

## The Spiritual Life

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# Still facing resistance, women ministers expand clergy's role

**T**he pulpit, once largely the domain of men, has become increasingly open to women over the past 20 years as many denominations have formally amended their rules to permit the ordination of women.

As a result, the number of clergywomen has skyrocketed, according to figures contained in "Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling," a study conducted by Hartford Seminary in Hartford scheduled to be released as a book in May.

In the United Methodist Church, for example, the number of clergywomen jumped from 319 in 1977 to 3,003 last year. During those same years, the number of American Baptist women ministers increased from 157 to 712. In the Episcopal Church, the figures rose from 94 to 1,394.

That's the good news. The bad news is that women ministers still represent well under half of all the clergy members in the 15 major Protestant denominations studied by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis and Patricia M.Y. Chang.

The highest percentage of women ministers is found in the Unitarian-Universalist Association where 376, or 30 percent, of the clergy are female.

Despite a more welcoming attitude among both church leaders and the laity, women ministers remain a clear minority in almost every area of church life.

Women are more likely to work part-time, to leave parish ministry and to be in specialized ministries, such as working with victims of domestic violence, because they cannot get a job pastoring a church.

Women are finding that even though a "doors are open there is still a lot of hostility," said Brown Zikmund, the president of Hartford Seminary. "There is still resistance and uneasiness. And it always be malice, as much as a experience and uneasiness by some the laity. Some people are still being a woman in the pulpit."

One area of inequality is pay. On average clergywomen earn 9 percent less than men for working the same hours, in the same kinds of jobs, within the same denomination and in the same-sized church.

"We couldn't figure out any other reason for that than gender discrimination," Brown Zikmund said. Still, Brown Zikmund said she was surprised that the pay imbalance wasn't higher. "It's still not right, but it does indicate that the situation is perhaps improving," she added.

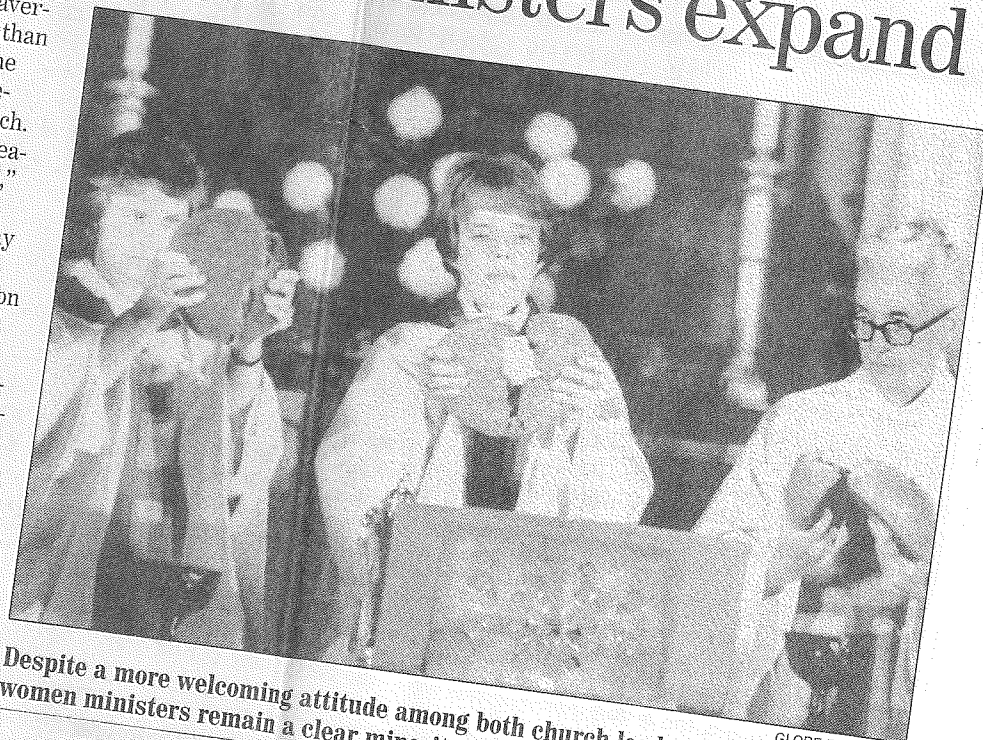
Clergywomen also have a much more difficult time following the traditional ministerial path from smaller to larger congregations. After ordination, 35 percent of men became sole pastors of churches with less than 150 members compared to 15 percent of recently ordained women.

Women also have a more difficult time securing positions as senior pastor and are more likely to serve as assistant or associate pastors.

"The study argues that churches need to give greater attention to the need for systemic change," according to an executive summary of the study. "If denominational leaders are actively hostile, or insensitive to finding the right ministry settings for women, women get discouraged. When this happens, it is not because women are failures - rather, it is because the system is failing women."

Nevertheless, clergywomen are still finding ways to serve as ministers, even if they are not working as pastors. They are expanding the traditional definition of ministry to include outreach to rape victims, teenage mothers, the homeless, immigrants and other marginalized groups.

In essence, many clergywomen are redefining what it means to be a minister. "The experience and sense of calling among clergy women in the 1990s shows that clergywomen are not merely survivors, nor are they breaking down old barriers simply to get into a vocation shaped and still dominated by male perspectives,"



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the executive summary stated. "Rather, clergywomen are reinventing ministry for the future. Clergywomen are expanding the very essence of Christian ministry and guiding the whole church to rethink and renew its leadership and membership."

### Religion Notes

**T**he Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has revoked the clergy status of an Iowa pastor for openly violating denomination rules forbidding non-celibate homosexuals from the ministry.

The disciplinary action stripping the Rev. Steve Sabin of his credentials came last Tuesday following a two-day, closed-door ecclesiastical trial. As a result, Sabin will no longer be allowed to pastor his 150-member congregation, Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Ames.

rules, gays can be ordained only if they take a vow of celibacy. Many of Sabin's congregants told local reporters that they supported their pastor and his partner.