

Feelings of Isolation in Women Ministers and Women In Ministry  
Conversations Giving Voice To Sacred Space  
Joan Hebert Reisinger

*Abstract: This study is a preparation for designing a continuing education curriculum for professional women ministers and women in ministry. It seeks to understand the feelings of isolation in women ministers and women in ministry in Dade and Broward County, Florida. Using a method of theological reflection, I utilized both qualitative and quantitative research to explore women's experience. This research was put into conversation with socio-cultural insights and insights from three narratives about women present in all four gospels. Focus groups were convened to envision a pastoral response. Results indicate that women in Dade and Broward County have specific needs for continuing education including developing opportunities which explore and affirm women's images of themselves as women ministers and their abilities to care for self, and developing explicit opportunities to meet spiritual and professional needs through increasing women's use of voice.*

This study began as I heard women's feelings of isolation in the conversation of colleagues who are ministers in the Protestant and Roman Catholic faith traditions in Dade and Broward County. I realized I have these feelings of isolation, too. These women in Dade and Broward County have identified with and are invested in their churches. They see great value to their ministry. Although the women have expressed feelings of isolation and efforts to provide support in the form of discussion groups have been made, these efforts have not had continued or consistent results. I sought to get a clearer understanding of what the women feel would be helpful in continuing religious education and support. I believe these feelings of isolation are reflective of a liminal, in-between space, and provide direction for continuing religious education that will be life-giving and supportive for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. I hoped this study would help utilize the liminal tension of this space to contribute to the empowerment and further understanding of the unique role of women within the emergent church.

This study had three parts. I began this theological reflection by listening to women's personal experience of isolation through in-depth interviews. I juxtaposed their position with that of the women in three narratives about women present in all four gospels: the woman anointing Jesus, the women standing at the cross, and the women approaching the tomb and being sent to speak the good news of the resurrection. I listened to their thoughts about these narratives. I sought readings in the Social Sciences dealing with women's development. During the second part, reflection, I developed a written questionnaire, using information from the earlier listening. The questionnaire was an effort to gain more information about the women's religious experiences, psychological development, use of voice and leadership styles. It was statistically analyzed for correlations. As a researcher, I had done my own theological reflection, but felt it necessary to listen again to the women's reflection. I invited the women to meet in focus groups in order to put the pastoral need into conversation with the information about personal experience, culture and tradition, going deeper into the realm of insights. The reflection and dialogue served as a means for clarifying the information as it related to the pastoral need. Finally, during the focus groups the women, responding to the pastoral need, turned to imagining a pastoral response.

I enter this conversation as a white, middle-aged, middle-class, American, Roman-Catholic woman attempting to ground myself in Christian eco-feminist theology. I bring with me the following assumptions. There are feelings of isolation in women, reflective of the disparity between personal and institutional theology and a pull to minister in ways which are not consistent with women's inner knowing. This disparity is often due to the choices people and our institutions make in the chaos present in our transition to a new culture and a new way of being church. This disparity is caused, in part, by gender issues, and issues regarding the valuing of diversity and pluralism. Continuing religious education is both essential in

supporting ministry and crucial in encouraging women to grow to deeper understanding and a living out of their faith in a way which affirms our deepest uniqueness and worth.

I also entered this project with biases. I believe that women have unique gifts to offer the church. One of these gifts is the speaking of our truth about inclusivity and respect for all people and the earth. Mentoring and support of each other are necessary. A movement to caring is necessary. It is both prophetic in its concern for truth and balanced in its concern for caring of self and others. While the scope of this project is centered within the Christian tradition, I have respect for the Divine presence in all religious traditions.

## **Listening to Women**

### *Interviews*

I interviewed fifteen women ministers and women in ministry. Ten of these women are within the Protestant faith tradition and five are within the Roman Catholic faith tradition. Eight of the women are ordained ministers within their tradition, and one is soon to be ordained. The other women are professional women in ministry. Three women have a Doctorate degree. Ten women have a Masters degree, with one currently working on hers. The women ranged in age from 40's to 60's, with the majority in the 50's and 60's. Ethnicity included African American, Caucasian, and Latina women. My research was not to establish a statistically significant sample, but rather a pastoral sample of women in ministry in South Florida.

Questions were asked in an effort to understand the women's experience and determine if they had feelings of isolation and the causes of these feelings. Questions centered around the following areas: feelings of isolation and their origin, disparity between personal and institutional theology, images of God and church, support currently in place, prayer and worship needs and styles, leadership parameters, and affinity to three narratives in all four gospels. It became clear that one of the results of this research was the opportunity for women to give voice to their experiences and their understanding of the current times and passages they are in within the church

Results of the interviews indicated that 12 out of 15 women experienced feelings of isolation. All fifteen were aware of other women who also experience feelings of isolation. Some termed these feelings as tension or rubbing. Ten of the women believed these feelings stem from a disparity between their personal and institutional theology. This disparity is experienced in the institutional theology which is hierarchical and concerned with preserving the status quo. The issues around which this disparity is experienced are lack of collegiality, how authority and power work in the church, the exclusion of people, including women from ministry, and the current issue of people who are homosexual and lesbian in ministry in the church and their inclusion in the church. The hierarchy of the church was viewed, in some cases, as lacking in a personal theology in interpreting tradition and doctrine. The hierarchy of the institutional church was discussed as lacking dialogue and moving toward retrenchment to an ideology of exclusion that backs off from justice. It was stated that the more one fits into the institution the less isolated one feels. Many women felt that the hierarchy fears the sharing of space and voice.

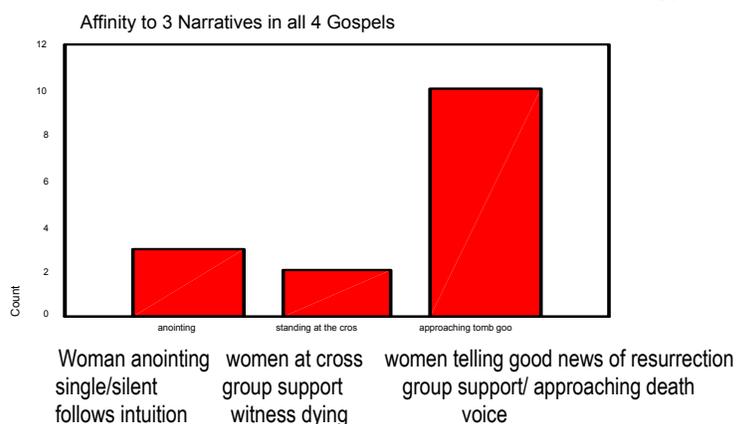
Women's images of God varied. Four of the women described a mainly masculine God or a Trinitarian God, based on Father, Son and Spirit. Eleven women talked of God as having no gender or God of many images.

Church metaphors or images varied as well. Church was seen primarily as fluid, relational community, dialogical people of like minds moving together to do justice. Ten of the women pray with a prayer group that is supportive as well. For eight of the women, this prayer group was one in which all share responsibility. The changes women would make in worship involve attention to all the senses. Dance, music, good sermons tied with their life experiences and the inclusion of women for the women at all/various pastoral responsibilities were important to them.

Women described their leadership as mutual and participatory. Eleven of the women felt the pull to lead differently from the institutional church, which they felt required hierarchical leadership based on a power – over relationship. Several of these women said that many women in ministry are following their instinctive leadership style, leading in a mutual, participatory way, however they feel a pull to lead toward participation in the hierarchy.

### Scripture:

There are three narratives from the Tradition involving women present in all four gospels: the woman anointing Jesus, the women standing at the cross, and the women approaching the tomb and being sent to speak the good news of the resurrection. Since these narratives are present in all gospels, this presence strikes me as relevant to us today. I used these to illicit the underlying theology of the participants.



As part of the listening process, I studied New Testament narratives involving women present in all four gospels which may add insight to the conversation.

### *The Anointing of Jesus*

The story of the woman anointing Jesus is found in Matthew 26: 6-13, Mark 14: 3-9, Luke 7: 36-50, John 12:1-8.

Differences exist between the gospels in the identification of the woman who anoints the living Jesus. However, despite differences in identification, “She is not unwilling to identify with the brokenness of the human condition. She is not concerned with what people will say. She is not constrained by the demands of false protocol or of oppressive society’s expectations. Apparently she is following her own intuition and her own judgment.”(Dornisch 1996, 78-79.) Her actions were counter-cultural.

The concepts of honor and shame that took place in the Mediterranean culture during Jesus’ time were one aspect of the culture. Men had honor because they operated in the public arena. “ ‘Public’ marked the exclusively masculine domain where aggressive male heads of households jockeyed for honor and standing in the wider civic community (polis). Conversely, ‘private’ defined the sphere of discrete kinship circles (oikos) where women guarded their proper sense of shame and modesty, conceived not only in terms of protected sexuality, but also regulated speech.”(Spencer 1999, 139.)

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza speaks of this concept as being dualistic in nature and one of many systems of domination present in Mediterranean society. Using this model “obscures that Mediterranean society in antiquity would be more adequately comprehended with the patriarchy/kyriarchy social model since the dualism honor/shame is only one, though an important, feature of the kyriarchy ethos of

antiquity." (Fiorenza 2000, 98.) Since this gender dualism is still present in other forms in our culture today, a consideration of the woman anointing Jesus as one who is 'neighbor', according to Fiorenza allows us to appreciate this woman anointing Jesus.

The woman in the gospels appeared unsummoned into a public place, out of the woman's private domain to anoint Jesus. In each story, she remains voiceless, speaking only through her actions. Yet, she acts with boldness, refusing to submit to a domination system that would render her silent. She places herself in a position, by her actions, where she will be perceived by those present as without honor and shameless in this society. Jesus' response is to restore her to honor. He not only states that her action is pleasing, but also gives her voice through each generation's telling of her story.

The woman brings expensive oil to anoint Jesus, living, affirming Jesus' actions as life-giving. Literature describes the anointing as representing the anointing for kingship, as prefiguring Jesus' death - anticipating burial, as anticipating the footwashing of John's gospel as a model of service and discipleship, and as anticipating the commandment that Jesus gave to love one another. The anointing of Jesus' feet "... would be consistent with understanding the woman's actions as being the beautifying preparation of Jesus' feet, for he is the one who will soon announce the good news of God's kingship to Jerusalem."(Ravens 1988, 286.)

#### *Women Standing by the Foot of the Cross*

The women standing by the foot of the cross is present in all four gospels: Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 23:48-49 and John 19:25-26.

This gospel speaks of women's presence even in the face of death. These women do not run away. They are present, together. It is interesting to note that in this narrative the women are, again, silent. Certainly, they have come from the private sphere of their homes to the public place of shame – the cross. The attempt to dishonor Jesus is publicly challenged by their presence as witnesses, legitimating Jesus' power.

Two symbols arise. One, the cross, is the symbol of ignominy, an executioner's tool. "The cross can be seen as an extreme example of the risk that anyone struggling against oppression takes at the hands of those who want to keep the systems of domination intact, but it is not in itself redeeming. What is redeeming is not Jesus' suffering and death, but his life, his vision of justice and right relations restored in communities of celebration and abundant life." (Reuther 1998, 102.) The other symbol in this narrative is the action of standing - present - as witnesses. This non-violent action is a powerful statement in the face of fear, and injustice.

In the Synoptic gospels, the women watch Jesus' death at a distance, but in John's they are close enough to hear Jesus speak. Through giving his mother to the disciple he loves, "Jesus ensures continuity between the past and the future. At the heart of Jesus' ministry is the creation of the new family of God... The new family that is born at the foot of the cross is marked by love and trust."(Newsome and Ringe 1992, 384.)

All gospels have the Greek word *ajpov* in common. *Ajpov* means several things in Greek. One meaning is that of 'separation'. It can also mean 'of origin', a place where anything comes, befalls, is taken, or 'of origin of a cause'. Matthew, Mark and Luke use this word to mean the separation of the women from the cross. This word is also used as Jesus gives his mother into the care of his disciple that he loves – the origin of the new family of the body of Christ.

#### *The Women Approaching the Tomb, Wondering Who Will Roll Away the Stone, And Being Sent To Spread the Good News*

This gospel appears in Matthew 28: 1-10, Mark 16: 1-11, Luke 24: 1-11, and John 20: 1-18.

The women come with courage to the tomb. They come after rejecting collaboration with the injustice of death on the cross. They come in the private sphere of women's work, facing death to be sent to the

public sphere announcing to men sequestered in the upper room the good news of the resurrection. In effect, they come from the silent stance against the injustice of the cross to find voice in witness to the resurrection and life. “Despite the fact that legally women’s testimony at that time was considered invalid, the authors of the four gospels all make women the primary witnesses to the most important event of Christianity.”(Schlumpf 2000, 14.)

There are several symbols that rise in this narrative. The first is the stone. Stones were quite large and were often rolled down over the tomb entrance. Stones could symbolize death. “The stone is an image of what is dead and of what cannot be enjoyed.”(Kittle 1964, 269.) In addition, in ancient Greek times, a stone could refer to places from which people spoke. The second is movement – the courage of going to and the movement of being sent, proclaiming the good news.

Two words which are used in all gospels are: *ajpokulivw*, a verb meaning to roll off or away. This word is not only used as the women wonder who will roll away the stone, it is also used to refer to the stones that were in place in front of the tomb. The second word that is similar is *apaggello* meaning 1) to bring tidings from a person or a thing, to report and 2) to proclaim, to make known openly, declare. Interestingly both of these words have as their origin the word used in the gospels about standing at the foot of the cross *apjov*, meaning separation or origin.

#### *Social Sciences:*

The results of the interviews indicated a need to listen to current reading regarding body, care for self, voice, women's ways of knowing, and leadership.

#### *BODY:*

Women are in conversation with the world bodily. They learn early to listen to their body. This connected way of knowing invites dialogue with others.

“ Anne Wilson Schaef, a psychoanalyst, explains ... ‘Women do not define the world using sexual concepts.’ ... When men speak of the body, they tend immediately to think of sexuality. When women speak of the body, what opens up to them first of all are the manifold erogenous zones of their body, with which they live which allows them to experience the world and to find access to it and to others – this multidimensional “tenderness” that in the beginning was an appropriate description of non-aggressive behavior but which later became worn out and dissolved into sentimentality.” (Moltmann-Wendel 1994, 72.)

Too often, women are silenced in their ways of knowing. Carol Lakey Hess states, “We do not force girls physically, but we shape them physically to believe that they should mold, shape and paint their bodies and spirits according to expected patterns of femininity.” (Hess 1997, 122.) Society and culture train us in gender early in life and equate girl – body with connectedness, submissiveness and caring, according to Hess. We can look at body and claim more balanced “gender nurturing with autonomy and connectedness, with control and flexibility (rather than submissiveness), with assertiveness and care.”(Hess, 124.) These more balanced ways of being body reflect on our way of being body of Christ.

A look at the Greek and Roman word for body, “*Soma*”, may be helpful in seeing church as institution as body. “*Soma*” was used by many writers of Hebrew Testament times to refer to a social body as well – a group of people.

“Since there is no word for ‘body’ in the Old Testament (except when designating corpse or a slave), it is not surprising that the term rarely occurs in Jesus’ teachings.

Nonetheless there is some emphasis on life in its bodily form...It is the Old Testament background and the life and teaching of Jesus that provide the New Testament with an understanding of the body as a means of communication and mutual help and love among the members of the body of Christ and even beyond to non-believers.”(Freedman 1992,

769,771.)

### *ETHICS OF CARING*

While feminists do not always agree with Gilligan's 'Ethics of Care' because it reflects a hierarchical developmental model and may be more formed by culture, this 'ethics of care' seems to be relevant to women ministers and women in ministry. Gilligan postulates three stages of care which are central to moral development for girls and women, much as Kohlberg's stages of moral development are said to be central to boys and men. Women develop in a way that focuses on relationships among people and with an ethics of care for those people. Decisions are made connected with concern for self and the social environment in which a person lives. The first stage is that of survival. The second stage is characterized by responsibility for others to the neglect of self. Women feel it is wrong to act in their own interests and value the interests of others over their own. This is the stage that our culture equates with the feminine image of caring. It is often a difficult stage to move from as women are affirmed for self-sacrificing ways which are often at their own expense. The third stage of care involves a transition to the realization of women's own personhood and the necessity of equal relationships based on a responsibility of care for self and others. "The move to the third level of caring comes about when a person realizes that living up to the expectations of care for others can become slavish and dissatisfying when mutuality is absent. (Hess, 90.)

Gilligan found that girls growing up were often acculturated not to address the brokenness in relationships, but rather to maintain silence due to the "Voices which intentionally or unintentionally interfere with girls' knowing, or encourage girls to silence themselves, keep girls from picking up or bringing out into the open a series of relational violations which they are acutely keyed into." (Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman 1991, 19.) For true self-care there is a need to encourage truth-speaking. "Both connection and separation, affirmation and challenge, are essential not only for women's survival in the world, but for women's flourishing and development... We are only in relation when we have shared our voice and presented our differences." (Hess, 92)

### *WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING*

Belenky in 1986 studied woman's way of knowing based on women's intellectual development. She described five stages of development. The first is lack of voice or silence, women having no voice of their own. The second is that of listening, receiving knowledge from others. The third involves learning from their own experience, but not requiring others to 'know' their truth. The fourth focuses on how to learn and obtain knowledge. During this stage knowledge is considered uncertain and women apply analysis to knowledge in order to procedurally determine its truth. Separate knowing was described as impersonal and detached and connected knowing as a way of knowing that emphasizes understanding. The final stage is that of the connected knower where knowledge is to be judged from one's own image of self as a participant in the construction of the knowledge. Information from the survey indicates women responded in agreement to a connected way of knowing.

### *VOICE*

The use of voice requires language. We know that language rules are socially acquired, that they are basically covert and cannot be directly observed, and that the rules of language specify how to arrange symbols to express ideas.

Semantics is the study of language meaning and how it is acquired. In language, the semantic component includes the meanings of the language, as well as the rules which link meaning with words, phrases or sentences. Words do not represent things exactly. They are used to give us an idea of the speaker's internal representations of the world. Words, sentences and phrases represent what people know about the world in which they live. Since language helps to construct the world, unless something is named, it is not thought to be real. If there is no name for an object or a concept, doubt can arise as to the validity

of the object or event. Language is produced within a culture and therefore, language is never free from the conditions that produce it.

Many theologians have written since the 1970's about the importance of speaking about God in a way that affirms human dignity and equality. In recent years, the image of a triune God in which the Spirit has been restored and the emphasis is on relationality has arisen. Elizabeth Johnson's female imaging of the triune symbol has provided an alternative image of the living God, based on Scriptures and tradition. "Inclusive imagings of God that are faithful to biblical witnesses and tradition provide a holy space that is truly redemptive for all...An authentic imaging of God as Communion invites each person into relationship and collaboration with her triune self who is mercy, and inexorably challenges the believer toward an ethic and action on behalf of people's who suffer injustice and on behalf of the earth itself."(Fox 2001, 248.)

Feminist theology has as its goal not to make women equal partners in a dominating system, but rather to change the system. By placing women's experience at the center, feminist theologians are bringing about an intellectual paradigm shift. More and more people are coming to realize that literal patriarchal speech about God is oppressive and idolatrous. "In this discipline"(theology) "the equal dignity of both women and men created in the image of God, redeemed by Christ, and graced by the Spirit is now basic doctrine, with the result that, as the Second Vatican Council," (Gaudium et Spes,) "teaches every type of discrimination on the basis of sex is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" (Johnson 1997, 25.) We cannot allow linguistics to 'gate' what can be said and understood because of interpretations and uses of language.

#### **LEADERSHIP**

Research indicates that there is a historical tension between two ways of structuring relationships, institutions and beliefs. Reiner Eisler postulates that a more "holistic picture of history as the tension between the forward push toward partnership model and the tremendous resistance and periodic regressions toward a dominator model can be seen throughout history."(Eisler 2001.) The liminal space being explored provides a period of disequilibrium that can provide space for transformation. We know that in life change is a constant. The issue is whether the change is still within the dominator system. The move toward a partnership model requires the view of all people as valuable and of equal worth. "The fact that we talk about issues that affect the female half of humanity as just a woman's issue should give you a clue as to how conditioned we all are to view women as secondary."(Eisler.) We cannot move to a partnership model and caring without valuing caring and partnership. Eisler recommends that we must think outside the box and think in economic and political terms of equal partnership which will begin a move from the dominator model.

Leadership styles can model partnership and equality. There is a move within every discipline toward discussing a servant-leadership model as envisioned by Robert Greenleaf in the 60's.(Spears, 1998.) Still 40 years later, this style of leadership has not yet made its way, to any great extent, into our culture or society. However, as women have risen to leadership positions in business and education, some have brought their relational styles of leadership.

Susan Willhauck and Jacquelyn Thorpe have studied women's style of leadership and described it as a web which seeks to include those at the margins by describing communal life. "The metaphor of the web represents the possibility of change in the church that may be called for by the presence of women in leadership."( Willhauck and Thorpe 2001, 19.)

#### **Reflection:**

##### *Questionnaire:*

Given the insights provided in the listening phase, I began to wonder if further insights would be gained in studying women's views of themselves in each of these areas, correlated with their views of church as body. In the three narratives present in all four Gospels concerning women, Jesus' body was living, dying,

dead and resurrected. The women approached Jesus. Church is often spoken of in terms of "body of Christ." How do these women ministers approach church as the body of Christ?

"We could talk about the body as institution, which is one way we experience church.

Perhaps it is a fair question to ask, is it a corpse? Or a statue, marble and unmoving? Or a living organism, much more than the sum of its parts? The body of Christ is an inclusive community of Koinonia in mutual need, it is called to be a prophetic sign and foretaste and, like our inseparability, it is both present reality and eschatological hope.

(Winfield 1995, 372.)

Is there a relationship between this isolation women ministers feel, the liminal space which we experience bodily, the parameters identified in the interviews, and the ways in which we experience church as body-living, dying, dead and resurrected? Will this information allow us to dialogue more deeply in order to imagine avenues of continuing religious education which will support women?

I developed a questionnaire and sent it to each participant via e-mail. It contained questions which arose from examination of the interviews as well as from reading in the social sciences and Tradition; and I used a Lickert Scale, rated on a continuum of 4 for agreement and disagreement. A neutral point was not used in order to encourage critical reflection. Questions centered around the following topics pinpointed in reading and the interviews: feelings of isolation and 'fit' within the institution, leadership styles, use of voice, church as body – living, dying, dead and resurrected, view of body both in terms of body image and feminist spirituality, 'ethics of care' development, and women's ways of knowing, understanding. Questions were designed to investigate a single parameter. Some were phrased in both the positive and the negative. These were correlated with each other and with the presence of feelings of isolation and the presence of disparity between personal and institutional theology.

I hypothesized that women with feelings of isolation would relate to church as body-dying, body-dead. I imagined that women would all use women's connected ways of knowing. I expected to find all women valuing their feminine body images. I hypothesized that these women, who were highly educated, would be taking care of self, speaking up about their experiences within the church, and using leadership that was mutual and inclusive. I hypothesized that continuing religious education needed to include a means for support and continuing theological education, particularly by women theologians.

Nine women responded to the survey. Some women had difficulty with the questions concerning church as institution as body-living, dying, dead, and resurrected. This initiated conversation and reflection.

The survey was transcribed onto the statistical software, SPSS 10.5 for Windows (Statistical Product and Social Services). This comprehensive software system for analyzing data statistically allowed analysis of questions for correlation of items. Bivariate correlations were made. Analysis showed good inter-question correlation between related questions.

Nine statements showed a positive or a negative Pearson correlation and a 2-tailed significance at the .05 level. These statements were in the following categories: church as institution as body dying and dead, fit within the institution, use of voice, 'ethics of care' development, and body image in the valuing of sexual differences.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
a Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.

		7	19	4	23	24	32	5	8	22
		institution as body dying	institution as body dead	institution as body living	fit in institution	body image	voice	voice	self-care	self care
SUR7	Pearson	1.000	.845**	-.706	.424	.	.786*	.641	.455	.455
Institution as body dying	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.008	.050	.296	.	.021	.087	.258	.258
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
SUR19	Pearson	.845**	1.000	-.780*	.607	.	.889**	.771*	.415	.415
institution as body dead	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.	.022	.111	.	.003	.025	.307	.307
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
SUR4	Pearson	-.706	-.780*	1.000	-.714*	.	-.748*	-.746*	-.748*	-.748*
Institution as body living	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.022	.	.047	.	.033	.033	.033	.033
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
SUR23	Pearson	.424	.607	-.714*	1.000	.533	.746*	.426	.783*	.683
Fit in institution	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.296	.111	.047	.	.140	.021	.252	.013	.062
	N	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	8
SUR24	Pearson	.	.	.	.533	1.000	.875**	.350	.746*	.
Body image	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.	.	.140	.	.002	.356	.021	.
	N	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	8
SUR32	Pearson	.786*	.889**	-.748*	.746*	.875**	1.000	.550	.803*	.467
voice	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.003	.033	.021	.002	.	.125	.009	.244
	N	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	8
SUR5	Pearson	.641	.771*	-.746*	.426	.350	.550	1.000	.596	.537
voice	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.087	.025	.033	.252	.356	.125	.	.090	.169
	N	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	8
SUR8	Pearson	.455	.415	-.748*	.783*	.746*	.803*	.596	1.000	1.000
Self care	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.258	.307	.033	.013	.021	.009	.090	.	.000
	N	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	8
SUR22	Pearson	.455	.415	-.748*	.683	.	.467	.537	1.000**	1.000
Self care	Correlation									
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.258	.307	.033	.062	.	.244	.169	.000	.
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8

## VOICE

There was significant correlation between seeing the church as institution as dying or dead and entombed and agreement with "I do not communicate to others the impact of their leadership styles on my ministry."

There was correlation between seeing the church as dead and dying and the agreement that it is important to speak about the times that I feel isolated within ministerial life with my colleagues, and it is important for me to express my care for myself by nurturing relationships with others.

## BODY IMAGE

Two women responded in disagreement to the statement, "I believe that a woman's body manifests the same fullness of spirit and God as a man's body." A positive response to the survey item, "Sexual differences are to be valued." correlated significantly at a .01 2-tailed significance level agreement with items relating to the importance of care for self by giving time to nurture relationships. Most women believed Christian symbols need reinterpretation, and God should be spoken of in other than male terms. These correlated to the statement, "Sexual differences are to be valued." Disagreement with seeing the church as institution as body living correlated negatively with positive statements regarding self care, communication of feelings of isolation and feeling invisible within the church, and importance for expressing care for self by nurturing relationships with others.

#### ETHICS OF CARE

Women expressed self-care in various ways. Two women out of nine expressed that their life feels like they are just taking care of themselves so they can survive. Three women out of nine (1/3) expressed that they believed caring for others to the point that they neglect themselves is part of their ministry. Most women agreed that self-care, including taking time to nurture relationships, was important.

#### Women's Ways of Knowing

Women agreed with statements about connected ways of knowing as described by Belenky more often than statements describing procedural knowing.

#### LEADERSHIP STYLES

Women indicated leadership styles which were mutual and inclusive.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

Women related to church as body living, dying, dead and resurrected simultaneously. My hypothesis that women would use women's ways of knowing and leadership styles which were mutual and participatory was correct. However, not all women valued feminine body images. Four women had difficulty with self care feeling that they were barely surviving or were sacrificing self for others. Six women restricted use of voice when talking to colleagues. In general, the results suggested the need for continuing religious education in the areas of voice, and self-care. It appeared important to attend to language, body image and the symbols we use in our rituals.

#### *Evaluation:*

I conducted both self and peer evaluation of this project. Quantitative evaluation took place at the focus group meeting, utilizing a five question response format on a continuum of 4 points. All participants felt that the experiences had provided relevant reflection and pinpointed needs for them within their ministerial experience. Three of the participants rated the survey one point below other ratings in its clarity. Two participants expressed enthusiasm for the survey. Three of the participants wrote later about connecting body, mind and spirit during the focus discussions and the spiritual connections they made during and after the focus process.

In evaluating the process, I would be more explicit in the way I assigned each survey a number as it was received. I may consider mailing it. I would shorten the survey sent by omitting questions related to women's way of knowing, and several questions about power and prayer. The data collected followed the norm for data already present in research. This is, however, based on hindsight and the benefit of statistical analysis.

#### *Women's Reflection:*

I invited all participants to participate in focus groups for the purpose of dialogue about the results of the survey and the needs for support and avenues for action. These focus groups were used for both the reflection and responding stages. Focus groups were held in the morning at St. Thomas University and in the afternoon at South Florida Theological Seminary in downtown Miami. I used the Whitehead method (Whitehead and Whitehead 1992) of theological reflection in the design of the PowerPoint presentation

revealing data from the interviews (personal experience), important insights from the readings (socio-cultural and tradition), and invited the participants into personal conversation about the implications they saw for pastoral need and then into communal dialogue. The PowerPoint presentation was used to begin the dialogue. Five participants joined in the reflection. All those who attended the focus groups responded to the survey. Six questions were postulated at the end of the PowerPoint presentation. The two which most resonated with the focus group participants were “Are there specific needs for us as women ministers and women in ministry?” and “Assuming that the church as institution is dying, what needs for transition arise?”

The women in the focus groups talked about the concurrent truth of the institution as dying, dead, resurrected and alive. They spoke of the need to go to the margins, to the people on the outskirts, at the edges and to engage life. Women felt that women do not always support each other. They reaffirmed the need for support of each other in ways that are not necessarily taking place now in Dade and Broward Counties, Florida. This support may be seen as the need to call each other together to begin conversation. An affirmation of women’s unique leadership styles and their need to be more intentional in mutuality and participatory leadership were seen. Courage and the ability to savor the process were identified as qualities women needed.

*Personal Reflection:*

Data from the questionnaire indicating women’s needs for continuing religious education in the areas of voice and self care put together with the information about women’s experiences from the interviews, the Tradition and the Social Sciences seem to indicate common issues. Voice, the use of voice while coming from a private to public sphere, relationship as one part of self care, knowledge that separation and death can also be the origin of a new creation (as shown by the Greek word, *ajpov*, and its derivatives) are among the issues needing reflection.

While only 3 women agreed with the church as body living, all of the women ministers proclaimed what is living in the body of Christ as institution. They talked of their life-giving ministry as connected and dialogical, the life-giving aspects of prayer and worship, what provided support for the reconfiguration of their ministry within the church and strengthened the concept of church—ekklesia. They also talked about the institutional hierarchy that attempts to exclude those who are different, to limit God in our human ways of imaging God, the pull of the faithful body of Christ to remain as children in their faith development and a system that rewards doing that. The actions of the woman anointing urge women not to take on the names given them, but to rather realize their inner self and voice. The woman anointing reminds women to ponder the situations within the church which leave women nameless and voiceless and to act.

Nine women felt feelings of isolation. Seven women felt invisible within their churches. Six felt the church was dying, four felt the church was dead. These women spoke and often showed bodily in their gestures and their stress, the pain they experience at the hands of a hierarchical leadership. They spoke of the dying caused by the pain of exclusion and exclusive language, the exclusion of the divorced, homosexuals and lesbians from the church, and women from church leadership. They spoke of a sinking feeling when hearing that the table of the Lord is a closed table, or of worship styles or leadership roles which limit the inclusive, participatory, mutual aspects that they know to be life-giving. Women are called to face and to name what they know bodily of the institution which is dying and the system which would render women as dead within the body of Christ. Women must come, as the women did in all three narratives, from the private sphere to the public sphere to resist rather than create new hegemonies. Standing together as women in the face of death-dealing systems within the body of Christ, resists exclusion and the rendering of women invisible and voiceless, and challenges the politics of the day through connection and relationship. “In search of a ‘place to stand’ together, feminist theological method must move toward a

greater collaboration and dialogue among its various voices.”(Schaab 2001, 351.) The word, *ajpov*, has much to teach us that in separation there can also be new revelation.

In the separation of unjust death, and in the acceptance seen in the creation of new family in John’s gospel, women are given renewed opportunity to look again at themselves and their images of God. These women saw that “Theology takes shape between God and the excluded, in the cracks and the fissures, where the tensions and repressions of the life of the church are addressed and reconstructed, thus opening up a new sense of God’s work.” (Rieger 2001, 173.) In the relationships, in the ordinary places in women’s lives, with the inclusion of the people at the margins, and by women’s choices in stating what is dying and dead, women witness to an emergent 21<sup>st</sup> century church-ekklesia. Women, as the women in the gospel, stand before the cross together, in community, as the body of Christ.

Can the church be ‘a living organism, much more than the sum of its parts?’ (Winfield 1995) Certainly this would be a resurrected church. Five women agreed with the church as body resurrected. In the resurrection narratives, women were sent as disciples to tell the good news which will bring about the kingdom of God – the renewal of all creation. While their word was challenged and disbelieved, they had the courage to go. The women in the study talked about the inner pull to a more mutual and participatory worship. They talked about bringing a ‘round table’ to the floor - off the predula for hands-on Eucharist (body of Christ), and worship and prayer in more bodily forms such as dance. Women envisioned a new day when all in the body of Christ will be welcome at the Lord’s table, and in ministry, if so called by God. Women need to search for resurrection in new styles of servant leadership that empower and affirm, are dialogical and inclusive - more true to woman’s unique way of knowing. Women need to explore universalizing principles that women would feel are truer to Jesus’ teaching and of a God unlimited by human imagination. These women resonate and expect the body of Christ resurrected. Women know that they want a new creation, a community of Koinonia. Some women are as afraid and as unsure as the women approaching the tomb asking, “Who will roll away the stone?” Some women approach the tomb as a place from which to speak, expecting the risen Jesus, proclaiming good news.

Women’s own resurrection stories can “ritualize the grief that Christian women have experienced for twenty centuries when their faithful and true witness is dismissed as ‘nonsense’. It can remind us of the deprivation imposed on the whole Christian community when its female members are silenced. It can move believers to choose the better part by taking actions to ensure that the faithful preaching of women be heard and accepted in our day.”(Reid 1996, 204.) In coming to the tomb of today’s churches, recognizing that Jesus is not dead or with the dead, and proclaiming the truth women know, women are part of the resurrection story, part of the creation of a new family of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church-ekklesia.

### **Responding:**

#### *Group Response:*

The final stage of this project was the focus group dialogue. The question was asked in the focus groups, “In this time of transition, what will heal relationships?” Thoughts for action included:

- Talk back. Too often we learn to fit in or translate rather than to talk back.
- Be intentional in shedding away patriarchy.
- Be clear about what we are about. Explore expectations, goals and objectives. Know that God is in covenant with us. Hear our own uniqueness as women.
- Return to nature and creation. Be in relationship.
- Communicate with each other across cultures, across faiths. Find common ground.
- Be honest about our leadership styles. Mentor others and call out the gifts of women in our community.

- There is a need to hear and dialogue with women theologians. Find a way to move to a local dialogue with women theologians and throw open the doors in hospitality.

*Personal Pastoral Response:*

Women ministers and women in ministry find themselves in liminal place – a sacred space. In every interview, I heard each woman speak of this sacred space, her beliefs and the way she lives out her faithfulness. It was gift. Continuing religious education can begin here in this liminal space, gathering women together for both contemplation and prophetic action. It requires presence to this in-between, sacred space that we are in and a listening to the place itself. A public event, a dinner – a place of dialogue, a place of dying and injustice - a place for witness and new community, a place of death and burial – a place of courage and the good news of resurrection.

Specific needs which continuing religious education for women ministers and women in ministry could address include:

- To use voice to speak of what they know out loud, in public places; to honor their intuition, empowering them to find and to rely on their own inner wisdom.
- To encourage looking creatively and openly at women's images of self, respecting women's embodied selves as women, and as intellectual and spiritual resources.
- To look at women's own images of the God they proclaim as reflected in leadership styles, actions in ministry, prayer, worship, and language used.
- To help women ministers understand the need for self-care and to explore stories of women's tradition as mentors in the care for self.
- To help women realize the ways women are victims of a system/culture which allows some to live at the sacrifice of others and to move to realize women's own complicity in being victims of this culture.
- To foster a critical examination of Tradition to recover women's stories in the Church and to tell women's own stories as women in the church.
- To seek solidarity with others, looking for creative opportunities to support and mentor other women.
- To educate and sponsor gatherings with women theologians who can stir women to action.
- To provide support and encouragement for women who are taking opportunities to speak to the systems of domination in their lives.

One of my hopes for this study is that others will employ this kind of listening process with other women in other places. I hope to be able to continue to explore these questions and to enlarge the number of women involved. I would like to extend the scope of this study into inter-religious dialogue among women ministers and women in ministry.

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