

Cox credited The United Methodist Church for being "in the forefront" of ordination of women, and observed that clergywomen who have the support of their bishops tend to do well.

Bishop's Support Pivotal

The Rev. Lois Neal, Atoka, Okla., agrees that the bishop's support was pivotal in her journey from pastor's wife to seminarian to pastor to district superintendent in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

Neal, then a widow and mother of seven children, recalled "fighting God's calling for a year" before finally enrolling in Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Mo. She credited Oklahoma Bishop Dan Solomon for "challenging me, and encouraging me in my ministry."

Describing herself as "a typical shy, reserved Indian woman," with a love for church music and liturgy, Neal admitted she has encountered those who were "not exactly happy about a woman ministers."

Still, she said, the bishop "made all the difference." He and her children have been her "greatest supporters."

In 1992, Neal, a Cherokee, was appointed by Solomon as the denomination's first Native American woman superintendent.

As she visits the 39 churches in her district, Neal said she is heartened by the growing pride and determination of Native American leaders, particularly women.

"I see the gifts and the fruits, and I tell young people considering ministry to let God lead them," Neal said. "I tell the young women that even Christ walked the valley alone."

"But when you answer the call, and God tells you it's right, there's nothing more beautiful," she added.

Overcoming Trials on Every Hand

The first time Janet Wolf heard a woman preach, in 1976, she remembers thinking, "Who does she think she is?"

"I had seen women missionaries, and I wanted to be a missionary, but I believed in my heart that it was wrong for women to preach."

Today, Wolf is the pastor of small, urban and struggling Hobson Church in Nashville, Tenn. She seeks to combine her two callings: preaching the gospel and working on behalf of the poor, oppressed and shunned.

She herself has been all those things, even in the process of becoming a United Methodist minister. Her first years at Vanderbilt Divinity School, the veteran of the Civil Rights and anti-poverty movements said she was criticized for being "too confrontational"



"When you answer the call, and God tells you it's right, there's nothing more beautiful."

—Lois Neal,
district superintendent

about racism, sexism and homophobia at the seminary.

She found a home at Edgehill Church in Nashville, known for its eclectic worship, cutting-edge social-outreach ministries and open-door policy to gay men and lesbians.

That congregation, led by pastor Bill Barnes, encouraged Wolf to pursue the ministry, and she cleaned houses and worked as a farm laborer to earn money while attending seminary.

When she applied for ordination in 1988, she was turned down, she claimed, because of her vocal support of homosexual people, a stand deemed by many United Methodists as contrary to the

Christian faith.

She kept pushing, with the support of Barnes and others, and was ordained. "One district superintendent told me there wasn't a church in the Tennessee Conference that would have me."

She was sent to a four-point charge in Lawrence County, Tenn. "I think they figured if I could make it there, I could make it anywhere," she mused.

With the support of her children and her husband, Bill Haley, Wolf began "one of the most challenging times" of her life.

It was not easy. Even before she arrived in town, Wolf—that community's first woman pastor—was denounced from "nearly every other pulpit in town." Her children's classmates taunted the boys as "children of the devil."

Several people left the churches, saying that a woman as pastor was a "sin." Wolf said, despite her need for support and conversation, the cabinet left her to fight the battle alone, she recalled.

Still, she found people who were willing to try her as pastor (see "Spectrum," p. 9). One of her most rewarding moments was when she participated in a member's funeral at a neighboring Southern Baptist church.

"Even though the pastors there wouldn't let me in the pulpit because I'm a woman, they did acknowledge my role as pastor."

At the graveside, the Baptist ministers honored the family's request to let Wolf give the eulogy. Wolf described that act as "a fairly bold witness" which "created a good deal of controversy."

'Oh Boy, We've Got A Woman!'

A trend that is both heartening and troubling is the increase in the number of women who are associate pastors at churches where a man is senior pastor. Heartening because more women are being appointed to large, pacesetter churches. But many women are troubled that they are sometimes accepted only in a secondary role.

Still, many carve out significant roles in the number-two position.

The Rev. Peggy Arter Good, associate at First Church in West Lafayette,

Texas Clergy Praise Show

The Rev. Hannah Miller, a feisty pastor portrayed by actor Patty Duke in the new NBC series "Amazing Grace," got high marks from a group of Central Texas United Methodist clergywomen.

A panel of eight ordained women watched the first episode together recently and evaluated it in terms of authenticity. They agreed that the show has potential, even though they said the first episode lacked depth.

The Rev. Jacquetta Chambers, pastor of McMillan Church in East Fort Worth, said she was impressed with the real-life problems Hannah Miller faces as a pastor, woman and single mother.

The Rev. Janice Cain, pastor of a three-point charge in the Waxahachie District, also applauded the program as a good start in affirming the growing number of women entering the ministry.

Check your local listing for broadcast times.

—Carolyn Stephens,
Central Texas Conference
communications director



First Church for five years. "It's good to have both men and women on the church staff."

Family Support Key

Seminarian Yoo and her husband, Jwan Jin Yi, are both doctoral students. They came to the United States from Korea six years ago to study.

Back home, Yoo had grown discouraged because, although she first got the call to ministry when she was in high school, she was afraid to go public with her desire to become a minister. In fact, she ran away from home to attend seminary and waited a year before breaking the news to her parents.

"The Korean Methodist Church did not ordain women much before 1989," said Yoo, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

"Even now, I'm not sure they would invite me to be a pastor there."

So, Yoo and Yi are considering staying in the United States after completing their degrees. "The United Methodist Church is more open to women," she said. "Women have some problems here, but they also have more support."

Even her husband's attitude toward her ministry has changed as they have become friends with both men and women in ministry, she said.

"He came from a very conservative family. He was under a lot of pressure from men back home not to support me in becoming a pastor," Yoo said.

"Now, he has friends and classmates who are women. He takes me seriously."

Many clergywomen credit their families—both immediate and extended—for helping enhance their ministries.

Wolf's husband, Bill Haley, "is the one who bakes 15 apple pies for the church bake sale," and helps their sons do homework.

She said she withstands

criticism from those who view hers as the mirror opposite of the perfect family, because Haley and their sons "are always in my corner."

Judith Wismar Claycomb, pastor of First Church in Oberlin, Ohio, said she gets more consideration from her congregation than many clergymen when it comes to family responsibilities. The mother of Aaron, 4, and Kara, 6, said she is allowed—even expected—to make her children a top priority.

Extended family support from her congregation is also a boon, she said. She enjoys exchanging hugs with affectionate parishioners, particularly older adults who need to feel loved. Claycomb observed that such physical displays of affection may come easier for her than for a man.

"I don't feel I am at risk for that to be misinterpreted as it might be for a man," she said.

Layman Says 'Yes!' to Women

With the increase in women pastors, laypeople in many churches are growing accustomed to and affirming their presence. Michael Tartt, a Dallas firefighter and lifelong United Methodist layman, recalled "being real uncomfortable" when pastor Sheron Patterson

Ohio pastors Judith Wismar Claycomb, left, and Betty Howard both credit clergywomen mentors with helping them realize their calls to ministry.



first came to his church.

"I have to be honest: I didn't like it," said Tartt, member of Crest-Moore-King Church in Dallas. "Even hearing her preach a sermon was tough. She didn't have that 'preaching voice,' like a man," he said.

But Patterson's way with people and her sensitivity to single adults (Tartt is a widower raising five children) made the difference, he said. "She helped me look at being single in a more positive way, and she was really supportive."

"She's one of the best pastors I've ever had," said Tartt, who was trustee chairman during Patterson's five-year tenure at Crest-Moore-King.

The Rev. M. Lynn Scott deals with issues related to clergywomen as a Division of Ordained Ministry staffer at the Board of Higher Education and Ministry in Nashville, Tenn. She identified several issues with which the denomination must grapple, if we are to demonstrate respect for and commitment to supporting women called by God.

Topping Scott's list is a re-examination of the current system of appointing and promoting ministers. Scott said the current "linear" path of advancement mimics the career ladder of the secular corporate world, which is designed to best serve men. Clergy, then, are assigned to larger churches and more prestigious appointments on their way "up" to becoming superintendent or bishop.

Many women, said Scott, seek a more holistic notion of ministry and of a clergy career, integrating family concerns, continuing education, moving from local church to other ministries and back in a circular pattern.

"A perception of mine is that women see ordained ministry in a much broader context than the day-to-day duties of a local church," Scott explained.

"For many women, success isn't getting sent to bigger and bigger churches; success is being faithful to one's calling."

Scott and others also said the church

Clergywomen on the Rise (U.S. figures)

	1984	1993
Women in UM seminaries	600	1,264
Women in full connection	1,100	3,188
Women pastors in local churches	1,875	3,794
Women bishops (active)	2	6
Women district superintendents	21	70
Total number of women clergy *	2,680	5,147

*(includes elders, probationary members, associate members, local pastors—including those appointed beyond the local church—and women ordained in other denominations who serve United Methodist churches)

Source: Division of Ordained Ministry



needs to be reminded that the basic problem of sexism still permeates church and society.

"Because we as a church are more 'educated,' most men know enough not to tell a dirty joke, but the systems haven't changed to accommodate women," Scott said.

"Our biases are still very much alive and often unconscious. A clergywoman may get offered \$5,000 less salary than a clergyman—either because churches rationalize she doesn't need it or they think she won't protest."

Janet Wolf said ministers need to help people struggle with those issues—not gloss over and ignore them. She challenged women and men in ministry to keep the call to integrate spiritual life with human need at the top of the church's agenda.

"Ministry is about helping people to hear and respond to God's cry for justice, here and now," said Wolf.

Wanted: More Role Models

Growing up Black in mostly White Youngstown, Ohio, Betty Howard wondered if she had a place in the world. It wasn't until she was encouraged by her pastor, Benita Rollins, to attend annual conference, that Howard first heard

God's call. For Howard, having Rollins—now a district superintendent—as a mentor made the difference.

Claycomb, her colleague in the East Ohio Conference, also recalled the influence of her youth director, Judy Craig, now a United Methodist bishop for West Ohio.

"She (Craig) influenced me to think about ministry in my teens," said Claycomb. "She said I had the qualities to be a minister."

From Zimbabwe to Korea to the United States, clergywomen agreed that women and girls need to be nurtured and encouraged to discern God's call. As doors open to women, the clergywomen hope that more will realize the call to preach.

Moyo of Zimbabwe proudly recalled how girls in her congregation greet her enthusiastically, and whisper their hopes to "be a pastor, too."

"They see me and they know they can do it," she said.

—Reported by Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service in New York; Maynard French, East Ohio Today, Canton, Ohio; Amy Wallace Brack, associate editor, and M. Garlinda Burton, editor of INTERPRETER.

ReViews

by Kathleen LaCamera



BOOKS



On Your Own But Not Alone: Life After College by William H. Willimon. Abingdon Press, 1995.

An author and Duke University chaplain, Willimon has written a wonderful guidebook for young people or for anyone leaving the security of familiar surroundings to face a new world of possibilities and challenges.

In this slim, not-to-be-missed volume, Willimon explains how Scripture can teach and inspire us in our hopes, dreams, trials, faith and failures.

On Your Own is full of memorable examples and just plain good advice. Willimon's reflections encourage young people to see the Bible as a friend and companion on life's journey, even as they embrace the exciting and frightening challenges ahead.

"Put aside your fears. Go for it! Because God is with us." Excellent counsel for almost anyone.

Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements by Thomas Oden. Abingdon Press, 1995.

The last several decades have seen an undeniable decline in church attendance and vitality in mainstream Protestant churches. Coupled with that decline

are the increasingly public divisions within these churches over such issues as the ordination of women, homosexuality and the role of political action in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Mainline Protestants are in trouble, no doubt, but even the search for reasons why evokes heated debate among various church factions.

With *Requiem*, Oden, a United Methodist clergyman and professor at Drew University school of theology, Madison, N.J., attempts to blame the decline on denominational leaders and seminary professors who, he claims, have forsaken their classic Christian roots.

Oden further suggests that church leaders have been taken hostage by a broad range of modern influences including feminists, psychologists, homosexuals and sociologists.

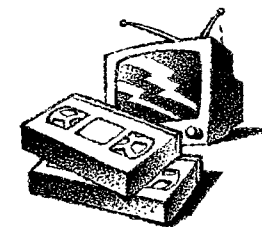
In his zeal to assess blame, however, Oden has missed an opportunity to offer helpful insight into deep frustration and alienation felt by self-described conservative, evangelical Christians.

His book is riddled with unsubstantiated generalizations and ill-defined labels. In one passage, for instance, he refers to "neopagan feminists and permissive amoralists and quasi-Marxist liberators." Readers can only guess to whom these labels refer, and the passages are seldom supported by compelling examples.

In *Requiem*, Oden has missed an opportunity to

articulate effectively the discontent of disaffected conservative Protestants.

VIDEOS



Discovering Everyday Spirituality with Thomas Moore. Trinity Church Productions, 1995. (Available from EcuFilm, (800) 251-4091.)

Each 25-minute segment of this marvelous, six-part video series focuses on God's presence in the most everyday and ordinary moments of our lives.

Hosted by author Thomas Moore (*Care of the Soul*), the segments combine reflection with stories and comments from a well-chosen array of famous—and not-so-famous—people who have felt God's presence.

Author Robert Fulghum (*All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*) reflects on how the daily ritual of ironing a shirt becomes a sacred activity, as it conjures up memories of his early childhood and the desire to do well with every task he undertakes.

United Methodist clergyman Jeff Smith, TV's *Frugal Gourmet*, gives a

delightful homily on the kitchen as a symbol of community, explaining that the act of cooking and eating together feeds souls as well as bodies.

Moore's reflections and the stories told by featured guests attest to God's attendance as people hang out their wash, dig gardens, sculpt, dance, work at a computer or just sit.

The series offers ideas for discerning the holiness in our midst, even when it is there in the most humble forms.

JUST OUT

How Shall They Hear? A Handbook for Religion Communicators edited by Tom Slack. Religious Public Relations Council, 1995.

Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer by Jan L. Richardson. Upper Room Books, 1995.

Educating for the Transition From Pastoral to Program Church by Brian Russell Schofield-Bodt. Alban Institute, 1994.

The Caregiver Survival Series by James R. Sherman, Ph.D. Four volumes. Cassettes available. Pathway Books, 1994-95.

—Kathleen LaCamera is a United Methodist pastor, media critic and producer for United Methodist Communications, based in Manchester, England.

Witnesses

IT WAS WHILE STUDYING THEOLOGY at Boston University in the 1950s that the Rev. **John H. Cartwright** first encountered Martin Luther King Jr., then a doctoral student, and Howard Thurman, theologian and one of the first Black deans of the chapel at a major U.S. seminary. Today, Cartwright, a United Methodist clergyman born in Houston, keeps the legacies of these two alive. He is both the King Professor of Social Ethics and coordinator of the university's Howard Thurman Center. Cartwright, founding director of Boston's King Center, today supervises doctoral students, teaches a course on King and helps maintain the university's collections of essays by Thurman.

"I want students to understand what King stood for, and to learn about what he did to live out his Christian commitment," says Cartwright. "I want people to remember the depth of spirituality conveyed by Thurman."

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

BOYCE BOWDEN

BETTY SALTER OF PENSACOLA, FLA., remembers her aunt, a Methodist deaconess, as a person "who gave her heart and soul to help other people." Today, Salter carries on the family tradition of Christian outreach as board chairperson for Habitat for Humanity in Pensacola. In a ministry supported in part by her home congregation, Ferry Pass Church, Salter and her husband, James, have helped build 35 Habitat houses in the past 12 years. She has worked with more than 1,000 volunteers. A United Methodist laywoman since she was 20, Salter says she loves seeing the fruits of her labors as a Habitat volunteer. "The church has taught me about sharing what God has given us," she said. "When you build a house for a family in need, it gives you a good feeling. You can see God all around."



CATHERINE REGAN/BARNETT BANK

LIKE LAZARUS, Canterbury Chapel Church in Bian, Okla., has been raised from death. The miracle-makers are recovering drug addicts and alcoholics.

Led by pastor **Meri Whitaker**, right, and lay leader **Ricky Gassaway**, the formerly dying congregation in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference has become a haven for as many as 75 people a week. Sunday services are informal, with Whitaker preaching in jeans, and recovering users strolling onto the porch for a cigarette between hymns. Whitaker and Gassaway are rebuilding the congregation by opening the doors to the men and women they meet in self-help groups at nearby Cookson Hills Community Center, where she is executive director. Gassaway, met Whitaker through the center and liked her pastoral style, he said. "She didn't try to force religion down my throat. She just told me what God had done in her life." Gassaway caught her spirit and has brought many of his friends into the church.

"Witnesses" celebrates individual United Methodists who demonstrate their faith in profound ways or extraordinary circumstances. To nominate someone, send a brief description, a daytime phone number where the person may be reached and a good-quality photo (if possible) to INTERPRETER, Attn. "Witnesses," P.O. Box 320, Nashville, TN 37202.