health outcomes, meaning that “depression in women needs to focus not just on symptom reduction or syndromal treatment but also on the context of women’s lives and in particular the context of their ongoing relationships.”<sup>90</sup> This mirrors Birnbaum and colleagues’ claim that women cost employers more in terms of days off. Possible explanations of this claim could be tied to the desire to achieve more of a homeostasis between work and home life, more of a need to invite others into the conversation surrounding their mental health, and more of an influence of societal, economic, and relational needs on the mental health of women. One of the final studies by Steiner and colleagues considers:

Pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder, postpartum depression, and peri-menopausal depression. They cite recent findings of women’s preferential response to the serotonin selective re-uptake inhibitors – a finding that underscores the value of gender analysis

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<sup>88</sup> Blehar and Keita, “Women and Depression: A Millennial Perspective,” 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

and consideration of hormonal status in interpreting clinical findings of treatment studies for depression and other mental disorders.<sup>91</sup>

This is important, for it reveals that there is a significant difference biologically between men and women, suggesting that these hormonal and biological differences potentially play a significant role in the rate at which women experience depression as opposed to men.

Considering that Millennial women are in childbearing years, the concept of menstrual and postpartum biological influences on women who work should not be ignored. While this by no means suggests that women are not capable of stewarding well their mental health in the context of their biology, it does perhaps reveal a limitation and additional hurdle for women to overcome compared with men of the same generation.

### **The Contemporary Woman**

Pew Research indicates that Millennial women are less likely to live with a family unit, more likely to marry later in life, with less than half of Millennial women being married, and more likely to be older than previous generations when giving birth and starting a family.<sup>92</sup> Each of these, it could be argued, is either a causation or a correlation of the influx of Millennial women in the workforce. Research has been employed that explores Millennial women in the workforce, the experiences of women in ministry vocationally, and obstacles women face in both the workforce and ministry.

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<sup>91</sup> Blehar and Keita, "Women and Depression: A Millennial Perspective," 3.

<sup>92</sup> Amanda Barroso, Kim Parker, and Jesse Bennett, "As Millennials Near 40, They're Approaching Family Life Differently Than Previous Generations," *Pew Research Center*, last modified May 27, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/27/as-millennials-near-40-theyre-approaching-family-life-differently-than-previous-generations/>.

## Women at Work

Feeling insecure is a universal feeling that transcends gender and experience; however, the concept of imposter syndrome uniquely plagues women. Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes have explored this phenomenon, concluding that:

The term imposter phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women. Certain early family dynamics and later introjection of societal sex-role stereotyping appear to contribute significantly to the development of the imposter phenomenon. Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Numerous achievements, which one might expect to provide ample objective evidence of superior intellectual functioning, do not appear to affect the imposter belief.<sup>93</sup>

This imposter syndrome negatively affects women's perceptions of the value they bring to the workplace. While the imposter syndrome is derived from the experiences of women during childhood, whether by lack of praise or too much praise with the reality of limitations, it can be combated:

As a result of a combination of such therapeutic interventions in conjunction with a commitment to change, a high achieving woman who has previously considered herself an imposter begins to allow herself to state and feel, "I am intelligent. I have learned and achieved a tremendous amount. It is all right for me to believe in my own intellectual abilities and strengths." She begins to be free of the burden of believing she is a phony and can more fully participate in the joys, zest, and power of her accomplishments.<sup>94</sup>

Yet again, this highlights the significance of relationships to the health and well-being of the woman.

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<sup>93</sup> Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention," *Psychotherapy: Theory Research & Practice* 15, no.3 (1978): 1. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006>.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

Nancy Worth's research echoes how feelings of insecurity and precarity specifically influence women's work experiences. These feelings "can mean you stay in a job you are over qualified for, never even try to apply for work because you assume failure, or stay in a job you do not really like because you fear being unemployed."<sup>95</sup> These feelings, however, can be mitigated and shaped by the people who surround women in the workforce, which will, in turn, impact their future experiences and self-perceptions. Worth concludes that "while a few women first attributed work success (or failure) to their own agential choices, implicit and explicit in their narratives were a range of social relationships that positively and negatively affected their autonomy."<sup>96</sup> Therefore, while imposter syndrome has a real and significant influence on working women, the relational environment in which they find themselves results more often in their success or failure and perception of the self rather than merely their own defined autonomy. Through the research of Canadian Millennial women through The Working Lives project, questionnaires and interviews reveal many things related to the feelings of precarity. For one, it reveals that the interviewed women highly valued community.<sup>97</sup> It also reveals that women struggle with feelings of security, even with supposedly secure jobs.<sup>98</sup> While women often gain or hold high qualifications, feelings of insecurity in how they describe themselves remain.<sup>99</sup> This reiterates the idea of imposter syndrome as a more gendered concept. While it can most

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<sup>95</sup> Nancy Worth, "Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 4 (2016): 611, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775815622211>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 604.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 607.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 608.

<sup>99</sup> Worth, "Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work," 609.

definitely affect men and women, women uniquely face precarity and feelings of insecurity in the workplace.

Perhaps a woman's self-perception is directly influenced by the work environment in which they find themselves. Susan Seliger and Shauna Lani Shames claim this by revealing that these feelings are exacerbated by the reality that women remain underrepresented in leadership roles.<sup>100</sup> This could be due to their own desire not to take on the burden of more leadership, but this also could be due to perceptions around women being able to manage work/life balance. Yet even with lived perceptions of discrimination and the challenges of managing a family and a career, Sarah Fiddler's research shows that women blatantly believe that they can manage both.<sup>101</sup> Women still face discrimination, and Fiddler's research of women at a community college reveals that there are still limitations to women achieving leadership in many fields, specifically higher education. Like Worth's research, Fiddler identifies that women exude a confidence in their abilities. Perhaps the dichotomy of confidence and imposter syndrome can coexist.

According to a study by Laurie Addison-Lavelle, women are experiencing growth opportunities in the workplace at a slow and declining pace.<sup>102</sup> While it could be said that women have more access to vocation than ever before, they experience continued roadblocks in pursuing their career aspirations. This could be due to Fiddler's theory that women often do not seek

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<sup>100</sup> Susan Seliger, Shauna Lani Shames, and White House Project, *The White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women's Leadership*, New York, NY: White House Project, 2009.

<sup>101</sup> Sarah C. Fiddler, "Eventual Leadership for Millennial Women," (PhD Diss., Northcentral University, 2018), 71.

<sup>102</sup> Laurie Addison-Lavelle, "Millennial Women in Leadership: A New Generation of Women Still Facing Gender Inequalities in Business Leadership," (Ed.D., Pepperdine University, 2016), 91.



promotions because they feel they are held to higher standards and require higher qualifications than their male counterparts.<sup>103</sup> While Addison-Lavelle finds a correlation between the number of Millennial women entering the workforce out of college and the increased number of women in leadership, many factors could contribute to the slow growth rate. Some of this could correlate with Molly Santillo's research, which finds that there is a lack of women role models as predecessors to mentor younger women in accomplishing their work goals while maintaining a family. Santillo finds that women often must sacrifice things centered around family, such as delaying marriage, not having flexibility as a working mother, and lacking time to start and devote to a family.<sup>104</sup> As suggested by Addison-Lavelle, even with leadership development, Santillo reiterates that Millennial women "are not moving into leadership roles after completing Leadership Development programs, which contributes to the low return on investment for organizations that are investing in such programs to develop the next cohort of leaders."<sup>105</sup> Through a survey of Millennial women ages 18–34 who are employed full-time, it is found that Millennials desire to move into leadership roles. Still, the perception of women in leadership plays a significant role in whether or not women pursue leadership opportunities.<sup>106</sup> Self-sacrifice around work-life balance may also contribute to this, as either perception or reality of expectations of those in higher levels of leadership may not prove desirable or feasible for the Millennial who so highly values work-life balance. Also, according to a 2015 study, women still

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<sup>103</sup> Fiddler, "Eventual Leadership for Millennial Women," 72.

<sup>104</sup> Molly K. Santillo, "Leadership Development for Millennial Women," (Psy.D., University of the Rockies, 2016), 89.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 120.

earn 22% less than their male counterparts.<sup>107</sup> This itself could remain a massive roadblock to women desiring to pursue more leadership in the workplace. It is evident that women continue to face challenges, as posited by UN statistics:

According to UN statistics compiled at the millennium, women who form one-half of the world's population, work three-fourths of the world's working hours, receive one-tenth of the world's salary, own one one-hundredth of the world's land, form two-thirds of illiterate adults, and with their dependent children form three-quarters of the world's starving people. To make a bleak picture worse, women are harassed, raped, battered at home, prostituted, trafficked into sexual slavery, and murdered by men to a degree that is not reciprocal. This is not to make women into a class of victims nor to deny women's agency, both sinful and graced, which is abundant. But it is to underscore statistics that make clear the inequity women face in society because of their gender. In no country on earth are women and men yet equal.<sup>108</sup>

So, while much progress has been made regarding women's access to career achievements and leadership opportunities, much progress remains.

### Women in Ministry

Michael Lipka has found that the Millennial generation, while already largely unaffiliated religiously, is increasingly becoming more religiously unaffiliated.<sup>109</sup> While many things coalesce to form this reality, Barbara Parker posits that there is a need for development and leadership opportunities for women to combat this attrition rate.<sup>110</sup> This seemingly opposes

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<sup>107</sup> Jeff Hayes, Cynthia Hess, Jessica Milli, Ariane Hegewisch, and Yana Mayayeva, "The Status of women in the States 2015," *Institute for Women's Policy Research*, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, "'Your One Wild and Precious Life': Women on the Road of Ministry," *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 206.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Lipka, "Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'," *Pew Research Center*, last modified May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>.

<sup>110</sup> Barbara J. Parker, "An Investigation of Millennial and Older Generations Expectations of Women's Ministry: A Delphi Study," (Ed.D., Dallas Baptist University, 2017), 101.

Santillo's claims that there are leadership development opportunities, but the area of opportunities for women in ministry needs more exploration. What is certain, however, is that many women are choosing to enter into vocational ministry of their own free will as they become "educated with theological and pastoral skills in order to take initiatives and serve in ministry in the church and society."<sup>111</sup> Research is needed to understand if this initiative is rooted in the individual or is encouraged by family, friends, church, and/or pastoral leadership. What is known, however, is that women entering into ministry full-time have not come without resistance.

According to Jaco Hamman, while many women are recognized educationally for their leadership and abilities within theological studies, this often does not correlate to ample professional opportunities or support.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, as Fiddler and Santillo emphasize, this contributes to women either feeling unqualified, or it reveals that even qualified and educated women are not given the same opportunities. Specifically in ministry, life experience is highly valued alongside educational experience. Research is needed to conclude how lived experience factors into opportunities given to women. Research shows bias from numerous perspectives, including theological, psychological, economic, etc.<sup>113</sup> For instance, the idea of the "dominant other" is explored in relation to the church body, revealing that "[S]ince women are not perceived or experienced by a grieving church as being dominant, women in ministry are overlooked by the church to be pastoral leaders."<sup>114</sup> Essentially, women are not perceived by

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<sup>111</sup> Johnson, "'Your One Wild and Precious Life': Women on the Road of Ministry," 203.

<sup>112</sup> Jaco J. Hamman, "Resistance to Women in Ministry and the Psychodynamics of Sadness," *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 6 (December, 2010): 770.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Hamman, "Resistance to Women in Ministry and the Psychodynamics of Sadness," 776.

many church congregants as being dominant and, therefore, are not given the same leadership opportunities as men. It appears that personality traits become significant in how women are perceived within ministry. More exploration is required to understand how gendered personality traits impact opportunities afforded to women and whether or not assuming more masculine personality traits impacts the leadership opportunities made available to women. Potential masculine traits could include dominance, authority, confidence, aggression, etc., while more feminine traits could include nurturing, gentleness, submissiveness, peaceability, etc.

To fully understand the ministry environments where women find themselves, exploring the implications of personality types and expressions across genders is pertinent. A study by Costa et al. identifies gender differences in personality traits across cultures and gives specific credence to gender stereotypes in Western cultures. In this study, a review of previous personality traits through gender differences is given consideration. Such studies include one by Maccoby and Jacklin, concluding that “men are more assertive and less anxious than women; no differences were found for two other traits analyzed, locus of control and self-esteem.”<sup>115</sup> A study by Feingold seeks to corroborate the study completed by Maccoby and Jacklin, concluding that “women scored lower than men on assertiveness and higher on gregariousness (extraversion), anxiety, trust, and tender-mindedness (nurturance).”<sup>116</sup> In this specific study by Costa et al., the NEO-PI-R (of the Five-Factor Model) is utilized, which “structures specific traits in terms of five

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<sup>115</sup> Paul T. Costa, Antonio Terracciano, and Robert R. McCrae, “Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, no. 2 (2001): 322.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

broad factors.”<sup>117</sup> These factors are neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. Both biological and social psychological influences on personality are accounted for, and the authors emphasize that “these explanations are not mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible that social roles and other environmental influences can modify a biologically based pattern, and there is always a danger that findings from any single method of measurement will be biased.”<sup>118</sup> Cross-cultural understandings are also strongly considered, for cultural norms can significantly determine how personality traits are recognized and expressed. These studies largely determine that gender stereotypes are consistent and perhaps even universal across cultures. For this study, data was collected from various countries that had completed their own research involving NEO-PI-R. All participants were volunteers, with data being categorized by age and gender. Twenty-four cultures included data involving college-aged samples, and 14 cultures provided data around adult samples.<sup>119</sup> Overall, five continents and multiple languages are expressed through this data set. In this study, 30 specific traits are assessed. While there is a benefit to retrieving data from qualified researchers within their own cultures, the researchers of this particular study are at the mercy of the predetermined data presets and parameters. Therefore, while this data is wholly relevant, it cannot be controlled and understood equally. It could be argued, however, that this data is even more accurate, considering it arises organically within its own culture and easily enables the researchers of this

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<sup>117</sup> Costa et al., “Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings,” 322.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 326.

study to trust the cultural and language accuracy of the obtained data, making more accurate cross-cultural and cross-gender determinations.

One of the most notable results of this data analysis is that while gender differences are noticeable, they are more subtle than individual characteristics within each gender.<sup>120</sup> Likewise, stereotypes are often cross-cultural, with Western (and even specifically the United States) stereotypes usually mirroring those of other cultures.<sup>121</sup> This research shows a common thread that corroborates previous research by revealing that:

Women in most cultures were higher than men in Warmth, Gregariousness, and Positive Emotions, but lower in Assertiveness and Excitement Seeking... Women scored higher than men in Openness to Aesthetics, Feelings, and Actions, but lower in Openness to Ideas, consistent with pervasive stereotypes that associate women with feeling and men with thinking.<sup>122</sup>

This information was tested to determine if gender differences do play a role in women experiencing greater emotional sensitivity in comparison to men. This analysis of covariances did reveal a:

Reduction in the magnitude of gender differences, although women remained significantly higher on N1: Anxiety, N4: Self-Consciousness, and N6: Vulnerability...[and] Among U.S. adults, there are strong effects ( $d_s = .51$  and  $.59$  respectively) for N and A, and a moderate effect ( $d = .29$ ) for E; there are no significant differences for O or C.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Costa et al., "Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings," 326.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 327.

Regarding differences across cultures, reliability is proven through a comparison of adult and college-age samples, revealing similarities between N, E, and A and no significant correlations for O or C.<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, it is surmised that:

Gender differences are most marked among European and American cultures and most attenuated among African and Asian cultures... Western nations with individualistic values and with inhabitants who are more assertive and progressive have greater gender differences in self-reported personality traits than non-Western, collectivistic cultures.<sup>125</sup>

This study highlights that “gender differences are modest in magnitude, consistent with gender stereotypes, and replicable across cultures. What this study does not do, however, is determine the breakdown of stereotype perceptions by gender, instead opting to show a collective score of male and female responses from individual cultures and countries. Substantively, most of the gender differences we found can be grouped into four categories: Women tend to be higher in negative affect, submissiveness, and nurturance, and more concerned with feelings than with ideas.”<sup>126</sup> In comparison, men score higher in assertiveness traits. While this study reveals much, it is still limited by race and ethnicity pool and leans heavily towards a female perspective. There are also discrepancies regarding the age of participants in different cultures and periods in which data was collected. Ideas around women’s health and biology are briefly identified as potential influencers, but little is done to address the implications of such information. Were these women in childbearing years? Did they have families to care for? Were they working full-time? Were their cultures more matriarchal? What this author finds relevant to the present dissertation “was

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<sup>124</sup> Costa et al., “Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings,” 327.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 327-328.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 328.

the puzzling finding that self-reported gender differences are more pronounced in Western, individualistic countries. These countries tend to have more progressive sex role ideologies, endorsing such items as ‘A woman should have exactly the same freedom of action as a man.’”<sup>127</sup> This remains a bit of an anomaly. Perhaps this can be attributed to the context in which a woman resides. If she is comparing herself to a community of women, she may rank herself differently than if she is comparing herself to men. This is a relevant thing to consider, for women in ministry find themselves in environments surrounded mostly by men in leadership and pastoral positions, and therefore, will most likely compare themselves against these men versus against their gender. Costa et al., however, point out that if different comparison scales were solely to account for results, “then gender stereotypes would not be affected because questions about stereotypes require the respondent explicitly to contrast the sexes.”<sup>128</sup> Even collective cultures and genetic predispositions are explored, but none can fully and accurately account for results and result anomalies. Most plausibly, though, a woman’s self-perception could be influenced by their culture, whether individualistic or collective, and more so because of their gender role within that culture, rather than personality traits.<sup>129</sup> This would inherently affect how a woman, or even a man, self-reports their perceived function within gender stereotypes and personality traits. Also, while gender stereotypes are explored, there is no mention of the potential benefits of gendered personality traits. Perhaps women and men are gifted differently intentionally by God, and therefore, research exploring the negative implications of women in

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<sup>127</sup> Costa et al., “Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures: Robust and Surprising Findings,” 329.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



Western cultures trying to assume personality traits that go beyond their natural inclinations would be relevant. Also, consideration for outliers, or women who naturally assume more masculine traits/men who naturally assume more feminine traits, may impact results. Therefore, a few questions arise – does a woman from a Western culture, specifically the United States, self-identify her gender stereotype in an effort to counteract perceived gender roles? How do men from Western cultures perceive gender stereotypes? Suppose women from other cultures do not identify more pronounced gender differences. Is this because they do not exist or merely because of the lens through which they perceive themselves? More research is needed to explore how personality stereotypes influence women, specifically women in a male-dominated ministry environment. These stereotypes, even if self-perceived, affect how women approach and overcome obstacles in the workplace.

According to research by Birney Fish, five major themes of obstacles to women in ministry become apparent: expectations and demand, lack of friendships, lack of opportunities, lack of recognition, and lack of respect.<sup>130</sup> This coincides with the need for relational connection for women. The lack of awareness of managing females in ministry leadership has also made itself evident.<sup>131</sup> This reveals the need to research gender dynamics between ministry staff. Lack of control over these obstacles has a spillover effect on family life, often leading to “burnout, such as exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness.”<sup>132</sup> Female clergy experience higher levels of stress, lack of emotional resources, and more negative effects on family.<sup>133</sup> The need for

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<sup>130</sup> Birney Joshua Fish, "Work-Family Spillover Experiences of Women in Ministry," (PhD Diss., Texas Woman's University, 2018), 183.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>133</sup> Fish, "Work-Family Spillover Experiences of Women in Ministry," 205.

boundaries, resources, healthy spiritual practices, and balance in work and life become apparent. Kathy Ogletree Goodwin claims that while women in ministry desire to pursue healthy spiritual practices as discipline for their benefit, often daily activities, busyness, time management, laziness, family concerns, and self stand in the way.<sup>134</sup> Specifically, regarding the female worship leader, Tammy Jarboe argues that mentorship can be an avenue of abating these challenges “through modeling biblical principles, lifestyle worship and respect for authority.”<sup>135</sup> The door has been opened more widely for women to enter career ministry, but as Elizabeth Johnson reminds us:

The reality of women in ministry is a work in progress. There is no crystal ball that reveals how it will develop. Along with amazing breakthroughs and ways carved out in the wilderness, there are also dead-ends; rather than rivers in the desert, just drought. Discouragement, which is part of every life, can become severe. Women find courage to stay the course in multiple ways: mutual support groups; deep, contemplative prayer; humor, often ironic, that releases anger and sparks resistance; and so on. Add to these strategies one more: remembering stories of biblical women. You might be thinking that these people, too, belong to the past. But remembering them can be a spur to hope.<sup>136</sup>

It is relevant to note that many denominations hold complementarian views of women in ministry. Therefore, many women are adamantly not allowed to pursue a career in pastoral leadership within the church. Complementarianism, while defended biblically:

... Was coined by a group of scholars who got together to try and come up with a word to describe someone who ascribes to the historic, biblical idea that male and female are equal, but different. The need for such a label arose in response to the proposition that

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<sup>134</sup> Kathy Ogletree Goodwin, “The Effects of the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines on the Spiritual Journey of Women in Ministry,” (D.Min., Ashland Theological Seminary, 2012), 116.

<sup>135</sup> Tammy L. Jarboe, “Mentorship of the Female Worship Leader,” (DWS., Liberty University, 2019), 5.

<sup>136</sup> Johnson, “‘Your One Wild and Precious Life’: Women on the Road of Ministry,” 209-210.

equality means role-interchangeability (egalitarianism) – a concept first forwarded and popularized in evangelical circles in the 1970s and 1980s by “Biblical Feminists.”<sup>137</sup>

While complementarianism remains a reality for some denominations, many denominations have opened wide the door for women to enter into in pastoral ministry. The debate surrounding the appropriateness of women to be in ministry will not be explored in this study, but it is pertinent to note.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review reveals that there is much research on the topics of Millennials, women at work, and even women in ministry. There have been countless journal articles, books, and dissertations dedicated to exploring who Millennials are, how women have been affected vocationally since the Industrial Revolution, and whether or not women have a place in ministry where they can thrive. Yet, amid much research, and with this literature review only skimming the surface of information available, there remains a gap in exploring how Millennial women in vocational worship ministry perceive their experiences and how the influx of women into ministry from the largest living generation can be supported and made to last despite the obstacles that still exist. The exploration of research in this literature review will lay the groundwork for a phenomenological approach as this researcher seeks to gain information directly from the current lived experiences of Millennial women worship leaders in full-time ministry. The information gained from this research will help determine what opportunities and

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<sup>137</sup> Mary Kassian, “Complementarianism for Dummies,” *The Gospel Coalition*, Last modified September 4, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/complementarianism-for-dummies/>.

obstacles these women perceive to be available to them in their pursuit of long-term vocational ministry.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Overview

While Millennial women and following generations continue to enter into vocational worship ministry increasingly, there remains a space that is dominated numerically by men. Therefore, understanding the lived experiences of Millennial women in full-time worship ministry becomes vital in determining how women can become more represented in vocational worship ministry. This study used a phenomenological, qualitative research approach to determine the lived experiences of Millennial women in full-time worship ministry. A qualitative design was chosen to allow for a sample size from a broad range of experiences to be shared. There was guidance in the created questions but no restriction regarding how responses were to be answered. A sample of Millennial women in full-time worship ministry was recruited through social media, email, and direct contact with churches. These women were given a link to a survey and anonymously completed the open-ended survey of 31 questions through Jotform. This survey contained questions related to experience, opportunities, resources, hardships, and relationships. They were prompted with the opportunity to share their contact information to be considered for participation in a 1-hour video interview. Participants recruited through social media (Facebook, Instagram) were able to reach out directly to the researcher to request participation in the interview process. 10 participants were selected to complete the video interview portion conducted through Zoom. After transcription and member checking, data from the interviews and surveys was coded to find and categorize relevant themes. These themes were used to determine specific data points related to the longevity of Millennial women in worship ministry and how they can remain and thrive in vocational worship ministry.

## Research Questions

1. How do Millennial women who serve as worship leaders perceive their opportunities to be successful in a full-time ministry role?
  - a. What resources do female worship leaders have available to them to aid in their success?
  - b. What unique hardships are women in full-time ministry confronted with?
  - c. How do female worship leaders navigate hardships, family dynamics, and stress while in full-time ministry?
  - d. What support do female worship leaders feel they need in order to be successful?

## Research Design and Instrumentation

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to pinpoint specific experiences of a smaller sample size of an increasingly large, qualifying demographic. After the research questions were created and the relevant literature was reviewed, survey and interview questions were established. The online, open-ended survey was then created using JotForm with 31 predetermined questions with categories based on experience, opportunities, resources, hardships, and relationships. This survey was formatted to vet qualifying participants by ending the survey early for those who identified as male, outside of the Millennial age range (birth 1980-2000), and not in full-time worship ministry. The survey questions are listed in Appendix A.

Likewise, the semi-structured interview questions were created based on the research and survey questions. These questions were used to guide the conversation with participants as a starting point for further discussion around their personal experiences and preconceptions

regarding their role in full-time worship ministry. These interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

Survey and interview questions were aligned with the overall research questions to support the exploration of perceived experience, unique challenges related to being female, hardships and challenges, available resources, and relational support. These questions were open-ended with a mix of positive and negative language, i.e., “What opportunities are you given to grow?” versus “Do you feel as if you face a glass ceiling in ministry? How So?” Open-ended questions were intentionally chosen to create an opportunity for participants to share as much or as little as they felt relevant to their experiences. These questions were reviewed by both the research faculty advisor and the Institutional Review Board.

Survey questions were collected through Jotform and compiled into printable documents for coding. Interview videos were recorded through Zoom, transcribed through an online converter, edited for accuracy by the researcher, and sent to participants for member checking. The compiled data was coded for themes related to relationships, support, challenges, perceptions, and so on. The faculty advisor reviewed this coded data for accuracy.

### **Research Ethics**

Great care was taken to ensure research procedures followed appropriate and ethical protocols before, during, and after data collection. Before collecting data, all relevant research questions and procedures were submitted to the Institutional Review Board for approval. Exemption from IRB oversight was granted due to the nature of the research and interaction with participants. Safeguards were implemented to ensure both anonymity through surveying and confidentiality through interviewing. Participants were asked to read and acknowledge the nature

of the research before participating in surveying. All collected surveying data was stored through a password-protected Jotform link, and all printed materials were stored in a secure drawer and promptly disposed of once the research was completed. Zoom interviews were conducted in a private setting to ensure the confidentiality of participants. All interview transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer. Interview participants were asked to participate in member checking to review transcribed data for accuracy. This was to ensure appropriate representation of each participant who willingly shared their experiences, especially considering that some of their experiences were sensitive in nature and potentially identifiable by their employer. Interview transcriptions were written using pseudonyms. By ensuring care was taken regarding ethical considerations, trust and equity could be built between the researcher and participants. This created an environment where a more accurate representation of the requested population was achieved.

### **Population and Sample**

The scope of this study sought to explore the lived experiences of Millennial women born between 1980–2000. The population of Millennial women specifically includes women in worship who are in full-time ministry within the United States. Those recruited for participation in this study had a vocation related to the role of a worship leader, including other titles such as worship director, worship pastor, and worship administrator, to name a few.

A sample size of 50 survey and 10 interview participants were selected to represent a much larger, qualifying demographic. The number of survey participants was chosen because it enabled this researcher to obtain enough valuable open-ended information from a large but not easily found population. While there is a large population of women in worship ministry, both



part-time and through volunteer roles, the specific demographic of women in full-time worship ministry is much smaller and more challenging to identify. Likewise, the number of interview participants was selected to gather valuable experience from a diverse microcosm representing a larger, more elusive population. These participants were located across the United States. This researcher found it challenging to locate and obtain qualifying participants but was able to make the allotted connections over roughly four months.

This study was comprised of two means of data collection. The first involved anonymous, open-ended surveying of 50 Millennial women born between 1980–2000. These women were selected from churches throughout the United States and were working actively in full-time worship ministry. The second involved semi-structured interviewing of 10 of these women from the delineated demographic. These women were selected from various churches across the United States, and interviews were conducted through video chat. Income, race/ethnicity, experience, denomination, and relationship/family status varied in uniqueness. This specific research sample's sampling techniques included voluntary responses and random sampling from advertised participation and generalized recruitment from various churches. While this researcher sought to find a cross-section representative of the larger Millennial women worship population through a phenomenological approach, more accurate data was acquired without bias by choosing randomized women from the sample group.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection began after IRB exemption was secured and took approximately four months. The data collection process started with finding 50 research participants from the sample demographic for surveying through recruitment on social media and direct contact with various

churches. Ten interview participants were requested and selected from eligible survey participants. Interviews were scheduled and completed in a timely manner following the surveying. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, then checked for accuracy through member checking with participants. Once this data was collected, it was analyzed and coded for thematic and consistent material. Interview participants were given a \$25 Amazon gift card once interviewing was completed.

Anonymity through surveying was selected for the benefits of (1) giving participants a sense of security regarding any information shared that may reflect negatively on them or their employer and (2) removing bias by preventing the use of pre-determined participants, denominations, locations, and so forth. Confidentiality through interviewing also provided a sense of security regarding shared experiences but revealed to this researcher how experiences varied based on denomination, location, etc.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted by coding the survey responses and the transcribed interviews. Specific themes related to the research questions were identified, including perceived experience, unique challenges associated with being female, hardships and challenges, available resources, and relational support. These themes were cross-examined between participant responses and compared against each other. Key themes were highlighted to support both ways women are empowered to thrive in vocational worship ministry and areas in which they could be better empowered to remain in ministry long term. This data was used to inform Chapter 5 for further research exploration.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Neither complementarianism nor egalitarianism poses an obstacle to this research, for it is assumed that each participant willingly entered into vocational ministry, regardless of denominational or personal belief system. As it is the cultural norm for women to be in the workforce, this is not a unique circumstance for society at large; however, beliefs about women in ministry can vary denominationally. Therefore, it is assumed that each participant is from a denomination and church that holds a biblical view of women participating in some form of ministry, although their past experiences can undoubtedly vary.

Each participant partook in a survey and/or interview and could ask for clarification, engage as desired, or remove themselves entirely from the study. Therefore, honesty and transparency can be assumed from every woman contributor as they have complete autonomy to respond and answer authentically. Thus, survey results have been compiled in good faith attempts and can be understood as truthful representations of participants' lived experiences. These women shared from both their present and active ministry experiences, as well as past experiences, and it is assumed that these experiences could, in many ways, transcend time. The hope of this study, however, is to identify how viable experiences can be transcendent and nonviable experiences for longevity in ministry can be determined to affect positive change for women in vocational worship ministry.

### **Delimitations of Proposed Research**

This study covers the lived experiences of full-time Millennial women worship leaders born between 1980–and 2000 in various areas of the United States. This study intends to determine if there are unique obstacles that these women faced that could potentially hinder their

ability to achieve long-term success and remain in vocational ministry. This study does not examine the theological debates regarding whether or not women should be in ministry. This study also does not explore the experiences of women in ministry who are not in the field of worship nor of women who are not in full-time, vocational worship ministry.

### **Delimitations of Samples as a result of the Sampling Technique**

This study was limited to two means of data collection: data collected from 50 Millennial women worship leaders who are in full-time ministry in churches throughout the United States through anonymous, open-ended surveying, and data collected from 10 of these Millennial women worship leaders who are in full-time ministry in churches within the United States through semi-structured video interviews. The goal was to complete surveying and interviews over one semester. Participants were not selected based on income, race/ethnicity, experience, denomination, and relationship/family status, but rather, were selected based on their age, gender, and status in vocational worship ministry. The number of participants was chosen to leave adequate time to conduct thorough interviews and data coding and to find a substantial representation of a larger, but not easily identifiable, population. Participants were limited to Millennial women worship leaders who are currently in ministry, purposely omitting but considering experiences of other generations of women, women who participate but do not vocationally work in worship and/or ministry, women who were unable to remain in vocational ministry, and men who vocationally work in worship ministry.

### **Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings**

Participants were located throughout the United States, but the location otherwise was randomized. Location and denomination, etc., potentially impacted results, considering some women were from cultural areas and denominations that do not inherently empower women for leadership. Along with the limited scope of participants, this could have increased the risk of bias and not provided an accurate scope of the entire Millennial women worship leader population. Since this study did not interview males for their lived experiences, nor did it consider the experiences of older generations of women in worship ministry, it relies upon the experiences of Millennial women to determine any correlation in lived experiences across genders and generations. This leaves a gap in determining if the experiences of the interviewed/surveyed women are solely unique to them based on their gender/age.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

This study seeks to determine Millennial women worship leaders' perceptions regarding their role in full-time worship ministry and how these perceptions impact their long-term viability and success as worship leaders. The primary and secondary research questions provide the framework for the conducted research:

1. How do Millennial women who serve as worship leaders perceive their opportunities to be successful in a full-time ministry role?
  - a. What resources do female worship leaders have available to them to aid in their success?
  - b. What unique hardships are women in full-time ministry confronted with?
  - c. How do female worship leaders navigate hardships, family dynamics, and stress while in full-time ministry?
  - d. What support do female worship leaders feel they need in order to be successful?

Two research methods were conducted to answer these questions and identify trends. The first consisted of an anonymous qualitative survey. The second consisted of confidential, one-on-one Zoom interviews.

An examination of survey and interview results is conducted below, seeking answers to these research questions through the lens of general information, experience, opportunities, resources, hardships, and relationships. A total of 50 Millennial females contributed their open-ended responses to the survey questions that comprehensively cover these topics. A total of 10 Millennial females participated in 1-on-1, confidential interviews to expand upon the foundation laid by the survey questions. These interview participants are recounted using pseudonyms.

Significant themes for each response are identified below. Participant responses can, at times, fall under multiple themes.

## General Information

### Survey Participant Age

With surveying, qualifying questions were answered to confirm that participants were Millennial females in full-time vocational worship ministry, and general information was obtained from each survey respondent. This information included birthdate, congregation size, number of staff members, number of female staff members, denomination or affiliation, and specifically, number of female staff members in pastoral roles.

The Millennial generation is quite large, spanning a few decades. This study explores Millennials born between 1980 and 2000, a twenty-year range. Respondents reflected the totality of this wide range.

**Table 1**

*Age Range of Respondents*

Age Range	Number of Respondents in Age Range	Percentage of Respondents in Age Range
24 years old	4	8%
25-29 years old	17	34%
30-34 years old	14	28%
35-39 years old	5	10%
40-43 years old	10	20%

The largest participating age range at 34% comprises Millennial females between the ages of 25 and 29. The percentages decline until 40-43 years old, with another spike of participants at 20%. Respondents aged 24 represented the lowest number of participants at 8%, with those aged 30-34 coming in at 28% and 35-39 at 10%. While this survey is a microcosm of a larger population, and many variables impact who chose to participate, these results could suggest larger societal trends. These participants could indicate that most Millennial women are entering vocational worship ministry at higher rates in their mid-20s, with fewer women remaining in vocational worship ministry as they progress through their 30s. For participants in their 40s, there is another spike of Millennial women in vocational worship ministry, suggesting that Millennial women could seek to re-enter the workforce as they leave their childbearing years.

#### Survey Church and Staff Demographics, the Female Experience, and Participant Backgrounds

Congregational size amongst participants varies quite drastically, from under 100 church members to over 5,000. Most participants (44%) work at churches with congregations ranging between 100-499 people. 32% of participants work at churches with congregational sizes between 1000-5000 people. 10% of participants work at churches with 500-999 people, and 10% of church sizes are between 0-99 people. Only 2% of participants recorded working for churches with a size of over 5,000 people. Congregational size is often indicative of staff size, for the larger the church, typically, the larger the staff. Therefore, this information most likely reflects and impacts how many staff are hired at each church and the diversification of said staff.



**Table 2***Congregation Size of Respondents*

Range of Congregation Size	Number of Respondents with Congregation Size	Percentage of Respondents with Congregation Size
0-99 people	5	10%
100-499 people	22	44%
500-999 people	5	10%
1000-5000 people	16	32%
5000+ people	2	4%

Staff size among participants varies from under 4 to over 100 people. With a slightly more even distribution, most participants represent staff populations of 5-9 people (32%). 28% of participants are on a staff of 10-24 people, and 22% are on a staff of 0-4. Less than half of the participants are part of a larger staff, with 12% having a staff of 25-99 people and 6% having a staff of over 100 people.

**Table 3***Staff Size of Respondents*

Range of Staff Size	Number of Respondents with Church Staff Size	Percentage of Respondents with Church Staff Size
0-4 people	11	22%
5-9 people	16	32%
10-24 people	14	28%
25-99 people	6	12%

100+ people

3

6%

The size of each church's staff is important to note because it creates a solid framework for analyzing and understanding the representation of diversity on the staff, particularly the breakdown of male-to-female ratios. When looking at the staff sizes, there is no discernable trend regarding the number of staff members, aside from the majority of participants being on a staff of less than 24 people. While one could assume that larger churches would have more staff members, this data does not necessarily reflect that assumption, considering that a large number of participants are involved in churches with 1000-5000 congregants (32%), yet 82% of participants are on staff with less than 24 people. According to this data, most respondents (32%) only have a staff of 5-9 people. Having fewer full-time staff members at respondents' churches could impact the number of female staff members and the ability of female staff members to assume leadership and/or pastoral positions. This seems to be reflected in the obtained data.

While all participants are in a full-time vocational role within worship ministry, their shared data shows a starker trend regarding females on staff. 82% of respondents' staff are fewer than 24 people, and 94% have fewer than 24 females. In fact, 52% of the staff have 0-4 females, 22% have 5-9 females, and 20% have 10-24 females. Only 6% of staff, represented by three respondents, have 25-99 females on staff. While these statistics are not a one-to-one comparison, the differences between staff size and the number of females represented on staff are noticeable.

**Table 4***Respondent Female Staff Size*

Range of Females on Staff	Number of Respondents with Female Staff Size	Percentage of Respondents with Female Staff Size
0-4	26	52%
5-9	11	22%
10-24	10	20%
25-99	3	6%
100	0	0%

It is also significant to compare how many females are in leadership and/or pastoral roles, for not every vocational full-time worship position necessitates either of those titles. Out of the represented data, 64% of staff have 0-4 females in leadership or pastoral roles at their churches. Every respondent indicates that at least one female is in a leadership or pastoral position within their church. 26% indicate 5-9 females in leadership or pastoral roles, 8% indicate 10-24 females in leadership or pastoral roles, and 2% indicate that 25-99 females are in leadership or pastoral roles. This researcher recognizes that some of this data is reflective of denominational norms and standards, and as such, asking “How many females are in leadership or pastoral roles?” could be interpreted differently by each respondent depending on their specific church context.

**Table 5***Female Staffs in Leadership or Pastoral Roles*

Range of Females in Leadership or Pastoral Roles	Number of Respondents' Female Staff with Leadership or Pastoral Roles	Percentage of Respondents' Female Staff with Leadership or Pastoral Roles
0-4	32	64%
5-9	13	26%
10-24	4	8%
25-99	1	2%
100	0	0%

Respondents represent 13 denominations and affiliations, with the most significant representation being non-denominational, at 52%. Evangelical Covenant represents 12%, Southern Baptist represents 10%, and Assemblies of God represents 8% of respondents. All respondents represent a branch of the larger Christian faith, whether more contemporary or traditional.

**Table 6***Respondent Denominations*

Denominations	Number of Respondents in Denomination	Percentage of Respondents in Denomination
Non-Denominational	26	52%
Evangelical covenant	6	12%
Southern Baptist	5	10%
Assemblies of God	4	8%

Converge	1	2%
Lutheran	1	2%
Baptist	1	2%
Bethren in Christ	1	2%
Church of God	1	2%
United Methodist	1	2%
Foursquare	1	2%
Pentecostal	1	2%
Redeem	1	2%

There is variability amongst participants regarding the length of time they have spent in full-time vocational worship ministry. For most participants, leading worship has encompassed much of their lives for many years, regardless of whether it has been done vocationally. Some have gained experience through serving in youth groups, summer camps, and pursuing higher education degrees in worship. Two participants grew up with parents or family members in the ministry, which influenced the opportunities they gave them. Only two participants have been in worship ministry for less than one year. It is also worth noting that only three participants have been serving in worship ministry and full-time worship ministry for the same length of time. Most participants served for many years before either being offered or pursuing worship as a full-time vocation.

**Table 7***Length of Participant Time in Ministry*

*\*11 participants do not have quantifiable years in worship ministry*



### Interview Participant Demographics

In conjunction with the anonymous surveys, participants were given the opportunity to participate in a 1-on-1, confidential interview to expand upon the foundation that was laid by the survey questions. The ten total participants and their experiences are recounted here using pseudonyms.

**Table 8***Respondent Church Environment*

Participant	Church Environment
Tonya	• Church of about 300 people

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible Church Denomination</li> <li>• Staff size: 4 full time (1 woman)</li> </ul>
Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 300-400 people</li> <li>• Non-Denominational</li> <li>• Staff size: 4 full time (1 woman)</li> </ul>
Charlotte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 50 people</li> <li>• NAMB Church Plant</li> <li>• Staff size: 4</li> </ul>
Viv	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-size church</li> <li>• Assemblies of God Denomination</li> <li>• Staff size: 11 pastors (4 women)</li> </ul>
Laura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 300 people (church plant from larger church)</li> <li>• Technically Southern Baptist</li> <li>• Staff size: 6 with 2 nonpaid (2 male pastors, 1 male ministry director and 3 women ministry directors)</li> </ul>
Willow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 700-800 people</li> <li>• Non-Denominational</li> <li>• Staff size: 22 not all full time (6 women)</li> </ul>
Selah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 2000-3000 people</li> <li>• Non-Denominational</li> <li>• Staff size: 150-200 multi-site across campuses (35-40% women)</li> </ul>
Eleanor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 30-100 people</li> <li>• Non-Denominational</li> <li>• Staff size: 2 (1 woman)</li> </ul>
Brittany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 200-230 people (multi-site with larger reach)</li> <li>• Non-Denominational</li> <li>• Staff size (at campus): 3 full time (1 woman)</li> </ul>
Emily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church of about 55 people</li> <li>• Church of God</li> <li>• Staff size: 2 (1 woman)</li> </ul>

## Interview Participant Backgrounds

### **Tonya**

Tonya has been in full-time worship ministry for 12 years. She got pregnant at 17, which prevented her from going to school. Now, she is married with 5 children. Tonya served on worship teams for years before getting hired part-time, offered an interim position, and then hired as a full-time worship director. After experiencing transition through a couple of churches, she landed back at her home church. She hopes to remain in ministry long term.

### **Grace**

Grace started in worship ministry right out of college for a church of 2500. She remained at that church for almost ten years, 5 of those years being on staff. After she got married, she left the ministry to start a business. Grace entered back into vocational ministry after being offered a worship and creative director position by her previous youth pastor. She has served in that capacity for four years. While unsure if she will remain in vocational ministry, she desires to serve the local church through worship for the rest of her life.

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte has wanted to pursue worship ministry as a career for a long time, but it was a struggle to find a job as a female right out of college, even with previous serving experience in the church. After landing a job with a church plant, she came back home after only six months due to unhealthiness in the church and on the staff team. From her experience, she has seen and faced resistance to female leadership in the church. While facing hurdles at a previous church, she was eventually offered a worship position for another church plant under the pastoral leadership of her father and has been there for the past year. This position is not where she would



have chosen to end up, as she does not make a lot of money and has to live at home with her parents, but she hopes to find herself in a more life-giving environment where she can thrive in vocational worship ministry.

### **Viv**

Viv graduated during COVID-19 and eventually landed a job at a church in another city through a ministry residency program. This is where she currently resides. This church is important to her because they are intentionally racially reconciling and seek to give everyone a seat at the table through diversity in their staff, leadership, and congregation. Viv thinks she will be in ministry long term, but she is submitting that to the Lord. She would not be surprised if that ministry shifted away from worship and is open to the possibilities.

### **Laura**

Laura came from the Assemblies of God denomination. She grew up on worship teams and felt called to ministry but became pregnant in high school. This caused her life to take a detour. It was about ten years before she felt the Lord could use her again. This prompted her to dive into serving again with worship ministry, eventually leading to her becoming the worship pastor's assistant. Then, in 2017, she took a position at a small church where she was supported by the pastor but not by the congregation. This experience felt incredibly restricting as she was only allowed to sing songs on stage and not lead in other capacities. Eventually, she was asked to lead at her previous church, where she felt empowered and supported. Laura feels called to vocational worship ministry, but she is open to the Lord using her in other ministry capacities or mentorship roles.

**Willow**

Willow did not witness many women leading in ministries and never thought such a job could be for her. She served in music ministries growing up, and it was a leader of hers that told her she is capable of way more beyond her current church at the time. This led her to pursue schooling and serving on ministry teams in college. An opportunity presented itself during her sophomore year, but she decided to wait until finishing school to see if it would remain. The Lord opened that door in 2020, bringing her on in full-time worship. While she has goals and desires to remain in worship ministry, Willow knows her identity is not wrapped up in her vocation and is willing to follow where the Lord leads.

**Selah**

Selah wanted to be famous as a young child. Over the years, though, her desire shifted to wanting to use her voice for God's glory. She was offered her first role as a worship pastor in 2014, and it was three years later that she realized she had adopted a lot of unhealthy rhythms and habits with people and the ministry. This made her want to completely pull back from working in worship ministry. She took a year off as they moved to another city and then was called back to her previous city to help transition their pastor. This is where the desire to pursue worship ministry began being birthed again. With the prompting of a friend, she applied to her current church and moved her family to follow this calling. Five years later, she is the campus director and gets to help steward the experience for other worship pastors. As a mother, she does not see herself pursuing worship ministry at the same pace forever. Regardless, she does plan on staying in ministry for a long time.

**Eleanor**

Eleanor has been in full-time worship ministry for 5-6 years but has been involved in ministry for much longer. She met her current pastor while working for a previous large church, and he reached out to see if she would be interested in becoming their worship leader. Since this was a part-time church plant, she relocated to another state. Eventually, she reached out to this pastor because she felt called to return, and she returned to where she currently serves. While she never felt called to ministry when she was younger, she feels God is calling her to this career from here on out.

**Brittany**

Brittany is new to vocational worship ministry and has only been employed for a little over a year. This is her first full-time paid job in ministry, and while she was raised in church as a pastor's kid, she never wanted to work in ministry. In college, however, God called her to worship, and she switched her area of study to pursue just that. After experiencing a paid internship, she became interim worship leader at 18 for 6-7 months. Eventually, she moved back to where she is from to come on staff as a worship leader, where she currently works. Brittany desires to pursue worship ministry for the rest of her life or until the Lord calls her to do something else.

**Emily**

Emily has been in ministry for nine years. While she has served many different roles, she has always been involved in worship. She has served in worship ministry at her current church for the past 18 months, along with serving the kid's ministry and helping with church cleaning. She and her husband are the only two on staff, and they feel called to ministry and have been in

ministry for the entirety of their marriage. This is something she hopes to pursue for the rest of her life.

### **Themes**

Q1: How do Millennial women who serve as worship leaders perceive their opportunities to be successful in a full-time ministry role?

To comprehensively understand how Millennial women worship leaders understand and perceive their opportunities to be successful in full-time ministry (Research Question 1), it is necessary to recognize where the desire to pursue vocational worship ministry originates.

### **Calling**

It becomes apparent that one of the leading forces behind women desiring to pursue vocational worship ministry long term is calling. According to participants, this sense of passion and calling is innate to them from God. 38% of survey participants reference this passion for worship and calling from God as what prompted them to seek out vocational worship ministry in the first place. Similarly, 96% of survey participants desire to continue in worship ministry in various capacities long-term.

Most importantly, what keeps women in ministry long term is a clear calling from God. For example, this is what drives Emily, because as someone who has stepped away from ministry for a season, the call back to worship ministry is what brought her joy— “I don’t think there will ever be a day that I’m not in ministry in some capacity, even when we’re no longer pastoring.”

### **Lack of Desire to Continue**

Out of all 50 survey participants, 4% reveal a desire to not continue with worship ministry long term. This is due to a belief that both financial compensation is not warranted for the role, as well as the desire to pursue other jobs outside of ministry.

Q1a: What resources do female worship leaders have available to them to aid in their success?

### **Education/Life Experience**

Thematically, both education/practical and life experience are referenced by survey participants as typically useful for vocational worship ministry. In a further breakdown, these things are shown to have impacted participants through assistance with job prospects, networking, building confidence, developing leadership, and impacting compensation. This is not, however, the case for all participants, as 22% of survey results reveal no significant effect of education or experience on vocational outcomes.

There is a pretty even split in thematic responses regarding the implications of both education impacting worship ministry, and also life experience impacting worship ministry. Overall, the positive implications of some form of education/practical experience prior to worship ministry are referenced by 60% of survey participants, and the positive implications of life experience impacting vocational worship ministry are referenced by 62% of participants. For some, the benefits of education are apparent because education can influence disciplines, accountability, and responsibility. These educational experiences can also shape who a person is. For those who have not sought education, or even for those who have, life experience can play a massive role in the development of a worship leader. For instance, it can be a confidence-builder,

it can assist in gaining respect, and there are also only things that can be learned through hands-on experiences. Education and life experience become a useful resource for job prospects, networking with other churches and people in the field, self-confidence, leadership perception, and impact on compensation.

### **Mental Health Resources**

Survey participants heavily emphasize the availability of mental health resources, with half of the responses (50%) highlighting access to counseling, coaching, or some form of mental wellness assistance. These mental health resources prove vital to the overall vocational experience for many women, as will be explored further below.

### **Employer Benefits**

An employer's benefits package, whether paid time off or health coverage, is also recognized as a resource by 34% of participants. Many women share how they are encouraged to pursue physical wellness through their benefits package, which can involve many things, such as wellness reimbursement for participating in healthy activities, time to go to the gym and workout, or provision of a health coach to guide physical wellbeing. Other areas of note include flexibility in schedule, access to growth and development resources (such as books), and mentorship opportunities.

### **Maternity**

Of those women who participated in the survey, maternity assistance is highlighted by 52%. While maternity leave can vary, many women reference how vital such a resource is. Along with maternity leave and childcare benefits, interviewees also mentioned having flexibility in schedule to care for family. A few women share how they are the first on their staff to be

pregnant or have children, and they have to navigate a bit of the unknown surrounding what is offered by their church.

#### Time off

Another resource that women find beneficial, as already somewhat highlighted regarding flexibility, is time off. This is expressed by 42% of women. Some pastors even allow their female staff to take as much time off as needed. For some, this creates an opportunity to assist other local churches and network. Even with such flexibility, however, there can be difficulty in fully disconnecting due to the nature of having to plan and staff worship even when taking time off. Work flexibility itself is highlighted by 20% of participants, and this is especially valued in relation to childcare and family needs.

Surprisingly, not many interview participants reference the Benefits they receive as compensation for their jobs. Viv, for example, references receiving two weeks off and pastors receiving three weeks off, with time off being something that grows with a person's longevity on staff. Laura shares of financial resources being made available for anything she needs to be successful in her job as a worship leader. Willow has flexibility in her schedule and is given a thirty-minute break daily.

Other areas mentioned briefly include childcare assistance, having a nursing mother's room, receiving mentorship from other female worship leaders, and receiving additional financial assistance outside of a salary.

## **Spiritual Resources**

32% of these women reference how their church equips them with spiritual resources, whether that involves the opportunity to grow in spiritual knowledge and disciplines or whether that involves access to spiritual guidance and mentorship.

## **Relational Support**

Relational support is another unique resource that equips women in worship ministry. According to 20% of responses, this can involve connecting with other women in the organization. This can also involve having a supportive pastor. While some are seeing the progress and opportunity of women leading in the church, this does not always translate to feeling supported as a woman in worship ministry.

## **Mentorship**

Based upon survey responses, having a female mentor in worship can play a vital role in the longevity and success of a worship leader. There are 42% of responses that reflect this benefit. Having a mentor can be empowering. It can provide an avenue for collaboration and advice, as mentors support these women in all spheres of life by providing wisdom from their own learned experiences.

Having access to mentorship and counseling resources has been proven to be beneficial to participants. Charlotte has participated in Worship Circle, and while this is an expense she nor the church can continue to afford, she has been able to find and mentor a group of women in worship who are there as a support system. Likewise, participating in counseling every week has brought emotional stability in a ministry season that has been filled with difficulty. Tonya has



also been offered financial compensation for counseling or coaching, and Willow is given the ability to meet with her female mentor every week during her work schedule.

Charlotte feels that the lack of access to these types of resources is a detriment to women, and because many of the smaller churches cannot afford to participate in these readily available resources, ‘that’s something that is really missing in our culture of worship and ministry and everything, is inexpensive resources not only for women, but just for worship leaders in general as well.’ Eleanor echoes this sentiment coming from a smaller church, with the difference being that she has come from larger churches where she still has access to resources, and her church has networking relationships with other organizations that can help fill the gaps.

#### Pastoral care

Many women share that a strongly desired resource is not simply a tangible one but that it revolves around relational dynamics and pastoral care. It has made a difference in the working experience for women in worship whenever they have a pastor or staff members who check in with them and show personal care in their lives. For instance, Tonya shares that her biweekly check-ins with her pastor help her feel shepherded and cared for as a whole person, not just as a worker. Willow’s team has just started meeting with pastors once a month. Brittany has a biweekly meeting with her executive worship pastor, where he checks in on her personally to keep a temperature on her mental health, stress level, and family life. This is something that Viv wishes she did not have to initiate with her leader. While she is supposed to meet regularly with her leader, it often falls through the cracks. This contributes to the feeling of being unheard and unseen:

He’s not known to be the best communicator unless he wants to be and doesn’t always follow through, so we’re supposed to have consistent meetings, but I’ve stopped fighting

for them just because my personality, and it's to my detriment, is that once I ask for something, I don't think I should have to ask again. So then I ask two, three times, then I feel unheard and my needs aren't met, so then sometimes the follow through isn't right because there's a lot of great trust in our team, and I think the great trust is a good thing, but then there's a lot of accountability [lacking]...so I would say it's one of our bigger problems...I need to be on the same page and I have to fight to be on the same page a lot of the time, and what I can do on my end is acknowledge that I'm really good at filling in the gaps, so I'm used to it, so I won't fight as hard for that time a lot because I'm just like, it's so much easier for me to just kind of sit in a conversation and not invite myself into a room then fill in the gaps myself instead of being invited into the room and helping them understand why I need to be in the room.

While she works hard to fill the gaps with trust, healthy accountability can be difficult to sustain when communication and care are lacking.

### **Practical Tools**

Participants share various tools and resources that greatly aid their success in the field of worship. Practical tools, such as Planning Center, Monday, Microsoft Teams, and Multitracks, are shared as examples. While many churches have access to these, they are not always made available to worship leaders in smaller churches who may lack the resources to purchase these tools. Access to these materials would also aid those women who may not be as well versed or skilled in any particular area, such as Grace, who shares that she does not have as much experience with using clicks, loops, etc. So, having access not only to the resource but to someone who is more versed in any particular resource would be helpful. This is what Laura advocated for as a worship leader, and because her church had been launched from a larger church, she was better able to advocate for what resources she needs. Similarly, Emily utilized courses online to help her learn and implement technology within her scope of worship.

Six interviewees emphasize the significance of participating in some form of training outside of the normal scope of their role, such as conferences, staff experiences, and book

studies. Participation in conferences has allowed these women to see the full scope of what they are a part of and for them to feel like they have a seat at the table. Training has equipped them with a healthy sense of spirituality and emotional well-being as they pastor others and learn how to expand their leadership capabilities. Catching the vision of what the Lord is doing has equipped them to cast this vision to their worship teams.

### **No Benefits**

Out of all survey responses, 16% of women share that they do not receive any form of wellness resources. Many do not expound upon their responses, but a few share that they simply did not have them or could not receive them if they were not ordained within their denomination. Also, 22% of women do not believe they are uniquely resourced at all as women in worship ministry. Roughly a third of participants (34%) do not feel a need to be better resourced as a female.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, six major themes emerge regarding how women are resourced in order to aid in their success in worship ministry. Many women cite the relevance and usefulness of education and life experiences to their vocational endeavors in worship ministry. Women are often resourced with and encouraged to pursue mental health wellness. They are given varying degrees of employer benefits, such as maternity leave and time off. Many women are encouraged in their spiritual health and walk with the Lord. They are also supported relationally through mentorships and pastoral care. Plus, many women are given practical resources that aid in their job's day-to-day logistics and needs. About a third of women do not feel a need to be better resourced. 22% of women do not believe they are resourced at all as women in ministry.

Q1b. What unique hardships are women in full-time ministry confronted with?

### **Gender**

While there is not a large disparity between areas of hardship or resistance that survey participants face, being female is revealed to be the biggest hurdle to growth opportunities, with roughly 34% of participants sharing their unique challenges and personal experiences as it relates to their gender. These challenges can be denominational or involve struggles such as gaining respect in the workplace as a female in ministry. They can also sometimes manifest between the women worship leader and the congregation itself, with participants sharing how their congregations have been resistant to their leadership merely due to gender. Lack of opportunity, or facing a glass ceiling, is referenced by 10% of survey participants as being a uniquely female experience in full-time ministry. This can involve a lack of opportunity to advance in their career or leadership or even a lack of opportunity to enter into vocational worship ministry as a female.

### **Glass ceiling**

An overarching theme presents itself around the idea of facing a glass ceiling in ministry. Every participant acknowledges that, in some capacity, a glass ceiling remains. Many participants have experienced this in the past at previous churches or workplaces. One of those participants is Grace, who shares that while she does not feel a glass ceiling currently in her church environment, she acknowledges how frustrating facing the glass ceiling can be based on previous experiences. In the past, Grace had found herself working for a larger church with many systems and processes guiding many of the decisions that were made. Because of this, there wasn't much room for growth:

...When I was hired for my role, there wasn't a whole lot of room to move...I didn't really know what I was allowed to do and what I wasn't allowed to do. And I was trying to help in more ways and was met with, like, well this really isn't your lane. Just kind of stay in your lane. Kind of stuck in a lot of ways.

Laura expresses a similar sentiment, claiming she does not see a glass ceiling in her current church location because she has a supportive pastor who appreciates gender differences. This current pastor understands the value brought by both men and women collectively. Still, since Laura does not desire to become a senior pastor, the idea of climbing the ladder at her current church becomes irrelevant. While she currently resides in a supportive environment, Laura has, however, experienced limitations in previous churches while on staff. Claims of unfriendly environments towards females in leadership roles in two other churches would have skewed Laura's view of a glass ceiling in a negative direction had she not found her current supportive ministry environment. She states, "When I think about the fact that there was a season where I thought maybe that that's where the Lord had me forever, I would for sure have said yes to that question." Having a place where she can occupy her God-given space has made all the difference in Laura feeling as though she can be all God has called her to be.

Emily's perspective echoes the experiences of both Laura and Grace. Emily, who is currently on staff with her husband, says he is incredibly supportive of her being in ministry. The environments, however, have not always been nurturing environments for women in leadership:

There are other places that we have been in the past where I feel like women aren't as accepted in ministry. There are times that I've been made to feel uncomfortable. So, like I said, I mean, with where I'm at right now, no, I don't necessarily feel like I have a glass ceiling, but you know, does that change over time? Maybe.

## Chauvinism

Tonya shares that she has experienced chauvinistic interactions at her previous church, where she had served for four years. This particular church had strong parameters written in its constitution regarding women, limiting their role. For instance, women could not teach a co-ed Bible study, and women could not obtain the title of pastor. Before Tonya left this environment, a position in worship leadership became available. When talking about it with her leadership, she was discouraged from applying for the position because she was a female and because, even after four years of serving in worship, they did not deem her ready. As she somberly recalls, “He was already pretty chauvinistic, [I] didn’t love working under him. He treated me like an admin and he would say things like... ‘I mean, her job is to free me up to be able to do what only I can do...’ that just always bothered me.” Because of this, she felt limited in her capacity and potential and eventually left this church for a healthier church environment.

## Women in leadership

There is often the assumption that female worship leaders are not actually in a pastoral role. Participants, such as Selah, have had to field questions regarding their authority and leadership, as there are often stereotypes that misguide other people’s assumptions. She shares, “I have seen a lack of respect for female worship leaders...people will assume that like, oh, you’ve been given this role versus I’ve earned it.” This has played itself out in conversations with other peers in the worship field— “I’ve literally heard men say like, oh, looking at the female worship pastor, who’s the actual worship pastor? Like, not you. Like who’s the actual person who’s leading that department? I know it’s me. So maybe the most inequality I’ve seen is of people’s misconceptions.”

While many of the participants have experienced working for churches that do not affirm women in leadership or pastoral roles, Emily describes her current experience as one where she feels supported by her husband (pastor) but not supported by church elders because of denominational beliefs and generational opinions. She emphasizes that leadership does not necessarily treat her poorly, but she is stifled in her current position and that the elders create additional hurdles to overcome. As she explains one particular example,

So, we're walking through [Romans] on Wednesday nights...and my husband said, "hey, you wrote your exegetical paper on Roman's 12 and it's great and I want you to teach." And I was like, "okay, cool. I'll do it." And our elders sat in the back of the church with their arms crossed and threw me the hardest questions that they could throw me and were shocked when I answered them. So, I kind of felt like it was one of those, you know, we really don't want you in this role. So, we're going to make it really hard for you... And I feel like in a lot of ways, some of that's denominational. And in a lot of ways, it's just generational.

Charlotte is in the unique position of working for her father, who is the pastor. This dynamic directly impacts her interactions with other staff members, often negatively. For instance, since she is young, staff members often go above her head straight to the pastor when decisions around worship and communications need to be made. Because of this, she often feels sidelined and left out of the loop of things directly pertaining to her role in worship. When addressed, she shares that oftentimes she is met with responses like, "Well, we didn't do it that way before you came," or, "We've been here longer, so we know the people, or we know how things are supposed to be done." This creates a sense of imposter syndrome, making Charlotte question if she is doing her job well and if there are areas where she needs to improve. As she shares:

...There's a lot of things I still need to work on, obviously, like, they all need to work on things, but it's very discouraging when I'm told that when I'm like trying to grow...there are times where I'm like, I don't feel like I can...so not only as a, you know, pastor's kid, but also just as a female.

Interestingly, some pastors believe that worship is inherently feminine, and because of this, women have to be cautious about how they approach leading worship from the stage. This is something that Tonya has experienced with an executive pastor in the past, putting the onus on her to bring balance in her leading. As Tonya recalls, this pastor told her before offering her the job:

“Worship is already very feminine...and so if I were to put you in this role, you are, on a scale of women, like you are extra feminine. And so like, we need to make sure that whoever’s in this role is going to balance out our congregation...” Like, I’m extra feminine because I do my hair and I wear makeup, or I don’t understand...?

Similarly, Grace believes that worship itself can be over-feminized because it involves intimacy and tenderness with the Lord. This can, unintentionally, be harder for men to connect with:

As a woman, I think sometimes you can get resistance from men, just thinking this is like an emotional thing or maybe dealing with their own preconceptions about a woman in worship ministry. So, I think sometimes I’m really conscious about that. I’m like, man, do I have enough guys on my team? Like is there enough balance here? You know, are men able to connect with what’s happening in this room? Because I’m, you know leading the charge, and I think about that a lot, whereas, if like for me, I don’t think I would necessarily have a hard time like connecting in worship if it was an all-guys team, like I don’t think I would have a hard time with that. But I think sometimes...it can almost feel like worship is too touchy, feely, or too emotional or something like that, you know? I think there has historically just been more men, like in ministry roles, like even in the Catholic Church with priests...it's just kind of like, I don't know why that happened, but it seems like that has been historically, who has ran the church has been men.

While she believes that women have a unique way of being sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is doing in a worship setting, it requires women to be open to what is happening in front of them. This is both a strength and a potential weakness if women are unaware of how other people are responding to what is happening in the room.



## Gaining Respect

16% of survey participants share disparities felt at work due to their age or perceived immaturity compared to their male counterparts. Overwhelmingly, the most significant hardship a woman faces in full-time worship ministry falls under gaining respect. 70% of women share this struggle in various capacities. For instance, simply being a young female can present challenges. Perceptions of women worship leaders can create resistance and lead to women feeling unseen and unheard. Being a female can, at times, create tensions and simultaneously make it challenging to address conflict as it arises, especially with the opposite gender. Denominationally, it can be difficult to find positions in worship ministry and gain respect in those positions.

## Intentionality

It can be challenging to feel underestimated or overlooked as a woman in ministry because the reality for many women is that they will not be invited to the conversation in the same capacity as men. Because of this, as Viv shares, women will naturally not receive the same level of mentorship or communication because of the boundaries that need to be maintained between gendered staff. This puts the onus on women to be intentional, rather than feeling as though men are intentional to not only avoid inappropriate interactions, but also to strive for better interactions with women. In her words:

For whatever reason, they're [men] being intentional about their interactions with women for reputation or for perception rather than being intentional about, how do we have a whole healthy perspective which includes women? And single women because 50% of the church is single and over 50% of the church congregants are female. So, to not include that piece, I think is really detrimental to church staffs and church congregations.

## Musically

At times, the feeling of needing to gain respect can present itself musically, with women bearing the weight of different pressures and standards placed upon them. Viv shares of previous church environments where a woman's musical freedom during worship was suppressed in comparison to the men on the worship teams. While men were not held to the same standard, the women were expected not to add flair—"to be good enough to not be distracting, but not too good that you are distracting, and it was considered a heart issue if you did anything to show off." Because of this experience, Viv had to learn how to not overcorrect how she approaches vocal agility and presentation while leading worship. This is something that she has seen many women struggle to overcome. Aside from just vocal ability on stage, Viv also claims that a significant difficulty of women in worship ministry has to do with being in the music field in general:

I mean there's two sides to it, right? There's women in ministry, and then there's women in music, and when you combine them, it's such a unique combination of having to work 10-15 times harder to prove yourself as capable to gain people's trust or even break down stereotypes as women in worship, and I know what my perspective of stereotypes are and how they've been impacted by my actions and how I approach ministry...

While Viv acknowledges that this is her perspective, from her experience, it seems as though this is not something that men have to give much thought or credence to. In contrast, women have to intentionally be more aware of what they bring to the table regarding musical ability.

## Denominationally

Some denominational influences and beliefs can, and often do, determine the extent to which a woman is granted pastoral leadership in the church. Some of these participants have found themselves in environments where their experiences and opportunities are inherently

limited because of this. Worship, however, can be a unique space for women in this conundrum.

Eleanor has been a witness to this, claiming that worship tends to be a field more open to

pushing the boundaries on what women can do on stage but still faces inequalities:

They're okay with you playing, or maybe with you being a BGV [background vocalist], or maybe they're okay with you being a song leader, but maybe they're not okay with you being in that pastoral role. Maybe they're not okay with you using an exhortation moment in between songs or encouraging the congregation, or even praying for the congregation, or anything like that. It's like, you can get up and sing, but just do that and that's it...so there has been a little bit of inequality and imbalance in that area.

### **Job Prospects**

Another topic that presents itself revolves around obtaining a job in the worship ministry field. For some women, whether due to their own mental limitations or from apparent challenges within the job-seeking process itself, open doors seem hard to find. This is the experience of Charlotte, who had a difficult time finding a worship position during her job search, mainly because of being female:

...anytime I have looked at job descriptions on stuff...it's like to the point where I don't even think about applying for positions if I know in the job description it even says the word pastor...There's no point in me even applying because they're going to immediately say, "hey I don't want you, like females aren't allowed to apply for this position," because that's happened before...

Eleanor shares similar experiences to Charlotte, claiming that churches often lack clarity about who they are seeking to hire for posted positions. Because of this, it becomes incredibly challenging for females to get their foot in the door unless they are able to obtain a position through networking. She shares of one specific experience where the majority of candidates who applied for the worship position were female. Yet, the church that was doing the hiring had not even considered how their elders would respond to the hiring of a female:

There was an interview I went in for, and they said that, I think four out of their five candidates were female, but they hadn't even approached the elders yet. And they said, "So, we don't know what that's going to look like when we go to the board and say, hey, these are our candidates. And they might say, absolutely not."

Multiple participants have faced inequality and opposition during the interview process. While there was not always adversity that was overtly due to gender, the sentiment can be felt. Brittany experienced this firsthand as she sought out worship pastoral positions— "they would never quite say, it's because you're a female. It was always just, oh, you're not married, and that could put us in a predicament. I'm like, so you automatically assume that...I'm a home wrecker?" As a younger Millennial, these encounters based on her gender, age, and relationship status were not something she wanted to believe existed until she experienced it firsthand. Many churches did not do their due diligence regarding hiring expectations before scheduling interviews with her, and some of these churches tried to employ her to work in the kid's ministry. It took a lot of effort and perseverance before she found a church that would take a chance on hiring her.

Because of this, women inadvertently experience a unique sort of whiplash before they even land a position in the worship field. Yet, while there may be unique obstacles that compile for the female in worship, landing the right role in the right church environment makes all the difference in feeling like a glass ceiling does not exist. Brittany affirms that the right church is worth the effort and wait. These supportive churches, however, are hard to come by. From Brittany's perspective, it is hard to be a woman in worship ministry without feeling like there is an imminent cut-off to a career. It is hard to gain leadership experience without being granted the opportunity. Being a single woman amplifies this, on top of the challenges women face in simply

landing a role. Yet if and when these challenges are overcome, finding the right church environment that is supportive of women is worth the extra effort:

...It's the stepping stones that are hard. But once...you're lucky enough to find that one church that is willing to one take a risk on someone who's fresh out of college with no experience, regardless of gender, someone who's single, regardless of gender, you kind of get into, you know, touchy ground there. And then add a female on top of that. And it's just like, all the cards are kind of stacked against. But if you have a church and a staff and leadership that's willing to take that risk. It's so worth it. And I don't feel capped off at all. Like, I don't feel like I can't grow. I don't feel like I don't have the opportunity. I feel like if I wanted it, this church would support me. And they would do whatever they could to help me achieve and help me grow into, you know, whatever I wanted to be.

### **Self-Confidence and Personality**

Women often face unique struggles with self-image and confidence, with 16% of participants blaming themselves for being their own roadblock to opportunity. There are also self-perceived personality differences that factor into this. From Tonya's experience, being sensitive and tender can be a challenge when working with men. While she does not solely attribute this to being a female, she suggests that it has something to do with being a woman and a mother. She says:

I'm very sensitive to the Spirit. I'm very tender toward the Lord, and so where I may be a little bit more feminine or a little bit more emotional...I am not manufactured at all...and so I think that that down-to-earth sensitivity, which I think in part comes from being a feeling woman, like the empathy that women maybe have a little bit deeper...I think sometimes the hardest part is working with men, especially and how that can be seen as like a weakness and how I think sometimes I can get into trouble and maybe care too deeply and I take it on too deeply.

The most common answer involves feelings of inadequacy as women in worship ministry. This can come from a variety of places, including internally, with which Charlotte wrestles:

I'll probably go back to the whole like feeling inadequate and dealing with the authority thing and feeling like I can't do it because I'm a female...And so that's really hard to, you

know, see them at like, we'll have our annual meeting a few weeks and so it's really hard to know who those people are, and like see them and know that like they would never support me and what I'm doing.

These feelings of inadequacy are hard to combat while working alongside many churches within a denomination that does not support women in leadership. Similar sentiments can be found generationally, as Emily shares resistance she has faced within her family regarding whether women can be in worship leadership. From her experience, “My grandma feels that way. But she doesn't stifle me in that. And some of the people in the church are supportive. And some of the people aren't...and so that's okay. So, I think that that's been the hardest part is finding support.”

Yet, these thoughts of inadequacy can remain even without this outward pressure and resistance.

As Eleanor describes:

The hardest part, I think, is overcoming some of the thoughts—a woman can't lead like a man. Again, we've had some great women that have stepped up and gone before us, and we've got a good ramp up that we're stepping into...and so I think that us coming in, we've got some great support that's already there. But we're still niching out some of that thought process...the hardest part is overcoming kind of like what my pastor said, don't try to lead like a man. Lead like a girl. Lead the way that God wants you to lead because you can't lead like him. But you can lead like you.

While there are many women who have gone before, there still remains a large disparity of males in leadership roles within the church. While an argument is not being made for total equality within church staff, it can be hard to combat the desire to become and emulate what you most see. As Eleanor reminds, the value that women bring is leading from their own strength, not from the strength of men.

## Relational Challenges

### Pastoral relationships

8% of survey participants reveal tensions when it comes to healthy relationships on their team and/or with their congregation. Likewise, only 8% of participants share of negative experiences with their pastor. For instance, one woman simply describes her relationship with her pastor as challenging. There can be tensions with personality compatibility. Differences in worship philosophies and methodologies can also contribute to an unstable feeling with pastoral leadership. For 14% of participants, their relationship with their pastor is not bad but merely mediocre. Some of this is related to differences in personality. There can also sometimes be a divide between other staff members who are able to form closer friendships amongst each other or with pastoral leadership, sometimes due to their gender. This can create the perception that being a male does, in fact, impact one's experience with the pastor. One participant cites this relationship with their pastor as irrelevant: "Currently, we're in an interim, and I'm the acting pastor."

### Lack of communication and care

One of the largest contributing factors to a feeling of relational support lacking has to do with a feeling of being left out or there being a lack of communication. 20% of participants share how they can feel isolated and out of the loop at work. This can also create a sense of isolation when ministries do not learn to communicate well amongst each other. While it is common for conflicts to arise, a lack of communication can create confusion and no clear path to solutions.

Lack of encouragement and intentional relationship-building time is also cited (12% of responses) as an area where support is lacking. Some teams may be great at giving feedback but

may lack the ability to provide just as much encouragement to teammates. Other women desire to build relationships with their staff teams but do not feel that they are given the opportunity to develop those relationships. The weight of weekend responsibilities can negatively impact this relationship development as it can demand time and focus. For women who may be new to ministry, it can be vital to create avenues for community so they can develop healthy and spiritually enriching relationships. Other areas that are referenced include staff teams not fully understanding the unique challenges that women face, nor the family dynamics that women juggle (10% of responses), not feeling heard or having a voice (8% of responses), struggling to deal with conflict (8% of responses), lack of understanding the role and challenges that come with the role (4% of responses), and not feeling like there is any relational support within ministry (4% of responses). One participant shares that they feel relational support is lacking “everywhere.”

A little less than a third of participants (28%) share that they feel no lack when it comes to relational support. These women feel well cared for and seen. While this support can be great within the context of worship, this support can sometimes, however, not translate to or with upper leadership.

10% of women share that their dynamics with men and women on staff are negative. This can be due to several reasons, such as poor communication or a comparison of gifts within worship. Growth within the church can also influence how staff dynamics morph and change. One participant shares the challenges she and her husband face, struggling to connect with male staff members. Another woman shares how dynamics among women can be complicated.

22% of participants share that while their relationships within their staff are good, they could be better. Some of the reasons cited include the tensions of cliques on staff, feeling closer



to one gender as opposed to another, and the challenges that boundaries around gender dynamics can create with actual job functions.

About half of participants share that their interactions with both male and female staff members are not related to or dependent upon their gender. Rather, interactions revolve around things such as communication, priorities, and boundaries.

For instance, communication is discussed in a few different ways. Charlotte says there are days when everyone is on the same page, and there are days when she feels like she is being pushed around. A lot of this lack of consistency derives from a lack of communication. Since much of her experience at work is outside of the office, she does not always know how to communicate with or get to know the staff. As she shares, “I haven’t really been able to get to know people and...see their quirks and all of those things to be able to, you know, communicate...and I haven’t been able to build my own and I feel like that’s hurting some of those relationships that have even barely started.”

Viv has experienced the opposite of this, sharing that she feels fully supported and that she has her staff’s attention when she needs it. Even with a pastor who has a full schedule, she states that “they find time that day,” and she feels “nothing but intentional support from my male lead pastor and any of my other coworkers.” Having clear communication about roles and expectations helps with this dynamic tremendously. She continues to share about how this plays out with her direct reports:

I will say as far as like my direct reports, the way that we have worked it out is like my male direct report, he deals more with the practical side of things, so we’ll talk about just like efficiency in ministry and kind of the ins and outs of task oriented type stuff or philosophy of ministry, as where my female direct report is much more on the personal side of what’s going on in your life and like supporting me personally. And not that those things don’t cross, like my male director...anytime I’ve ever been sick, you know checks in on me to make sure I’m good, make sure I don’t need anything. We have a great team.

So, all of them, just our personal interactions are intentionally improving, and I've gone to him about personal things... Sometimes I find in communicating things similar to what I mentioned earlier, just it's harder to get people to understand things when that's not the perspective that they've had and experience that they've had.

Great communication takes effort and awareness; when this is implemented, the fruit of such labor can be seen and felt. This also enables appropriate boundaries to be clearly established, as Viv has worked towards amid the previously shared situation with a male coworker.

Laura echoes the sentiment about communication and boundaries by revealing the importance of establishing priorities in relationships. Since her role requires communication with other team members, she often has to initiate getting the information and content that she needs from others. This also involves her having to “put really strong boundaries in place.” Even with the effort that is required to communicate and create boundaries, she feels very supported by her teammates— “There’s no silos at this organization yet. I pray that there never are. But I understand the bigger you get, sometimes that does [happen].” Essentially, what Laura is saying is that each ministry supports and helps each other, but growth can create complexity, which may make it harder for each ministry to continue to work together well in this way.

Healthy communication has enabled trust to be built between Selah and her team, especially as she balances being a working wife and mother:

Staff wise, if I tell someone, hey, give me a few moments. I'm going to put my kids to sleep, I'm not judged for that aspect of being a wife and a mom. People really value family here, which is really good. We recognize that, like, it's okay to put a pause on work stuff if something personal comes up.

Selah has learned to communicate her needs with her team, which has created a healthy bond and understanding amongst both males and females. She is also able to help coach other women as they enter into vocational ministry, especially those who enter into motherhood while

working full time— “I've had the honor of getting to tell other women, hey, you don't have to feel rushed back into what's happening [after having a baby].”

While Tonya previously shared about an unhealthy dynamic with a pastor’s wife, Eleanor shares how proactive communication and boundaries have led to a healthy dynamic between her and her pastor as the only two staff members. By looping in the pastor’s wife, who also serves with the church, she has been able to be cared for by her pastor and work in appropriately close proximity:

We work super closely, just me and him, even though she's technically my oversight on paper. I feel just as supported, if not more supported by him than I do by her. I don't feel like he thinks, oh, I need to go to [wife] and have her go to Eleanor. He will come directly to me. We're all in text threads together. And that is part of that boundary of like me as a female staff member. He's just making sure that she's in on the loop and the fact that she's my oversight...She's just on it for the boundary protection of, they're married and I'm another female. I don't feel like he thinks that he needs to go through his wife to come to me and that he's comfortable coming to me as long as we still have those boundaries and stuff in place just for the transparency of like there's nothing weird going.

She feels fully empowered in her role, whereas in past worship ministry experiences, her age and gender hindered her from achieving professional advancement:

It was never said necessarily out loud from leadership as an overarching but in those more private conversations. It was either the feeling that you were given or there were a couple of times that things like that were said of like, hey, you're a female, so we are never going to give you—you feel called to do this, but we are never going to support that because you're a girl.

#### Staff interactions

An area largely touched upon was that of staff interactions and boundaries. How a staff or church chooses to handle obstacles that arise for women, and how they choose to support women, directly correlates with their feeling of empowerment in their role or lack thereof. One example shared by Viv explains how the “Billy Graham” rule, where women and men are not to

be alone together, has sought to protect women but also has more negative outcomes for women in comparison to men. While there are obvious benefits to such a rule, and while it comes from a place of good intentions with a heart to honor both males and females, it can limit the work that women are able to do with men:

...While I respect them honoring and respecting women and being cautious...the perception that certain meeting situations can have...we want to be honoring and respecting to one another, but at the same time, we're limiting the work that can be done between male and women, male and female pastors that are at the same level when the large majority is still male, and when we think that it's honoring to both, and it's actually just women...we don't look at the problem as a whole and instead we just say okay, here's a problem, and like here's a simple solution...

Viv then goes on to describe how, even in an incredibly affirming church environment, she had to fight to be heard in a situation that arose with a male coworker as an unmarried female staff member. In this particular situation, there was a male coworker who was actively going through a divorce. While this was happening, he made a pass at Viv. She responded with strong boundaries and sought leadership's assistance for accountability, but later learned that it was never reported to HR or properly handled. Viv emphasizes that her church is strongly affirming of women, even being nationally recognized for how they co-lead with women, and yet she had to advocate for herself:

I don't say that to bash leadership, I say that because they haven't experienced it...it's not me trying to point fingers or hold onto negative things, it's just like, if I'm here to invest in you and provide my unique perspective and to help make this team better and stronger, that means like fixing holes in the net...and it's important to not just me, it just happens that I'm the representation who gets to maybe take a couple of hits and the hard blows...

In the midst of experiencing a challenge while being in a church that fully supports women in ministry, Viv recognizes that:

Unmarried people have a harder time in ministry. I think women have a harder time in ministry. You can say that about many different minorities in the church, they're going to have a harder time in ministry. But when you combine two of those, and mine is just that

I'm unmarried and a woman and I happen to be young, it's just hard to gain respect as a young person anyway.

Selah echoes similar sentiments as Viv in that while a church can largely be affirming of women and supportive of their calling, many times, the glass ceiling becomes more present in person-to-person interactions: "I believe it happens more person to person than organizationally in our church. Really people's biases coming up, or their lack of trust in women, or their lack of trust in ability to make decisions, emotional things."

#### Male/female dynamics

Participants experience different dynamics between male and female coworkers and with those in leadership positions. Much of this varies with the individual. This is the case with Laura, as she shares that she prefers male company over female company, because, from her perspective, males tend to be a little less dramatic. Yet, at the same time, she also shares that her current work environment does not have a dramatic female staff. In fact, the staff member who Laura struggles with the most is male. With this particular dynamic, this coworker and she are able to have a great relationship outside of work but occasionally struggle to get along during work due to differences in work ethic. In seasons where this becomes more of a challenge, "What I try to do is not put myself in a position where that person has to do things that impact my job."

Despite having a woman representative in an executive role at her church, Tonya does not believe this woman is a true champion of women in leadership. Much of her perspective comes from the fact that when she was hired in the worship role at this 2,000-member church, it caused some division in the church. Some people left because of her gender, claiming she should not be able to speak from the platform. This prompted leadership to do a deep dive into the biblical

stance on women in the church and church leadership throughout history, leading them to affirm her ministry publicly. It never went so far as to change her title to worship pastor, but it did settle the uproar.

While more difficult interactions amongst staff have become evident, there are also many positive interactions about which participants are eager to share. For instance, Willow shares how having many staff members around the same age has allowed a brother/sister dynamic to develop casually. While this had been hindered for a bit due to working remotely, they now have office space and have seen the camaraderie naturally grow. These relationships revolve around genuine care for each other, where they check in on marriages and friend groups and catch up on each other's lives outside of the ministry.

Similarly, Selah shares how their staff has found great camaraderie amongst the female staff members specifically. An environment without competition has been created where women can fill their God-given space without fear or distraction. As she shares:

I think when we know what our roles are and what God has designed us to do, it removes that competition... We have a unique characteristic that we empower women in ministry. I think that helps a lot because we're literally, every five weeks reminding our teams, like hey, we're empowering the biblical call of God on the lives of women here.

While she has never felt inappropriate interactions with male coworkers, there are still times when it can feel uncomfortable. For instance, Selah shares that she has probably felt more racial discrimination than gender discrimination from coworkers, but there have been times when jokes have been made, questioning her competence because she is a woman. The comments may not be directly misogynistic, but regardless, the motives can be felt.

Grace almost experienced the opposite of Selah at her previous church in that while she comes from a more traditional, older church that does not often have females speaking or

preaching from the platform, she was exposed to strong female leaders and felt empowered to steward the creativity and worship of the church. Both of her direct report bosses were female and taught her a lot, and her senior pastor entrusted women to fulfill the duties of their roles.

Brittany's experience involves intentional time and getaways dedicated to team building amongst direct staff members and those staff members at other campuses. Since this happens weekly with her worship department and monthly with the entire staff, she shares that it has positively impacted the dynamic of everyone's relationships with each other. They are able to have fun together over a meal, learn together, and hear about each other's lives. It creates a sense of unity, especially as she is the only female worship leader amongst other males— "There is no like women and then men...we're all kind of together. Some people bring their spouses and their kids, some don't. We have great relationships with each other."

It can be hard for women to bridge the male/female gap on staff. For instance, it can be more challenging for a female on staff to have a healthy dialogue with their male pastor since they have to be cautious about how they meet one-on-one and how to converse without getting too deep into a mentorship that is inappropriate. While this is a good boundary to have, as Laura emphasizes:

It's also a difficult thing because I think that there is mentorship that happens between my pastor and the other pastor on staff that will never happen between my pastor and me because it would cross those lines, so there's not fix for that...it's just something you're going to need to deal with if you're a female on a church staff.

Along with boundaries in relationships comes the challenge of breaking down boundaries that hinder the development and growth of women. Many of these boundaries that hinder women come directly from the women themselves. As Brittany tells,

Growing up, like I said, I didn't have a lot of women in leadership to look up to, so I didn't think it was a possibility. And so, I set a lot of walls for myself. And breaking those

was probably the hardest thing to do. Reminding myself that I deserve to be here just as much as the next person, has probably been one of the hardest things to get through—my mental state of, I deserve to be here. I'm equipped to be here. I'm enough to be here. I'm good enough to be here. My opinion, my voice matters. And feeling like I needed to prove that to people, when in reality, the people that I was working with weren't looking for proof, they already believed it. I know that's not the case across all churches, but my leadership already believed it. I just had to remind myself. That was probably the hardest thing and something I'm still working on.

It can be challenging to navigate boundaries because while many boundaries are healthy and necessary, they can also quickly become a hindrance without guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

#### Relationships with women

Negative interactions with females are also discussed, revealing issues with women in leadership and competition between females. Tonya recalls experiencing tension from both males and females who had been under her leadership, where there would often specifically be the comparison of gifts that would present itself as a problem. She shares about the stereotypes that seem to ring true of women, saying that “if you are male and you're kind of, like, a hard leader, then, you know, you might be seen as a jerk. But if you're, like, a female, then they're like, you're the B word.” Tonya's previous church experiences reveal a lack of support by both genders. While she is supportive of women and seeks to pour into women's ministries, she has, at times, not felt supported as a woman worship leader. Laura's experience slightly differs in that she felt a direct lack of support from female staff members at previous churches. She shares one particular experience where:

The pastor's wife at my previous church was the problem, she did not like other females and very much felt threatened by them. And so, I would say that I actually felt incredibly supported by most of the male staff members, and very much undermined and sometimes sabotaged by the female staff members.



## **Financial Discrepancies**

Of the 50% of survey respondents that indicate subpar pay for women in worship ministry, there is a range of perceptions regarding the lack of equitable pay. For instance, one woman shares that as a single woman, she is able to make her salary work. But as responsibilities grow, this will become more difficult. Another participant shares about the inherent expectation that people in ministry, regardless of gender, should not be paid a livable wage due to the virtue of sacrifice. Those in worship ministry can, at times, make less than what is standard for other positions. This can present challenges not only in terms of affording living expenses but also in having flexibility for recreation outside of ministry. For some, a livable wage comes only after self-advocacy and fighting for fair pay. While gender is not always noted as an influence in subpar financial compensation, some women experience a clear and unwarranted financial gender gap.

Of all survey participants, 24% of them reference the influence of benefits on their financial compensation. For some, this influence is positive. Some responses indicate even their benefits are lacking. 10% of participants share challenges they face around financial compensation, including the need for self-advocacy in the face of resistance, having to hold multiple jobs to make a livable salary, facing demotion in light of poor leadership above them, having fair pay and benefits be inaccessible outside of a pastoral role, and the gray area of ministry financials when compared to the corporate world.

## **Motherhood**

### Childless

44% of respondents do not yet have kids or do not desire to have kids. For some, this will be a hurdle that is crossed once they find themselves in a marriage and position to consider the option. For others, many considerations need to be addressed prior to having a family. For instance, there are concerns about the financial implications and lack of familial support. These concerns could potentially impact some women's abilities to remain in full-time ministry. The demands of being in worship ministry can also seem like a hindrance to those who do not yet have a family to juggle. Yet, for many, even though there are concerns, there is an understanding of the joy that having children could bring.

### Family responsibilities

Family responsibilities (20% of responses) can be a unique weight that women carry, whether it involves how to parent, managing work and children, entering into marriage after working as a single woman, and so on. For mothers, they can often be the default parent at home, which creates unique challenges when balancing work and home life. It can also be challenging to find childcare. For the women who are pastors, it can be challenging for their spouses who do not adhere to traditional gender roles. Overall, for women in full-time worship ministry, it can sometimes feel like they are living a double life.

While many males have families on staff in churches, the career expectations placed upon men and women with families can be drastically at odds. As Selah shares, there has often been a disconnect between people who do not understand the responsibilities of a working mother, especially a mother who has to steward her family while working on weekends. She has

witnessed the expectations explicitly placed on working mothers, sharing, "I've seen that before. People are like, oh, she's probably going to go at some point, and this will not be a career for her, so we're not going to invest wholeheartedly in her." Therefore, not only are women often called to balance more familial responsibilities than their male counterparts while working, but they are often written off as not viable long-term investments as employees. This can directly impact the leadership opportunities that are presented to them.

### Physical differences

Women uniquely face physical challenges that men will never experience, especially as it is related to pregnancy and birth. For Willow, this is her current reality:

I think I feel like being pregnant has been given me such a different perspective on just like, women, because you go through so many changes. And it's like a man will never understand like, being at work and feeling like you have to throw up all the time. Someone gets sick and they're like, I'm going out of work, and they don't come in, but like, I feel like being pregnant, it gave me this like, different strength and understanding of like, wow, it is wild that God has given women this amazing ability to bear children, and yet, still being able to work full time. So, I feel like that has given me a different perspective of being a female in ministry, working full time.

While this can undoubtedly present unique hardships, they are also unique blessings that females get to experience and carry. Experiencing this directly has also shed light on the need for women to communicate and advocate for their needs, as Willow continues:

Whereas maybe men are like, seen as very much more assertive and demanding, and women might seem more soft and compassionate and understanding, kind of like stepping into that being assertive and like having a voice and being firm. That's something that I feel has been hard as a female in ministry, like learning that because...I know there are a lot of women that are just very confrontational, and they like can do it. But me, that's something I really had to learn. It's like being confrontational, being able to say something and like not say sorry for it. So, I feel like that would be hard part.

## Maternity needs

There is a lot of uncertainty around the practicalities of becoming a working mother for these Millennial worship leaders who do not yet have children. For instance, Grace hopes to have children in a few years, but since there has never been a mother on staff, there is no clarity about what a maternity policy or benefits will look like. Willow, similarly, has become a guinea pig for her church as the first pregnant woman on staff. She has worked to establish rhythms of work and rest, abiding by the Sabbath and trying to withhold communication with staff members on her two days off every week. She reiterates the expectation that:

A lot of times you expect people in ministry to be like 24/7 on call. And there are some things where I think you use discernment and say like, okay, I want to step in here where I want to help this person out. But then there are some things where I'm like, no, like I won't respond until, you know, the next day when I'm at work. Just so that I prioritize my husband well, I feel very unified in our schedule and with my husband. And that's where I'm like, I know being a mom, stepping into this, like this will be even more fighting for boundaries and making sure our family is our first ministry, making sure I put them first and not working outside of that, like really taking my time well.

Because she has these boundaries in place and has been able to research what maternity benefits she has access to, she does not foresee being unable to handle the pressures of being a new working mother. Brittany, being raised in the ministry, remembers the resentment she harbored at her dad for prioritizing ministry work ahead of her as a child. Because of this, she strongly desires not to replicate this in her future family. With a lack of clarity on her current maternity benefits, she went to various worship leader Facebook groups to ask women how they manage to raise a family and to work full-time in ministry. The disparity of replies was quite shocking to her. For instance, a lot of men were able to offer opinions based on their experiences:

So, I started reaching out to resources and a lot of men actually chimed in and were like, I'm a full-time ministry. My wife worked full-time. They gave me off for, you know, my paternity leave. And I tried working from home part-time so my wife could go back to work and do what she wanted to do. And they're like, it's hard...

It was quite shocking for her to hear about the experiences of women in postpartum:

But I was shocked by the amount of women who were like, I only took four weeks out of the six that was offered to me because I felt like my, you know, my job was slipping away or somebody else was stepping in and doing it better than me. And it freaked me out...Or, you know, I had to take a lot of time off because I had complications. And I just, they obviously willingly gave me the time off because of surgical complications. But I just kind of felt like, you know, they resented it a little bit...

There were even older women who did not appreciate younger women advocating for their postpartum needs due to their belief that the church should operate like any corporation:

And then the amount of women on there, especially older generation, I had one woman like scream at me on that post, like how dare I expect my church to be any different than normal corporations. She's like, you should get the standard six weeks and don't expect or ask for anything more because you work for a corporation. And I was like...we have to operate as a business. A lot of churches that are successful have to because if you don't, you know—salaries and holidays, all stuff gets a little fishy. When you have a hundred employees, you can't just operate like a church. You have to operate some kind of business aspect. We have a handbook. We have time paid time off. We have sick days...but you also remember, we don't work for a white-collar office corporation. Like we work for a church. I'm expected to be involved in the community. A lot of my week to week and my day to day is grabbing coffee with a team member who's struggling with something spiritually and I'm there counseling them or, you know, going to the plays of those who are on my team...And I don't know what that's going to look like when I have a baby attached to my hip. I was talking to my pastor about it and he's like, we're actually revamping the handbook right now...He's like, so honestly, this is a terrible response...I don't know what that looks like or would look like for you.

It becomes apparent that many churches have not considered what it looks like to foster healthy environments for mothers in ministry because they have not had females work on or stay on their staff after becoming mothers. For older generations of women that have experienced working while in worship ministry, there seems to be a lot of fear that has been harbored about being replaced in their role or having to prove themselves extra hard in their jobs, as well as some resentment to younger generations for fighting for the change they were unable to experience.

Brittany feels the tension of wanting to breastfeed and nurture her baby but also not having the desire to leave ministry to be a stay-at-home mother:

I think stay at home moms are amazing and strong. And I wish that is something that I wanted to do. But as of now, I'm not a mom. So, it may change when I actually have a baby, but I love the ministry that I'm in. I love the career that I'm in. And I don't want to set that aside...But I am nervous about what that will look like because I do have so much on my plate with my current role and still trying to establish people to help me and to delegate to. And I'm like, add a newborn on top of that, no sleep, and gosh, it's going to suck. I'm sure. But I'm here to see how my church and my leadership helps me out with that. Like what they offer. And I just don't want to resent my career. And I don't want to resent my kids for taking that career from me. And I don't want to resent my career from taking me from my kids. That's my biggest fear.

Ultimately, the struggle of finding work-life balance does not reside with working mothers alone, and providing clarity on how this can be appropriately achieved to women of all ages and stages of life will help to assuage any fear or animosity that women may harbor towards their pastoral staff and towards their church.

For Selah, the most challenging part about being a female in ministry is being unable to be with her family all the time. While she has found a healthy work-life balance, the desire to be with her children never leaves:

I don't know if that's just a woman in ministry thing. I know for me, it's this. I want to be a mom, but I also know that I'm called to so many other aspects...so, specifically, like wanting to honor that the Lord has said, hey this is a season of life that you're in right now, but also wanting to be home with my babies and rested.

### Work-life balance

The most challenging part of achieving work-life balance, according to 50% of survey responses, revolves around finding healthy routines and rhythms. The demands of ministry can make finding a balance a difficult quest. Ministry is not a typical 9-5 job, and because of this, it

can be hard to sustain any long-term rhythm. The pressure that comes with a ministry job can create exhaustion and lead to unsatisfied emotions.

The next most prominent challenge, with almost half of participants (46%), involves family conflicts. Many women who do not yet have children fear what starting a family could mean for their ministry rhythm. A lot of guilt can emerge when ministry pulls women away from their families or when they cannot step in fully to family or ministry due to personal challenges. The lack of time in a day can make it difficult to balance it all. Also, as mentioned previously, childcare can be challenging to obtain and afford.

Multiple participants express having kids and struggling to manage work-life balance, often due to the requirements of the role and the limitations of time with family responsibilities. Balancing ministry expectations, which often arise outside of work hours because of the nature of ministry work, has been a challenge for Tonya. As an older Millennial, she has found out how to put more appropriate work-life boundaries in place, but this was not always easy to do as a young mother. She even went so far as to seek a lower title at a larger church in the hopes that the workload would be different, but she found that ministry is 24/7 by nature. Having supportive staff members and family members who are able to hold her accountable and help her guard her time has been incredibly impactful in her personal life. She explains how it can be difficult to relate to those who do not have the same family responsibilities:

It's hard for me, too, because I've been a mom since I was 17. It's even hard for me to relate to women who don't have kids just because it's so life-changing...my priorities are going to be different...I'm not going to bleed for the mission at the level that somebody who doesn't have kids might be able to. And like, that's your life stage, so that's cool that you can do that, but like, I love the Lord, I love my church, but I do have a family that it changes...like I am literally pouring my guts into this place and here my children are suffering for it, so yeah.

In Laura's situation, she echoes the necessity of boundaries and how a lack of boundaries led to unhealthiness within her family. Because her children were with her often at the church, they saw all sides of ministry life. This, unfortunately, led them not to want to participate in church as adults. Being limited by what she could do at the time, she shares that:

I don't know how I could have done it any differently, so I guess it's hard to say that I didn't handle it well, but looking back, I feel like I wish I'd had a bit more boundaries...because I loved doing that stuff and I loved serving, and so it was hard because I put my whole self into it all the time. And sometimes even brought them along with me...because you know, we're serving the Lord together, and I think that's a great example for my kids, but at the same time, I will be interested to see how the Lord redeems that later on, because right now, we're in a little bit of a tough patch...I'm just trusting the Lord.

Laura does not necessarily attribute the work-life balance struggle as a gendered issue but rather a personality and drive issue. Had she not had children in the mix, she believes that "I probably would have been at the church more...I probably would have lived there, would have had a cat, and we probably would be divorced."

The opposite experience seems true for Emily, as her children love being at church. The tension lies, however, in managing the tasks that come with working and being a mother. In preparing for weekend worship, she often has to wait until her husband gets home in the evenings so she can head over to the church to practice without distraction from the children. This can create separation between her and her husband since they often do not get to spend a lot of time together due to all of the responsibilities they shoulder. As a mother to a child with medical needs and living in a town far away from family or close friends, Emily often finds herself thinking, "How do I do this, and how do I be a mom... when is it all going to fall in line and make everything easier?"



Other struggles with work/life balance include the difficulty of avoiding overworking (12% of responses), facing health challenges (4% of responses), carrying the burdens of others and the weight of ministry (4% of responses), and having to plan weekend preparation around an inconsistent weekly schedule (2% of responses). Only 2% of responses indicated no challenges regarding work/life balance.

### Burnout

The biggest factor contributing to women feeling a desire to quit in ministry revolves around burnout. Out of all participants, 20% of responses reflect either a current or past experience of burnout leading to thoughts of quitting. When there are unhealthy staff dynamics, it can lead women in ministry towards the desire of quitting. 16% of participants explain how working with volunteers, feeling disrespected, and feeling unheard can create unhealthy tensions.

Also, the weight of family responsibilities can weigh heavily and uniquely on women in worship ministry. 14% of respondents identify this as a point of tension. Often, it involves children. It can be emotionally challenging to try to balance ministry with kids. Having children is demanding in and of itself, even outside the realm of ministry, which can create burnout. For women who do not yet have children, it can be stressful to imagine how to manage it all.

Out of all participants, only 14% cite never having felt the desire to quit while in ministry. Additionally, there are a few who are new to ministry and, because of that, have not yet experienced anything that would prompt a desire to quit. For the rest of the respondents, there is a mix of how often they have experienced this desire. It ranges from fairly often (ex., once a week) to rarely (ex., only once). All of these previously mentioned areas can contribute to the

prevention of women in vocational worship lasting long term as they try to manage and sustain work-life balance.

## **Mental Health**

Both Charlotte and Emily transparently share that they are currently struggling with their mental health for differing reasons. While Charlotte sees a counselor every week, she deals with depression, anxiety, OCD, and ADHD. Being that she lives at home, it also is a challenge to interact with family members who deal with similar mental health issues. While she desires to move out of her parent's house and seek another ministry opportunity eventually, her counseling is what has kept her sane:

I feel like what I've gone through over the last couple years with all the ministry changes and all of the struggles, it's rough. Being able to at least talk with my counselor and talk through those things, that's been really good and healthy to be able to at least talk through those conversations. And so, I feel like if I wasn't able to do that, then I would probably go crazy.

Emily, a mother who is also responsible for the worship ministry at their church, is experiencing burnout and loneliness— “Having to take care of schooling my kids and the youth ministry and the children's ministry and cleaning the church and worship, I'm approaching burnout quickly. And we've discussed that. We don't know how to fix it.” While currently on medication for depression and anxiety, she is far removed from family and does not have many friends locally with whom she can connect. This has been amplified in the past by post-partum depression and suicidal ideation, “and so, if I start feeling that way, I have to back up and tell my husband, hey, you know, we're back in this place again. And, you know, sometimes meds are what I need. Jesus is enough. I trust and believe that, but I have a chemical imbalance, and I need to take some

medication.” Thankfully, previous counseling and the use of medication have helped her cope with burnout and isolation, but she is not currently thriving as a mother, wife, or worship leader.

### **No Unique Hardships**

10% of survey participants reveal a feeling of no resistance to leadership opportunities within their current church environment. Likewise, 10% of women do not currently, or have not previously, faced any sort of unique hardship as a female. Even while ministry can be hard, these women would claim that they are not hindered or disrespected due to their gender.

Some participants may not have faced as many hurdles in their pursuit of joining or remaining in vocational worship ministry, or despite the hurdles, they have found themselves in a place where they can confidently declare that they are experiencing equality in their role. For Grace, she never felt like she was limited simply because of being a woman. While she acknowledges being a part of a denomination that would not usually allow women to teach or obtain pastoral roles, she has seen a shift in this lately. Likewise, even after experiencing that hiring process that she did, Brittany feels full authority to step into what God has called her to do, and she trusts that if He calls her, He will equip her and guide her to where she needs to be. It has not always been a smooth and easy journey, but as she explains:

I knew I just had to hold out for the right people who weren't going to look at me and be like, you're a woman. They're going to look at me and be like, you have this education, you are equipped, you sing beautifully, you have great leadership skills, you answer all these questions correctly, you're hired, like, you are a good fit for us. And that's what [church] was for me finally...and it's been the perfect fit.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, nine categories with multiple subcategories have been identified as unique hardships that women currently face or have faced in full-time vocational worship ministry. For

many participants, from their perceived experiences, difficulty arises in their vocation as worship leaders due to their gender through the presence of glass ceilings and chauvinistic tendencies. Participants share how they feel a need to gain respect through intentionality, with their musical skills, and sometimes within their denominational settings. Women have faced roadblocks when it comes to pursuing job prospects and trying to enter into vocational worship ministry. These things can create a lack of self-confidence and a warped idea of how personality traits can and should play into worship ministry and leading. Along with this, there are relational challenges that can arise, often due to unhealthy relationships with pastoral leadership, lack of communication and care from their staff teams, having to watch and balance appropriate staff interactions, experiencing differing male/female dynamics in the workplace, and even having conflicting relationships with other women. Many women still face financial discrepancies from their male counterparts or face financial challenges in general in their roles. The role of motherhood becomes a challenge in and of itself as some women are afraid to have children, women who do have children struggle to manage family responsibilities, and women experience differing physical and maternity needs than their male counterparts. This can create a struggle with work/life balance, leading some women to burnout. A few women share their struggle with mental health and how this exacerbates the challenges they face. Only 10% of participants share not facing any unique hardships in their role as a woman in full-time worship ministry.

Q1c. How do female worship leaders navigate hardships, family dynamics, and stress while in full-time ministry?

### **Stress Inducers**

There are a lot of ways that stress is induced in the lives of these women worship leaders. Some common themes revealed by survey participants involve stress in life circumstances, stress at home or with work-life balance, and self-inflicted stress, sometimes due to the weight of ministry. Worship leaders often deal with stressors due to life circumstances beyond their control. This was the most referenced form of stress inducement. Similarly, many participants reveal a struggle to balance work with home life, often due to the challenges of having a family. There is also a responsibility that comes with stewarding the call to ministry, which can cause a lot of self-pressure. In the same way, ministry itself can be incredibly challenging. The weight of stewarding this responsibility is often not taken lightly.

Roughly half of the participants share how often they feel stressed at work. Most participants describe stress as something that occurs a moderate amount of time or often. Out of those who share, only 4% of participants are not stressed often. 10% of women share that they do not feel supported in their personal lives. This can be due to location or due to lack of community. When ministry is all-consuming, it can prevent women from feeling like they can have a personal life outside of work, contributing to stress outcomes.

### **Counseling/Mental Health Wellness**

28% of participants seek to reduce stress through mental health wellness or counseling. This aids in better stress and mental health outcomes. Out of the ten interview participants, eight women share that their mental health is in a great spot. While this does not necessarily mean they

do not encounter stress or hardships, it reveals that they have learned to cope with the burdens of being a woman in worship ministry.

A common theme regarding mental health has been the influence of counseling and therapy on these women. Tonya, having experienced a traumatic experience at her last church, pursued counseling before entering into another ministry job. Likewise, she also got her child into counseling and pursued mental wellness over her ministry job. She still experiences the physical repercussions from the lack of support and care at her last church, which include tinnitus, nerve damage, facial neuralgia, etc. Still, her current environment and pastoral care have made a difference in her healing. Having a pastor overseeing a counseling center at her church has made her feel like she is counseled and poured into regularly. Grace has been able to go to therapy and find solace through exercising and getting outside. She shares, “I used to have a lot of panic attacks and put a ton of pressure on myself. I think we all put pressure on ourselves in this field...But I think I was living like that every day or a long time. It wreaked a lot of havoc on my body, so yeah, this is probably the most balanced and healthy that I’ve been in my career so far.” Viv is experiencing revitalized mental health, with therapy helping her to unlearn old thought patterns and learn how to sit with various emotions. Her church has provided five to seven mandatory counseling sessions with each staff member’s counselor of choice, and this has drastically helped her mental health and the health of their staff. Similarly, Laura has been provided counsel in the past, and it is offered as a resource to staff members as needed— “I think that’s one of those resources that I would say some people don’t have with their church, and I definitely am thankful that I have that.”

While some are not pursuing therapy or counseling, they find support and solace in those around them. Selah has had intense moments of depression and anxiety, but now she has people

who she can go to who will be honest with her. In the past, though, she has felt like, as a female, she could only go to her husband. Brittany has started having weekly checkpoints for accountability and leans strongly on her husband. While there are days with pure exhaustion, she finds herself “happy and joyful.” As someone who has struggled with depression in the past, she feels:

...like I finally found my joy. Joy, you can have joy every day but have a bad day. And that doesn't mean I'm not stressed. It doesn't mean I'm not exhausted. And it doesn't mean I don't have things that, you know, piss me off or happen that I want to rant about. But the joy of the Lord truly is my strength. And that's what's been getting me through the day.

This is why Brittany sought to pursue a career in worship ministry. She did not have the example of women in leadership to look up to or aspire to be, but God confirmed to her that he delights in her and her worship, which changed the trajectory of her life. Lastly, Eleanor has learned how to provide support for other’s struggles with empathy because of the influence that healthy counseling and processing has brought into her life.

### **Trusted Relationships**

Over half of participants (52% of responses) cite healthy relationships as the most prominent outlet for stress relief. As mentioned previously, 42% of survey participants have a female mentor and experience significant stress reduction due to having someone to go to for advice and accountability.

For Tonya, the success around work-life balance came from finding flexibility and trust from her pastors and coworkers. With five kids and the eldest in worship ministry, she reflects on what it means to steward full responsibilities as a mother and worship leader. What has helped tremendously was adjusting her schedule around her family needs. This is in stark contrast to

previous experiences she has had while working at churches. Now, she is fully supported by her pastors:

And the other cool thing about my pastors now is time is very flexible. I don't have to be at the office from 9-5...If I need to go pick up a kid from school or whatever...at my old church I would have to ask permission...and whereas pastors, I feel like this was a male thing too...they were never in the office. But yeah, I felt very watched. But like now I started doing that with my current church and they were like...you don't have to ask us if you would need to go to coffee. Just tell us so we know where you are, but like don't ask us anymore.

This trust not only provides logistical support as she manages being a mother of five with three children still in school but also provides emotional stability and respect for her work efforts and value as a mother. This is amplified by her husband, who has been a support system in helping her protect her time and has carried the weight of parenthood alongside her. Similarly, Eleanor has been able to find flexibility in her schedule, allowing her to work from home when the children are home from school and go into the office when they are in school. This support from her pastors has helped her children foster a healthy relationship with the church and a healthy understanding of what it means for their mother to be in worship ministry.

## **Rest**

### **Spiritual disciplines**

Finding time to rest or Sabbath is important for 26% of survey respondents. Similarly, 30% of respondents find stress relief and rest through spiritual disciplines. In seeking to find work-life balance with both work and family obligations, women have found success in stewarding their time and the Sabbath and prioritizing what matters in their lives. While this is not always done easily or well, it has drastically improved the overall experience of being working mothers in worship ministry. As Selah wisely reminds, in the midst of having to balance



more, “It looks like choosing not to partner with guilt when I have to make a decision for our family versus work.”

#### Stewarding family time

Older Millennial participants have learned many lessons as they recount how they had to decide to pursue rest through stewarding their time. It can be challenging for working moms because they often come home in the evening and have limited time with their children before they have to send them to bed and prepare for the next day. This is what prompted Selah to ask for an adjusted schedule so she could still accommodate all of her work needs but have more intentional time with her children after work. Shifting her schedule forward every day, with the support and permission of her church, enabled her to do just that. This, paired with a Sabbath Monday granted to every employee, gives everyone a break from the load of ministry. As she reiterates, this does not mean that pastors are unavailable to those in need, but she shares, “I can count on my one hand the times I’ve been asked to do something on our day of rest. So that gives us Saturday, we’re still working Saturday, but we’re not like in an office...and then Monday, it’s an actual day where we’re with our family all day.” After experiencing unhealthy seasons in their marriage and within stewarding the call to worship ministry, Selah learned to “[take] back in these areas and really honor each other...our God first, and each other, and that serving comes after that.”

#### Stewarding personal time

For participants who do not yet have children, balance has been found and is a work in progress. This work-life balance looks different than those with children. For instance, Grace claims, "This is the healthiest I've been in my life. Like I have a lot of flexibility...I got a horse

recently, and that is like my work-life balance.” While she has experienced burnout and anxiety working in previous church environments due to the size and tempo of events, she has been able to form and sustain a life outside of worship ministry:

I didn’t really get to do a lot of stuff. I was working a couple 12-hour days every week. It was just like, very different. It was kind of fulfilling in a lot of other ways, but I didn’t even realize that I was burnt out until I was like forced into rest from a car accident. So, I just kept going and going and going, and I was loving it. I was almost living on this adrenaline high for five years straight and I didn’t realize how actually like burnt out and anxious I was.

In her current church context, staff members receive two days off a week: one for Sabbath and another for household responsibilities. Plus, she is able to have a flexible schedule in and outside of the office, which has been, as she describes, “refreshing.” This enables her to pursue rest through a beloved activity, through which 32% of respondents also find rest.

## **Healthy Disciplines**

### **Prioritization**

Being able to prioritize tasks has been vital for Eleanor as she has only ever experienced working in full-time worship ministry as a mother. Because of this, she has had to be intentional to keep her children her main priority:

I think my main focus has always been making sure that they don’t think that the priority of the church or the needs of the church are taking priority over them. Sometimes, that has been hard in different seasons...I mean, it’s always busy, but you know, Christmas and Easter, things like that...But y’all need to understand that none of that is more important than you [her children].

Giving her children this assurance has enabled them to approach her as their mother and as a spiritual guide and pastor in their own lives. It has also laid a foundation of trust, so if something with the church has to take precedence, they do not question that they remain their mother’s first

priority. This was incredibly important for Eleanor as she was a pastor's daughter and understood the toll it took on her as a child. This is why she is adamant about "trying to balance and make sure that everybody knows, including my husband, that there's no ministry position, there's no church event, there's nothing in that that's more important than any of them." Prioritizing like this, even with the support of her pastors, does require significant energy as a mother as compared to someone without children:

I do think it's a little unique as a mom. I mean, if I was a single woman or if we were married and we didn't have kids, obviously, I wouldn't have to necessarily look at, hey, I'm doing this, but I have kids in school, or but I have to go pick them up, or whatever. There are those things, like even the logistical things, that I have to think of as a mom and balancing time of like, hey, I need to go meet with this person, but I have to be out by this time because I have to go wait in the drive line. Which is going to be sitting there for an hour, and I get work done in the drive line too, but it's just, you know, I can't be like in a coffee shop meeting with somebody. So yeah, there's definitely like demands on my time that I have to think of in that perspective of like, I have motherly responsibilities and duties that I also have to take care of.

Yet even with these different responsibilities to shoulder, Eleanor believes that women are gifted uniquely to carry the weight. Being able to walk this out firsthand enables her to be more sensitive to women and new mothers as they try to navigate the complexities of working full-time because she has had to learn through her own failures and successes.

### Boundaries

There are benefits to being a single woman in ministry, and this is a sentiment that Charlotte feels. While she desires to find a supportive spouse to carry the mental and emotional weight of ministry, and while this was mirrored in a healthy way for her as a child, she also recognizes that she has flexibility and freedom to do things that she otherwise would not be able to accomplish with a family. An example of this is her passion for mission trips— "I just got back from a mission trip. I probably would not have been able to go on a long mission trip like

that if I had a family and kids and all these things...I feel like there's kind of two different sides of it, depending on your perspective.”

For some, being a single woman in ministry does not come without its struggles and challenges. Viv experienced this as she moved to an entirely new city during the pandemic to join a church's worship staff. As a younger Millennial, she is navigating the natural transitions that come with friendships and has learned how to keep boundaries in place even without having a solid or healthy support system:

So, I have to be okay with being alone, and I have to be OK with people saying no, I have to be OK with showing up for myself, which means having consistent boundaries, right, and these boundaries are for me, not for other people. I'm not trying to manipulate people through my boundaries. I will get asked a lot more than the average person because people understand my flexible schedule to be more flexible because I don't have immediate family here, I don't have kids, I don't have a husband. So, I find that I'm asked to do a lot more things, and part of how I've counteracted that is just like if I'm not on the clock, I don't look at my email.

Through therapy and guidance, she has learned the difference between helping others and being taken advantage of, especially as she has worked to establish a flexible schedule. While ministry requires pastors and leaders to pour out into others, it is healthy first to seek the Lord to determine where He desires one's energy to be poured out. By establishing these boundaries now, Viv is hopeful that she will have a healthy work-life balance if she ever desires to get married or have children. If she does not, she finds herself worthy enough of these boundaries regardless.

## **Conclusion**

While women face unique hardships within worship ministry, they navigate these hardships, family dynamics, and stress through healthy avenues to the best of their abilities. By first recognizing some stress inducers, Millennial women can pursue health and holistic wellness

through counseling and mental health wellness, fostering trusted relationships, and actively pursuing rest through spiritual disciplines, stewardship of family time, and stewardship of personal time. Likewise, healthy disciplines can be fostered, leading to appropriate and balanced prioritization of responsibilities and boundaries with others.

Q1d. What support do female worship leaders feel they need in order to be successful?

### **Relational Support**

Roughly a third of survey participants (28%) share how a feeling of relational support from others impacts the overall experience as women seek to grow in their roles. Regarding supporting females, some participants reference a need and a desire to connect with more women. Likewise, there is a desire to connect with women in a similar vocational role. Having a space to discuss how to better support women in worship ministry would be a starting point for churches seeking to progress in this area.

### **Mentorship**

10% of survey responses indicate a need for mentorship by other women. Despite the benefits, about half of the participants (48%) do not currently have mentors. Almost all of these women would ideally love to have a mentor, but they do not currently have access within their sphere of women worship leaders who have gone before. Having a woman to go to who has walked a similar experience can help guide what it means to be a strong woman walking out their calling. This would be especially helpful for women who are navigating what it means to be a working mother with multiple responsibilities to balance. While the desire is there for many women, it can be challenging to find women mentors in the field of worship. Even being proactive in seeking out mentorship does not always prove fruitful.

Out of the responses, 10% of women indicate that they do not have a female mentor in worship, but they do have female mentors in other areas of ministry or life. Even women mentors outside of worship can positively impact one's experience in vocational worship ministry. Coworkers and other positive women mentors can influence women's longevity in worship because they can provide a clearer path for women in ministry as a whole. Yet, even with these other mentors, a gap can still be felt specifically within the context of worship. 16% of survey responses indicate the significance that mentors and/or counselors provide, giving a place of full transparency where women can process both their ministries and their personal lives.

A little less than half of the interview participants share that they do not currently have a female mentor and that this impacts their worship ministry experience. Tonya explains that while she has connected with worship leaders who have gone before her, "There aren't a ton of women in this role that are ahead of me...but I do have spiritual mentors like within my church. So, I have loved that." Her spiritual mamas have gotten her through the difficult times in her life, and while she has peers who are good friends in worship, having a female mentor, specifically in worship, would be impactful.

For Grace, she has had difficulty finding a mentor locally. By her definition, a mentor is "somebody that's been in this for, like, 30 or 40 years. Like, that is really hard to find." She has had connections to a few women who would meet this criterion, including Rita Springer, but as she continues, "There's not a lot of women right now...so I haven't really found that entirely." This would be a similar experience for Charlotte, who had a mentor in the past but has most recently found mentorship through Worship Circle. Since she no longer participates in Worship Circle, she has felt the gap:

I feel like the one from the church was probably like my most consistent mentor. And I think that was something, having her, being able to know, like, if I dealt with a situation or something, I could, you know, text or call her, and be like, hey, I just went through this...I feel like I did for a little bit with Worship Circle but I feel like now that the term is over, I don't really have that consistency anymore. So, I think that's hard, like I would really love to have somebody, you know, that's here or really close by so I could grab coffee or lunch or something and talk through things. So, I think that's something that I've really been wanting, and I've tried, but a lot of times it's where people are like, oh, I'm too busy, or I'm already mentoring people, so I have tried to find people closer, but it's been a problem to do that.

This echoes the sentiment that mentorship in person makes a significant difference and that depending upon location, finding a woman mentor in worship can be incredibly difficult.

Likewise, not only does having a mentor in person make a difference, but explicitly, having a female mentor makes a difference. Brittany shares

I don't have a mentor as of now. And I want one so bad who is a female, because while I love the people that I have above me, the leadership above me, it's not quite the same. You know, I can only get certain aspects from them. So, I am currently actively looking for a female to mentor me and to kind of be that touchpoint with me.

Yet even with the difficulty of finding a female mentor, there is hope for how the future of worship ministry is being shaped with the addition of more women into vocational worship ministry— “I'm excited to see how, like, worship changes throughout the years of more women being added and more women being given the opportunity to write music and to lead bigger congregations and everything and not be expected to hold a secretary job while doing it.” A generation of Millennial Worship Leaders is hoping to rise up and be an example and influence for younger generations of females hoping to make a living in worship ministry.

Over half of the interview participants share that they have found meaning and support through female mentors in worship. Viv has been blessed with four mentors, three outside of her church. These mentors have helped to give her perspective on the state of worship ministry as a whole:

...when they come to me with stuff they're going through—how do I word this because, like, when I word it, it makes it sound worse—but like when I hear the problems and the situations that they're dealing with, and I think of maybe ten years ago, like things I was hearing in conferences and whatnot, like I know the Lord has been so honoring in like who they are and where their hearts are at in the work that they're doing in their spaces to help women flourish. So, like his provision over them too, and placing them in my life, like it's nothing short of...it's an answered prayer.

Having these mentors has helped Viv keep a heart of gratitude and understanding. Laura also has sought out multiple mentors who have given her a new and profound sense of confidence through sharing their experiences and stories. She finds insight not only from older mentors but also from women in worship who are of all ages. With the impact of these spiritual mentors in her life, she shares, "I don't know that you can really put a price tag on that gift to have someone sit with you and just pour into you from a spiritual standpoint."

Willow expresses the desire and need for accountability from her mentors, who are both near and far. These are women that she holds in high regard and goes to regularly for advice and wisdom. Likewise, Selah has found wisdom from mentors on the days when she desired to quit ministry:

One of them, really good friends and mentors, wrote a book called *Raised to Stay*. And it's about staying in church, even when it's hard to...A lot of racial things were happening during that time, like the beginnings of something that we're seeing racially and socially. She just began to tell people, "No, you were raised to stay and stick around when it gets hard. You were not raised to tap out when your emotions are feeling tapped or when you're feeling like your mental health is dwindling like you weren't raised to quit; you were raised to rest..." I've had lots of female leaders who have helped me to say no, honey, you can do it. Don't quit. Like, we need you at the table...

It is these mentors in Selah's life that have helped her stay the course when ministry became overwhelming. Emily reiterates this by sharing that her mentor is someone she calls when she is struggling with the ins and outs of worship ministry and needs someone to listen.



Eleanor has found mentors within worship to be helpful, but she has found mentors outside of worship ministry to be even more beneficial. While she learns from those in the field of worship, she also believes that:

Just because they're in worship doesn't mean you're the best leader. You can find leaders all over...so I want some leaders that don't have anything to do with that that I can bounce things off of just in the perspective of being a good leader for my team members and being able to shepherd them and pastor them well.

### Pastoral support

Overwhelmingly, participants (76%) cite their relationships with their pastor as positive. Many women report feeling fully supported by their pastoral staff. A sense of trust can exist between a pastor and a worship leader, making for healthy dialogue and communication. Having a pastor who encourages healthy growth and makes themselves available increases these feelings of support and care. When a pastor can manage the divide between being a boss and being a pastor, it can make a person feel seen and known.

The most significant way that women in worship feel supported in their personal lives is through relational support, with 66% of respondents citing this as impactful to their experience. When a woman feels cared for relationally by their church and staff, it can create a sense of belonging. Having multiple support systems blatantly aids women in pursuing longevity in worship ministry. Likewise, having relationships with both families and church staff members creates an environment of trust.

Many women are currently experiencing healthy dynamics with coworkers and leadership, but many have not had healthy dynamics at previous churches. This is true for Tonya, who has two males above her in leadership who she respects greatly, but she had to shift her mindset after coming from an environment where she did not feel championed as a female in

worship. She describes her current pastor as shepherding, checking in with her weekly, and caring about her as a whole person. He is also humble and champions her gifts, even going so far as encouraging her that, “you’re not just here to execute my vision. You have a seat at the table. Like you’re here to speak into the vision.” Not only does he speak these words of affirmation, but he actively puts them into practice regularly.

Grace, similarly, is experiencing an incredibly healthy dynamic with her staff of less than ten. She describes the environment as being collaborative, super relational, fun, and pastoral with lots of love amongst coworkers. She has “never once felt that I’m treated differently because of my gender. I’ve never felt belittled. I’ve been trusted with a lot,” even with leading things from stage like communion. There has never been a time at her current ministry where she has felt silenced.

Laura’s current staff dynamic is “the most cohesive and united church staff that I’ve ever been a part of. Everyone genuinely wants the other person and their ministry to succeed, and so for that, I feel like there’s not a competition.” With this, however, is the recognition that as their church grows, things may shift and change as people vie for more space and experience growth pains. Currently, however, they are enjoying their interactions and health as a team.

Eleanor shares that she feels empowered as a woman by both her pastor and his wife. This creates a great working dynamic amongst the three of them. She shares a recent story about a conference they attended together, where the first three speakers were females. Her pastor was the one to point out the intentionality behind this as an effort to shift some of the leadership to women and take a stand that women have just as much of a voice as men do. Her pastor noticing this reflects his own philosophies and interactions. Eleanor shares that her pastor and his wife “are there to fully support me and kind of help protect just the boundaries that we need to put in

place,” particularly around conversations and meetups. There is trust but also measures to ensure that all parties are respected openly, publicly, and transparently. They have found a healthy rhythm with their own version of the “Billy Graham” rule. Beyond merely being supported, Eleanor also feels empowered as a woman to fully utilize her gifts and balance out the strengths of her pastor:

Our working relationship is really great. I feel like we have a lot of trust between all of us. In fact, we actually had a conversation where he said, you are empowered to lead as a woman. Do not lead like a man. There's nothing worse than a woman who is trying to lead from the perspective of a man because you're trying to lead from a place that you're not. Use your characteristics and use your giftings and use the anointing that the Lord has given you as a female and lead in those strengths. And then, in the strengths that you don't have, I have those. And then when we can work together, then it's going to be more powerful and you're going to see a unity within the staff and the leadership that a lot of places don't have.

#### Relationships with male counterparts

The majority of women believe that they have a positive relationship with both men and women on their staff, with 75% of women sharing how these relationships can be a positive influence on their lives. These relationships can present themselves differently because of gender, but this can be healthy with appropriate boundaries and accountability.

Grace and Brittany share how positive interactions with male coworkers have impacted their experience serving in vocational worship ministry. For Grace, her male counterparts have become like brothers who are there to help, balance out the gifts of everyone on staff, and offer wisdom. Likewise, she shares that, “My senior pastor is highly relational, highly pastoral. I feel like I can pretty much share any sort of sticky situation that I’m in, and he’s got some really good wisdom for me.” Brittany experiences what it is like to be the only female on staff in the worship departments among her cluster of campuses. She shares, “They all support me tremendously. We

laugh, we joke, we do lunch every Monday. They are kind of my biggest advocates.” She jokes about being the only woman around a bunch of testosterone and how her being hired as the first female worship director for their church was a significant milestone.

Tonya, however, differs in her experiences with male coworkers. While she has experienced varying degrees of support, with some experiences being positive, she was adamant to share about men who have struggled to serve under her leadership as a woman— “It was a total ego thing...” What eventually led her to a place where she feels supported and is thriving came about through the hardships of male ego and misogyny.

#### Relationships with women counterparts

Similarly, there are varying degrees of support and experiences with participants amongst their female staff members. Three interview participants share their positive interactions with female coworkers. Grace, who works with females who are both older and younger than her, celebrates the familial relationship that has grown, claiming that they have become like sisters— “There’s a tone of trust there...they’re both great.” Selah echoes this dynamic, emphasizing that camaraderie has been built because everyone has fought for that to be the environment— “...We’re not competing with each other. We are literally sharpening each other.” Brittany appreciates the differences between male and female coworker interactions:

My females are the ones that I rant to. Boys will be boys, as much as I hate that saying. They talk about gross things. And they are men, and they do what they gotta do. There are times when I walk into a female’s [office], I’m like, I just need estrogen for like five minutes...The women here are amazing, and they’re fantastic, and I love them all dearly. And we do women’s retreats and stuff like that. So, we do get to hang out occasionally together. But we have like a women’s group chat going where we just like rant about the men sometimes – we’re just like, “just walked into this” or “just heard this conversation happening when I walked past this office.” And it’s funny, but they’re all amazing and I absolutely love that everyone that I work with is supportive and amazing.

### Congregational impact

When staff and coworkers unite in thought and practice, especially in the ministry, it becomes contagious and tangible for others. This is the case for Laura's staff. Because they have created a culture of positivity and sought to treat each other with respect, the congregation has grown to love the staff and fully support them in their roles. They are living in the fruit of this, allowing them to press forward without experiencing complaints about women in leadership or how women in worship choose to lead. It has become rooted in their culture internally and externally. This gives hope and confidence to churches that are striving for the same.

Overall, the influence of healthy relationships cannot be understated. When women feel relationally supported in all spheres, it impacts their vocational experience and directly correlates to better long-term outcomes. Churches can help support women in vocational worship ministry through avenues of mentorship with other women, particularly in worship. Likewise, pastoral support from the pastor and staff collectively creates environments of trust and authenticity. Healthy relationships with both male and female coworkers, as well as interactions with the congregation, are vital. When these are fostered with intentionality, most women in worship will thrive in their assignment.

### **Encouragement**

While Charlotte struggles in her current church environment, she shares how encouragement to stick with it can make a difference in her remaining in worship ministry. The moments where she feels encouraged are life-giving— “For me, like, words of affirmation is like one of my top love languages and so...that's a big deal...just to have that encouragement because I feel like even just one word of discouragement like just shuts me down.”

Feeling valued practically and as a person is significant in improving a woman's experience in worship ministry. For instance, Laura shares that she would love more financial compensation, but the most important thing would be "Just feeling like I have a good relationship with my pastor and that he sees value in what I bring to the table." Willow expounds upon this, claiming that it is not simply the role that brings satisfaction, but what matters is the environment in which that role is fostered:

Like if you go into an environment that you don't feel heard or you don't feel listened to, those are the times where you like you feel like I'm done, like I'm quitting. Like when you don't feel like, you know, you have a voice, or not that it has to go your way, but that you are able to speak and, you know, say certain things. So, I feel like continuing in a healthy environment where, you know, we've been through such hardship and now that we are able to know what toxic leadership is and make sure that we're keeping the Lord first in our leadership and our decisions and what we're doing for ministries.

This healthy environment, coupled with emotional support from the pastors and staff members, helps create strong bonds and connections that prevent someone from wanting to leave. When tasks become more important than people, things can fall apart. Even when experiencing hardship,

I feel like that even in that moment, I never thought, oh, I want to leave when that was happening because I'm like, I've seen it before and the Lord's taken us through it. And I think it's those moments where you aren't being checked in on, or you're being like looked over in communication that makes you feel like, well, I guess like, you know, I'm done, I'm out. I think it's when we're checking in on each other and we are treating each other like brothers and sisters and like that relationship is more important than roles and responsibilities and we put more deposits into people than we do withdrawals.

A key part of feeling valued and supported is related to pastoral care and transparency. Eleanor has spent years not trusting the leadership above her because of a lack of transparency and trust that she could fully share what she was experiencing. She rightfully asks, "But if you have to fear your job or your position or your support from the people and leadership above you, if you can't be open and transparent about things and they are your pastors, then why are they

your pastors? You should never be scared to go to a pastor, right? That's what they're there for. That's what we're there for." Creating a staff environment free from judgment and shame with supportive pastoral staff is vital in helping women feel seen and known. While there are situations that would cause someone to have to step down from their position in ministry, as Eleanor explains:

Too many times I've seen it to where people go to leaders, and they're like, hey, I'm struggling with this, and they're like, you need help with that... You can't be seen in the church. You can't be seen in a position of leadership. I don't want to talk to you. I want you to go get help. And then maybe we'll touch base at some point down. That's not helpful. That's where people get hurt. That's where people walk away from the church.

Therefore, encouragement from those in their environments impacts a worship leader's perception of success within their role. Finding ways to be intentional with encouragement and support throughout the work week will aid in positive longevity outcomes. This is especially true if women feel encouraged not only in their work environments but also in their personal lives to pursue the call that God has placed on their lives. Women want to feel as if they are valued, seen, and heard. Cultivating healthy churches that prioritize this will enable women to feel supported in their success at their jobs.

### **Opportunities for Growth and Development**

The majority of survey participants share that they have experienced opportunities to grow in their roles in various ways and how this has affirmed them in their calling and aided in their success vocationally. The two most prominent themes that emerge are in the capacity of promotion within their roles, with 56% of women sharing how this has impacted their vocational trajectory and leadership development opportunities, with 52% of women finding success in their role as they develop their leadership abilities. Even if women have not yet received a promotion,

having the avenue for promotion has given them something to work towards. Likewise, as they develop as leaders, they are often given opportunities to teach, preach, and lead others in varying capacities.

While not as significant, other opportunities for leadership growth emerge as impactful in a participant's success in vocational ministry, such as opportunities to pursue ordination (4% of responses), experience financial growth (12% of responses), grow in leadership oversight (20% of responses), and grow in feeling supported within their current role from other staff members (6% of responses). 20% of participants feel a lack of opportunities within their current role and/or church environment. This can be due to a lack of opportunity to pursue promotion within their current role, which can have negative implications for the Millennial women worship leader's vocational experience. 8% of survey participants share a desire to grow in theology and pursuing pastoral roles or titles.

### Empowerment

For some participants, leadership growth comes through feeling fully empowered in their worship ministry role. This is the case for Grace, as she has had total freedom and trust to follow her instincts and what the Lord is speaking to her. While she would naturally prefer more boundaries and structure, she has relationships with worship leaders whom she can contact for guidance. Charlotte has been asked to start helping with her church's kids and student ministries, which has opened up opportunities for her to grow in her role as leader over communications. Trust has also been given in song selection, teaching of songs, and pastoral moments from the platform. She does admit, however, that "Some days it feels like there's more trust while other



days...I felt like you thought you were trusting me with this, and now there's not, you know, so I feel like there is some inconsistency in that.”

Similarly, Willow has been empowered to essentially create and build out her role. She has complete control over her schedule, enabling her to create a discipleship and mentoring program, teach music lessons to team members, and propose and oversee the creation of their first album:

So, I feel like opportunities would be like growing the ministry, not necessarily growing, like, my idol. Does that make sense? Like growing what I'm doing. I'm able to have more leadership and even, like, experience and things that I never...I always had these dreams of my mind for our team and our ministry. And now it's like it's coming to fruition.

Leadership opportunities are also given through the entrustment of pastoral conversations with attenders and volunteers. As Selah shares, she is constantly asked to step in the gap and have hard conversations, which allows her to grow in discernment and lose the fear of man. She feels empowered by this: "In general, in the world, and even in the church world, we ask men to do that all the time...We don't often ask women to have those conversations.”

While Eleanor currently serves in the capacity of a pastor, she does not yet have the title of worship pastor. The church does, however, bestow that title once they deem someone is fully functioning in that role. With their church being small, she is hopeful that there is room for growth in this area as everything else grows in tandem. She is, however, given permission to contract with other churches to help teach and establish worship culture.

#### Perceptions of other women in worship ministry

Charlotte's view of women thriving in ministry has been somewhat tainted. When friends she thought were thriving in ministry revealed that they were struggling and hurt by their experiences, her views shifted. From her perspective, women may feel that she is also thriving in

ministry, but she is not— “I think that's the hard thing nowadays where there's so many people. Most people are, you know, they're like, oh, yeah, they look like they're thriving, but a lot of times they're not. And so, I think that it's hard to see that. To actually see the truth of are people thriving or are they not.” Therefore, finding women thriving in worship ministry as role models becomes paramount for longevity.

#### Finding women role models

While many participants have been impacted at large by women thriving in ministry, such as celebrity speakers and worship leaders, not every participant has experienced this close to home. There is a recognition that these celebrities can easily hide behind a veneer, so it is hard to accurately say that they witness women thriving in ministry. As Tonya shares,

This is probably glorified all through social media and stuff like that...like I remember one time thinking of how is it that here I am like stressed at the level of my life...how do these women like travel over the world, have kids, do these events...and so dreams definitely shifted.

After being in ministry, however, Tonya’s dreams and priorities have shifted to those in her local community. Selah echoes a similar sentiment about celebrity women who have impacted her life. While she may not be directly connected to them daily, these women have “helped me to know it’s possible. I didn’t know that it was possible to be in full-time ministry.” Grace knows of some women in ministry locally, but not many. Being in a predominately Catholic and Presbyterian area lends itself naturally to having more men than women in ministry. So, it is more challenging to see women thriving around her.

Four interview participants share how they regularly see women thriving in full-time ministry. Laura shares boldly,

I can literally visualize four people right now that I am in constant, consistent communication with that are in my area and are thriving in vocational ministry. I would say again, for me, it's a confidence builder. It's one of those things where I mean, I think the hard part is the denomination that we are in. You see less of it, so to know that I have two other females that are in my same denomination that are thriving as they lead worship in their church vocationally...it is very much confidence building.

As she remembers what led her to ministry, Willow is surprised that she was given opportunities as young as she is. Seeing her mentors thrive in ministry, though, "has been helpful to see them walking their calling, be supported while also, you know, having a family and being a mom, being a wife." It is inspiring to Eleanor, who has hope to see others thrive in ministry successfully:

And I can see it being done successfully alongside the men that are empowering them to do it. And so, while that's still an area that a lot of places are growing in, I do know that it's out there, and I do know that more places are opening up to it. And so, it's hopeful to be like, hey, if people are open to it, it is being done, and it is being done well. And there are people that we can look to and learn from to make more places like that stronger. And I think that with that being in place and more people being able to learn from it, there will be a point where we have a super strong outlook on women in ministry..."

For Emily, all of the women she knows in ministry are thriving. While she may be on her own journey and facing her own struggles, she shares that:

It gives me hope that at some point in our ministry, I'll feel more like I'm thriving and not just hanging on by a thread. And so, until that time comes, I'm good with hanging on by a thread and waiting for that thriving season. And I think we're starting to push into that here. And so, I'm excited for that.

In conclusion, women desire to pursue opportunities for growth. These opportunities are not always tied to a title but can also include opportunities to grow and stretch their abilities as pastors and leaders. Feeling empowered is vital to positive perceptions of their role and place in ministry. Likewise, as related to mentorship, having positive perceptions of other women in ministry can be a catalyst for empowerment and healthy self-confidence. Finding women role

models can be inspiring and motivating as they walk out what it looks like to be in full-time worship ministry.

### **Financial and Practical Support**

Financial support, while not the most pressing thought, does remain an issue for 10% of survey participants who share a need for better benefits, which can involve better maternity leave, fixing the pay discrepancies, and having more assistance with childcare. Likewise, 12% of women express a need in receiving adequate job tools, which can include vocal coaching, access to songs, and ability to attend conferences, as examples.

As churches hire and seek to retain women in ministry roles, understanding women's financial needs and burdens is strongly related to their ability to remain in ministry long-term. This is especially true for mothers, single women, primary breadwinners, etc. While 10% of women specifically reference the need for better benefits and more financial assistance related to family needs, the concept of better financial compensation was referenced numerous times, even if not directly tied to the blatant experience of being a woman in ministry.

### **Flexibility**

Flexibility is also referenced as something that aids women in their personal lives (10% of responses) and numerous times throughout the breadth of research. This can present itself in different ways, such as the flexibility to take time off as needed. This can also look like flexibility with work scheduling. For instance, one participant shares how flexibility enables her to pursue a second job to help increase her income. This includes an inherent need for pastoral care from leadership and staff (10% of responses) and an understanding of family needs and dynamics (6%).

Having support in time management and scheduling enables women to balance their unique responsibilities, which often include managing a household and caring for children outside of their routine work responsibilities. As a primarily weekend job, this can be even more challenging and require significant time away from familial and personal needs. Therefore, ministries that can find ways to support a flexible work schedule and structure can aid women in balancing work and personal life/family.

### **Women-Oriented Support**

Some churches have taken leaps forward to create environments where women are better able to achieve what is set before them, such as with maternity leave, childcare, and even financially. This has been true in Selah's experiences, as she shares that no glass ceiling is evident in her current role, at least organizationally, because everyone fought for that to be the case. For instance, there was a fight for maternity leave to be eight weeks instead of six weeks, which she claims is still not great, but at least moving in the right direction. Her church has also experimented with programs that provide reduced childcare on campus for women, whether staff or volunteer, so they can remain connected and plugged in with working for the church while being empowered to care for their kids without sacrificing one over the other. Financially, consideration is not given in preference to females over males; rather, it depends upon the individual's capacity. If they are producing more, have more experience, or even have more mouths to feed—this is all considered. While this may not benefit the single individual quite as much, it does, to a great extent, benefit mothers and families.

Where we've been and where we're going

Yet, even with many of these women sharing the obstacles they have faced during their vocational career, there is gratefulness for how far churches have come in recent history regarding women in ministry leadership, there is contentment in where God has called them, and there is hope for more accessible spaces for women to pursue their God-given callings in vocational worship ministry. As Tonya shares, "I really feel like I'm in the position I would ever want to be...So I really am content, honestly." Eleanor emphasizes the lengths that churches and church leaderships have come in recognizing the unique strengths of both men and women and how utilizing and representing both in ministry represents a well-rounded view of God reflected in His church. She describes, "There's things that women possess that men don't, and things that men possess that women don't. Or maybe it's not that we don't possess them, but they are stronger in one or the other." In other words, men and women are better together, and they reap great benefits from working in harmony. Yet while this is true, and while Eleanor believes "that the glass ceiling is starting to come up a little bit...it definitely can feel squashed...there's still a lot of churches who do not believe in women in leadership and women in ministry. And so, it can be absolutely a little tough." Willow shares the sentiment that ministry is hard but believes that most women who enter ministry are not actively thinking about the ladder to climb but more about how they can fully step into where God has called them. Because of her current church environment, these beliefs are even more solidified:

I feel like in ministry, I don't feel like there's this ladder that I personally am wanting to climb. Like, if I just stay [in] worship for the rest of my time, I feel that I'm just using my calling and I'm not demanding to be something else. So I would say, like, to the world, it would look like a glass ceiling because there's, like title-wise, nothing that I'm climbing for or nothing that I know is next for me title-wise, but like job experience and like what you're able to add and like what you're able to do, I feel very free and being able to do things in like building out what I do for my job.

Similarly, Brittany echoes that being a woman in ministry is complex, and there will be some kind of glass ceiling. Still, at the same time, the desire to be a preacher or go further is not necessarily there for her in ministry. While in her specific context, there are executive-type roles in worship, and while she may desire to pursue that down the road, she believes that “I would be highly considered—my church obviously doesn’t have a problem with women in leadership.”

### Self-advocacy

As referenced earlier, some participants share that they feel fully empowered as women in worship ministry. For instance, Grace shares that she has “never felt stifled in any way for being a woman.” This sense of empowerment has sometimes had to come through self-advocacy. This is an experience that Brittany has walked through, sharing that she has a medical condition that makes her menstrual cycle debilitating on the first day. While it was an awkward conversation, she advocated to her campus pastor for flexibility to work remotely one day each month. She was able to come to a resolution because of her proactive communication and encourages other women to speak up for their unique needs:

...it just takes the female deciding that she's gonna speak up. And if your leadership doesn't like that, then they hired the wrong female, and they're not truly, you know, okay with having women in leadership or having women on staff at a church. That's just something that we have to deal with as women, is having that bias standard everywhere...

Because women are leading the way in advocacy, empowerment is becoming more of the norm.

Eleanor emphasizes that there has been a lot of progress in the last five to ten years, which has changed the environment for many women in worship ministry. This has led her to become passionate about paving the way for future women to work in ministry long term because:

Me, as a woman in ministry, will have a more unique voice to the women that are coming in, and the women that are willing to step into that, and giving them like, hey, you have just as much anointing and calling as any man does in this area and don't feel lessened by it just because of your gender. And there are going to be churches that are going to say to the contrary, but that means that that's not your place. So, find the places and find the people that are standing behind you and rallying behind you and championing you. That is where your place is supposed to be.

### Invited to the table

While much progress has been made in the field of worship for women in full-time ministry, there still remains an overarching lack of support that many participants intentionally share. This lack of support can present itself in a few different ways, including a lack of feeling heard and invited to share opinions, a lack of support as a working mother, and a lack of support from other females in worship ministry.

At times, women have felt as if they were excluded from relevant work conversations, whether intentionally or not. Willow leaned into conversations with her coworkers and leaders after feeling as if she was not invited into conversations that dealt directly with worship at their church. While this lack of communication was often unintentional, it did create questions for Willow regarding whether or not her gender and age played a role in the team dynamics. As she communicates:

I don't feel like it's ever been like, you're a woman, so you can't do XYZ. But there's been some communication where I don't know if it's just communication that we missed...and I talked with my director, and I said, I feel like I'm being overlooked, or I feel like I'm not being seen, and you're making a call that directly affects me, and I'm not involved even in the process of talking about it.

Experiencing this gap in support and communication has caused a lot of self-reflection, and while this has been positive in many ways, Willow had to fight externally and internally to create healthy lines of communication with her team. Similarly, Brittany did not feel she had a voice



when she was first hired as a worship leader. She believed that "...that's how it's going to be. I'm a woman in ministry. I just need to get over it." After a few months of attempting to withhold her thoughts and opinions, she self-advocated to her leadership that she felt micromanaged and like she had no say in her department. As she recalls:

So, I was like, I love you both, but you hired me because you trusted me that I was good at my job and that I was, you know, equipped enough to do what you would ask me to do. I understand I have some growing to do. It's my first full-time ministry job, but some of this I have down, like, you know, I'm not green. I'm not new to ministry at all...so I kind of set them down, and we had a heart-to-heart moment a few months in. And I was like, if this is not what you were looking for, let me know now. I was like, but you hired someone who has a voice and has an opinion, and I would like to use it.

This self-advocacy and healthy communication led to reform on her team. She now feels fully empowered in her role and confident in sharing her opinions and dreams for the worship ministry.

### Support for mothers

The area most requested to be better resourced for women in vocational worship ministry revolves around support for women and moms (20% of responses). One of these areas specifically includes the need for childcare support. This also manifests as a need for more time and schedule flexibility while raising kids.

For others, complexity arises when the women work full-time and enter motherhood. This was the case with Emily, where she used to feel seen and heard in her job until she became a mother. While she and her husband have worked together in ministry and were hired as package deals, becoming a mother caused her to feel pushed aside without a voice. In an attempt to self-advocate, she was met with resistance. Her husband's support, though, prompted them to relocate to a more supportive church environment. Sadly, as she shares, "And that's something

that I hear so often from my female friends in ministry. There's no support for me here, and I don't know how much longer I can do it."

#### Support from females

Lastly, lack of support from other females in ministry was revealed as a cause for not feeling heard as a woman in ministry. While participants have previously shared the struggles or complexities specifically with pastor's wives, Eleanor shares about the dynamic with female staff members. While she has seen healthy camaraderie, she has also experienced the effects of jealousy and other females feeling threatened in their roles. This especially plays out when females feel that only a certain number of females can be on staff, leading to contentious relationships as they vie for their seat at the table. It becomes challenging because,

...even within women, instead of us empowering each other and being like, hey, you do have a voice. Like God has called you uniquely as his daughter to stand beside the men and work together. We're like, no, you can't. Or I don't want to teach you because I'm afraid that you'll come in and take it from me. And that's really sad.

Grace has a passion for unity and collaboration. She sees a need for women worship leaders to learn from each other and help each other thrive and grow. Through coaching and helping others, she hopes to not only be ignited in her passion for remaining in ministry but to help spur on other women in their pursuit of worshipping the Lord.

#### **Pace and Rest**

For those hoping to achieve longevity in full-time worship ministry, pace and boundaries become incredibly important. As Tonya advises:

Remembering that it's a marathon and not a sprint. I'm a sprinter, and so like having people in place who keep that in check, so like my husband, my pastors...I mean, as much as I would love to say that I could, any person could keep perfect boundaries, I think somebody having an outside perspective, especially for my personality...people

who really help me make the trip and not kill myself in the process is probably what I would need.

An important part of keeping a sustainable pace is practicing healthy rhythms of rest. Selah shares the importance of the Sabbath as a means of releasing control to God:

I trust you in this day and I trust that the Sabbath was made for us to rest and get healing from God. So, I'm resting on the day I'm healing. I'm able to hear God not just for work. I literally turn off my work...I only talk to people who are going to speak life into me that are like life giving on that day. I'm hanging out with our family.

Along with the Sabbath, worship leaders need to pursue God daily. While this should be evident, it can be easy to put a relationship with God on the back burner to completing ministry tasks and responsibilities. This takes intentional discipline, but as Selah makes abundantly clear, it "has sustained me and will continue to sustain me...I know that the longer we're on staff, the more vacation days we have...so Sabbath time with the Lord every day."

It is vital to ensure that worship leaders, particularly women, receive adequate time and support in pursuing the Sabbath and healthy rest. Environments that encourage and promote such rhythms of rest prevent overworking and burnout from occurring.

### **Other Areas of Support**

The main areas where interview participants wish to be more resourced revolve around staffing their teams, more investment and support for marriages of staff members, other mentors or pastoral care outside of their boss, and the desire for worship retreats. Laura, having come from both small churches that lack resources and large churches that are well-resourced, does feel like she is given adequately what she needs to accomplish her job. She feels a lack, however, in the quality and quantity of the participants on her worship team. She believes this is something ultimately that worship leaders entrust to the Lord, and while they prepare and mentor those in

their sight, those who feel called to worship ministry will eventually come out of the woodwork in God's timing. Selah desires to see more investment in staff members' marriages, whether through marriage small groups or some other means. While they invest and pour individually into the church's males and females once a month, there is not something catered to the staff members, enabling them to simply receive rather than pour out. Eleanor finds it challenging to find and pursue true pastoral care because of the complexity of her pastor also being her boss. While she does acknowledge that she would feel supported if ever needing to speak to outside pastoral counsel, she has not seen this practiced well across churches:

I don't think in any way that anything would be held against me if I was struggling in a work relationship with them, and I took it to them as a pastoral thing. I don't think that that would have a negative effect on my working relationship or anything like that. It wouldn't be held against me. I think that it's very rare to find leaders who can sit in those positions and separate them and pastorally walk you through something but then not hold it against you as a boss...I mean, I've been in ministry and leadership for forever, and I even told them this last week, and I said, I honestly don't know that I've ever had a pastor or a leader that I trusted 100% because many of them have ended up being the ones who have hurt me the most or who have held something against me later. And that has ended up not being good, and not all, but a high majority of them have ended up in that. And so, it is hard for me to trust, especially a boss in ministry as my pastor, and not expect them to hold it against me. However, I do feel at this point with the people that God has placed me with that I 100% have that transparency.

Lastly, Brittany reveals a gender discrepancy involving staff members who are able to pursue growth opportunities and spiritual renewal at retreats and trainings. Because she is the only female on the worship staff, all their worship staff members cannot attend worship retreats because of room and boarding issues. Other staff members, however, do not experience such gender discrepancies (whether they have a more even split of male/female or are all male) and can attend these events.

Viv hopes to see:

A continued recognition of how women have been hurt in ministry and accountability in the church and seeing things change for the better, and there's a lot of great things happening, a lot of things moving in the right direction. But if it stalls, and I don't see that conversation continue to get better, and I think that it will, but you know, for example, and it's not necessarily something that I directly deal with—but if we're encouraging women to be in ministry but then we go to these big conferences, or even just local conferences, and the same people who say that we value women in ministry don't provide childcare—you know exactly what these people are getting paid, which is like not a lot, so to ask them to try to get childcare every single time for their kids when the whole basis of what we do is based on serving, but then if you have other women saying what are we going to do with our four kids we they don't provide that option, that to me, that's not showing support for women in ministry.

While this is a specific example, it highlights Viv's desire for healthy reform and correction for women in worship ministry. While there has been much progress, this progress needs to trend in the right direction for women to continue to find value in pursuing vocational worship ministry. Frustration develops when women see and experience the lack of support for sustaining a full-time ministry job without accountability for the resistance that women have had to overcome and continued progress to equip better and support women.

### **Interview Participants' "Why's" for Remaining in Worship Ministry**

Like with hardships, there are various viewpoints regarding the best parts of being a female in worship ministry. Apparent themes are related to women's natural tendencies, being able to be an example to other women, stepping into God's calling, and receiving and giving love to others.

#### **Nature of women**

Women are gifted uniquely and differently than men. As Tonya shared in hardships, the same thing that poses a challenge in ministry is also the best part about being in ministry. That revolves around being sensitive and tender to the spirit. Grace agrees, saying, "I think we can be

really sensitive to what’s happening in the room.” This unique gifting as women gives them access to a part of the church that men may not be able to reach. For Viv, this has uniquely equipped her and enabled her to reach more people:

I think part of being a woman in ministry—I can’t tell you the number of times where, again, just the nature of my position has allowed me to build relationships with people and then have them not even know that I’m a pastor. And sometimes I’m intentional about that, and it’s not that we don’t use titles any time. I’m leading on the platform like my title is up there and pastor is in the title, so it’s not anything that the church is doing, but just the nature of my position and the people make assumptions. So, there was a lot of people who have said like if I had known you were a pastor before, I probably wouldn’t have been as open, or like I don’t think I would have built a relationship with you the same way, but like they are thankful that it happened the way that it did.

Being an example

Many participants share that value is largely found in the ability to be an example for other women hoping to enter ministry. Charlotte grew up seeing celebrity worship leaders, and now, she gets to be that example to kids and students locally that she leads every week:

And I think that’s why I love leading in kids and students so much, too, and why I have a passion for college ministry because I feel like within the next generation, there’s so many leaders...if they’re not mentored, they’re not going to develop into the next worship leader, pastor, kid’s pastor, youth pastor, whatever. And so, I think that’s one of the best parts of being able to be a female worship leading is I get to mentor the next generation of female worship leaders.

For Selah, not only is it meaningful to reach women in the church, but she is excited that her children get to see what it looks like for a woman to live out her calling within worship ministry. More than just leading and teaching people, though, is the influence they see as she gets to lead people into encounters with God. This has benefited her family all around to see that there are no limits to following where God leads:

My husband has grown in empowering me. I’ve grown in knowing what he carried because I’m in a role that many would consider a man’s role...I’ve had all three natural births, and the first one, I was like, let me just see if I can do this. And if I hate it, I’ll

never do it again. And if I love it, we're doing this forever. And I've had three, so it's like, oh yeah, you can do this. Like, let's go. You see the limits that you thought were limits go away. They're not limits, really. That's what I love the most.

Eleanor describes a beautiful picture of where ministry is headed for women:

If you compare it to a flower, I feel like right now we're kind of starting to see the women in ministry as it's blooming. It's starting to really open...and I think the generation behind us will kind of be when the garden is full and open...we're starting to see the weeds move out of the way, and the flowers are starting to come up. And we can teach them about our experience. But I also feel like they started working the harvest. We're starting to see the beginning of the harvest happen. And the generation behind us is going to see the full harvest of women coming into those leadership positions and stuff like that.

For Brittany, it is about the young girls and women who did not have anybody to look up to in ministry. Seeing the impact that she has had on the younger generation and being a resource for women on her team has shown her that anything is possible:

You can be a woman in ministry...that glass ceiling doesn't have to be there if you don't want it to be. And yeah, just kind of being their voice. It's been amazing and it's been the best part of my job more than leading worship has, just seeing all the young girls and youth and kids who, you know, will buy the same pair of shoes that I have because they wanted to be like me or dressing up like me at school because I'm their favorite musician or wanting to learn to play guitar because I played on Sunday even though I'm terrible at it. Like wanting to do those things because they see a woman succeeding in that role.

### Stepping into calling

Women were not always empowered to pursue where they felt the Lord was leading them. Now, women have the ability to step into their calling with confidence. This reminder humbles and grounds Laura as she shares with gratitude:

I cannot imagine being someone who has as strong of a calling as I feel to worship ministry and being told that there is nothing that you can do with it, that that is just supposed to stay inside of you because you were not born a male. And so, I am very thankful, and I think that that is the best thing about it...the fact that obviously, the Lord has given me something special that not everyone has and that I am in an environment and a season and a time in history where I'm able to step into that calling.

## Love to and from people

It is a blessing to feel encouragement and support from others, especially those who you go into battle with every week in ministry. While ministry is hard, being pregnant and experiencing the creation of life has given Willow a newfound respect and gratefulness that has been empowered by those around her to achieve her dreams. While ministry is hard and full of ups and downs, she shares that “having the extremes of both is like, what can be hard, especially when you care, and you're invested in someone's life.” Feeling empowered and supportive, however, makes the difference in making ministry enjoyable and worth it. Walking with people through the highs and the lows of ministry enables women in ministry to walk alongside them and love them in Christ, and for Emily, getting to love on multi-generations of people in all walks of life “and getting to love on them and see the joy of Christ in them has been the best part of ministry for me.”

## Conclusion

Overall, while almost every single participant emphasizes the call on their life, given by God, for full-time worship ministry, there is not a single participant who has not faced hardship in their journey. These hardships ultimately influence the longevity that Millennial women can experience, potentially hindering their ability to last in vocational worship. This is seen through the small number of women who express a desire not to remain in ministry long term. The majority of women, though, desire to overcome these hardships so that they can remain in ministry for years to come.

Ultimately, women need supportive relationships, encouragement, opportunities for growth, financial and practical support, flexibility, healthy rhythms, and a seat at the table. These



elements converge holistically to create environments that champion women in their God-given calling. Likewise, women who are supported specifically with their family needs, such as in appropriate work-life balance and finding healthy rhythms of rest, feel seen in their unique needs and experiences. Addressing these gaps as they are exposed will only seek to positively influence the presence of women at the table in worship ministry. Each interview participant shares valuable reasons why they desire to remain in worship ministry, such as the desire to be a role model for younger women and the ability to give and receive the love of Christ within the church body. These reasons, paired with holistic and intentional support, can create avenues for women to overcome hardships, manage stress and family needs, and feel fully resourced and supported in their calling. As these women continue to walk out their calling while loving people in such curated environments, they will remain in worship ministry and be an example for generations of women to come.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to understand Millennial Women Worship Leaders' Perceptions of Full-Time Ministry through their lived experiences. This was further explored through understanding how these women perceive their opportunities to be successful in a full-time ministry role, what resources are made available to them to aid in their success, how these women navigate hardships, family dynamics, and stress while in full-time ministry, and what support they feel they need to be successful.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study reveals that Millennial women in full-time worship ministry are overwhelmingly motivated by an innate sense of calling from God. This creates a desire to continue in worship ministry for the long haul, with some participants even returning to vocational worship ministry after taking a leave of absence.

Q1a: What resources do female worship leaders have available to them to aid in their success?

In terms of how these women are resourced to aid in their success in vocational worship ministry, over half of the participants reference educational and/or practical experiences positively impacting their vocational endeavors. Half of these women reveal access to mental health resources, like counseling or coaching, as a means of obtaining better mental health outcomes. Roughly a third of participants reference the positive implications of their benefits package generally, with half of women sharing the importance of their maternity benefits and flexibility in schedule. Just under half of the participants acknowledge time off as a resource that aids in their success. Other less-referenced resources in the realm of benefits include

compensation, childcare assistance, a nursing mother's room, mentorship, and additional financial assistance outside of a salary. A little less than a third of participants share that they are equipped with spiritual resources, and 20% of women are equipped with relational support. Just under half of women reveal the significance of female mentorship to longevity, and many women share of the necessity of general pastoral care within the staff team and with the pastor. Regarding practical tools, things such as Planning Center, Monday, Microsoft Teams, and Multritracks, are cited as useful resources. Likewise, a few participants reference the usefulness of having access to conferences, staff experiences, and book studies. Overall, 22% of women do not feel that they are uniquely resourced as women in ministry, and 34% do not feel the need to be better resourced as a female.

Q1b: What unique hardships are women in full-time ministry confronted with?

Regarding hardships, roughly a third of participants generally reference how their gender has created unique challenges to overcome in vocational worship ministry. For instance, there is the theme of facing a glass ceiling, which every participant references in some capacity. Some women experience chauvinism within their current or previous churches. There are also women who feel that their authority as women in leadership is questioned, and some women are from denominations that do not uphold or support women in pastoral roles. Roadblocks can be uniquely created for younger women, as age can create disparities through perceived immaturity as opposed to their male counterparts. Also, intentionality from leadership can suffer, as women often feel underestimated or overlooked in ministry, which can hinder the kind of mentorship or communication they receive. Some women express the feeling of needing to gain respect musically as they are held to a different standard than men.

Women reference the struggle it can be to find a job and get their foot in the door in vocational worship ministry, with churches often not providing clarity that they are seeking men for worship pastoral roles. Because of this, women have faced inequality and opposition during interview processes, impacting their experience of vocational worship ministry before they even land a job in the field. Then when in the job, many women face issues with self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy. There can also be relational hardships that present themselves, with 8% of participants having a negative experience with their pastor and 14% of participants saying their relationship with their pastor is mediocre. Lack of communication is a huge contributor to feeling a lack of relational support, as well as a lack of encouragement and intentionality with relationship building. Some women do not feel that their staff fully understands the unique challenges that women face in ministry, such as family dynamics, and there are small percentages of women who do not feel that they have a voice, struggle with conflict, do not understand their role, and do not feel any relational support within ministry. A little less than a third of participants, though, feel no lack when it comes to relational support, and 22% reveal that while relationships with their staff are good, they could be better. Half the participants share that their interactions with others are unrelated to gender and that communication and appropriate boundaries are key to healthy dynamics. There are varying experiences with male/female dynamics on staff, much of which is related to the individual context. It is noted, however, that bridging the male/female gap can be challenging, and boundaries can affect staff dynamics. There are times when relational discord is felt by both men and/or women, with some women feeling a sense of competition or lack of support from other women.

Half of participants cite subpar pay for women in worship ministry, with varying perceptions on what equitable pay is. Benefits are revealed to have positive and negative influences on compensation for women.

Just under half of the participants do not yet have children, and many of these women share concerns regarding things like financial implications, lack of support, and even lack of clarity regarding maternity policies, which could potentially hinder their longevity in vocational worship ministry. For those who do have children, there are unique family responsibilities that they carry. This can create a struggle with work/life balance. This can also create a feeling of differing career expectations placed upon women compared to men. Plus, there are unique physical challenges that women face related to health, pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. The need for self-advocacy in these areas arises. 50% of survey participants share the need for work/life balance and that the demands of ministry can make this hard to obtain. This can be due to family conflicts and rhythms, as well as family responsibilities. When balance is not achieved, it is often to the detriment of the family. This can lead to burnout, which is the biggest contributor to women feeling the desire to quit ministry. Mental health is also relevant, as there are worship leaders who share that they are currently, or have previously, struggled with poor mental health. Only 10% of participants share not feeling any unique hardships related to being a woman in worship ministry.

Q1c: How do female worship leaders navigate hardships, family dynamics, and stress while in full-time ministry?

Roughly half of the participants feel some stress at work, often due to previously shared hardships. These hardships are navigated through the use of counseling, trusted relationships, rest, and healthy disciplines. Currently, 28% of participants utilize counseling or some form of

mental health wellness as a means of coping with the hardships of ministry. For some who do not currently pursue counseling, they have access to supportive people and systems around them. Over half of these women share healthy relationships as their most prominent outlet for hardships in ministry. As for rest, a little under a third of participants reference rest and Sabbath as being important to their mental health. These spiritual disciplines become a means of stress relief. Older Millennial women share how stewarding their family time has positively impacted their vocations. Approaching schedules with intentionality and flexibility is critical. This holds true for those who do not yet have children, as some women share that they have found a healthy balance, and others share that they are still learning how to steward their time. This is correlated with healthy disciplines and learning to prioritize tasks and create healthy boundaries.

Q1d: What support do female worship leaders feel they need in order to be successful?

Women feel that they need support relationally to succeed in ministry. This can come through mentorship, with roughly half of participants citing that they do not currently have a mentor who can pour into them. Finding a female mentor in the same ministry space is not often easy. Regardless, mentors in any capacity are shown to be beneficial. About a third of women share that they do not have a mentor and that this negatively impacts their worship ministry experience. Likewise, most participants reveal a positive relationship with their pastor and how this contributes to feeling supported in their role. Relational support is referenced as being one of the most impactful things in women's personal lives. Many women share that they are experiencing healthy dynamics with their staff, but this has not been true in previous church experiences, showing that women do not desire to stay in unhealthy environments. 75% of women share that they have positive relationships with men and women on their staff and the

impact this has on their environment. When these relationships are healthy, the congregation benefits as well.

Verbal encouragement can be the motivation that keeps Millennial women moving forward in ministry. Feeling valued and seen can be more important than tangible benefits like compensation. This happens when pastoral care and transparency with leadership are provided. Women also desire an avenue for growth. Most participants share that they have been presented with opportunities to grow in their roles, which has affirmed them in their calling. This growth can present itself in different ways, such as through leadership or promotion. This can also become apparent through a feeling of empowerment within their role and with others. Some participants share how seeing women thrive in full-time ministry can be helpful in their own journey, but women have also experienced what they thought was women thriving in ministry, only to find out it was a veneer, and they were actually struggling.

Financial support is not the most pressing issue. Still, it is referenced as a need as some women have experienced pay discrepancies and desire more financial assistance as they grow their families. Understanding the financial needs and burdens of women and mothers will provide more tangible support. The same goes for flexibility and women-oriented support, with opportunities presenting themselves to improve maternity leave, assist with childcare, and provide more useful benefits. Sustaining a healthy pace and rhythm of rest becomes vital for women to achieve longevity in worship ministry. Overall, women desire to be heard and seen and to have a seat at the table.

## Discussion of Findings

Previous studies reveal that Millennials do not correlate job satisfaction to commitment, but they do correlate job satisfaction to a positive work environment.<sup>138</sup> With this, their commitment to a job is impacted by the environment. Differently, Campione argues that Millennials do not desire to pursue a career at the cost of a healthy family and work/life balance. Myers and Sadaghiani echo this, as they share that Millennials value work/life balance, which impacts their job performance and perceptions.<sup>139</sup> There is a lack of job satisfaction directly tied to retention, which is tied to poor mental health outcomes.<sup>140</sup> Millennials desire to be seen as valuable contributors early on and often and value open communication.<sup>141</sup> There are perceptions that Millennials are lazy, self-centered, etc. This leads them to being labeled as the “Me Generation.” While there is some truth that Millennials value individualism, power dynamics are created as older generations hold more negative perceptions towards younger generations of Millennials.<sup>142</sup>

This study does highlight the necessity of a healthy work environment, with almost every participant leaving churches that they felt were unhealthy in pursuit of something better. More similarly to Campione, however, Millennial women in worship ministry strongly desire work/life balance as a means to achieving longevity. Not having a healthy balance often impacts both work

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<sup>138</sup> Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, and Oishi, “Managing Millennials: Embracing Generational Differences.”

<sup>139</sup> Myers and Sadaghiani, “Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials’ Organizational Relationships and Performance.”

<sup>140</sup> Campione, "Corporate Offerings: Why Aren't Millennials Staying?"

<sup>141</sup> Myers and Sadaghiani, “Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials’ Organizational Relationships and Performance.”

<sup>142</sup> Arras-Djabi, Cottard, and Shimada, “Understanding the Stereotypes of Millennials in the Workplace.”



and family in unhealthy ways. This is why roughly half of the participants who do not yet have children have reservations about being able to remain in vocational worship ministry after having a family. For those with families, this is a constant tension that requires discipline, flexibility, and understanding from coworkers and pastors. Open communication, as cited by Myers and Sadaghiani, as well as clear communication and transparency, are referenced in this study as ways that women can feel supported. Similarly, feeling like a contributor is directly correlated to the findings of this study, which reference the desire for growth opportunities and empowerment within the worship leader role. While unequal power dynamics are not directly referenced in this study, this correlates with the need for healthy and supportive relationships with coworkers and pastors. There have been instances where women in this study have felt like their gender impacted their experience, and as pastors seek to lead healthy environments, addressing unhealthy power dynamics will remain relevant.

Mental health is a significant issue referenced in this study. Previous studies share that lack of job satisfaction is tied to retention and poor mental health outcomes. Likewise, Millennials are experiencing an increase in poor mental health, with females experiencing an increased amount of worthlessness, hopelessness, restlessness, nervousness, and psychological distress, often tied to the stress of the workplace and the climb of women in higher-level positions at work.”<sup>143</sup> Najman et al. purport that Millennials are more connected and yet more isolated than ever, resulting in the delay of important milestones, such as employment, marriage, and having kids.<sup>144</sup> Also, it is suggested that employment directly impacts the mental health of

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<sup>143</sup> Lucero, Emerson, Bowser, and Koch, “Mental Health Risk among Members of the Millennial Population Cohort: A Concern for Public Health.”

<sup>144</sup> Najman, Bor, Williams, Middeldorp, Mamun, Clavarino, and Scott, “Does the Millennial Generation of Women Experience More Mental Illness Than Their Mothers?”

Millennial women differently than males. Blehar and Keita agree with this, declaring that women experience more negative mental health at a rate of 2:1 times greater than men.<sup>145</sup> They highlight that women cost employers more than men in their mental health needs, potentially because they are more forthright about their needs.

The women in this study are susceptible to poor mental health outcomes, as revealed through the qualitative data, yet this study does not aim to provide a comparison to men. What it does reveal, though, is that many things impact mental health in worship ministry, such as work/life balance, interpersonal relationships, and support and encouragement. Some participants are choosing to delay having a family because of the physical and mental ramifications. Those with families have to advocate for themselves and actively seek out healthy rhythms of rest and balance. While some participants share of medically diagnosed mental health disorders prior to entering into the ministry, this study does not reveal the totality of the circumstances surrounding mental health – rather the current mental state of participants and things in their work environment that are positively or negatively contributing to it. This study also reveals that poor mental health can be greatly improved through access to counseling, mentorship, supportive relationships, and healthy rhythms of work and rest.

Research by Clance and Imes reveals the influence of imposter syndrome on females and the perceptions they carry of themselves in the workplace.<sup>146</sup> Worth echoes this research by sharing that these feelings “can mean you stay in a job you are over qualified for, never even try to apply for work because you assume failure, or stay in a job you do not really like because you

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<sup>145</sup> Blehar and Keita, “Women and Depression: A Millennial Perspective.”

<sup>146</sup> Clance and Imes, “The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention.”

fear being unemployed.”<sup>147</sup> This can also be influenced by a lack of representation of women in leadership roles and perceptions around women managing work/life balance.<sup>148</sup> Yet, according to Fiddler, women believe they can manage both despite discrimination.<sup>149</sup> Santillo claims that there is a lack of women role models to mentor younger generations in managing both.<sup>150</sup> This perception of women in leadership, or not in leadership, impacts other women in their pursuit or lack of pursuit regarding growth opportunities. While women are experiencing growth opportunities in the workplace, it is at a slow and declining pace.<sup>151</sup> Understanding the experience of women not only in the workplace but also in the ministry becomes necessary. Within the ministry, the Millennial generation is largely becoming more religiously unaffiliated, and there is a need for women in leadership to combat this.<sup>152</sup> There can be roadblocks to this, though, as personality traits of women in ministry can play a role in how women are perceived in ministry and what opportunities become available to them.<sup>153</sup> Fish reveals that expectations and demand, lack of friendships, lack of opportunities, lack of recognition, and lack of respect become hardships for women in ministry.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Worth, “Feeling Precarious: Millennial Women and Work.”

<sup>148</sup> Seliger, Shames, and White House Project, *The White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women's Leadership*.

<sup>149</sup> Fiddler, “Eventual Leadership for Millennial Women.”

<sup>150</sup> Santillo, “Leadership Development for Millennial Women.”

<sup>151</sup> Addison-Lavelle, “Millennial Women in Leadership: A New Generation of Women Still Facing Gender Inequalities in Business Leadership.”

<sup>152</sup> Parker, “An Investigation of Millennial and Older Generations Expectations of Women’s Ministry: A Delphi Study.”

<sup>153</sup> Hamman, “Resistance to Women in Ministry and the Psychodynamics of Sadness.”

<sup>154</sup> Fish, “Work-Family Spillover Experiences of Women in Ministry.”

This study does reveal that women experience a lack of self-confidence and prefer to have encouragement from those around them. This gives them a sense of assurance that they are achieving what they ought to and heading in the right direction regarding expectations of their role in worship ministry. While some women may not have growth opportunities, and while some are content with this, numerous women in this study have chosen to leave environments in which they feel stifled or unappreciated. There is a small minority who feel as though they are stuck in their role with no real upward trajectory. Participants have revealed a lack of representation of women in worship ministry, especially regarding those who can be mentors to them as women who have gone before them, and therefore, those who do not yet have families harbor fears about finding work/life balance. Creating pathways for women to assume leadership and thrive in work/life balance will help fight the attrition of women in leadership and of Millennials continuing to become religiously unaffiliated. This study affirms what Fish has discovered in that women do want to find a balance regarding expectations and work demand, having supportive relationships is critical to thriving in ministry, having opportunities helps them feel seen and valued, being encouraged and praised can motivate them to keep going, and feeling respected as a woman in ministry is vital to longevity.

### **Implications**

The findings in this study are relevant to many churches as they seek to retain and empower women in worship ministry. Women need to feel supported, and one way for this to occur is through access to counseling, mentorship, and mental health resources. When provided access to these things, women are able to be resilient in the face of stress while having a healthy

outlet. It helps them manage the weight of not only the job itself but also the weight that comes with ministry.

It is also important for women in worship ministry to have flexibility in their work schedules. This is especially true for women who are mothers and bear the weight and responsibility of not only stewarding a job but also a healthy family. Along with flexible schedules, having clarity regarding maternity policies, childcare assistance, and receiving appropriate financial compensation to support a family help to ensure that women can remain in worship ministry as they grow their families and take on more responsibility at home.

In addition to these things, churches and pastoral leadership need to understand the unique challenges that women bear in the workplace. Women desire to have a seat at the table, and churches can foster environments with healthy and clear communication that work to bridge the gap between females and other staff members. They can enforce healthy but appropriate boundaries on their staff, enabling women to have as much input and interaction as other staff members, regardless of gender. As women feel empowered through verbal and nonverbal encouragement and support, they are able to thrive in their roles. Lastly, providing avenues for growth, whether in title or scope, demonstrates to women that they carry innate value in the ministry and have a needed voice for the body of Christ. This all falls under the realm of showing respect to women by identifying their unique needs in order to create an equitable experience to the males on staff at churches.

### **Limitations**

In this study, a few limitations become apparent. For one, there is always an inherent limitation with gathering information through surveying, even with qualifying questions, for there is no way to determine if participants are being forthright with their responses. Likewise, those who choose to participate in surveying and interviewing may not be fully representative of the whole population. With the study itself, since there are only 50 participants, it is limited in its scope.

This study is only representative of the Millennial female's perspective and does not compare with Millennial males or any gender from other generations. Therefore, it is not fully possible to know if the data is representative only of the Millennial female or if there are other genders or generations that have or continue to share experiences in pursuing longevity in vocational worship ministry.

There are inherent limitations regarding researcher bias. Considering this researcher is a Millennial female worship leader in a full-time worship ministry, there is the potential for researcher bias, particularly within data interpretation and synthesis.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to this study, this researcher recommends continuing research on Millennial males in full-time ministry to compare to the data gathered by Millennial females in full-time ministry. This would provide more tangible data on the similarities and differences between the genders, providing more context for women's experience in worship ministry.

It would also be beneficial to explore Generation Z's emergence into vocational worship ministry and how it compares to the Millennial experience. Likewise, obtaining data on

Generation X and Boomer females in worship ministry would provide a landscape of data across generations from which to compare experiences.

Lastly, researching Millennial women not only in worship ministry but in all ministry spheres will help to have a holistic understanding of women's experiences across the board. This will provide an understanding as to whether some of the experiences in this study are unique to Millennial women in worship or if they are the experiences of women in ministry as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Millennial women have entered into vocational worship ministry in large numbers. With this comes significant opportunities for healthy careers in the field of worship, but it also comes with its challenges. Understanding the challenges that these women face and the experiences that they have endured will help Millennial women feel empowered to remain in worship ministry for the long haul. This research strongly emphasizes that these women believe they are called by God to make a difference in corporate worship environments, and this calling is propelling them to remain in vocational worship ministry. Understanding their experiences, whether at previous churches or current church environments, will equip pastoral staff and churches with a better understanding of how to support Millennial women through avenues such as leadership, growth opportunities, mental health and encouragement, stress management, relational support, family life balance, and tangible resources. These women desire to remain in vocational worship ministry, and with an appropriate understanding of their unique experiences and hardships, Millennial women will be well equipped to thrive and to become an example for generations of women to come.

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## APPENDIX A: Survey Questions

- Intro
  - Information Sheet
  - Gender
    - If female – proceed to next question
    - If male – survey ends
  - Year of birth
    - If between 1980-2000 – proceed to next question
    - If pre-1980 or post-2000, survey ends
  - Vocational status
    - If full-time worship leader/pastor/similar title, proceed to next question
    - If not full-time worship, survey ends
- Experience
  - How large is your church congregation?
  - How many people are on staff at your church?
  - How many of the staff are females?
  - What is the denomination of the church you serve?
  - How many females are in leadership or pastoral roles?
  - How long have you been in worship ministry, and how long have you been full-time vocationally in worship ministry?
  - What led you to begin leading worship as a full-time job?
  - Is this something you wish to continue long term? Why or why not?
- Opportunities
  - Do you feel that your education and experience have positively impacted your place at work and in ministry? How so?
  - What opportunities for leadership and/or promotion have been presented to you?
  - Have you faced resistance or roadblocks to leadership opportunities/growth within your role?
- Resources
  - What wellness resources are made available to you as a staff member? Ex. mental/spiritual/physical
  - How do you handle stress from work and personal life? How often do you find yourself stressed?
  - Do you feel you are compensated fairly financially? Why or why not?
  - How are you uniquely resourced to thrive as a woman in vocational worship ministry? Ex. maternity leave/time off/etc.
  - Where can you be better resourced as a woman in vocational worship ministry?
- Hardships
  - What challenges do you face with work-life balance?
  - When have you felt the desire to quit full-time worship ministry? How often do you feel this desire?
  - Do you have children?
    - If yes – what challenges do you face as a working mom in ministry?

- If no – how would having children or not having children impact your success while working full time in ministry?
  - As a woman in full-time worship ministry, what unique hardships are you confronted with? How do you navigate these hardships?
  -
- Relationships
  - Do you have a female mentor in a similar role?
    - If yes – how has this woman impacted your success or failure?
    - If no – how would a woman like this impact your success or failure?
  - How is your relationship with your pastor?
  - Where is relational support lacking at work?
  - How are you supported in your personal life?
  - How are your relationships with both men and women staff members?

## APPENDIX B: Interview Questions

- Share briefly about your current church environment.
  - o How many congregants?
  - o How many staff members?
  - o How many females on staff? What are their ages?
  - o How many females in pastoral roles?
- Share briefly about what led you to your current position in vocational worship ministry.
  - o How long have you been in full-time worship ministry?
  - o Is your goal to remain in ministry long-term? Why or why not?
- Do you feel as if you face a glass ceiling in ministry? How so?
- Describe the gender dynamics within your staff and your church. What types of relationships do you have with coworkers? With leadership?
- How are you supported by male staff members? Female staff members?
- What resources do you have available to you that positively impact your experience in full time ministry? What resources would be helpful?
- Do you feel heard and seen as a woman in ministry?
- Where, if at all, have you experienced inequality?
- Do you have children? How do you manage work-life balance with family?
- How's your mental health?
- What opportunities are you given to grow in your leadership?
- What are some things that are helping or could help you remain in vocational ministry long-term?
- Do you have any female mentors? If so, how does that impact your experience in ministry?
- Have you seen examples of women thriving in full-time ministry? How has this impacted your experience?
- If you could share the hardest part about being a female in worship ministry, what would it be?
- If you could share the best part about being a female in worship ministry, what would it be?

**Appendix C: IRB Exemption Letter****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 23, 2023

Katie Lenehan  
Lori Danielson

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-96 Understanding Millennial Women Worship Leaders' Perception of Full-Time Ministry through their Lived Experiences

Dear Katie Lenehan, Lori Danielson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.**

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair*  
**Research Ethics Office**