

Title – Serving God under the stained glass ceiling: A phenomenological study of female clergy experiences in the United Methodist Church in West Virginia

Program of Study – School of Education, Doctoral Program

Presentation Type – PowerPoint or Posters

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The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of female clergy in the United Methodist Church in West Virginia (UMC). Women, in general, and clergywomen in particular have struggled for generations in their pursuit for equity in the home and in the workplace. Collins (1979) wrote about women's early roles during Jesus' ministry, "women were the first to tell the world of the events of the resurrection, they were the preachers and teachers of the new message" (p. 153). Although there is no written account of women as formal disciples, Jesus did allow women to travel with him during his ministry, and He "treated women with dignity and respect, challenged the conventional sexism of the day, and forever redefined the role of women in the church and society" (UMC.com). Jesus respected people regardless of gender, and female clergy should expect the same respect from their peers when they heed the call. Historically, women clergy have not had the same opportunities as their male counterparts; however the United Methodist Church and its founder, John Wesley, have welcomed women clergy from the beginning. The UMC began to ordain female clergy in 1956, and it was another 10 years before the number of women in seminaries and pulpits began to grow. However, since then many female clergy have encountered barriers while they serve God in their churches and as part of the UMC. Situational and learned experiences of the clergywomen add to the significance of this study. Clergywomen in WV will be able to learn about the experiences encountered by their peers during their time as clergy.

Reading and learning about the phenomenon experienced by UMC clergywomen in WV may cause the women to unite to find ways to alleviate the problems. This study will add to the research regarding women clergy and their struggle to obtain leadership positions, including ordination and preaching.