



# Clergy Gender Trends Across Christian Traditions

By Amy Kubichek, Ph.D.

Religious Workforce Project

Lewis Center for Church Leadership

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**Religious  
Workforce  
Project**





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## About the Religious Workforce Project

Building on previous research, the Religious Workforce Project is an effort to understand the nation's religious workforce in a comprehensive way. The Project includes a national meta-analysis and a qualitative study in the Washington, DC, metro area. Funding for the project is generously provided by The Lilly Endowment, Inc. This project seeks to answer the following questions: Given today's changing religious landscape, how are leaders of U.S. congregations adapting? How do these changes shape the staffing, financial models, priorities, and the work of U.S. congregations? And what is the state of the religious workforce today?



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# Clergy Gender Trends Across Christian Traditions

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## Introduction

Historian Mark Noll marks the mid-twentieth century as the time when an expanding range of denominations opened pastoral leadership fully to women, and by the end of the century such participation had become “an accepted fact of life.”<sup>1</sup> The enrollment of women in seminary and their entry as ordained pastoral leaders in mainline churches began in large numbers in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> While ordination had been possible in many of the denominations previously, large numbers of women entered pastoral ministry as similar changes took place in other traditionally male-dominated professions such as law and medicine. Today women make up about one-third of theological students in the United States and Canada.<sup>3</sup> These figures, however, include schools from traditions that do not ordain women; mainline seminaries alone tend to report female enrollments closer to 50 percent or higher.

Yet to say that women’s participation as pastoral leaders is “an accepted fact of life” glosses over the fact that men and women lead pastors are represented quite differently across religious and denominational traditions. Overall gender statistics are generally meaningless without tradition specificity. Denominations have policies, politics, and customs that combine to encourage or limit women as pastors. Even within religious traditions, there is variation across denominations in terms of share of pastors who are women and men, size of congregations, etc. In this report, we compare clergy gender trends over time across religious traditions, and across specific denominations. We draw on data from the National Congregations Study and denominational data to do this.

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1 Mark A. Noll, *Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119.

2 Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 77.

3 Association of Theological Schools (ATS), Annual Data Tables 2021, Table 2.9.



In Section 1, we provide a brief historical overview of women’s leadership roles in each of three broad Christian traditions: Black Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and mainline Protestant. We also discuss how overall cultural trends in U.S. society have impacted women’s ministerial opportunities (especially women’s opportunities in pastoral roles). Additionally, we describe how barriers within denominations and religious traditions (such as denominational policies and customs) continue to impact the likelihood that congregations will have a woman as a pastor today. Next, we analyze National Congregations Study data to look at these differences in male and female leadership across the Black Protestant,<sup>4</sup> Evangelical Protestant, and Mainline Protestant religious traditions. The National Congregations Study is a multi-year, nationally representative survey of congregations across the United States. It covers a wide range of topics, including religious tradition of congregations, congregational size, staffing configurations and demographic characteristics of pastors and other ministerial staff.<sup>5</sup> We draw upon all four waves of NCS from 1998, 2006, 2012, and 2018 regarding changes in the proportion of pastors who are men and women across the religious traditions mentioned above. Finally, we examine male and female graduations from Master of Divinity programs from historically Black, evangelical Protestant, and mainline Protestant institutions. This is because seminaries have traditionally served as a pipeline of candidates to fill pastoral positions in congregations, and the Master of Divinity degree is often seen as the necessary credential to fill these positions. We draw on Association of Theological Schools (ATS) data<sup>6</sup> from 1998, 2006, 2012, and 2018 so that we can compare these trends prior to each of the waves of the NCS.

Section 2 takes a deeper dive into the characteristics of congregations served by women and those pastored by men based on data provided to us by various denominations, as well as publicly available data. We compare percentage of lead pastors who are women for each denomination in our study and how that has changed over time. After comparing general percentages, we look at gender of lead pastor and median worship attendance and median total expenditures of the congregations they serve. For the United Methodist Church (UMC), we also compare median expenditures spent on pastor salaries plus benefits for clergymen and clergywomen.

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4 It’s important to note that in the *National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019)*, Black Protestant includes congregations that belong to historically Black denominations as well as other congregations (such as mainline, evangelical, or nondenominational) in which at least 80 percent of regular participants are Black.

5 Mark Chaves, Joseph Roso, Anna Holleman, and Mary Hawkins, *Congregations in 21st Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University, Department of Sociology, 2021).

6 <https://www.ats.edu/Data-Visualization>.



# Section 1.

## Women as religious leaders across Christian religious traditions

### Factors influencing women's pastoral leadership

There are three main factors that have shaped the patterns of women's religious leadership in the United States. These include macro-level social changes that have taken place in U.S. society, such as the first and second wave of the women's rights movement and wider cultural shifts toward gender equality; official denominational policies regarding the ordination of women (especially in the role of pastors), and cultural factors (customs and traditions of denominations regardless of formal policy). This section begins with a discussion of the macro-level trends in women's ministerial roles in the United States. This is followed by a historical overview of women in the Black Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and mainline Protestant traditions, focusing on the denominational barriers and opportunities to women's status to ordained clergy.

The first and second waves of the women's movement had a profound impact on opening opportunities for women to be ordained to "full clergy status" – that is, to be ordained as pastors of congregations.<sup>7</sup> The first wave of the women's movement began during the mid-19th century with the Women's Rights Convention in upstate New York. Both state-level and national level conventions called for equal opportunities for women to become ordained clergy, along with equal opportunities for women in other fields of employment. The impact on denominational policies regarding women's ordination can be seen during the last decade of the 19th century. In 1890, only 7 percent of denominations in the United States allowed women to be ordained, but by 1900 this had more than tripled, reaching 25 percent. However, there was still widespread resistance to women serving as ordained pastors in the late 1800s, even among denominations that formally allowed women to be ordained.<sup>8</sup> The second wave

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44-49.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



of the women's movement, which occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, opened the doors for women's entrance into many professional fields of work, including the field of ordained clergy. More denominations enacted formal rule changes allowing women to become ordained pastors during the 1970s than during any previous decade.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the women's rights movements, there was a widespread cultural trend of greater acceptance of gender equality in the United States throughout the 20th century that opened greater opportunities for women sensing a call to ordained ministry. Women's participation in post-secondary schools and the labor force increased throughout the 1900s. For instance, only 27 percent of women were employed in the labor force in 1920, and by 1991 57 percent of women were in the labor force. (By 2019, women's labor force participation rate remained at 57 percent.)<sup>10</sup> Women made up 35 percent of undergraduate students in 1900 and only 6 percent of those who earned a doctoral degree, and by 1991 they composed 55 percent of all undergraduate students and 37 percent of those who earned a doctorate in the United States.<sup>11</sup> By 2019, the last "typical" year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, women composed 57 percent of all undergraduate students enrolled in degree-granting four-year colleges and universities.<sup>12</sup> In 2018-19, slightly over half (54 percent) of those who earned a doctorate degree were women.

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### **Black Protestant**

The diversity in policies, politics, and church customs that encourage or limit women as pastors is seen among the denominations that make up the Black Protestant tradition. There are several denominations that are considered historically Black Protestant denominations, falling within several denominational families, such as Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal/Holiness. Some denominations, such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), formally bar women from becoming ordained pastors. Others, such

9 Ibid., 48-49.

10 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "[Women in the Labor Force: A Databook](#)," (Report 1092, April 2021).

11 Myra Marx Ferree and Beth Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement across Three Decades of Change*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 7. Cited in Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 50.

12 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#) (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment Component; and Fall 2019, Completions Component.



as the Black Baptist denominations, have no official policies preventing women from filling the role of congregational pastors, but have a culture that discourages women from taking this role. We will discuss each of these denominational families in turn.

One of the large denominational families comprises Black Baptists, and includes the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America.<sup>13</sup> Black Baptist denominations typically avoid mandates on congregational decisions. There are clergywomen among churches of the National Baptist Convention, USA; the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and the National Baptist Convention of America. However, in the case of Black Baptist traditions, while there are no formal rules forbidding the ordination of women, generations of tradition and custom discourage women from pastoring congregations.<sup>14</sup> Women historically could take on leadership roles in their congregations other than that of pastor. For instance, they could take on the role of deaconess and become a part of a deaconess board.<sup>15</sup> In some Baptist churches, women with a gift of evangelism could become a part of the missionary board. While women missionaries cannot officially “preach” from the pulpit, they can “teach” from the floor. Even though these women are not formally ordained pastors, they still perform some ministerial functions. Black Baptist churches often have a “church mother.”<sup>16</sup> While the church mother in Baptist congregations does not have formal authority as she does in some other historically Black denominations (such as the Church of God in Christ), she is still very influential. Church mothers are often older women who have been dedicated to serving the church throughout their lives, often having served on the deaconess board or mission board.

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<sup>13</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen Ray Jr., and Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>14</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 286-289.

<sup>15</sup> Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *“If It Wasn’t for the Women...”: Black Women’s Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 107.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 104, 107.





The Black Pentecostal/Holiness family has its roots in what has historically been called the “Sanctified Church.” The Sanctified Church refers to “denominations and congregations formed by black people in the post-Reconstruction South and their direct descendants.”<sup>17</sup> These congregations became a part of the Pentecostal and Holiness movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Most of the congregations of the Sanctified Church elevated women as role models, and women took on a variety of leadership roles, such as evangelists, prayer band leaders, deaconesses, missionaries, and teachers.<sup>18</sup> Women were very influential in their churches, and some denominations allowed women to become bishops, elders, or pastors.

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) is the largest Black Pentecostal/Holiness denomination and was established around the turn of the 20th century.<sup>19</sup> While the Pentecostal family overall has a history of female pastors, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) does not allow women to be ordained as pastors. However, historically women have still played a very influential role in this denomination. In the Church of God in Christ, and other Sanctified denominations, Women’s Departments developed as an avenue to give women powerful leadership roles within the congregations. Through the COGIC’s Women’s Department, women who sensed a call to ministry could take on roles of evangelists, fundraisers for the congregation, deaconesses, missionaries, and educators. Through the Women’s Department, women taught about biblical doctrine, held revival meetings, and presented teaching similar to sermons during the morning service. They could even be in “charge of the church in absence of the pastor.”<sup>20</sup> Women’s teaching roles were essentially the same as men’s preaching roles, though women were not formally recognized as preachers. Even today, the Women’s Department plays an influential role in COGIC congregations. While women can take on a wide variety of leadership roles in COGIC congregations, the denomination still has formal restrictions

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While women can take on a wide variety of leadership roles in COGIC congregations, the denomination still has formal restrictions against women taking on the roles of elder, pastor, or bishop.

17 Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “If It Wasn’t for the Women...,” 44.

18 Ibid., 46.

19 Stacey Floyd-Thomas, et al, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, 18.

20 Church of God in Christ, Official Manual. Cited in Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “If It Wasn’t for the Women...,” 51.



against women taking on the roles of elder, pastor, or bishop.<sup>21</sup> Such exclusionary policies in this denomination have led some women to begin their own independent Pentecostal or Holiness congregations.

The Methodist family includes such denominations as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME). Of all these denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was the first officially to affirm the ordination of women, ordaining Julia A. Foote to the position of deacon in 1894, and ordaining Mary Small as the first elder in 1900,<sup>22</sup> after granting full ordination rights to women 1898.<sup>23</sup> Jarena Lee (1783-1864) is considered the first AME preacher. During the mid-1800s, women in the AME Church took on the functions of preaching and exhorting, even though they were not authorized by the denomination to do so.<sup>24</sup> In 1884, the AME granted women licenses to preach without ordination.<sup>25</sup> The African Methodist Episcopal Church began ordaining women in 1960, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church began allowing the full ordination of women in 1954.<sup>26</sup> However, women were not widely accepted as pastors, and they often were assigned to the most difficult congregations, or denied pastorate appointments altogether.<sup>27</sup> It was not until the 1970s when women in multiple denominations pressed for the right to be ordained that women in the AME became more accepted as pastors.

Exactly what proportion of Black Protestant congregations are led by women and what proportion are led by men is difficult to determine. Among Black Baptist denominations, some estimate that women make up about one percent of pastors leading congregations, and under 10 percent of all leadership positions.<sup>28</sup> Among the Black Methodist denominations, which culturally have been more accepting of women serving as pastors than in Baptist denominations, women have fared much better in

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21 Ibid., 69.

22 Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 285.

23 Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 48.

24 Jualynne E. Dodson, "Women's Ministries and the African Methodist Episcopal Tradition," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 126-127.

25 Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 20.

26 Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 286.

27 Dodson, "Women's Ministries and the African Methodist Episcopal Tradition," 136.

28 Courtney Lyons, "Breaking through the Extra-Thick Stained-Glass Ceiling: African American Baptist Women in Ministry," *Review and Expositor* 110:1 (Winter 2013), 77-91; cited in Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "State of Clergywomen in the U.S.: A Statistical Update" (October 2018), 8.

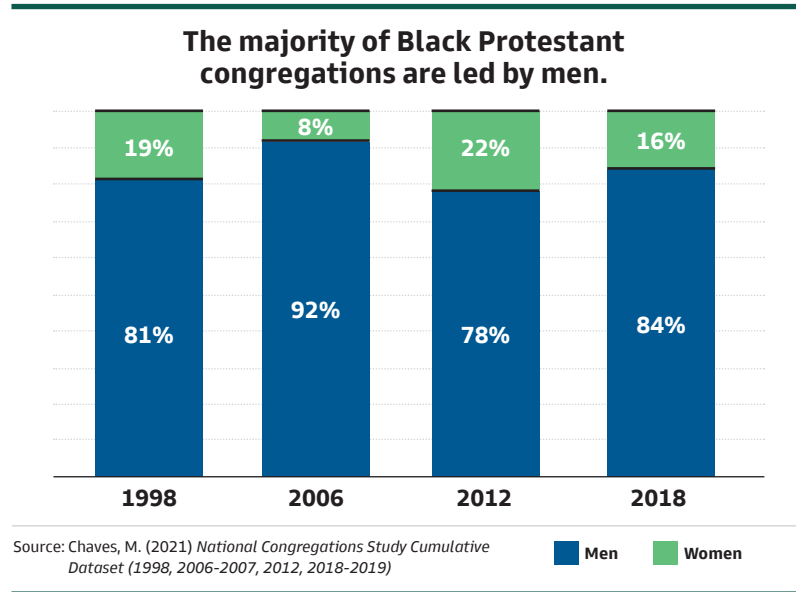


following their call to pastoral ministry. In 1988, women composed 5 percent of pastors leading AME congregations.<sup>29</sup> One AME source reported that in 2016, women made up around 26 percent of clergy serving congregations.<sup>30</sup> By 2018-2019, there were over 1,200 women serving as pastors of congregations, and over 4,500 women serving in a variety of ministerial roles.<sup>31</sup> However, it is unclear what percentage of all pastors of congregations these women compose.

To get a broader understanding of what share of pastors leading congregations are women, we examined data from the four waves of the National Congregations

Study (NCS). This study defines “Black Protestant” as those Protestant congregations in which at least 80 percent of membership are African American, or those congregations that belong to historically Black denominations.<sup>32</sup> Majority Black congregations that belong to mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, and no denominational affiliation are included in these figures. We found that most Black Protestant congregations were led by men across all four waves of the study (figure 1). Less than 20 percent of congregations were led by women in 1998, and this was also true in 2018.

We next examined the share of Black Protestant congregations that are led by women when only the historically Black Protestant congregations in the NCS sample are included. We found that within this subset of Black congregations, women made up only



**Figure 1. Share of Black Protestant congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen**

29 “2017-2018 “Commission on Women in Ministry Report to the General Board of The African Methodist Episcopal Church”, 13-14, cited in Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 8.

30 “African Methodist Episcopal Church 2012-2016 Quadrennial Report of the Connectional Women in Ministry to the 50th Quadrennial Session of the General Conference.” Cited in Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 8.

31 Erika D. Crawford and Teresa L. Fry Brown, “[Celebrating the Daughters of the Reverend Jarena Lee and 200+ Years of Women Answering the Call to Preach in the African Methodist Episcopal Church](#),” (PowerPoint presentation given on Sept. 15, 2020), 10.

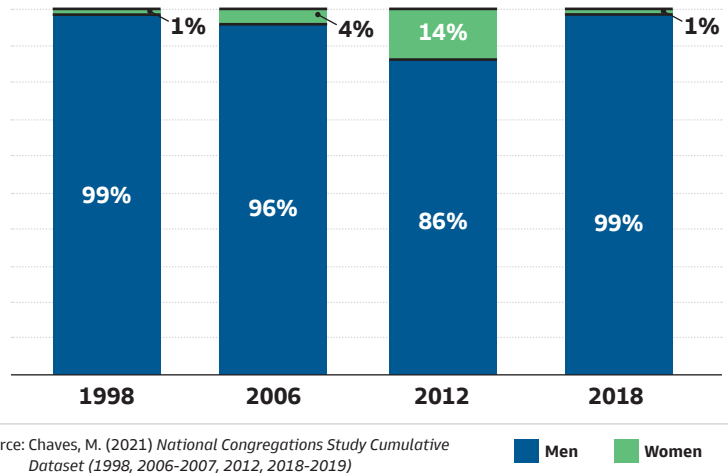
32 Mark Chaves, Shawna Anderson, Alison Eagle, Mary Hawkins, Anna Holleman, and Joseph Roso. *National Congregations Study Cumulative Codebook for Waves I-IV (1998, 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19)*, (Durham, NC: Duke University, Department of Sociology, 2020), 21.



1 percent of lead pastors in 1998, and this was still true in 2018 (figure 2). It is important to note that while the NCS data is a representative sample of all congregations across the United States, it is not necessarily a representative sample of each Protestant denomination.

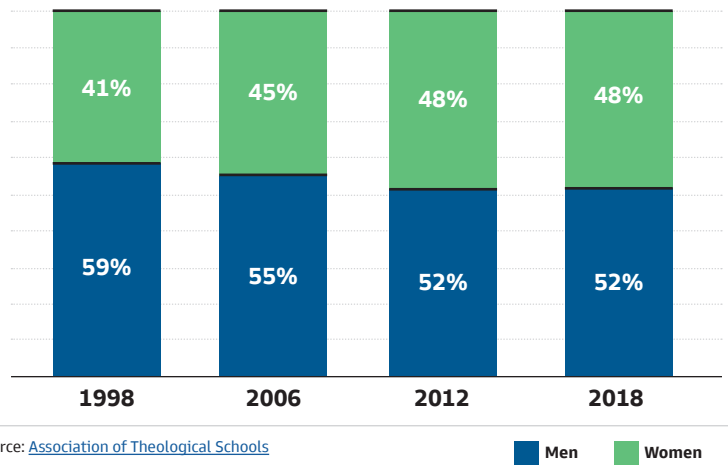
How do male and female graduation trends in historically Black seminaries and divinity schools compare with the clergy gender trends of Black Protestant congregations? We examined data on Master of Divinity completion trends of historically Black seminaries and divinity schools that are members of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).<sup>33</sup> It turns out that the share of M.Div. graduates who are women has been much higher than the share of Black Protestant congregations who are led by women throughout the past two decades. For instance, in 1998, about 40 percent of those graduating with an M.Div. from historically Black seminaries and divinity schools were women (figure 3), whereas a little less than 20 percent of Black Protestant congregations were led by women in the same year.

**Among historically Black Protestant congregations, women made up only 1 percent of lead pastors.**



**Figure 2. Share of historically Black Protestant congregations led by clergywomen and clergymen**

**About 4 in 10 M.Div. students graduating from historically Black seminaries were women in 1998, and this increased slightly by 2012.**



**Figure 3. Share of men and women M.Div. students graduating from historically Black seminaries, 1998, 2006, 2012, 2018**

<sup>33</sup> Data from the following seminaries are included in the analyses of historically Black seminaries: Hood Theological Seminary, Howard University School of Divinity, Interdenominational Theological Center, Payne Theological Seminary, Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University, and Shaw University Divinity School. While some of these institutions are affiliated with historically Black denominations, others are affiliated with other religious traditions.



By 2018, almost half of all those graduating with an M.Div. from historically Black institutions were women, whereas only 16 percent of Black Protestant congregations were led by women.

### **Evangelical Protestant**

During the Great Awakening of the 1700s and 1800s, women belonging to Baptist, Methodist, and Evangelical Free congregations were very involved in evangelism, organizing prayer meetings, writing hymns, and more.<sup>34</sup> While some revival leaders discouraged women from preaching, they encouraged them to lead in other ways, such as teaching and exhortation. While most Baptist congregations in the 1700s and 1800s did not ordain women, the Free Will Baptists ordained women to be pastors and elders from the founding of the denomination in 1727. Around the turn of the 20th century, there was a push among Free Church leaders to recruit women as evangelists and pastors to share the gospel as broadly as possible, believing that Christ's return was imminent.

The Wesleyan/Holiness movement, which started in the 1800s, affirmed women in leadership roles in ministry from the founding of the movement.<sup>35</sup> The founders of the Wesleyan/Holiness movement believed that the authority to preach came from the Holy Spirit, not from institutions. The Salvation Army has ordained men and women since their founding in 1865.<sup>36</sup> In 1896, 1,000 out of 1,854 Salvation Army officers in the U.S. were women, and by 1996 women still made up most Salvation Army officers.<sup>37</sup> The Church of the Nazarene has ordained women since its founding in 1908, when 20 percent of their clergy were women. Similar patterns are seen among Pentecostal denominations. The Assemblies of God formally allowed women to be ordained starting in 1935.<sup>38</sup> The Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), ordained women from its beginning in 1881, and the percentage of women pastors peaked at 32 percent in 1925.

As Pentecostal/Holiness denominations became a part of mainstream society and more institutionalized throughout the 20th century, they began to adapt to the more conservative attitudes and beliefs related to women in authority positions that were

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34 Jo Ann Deasy, "Women Leaders in Evangelical Congregations," in *Religious Leadership: A Reference Handbook, Vol. 1*, ed. by Sharon Henderson Callahan (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 276-278.

35 Susie C. Stanley, "The Promise Fulfilled: Women's Ministries in the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 139-148.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 148.

38 Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 16.



(and often still are) prevalent among other evangelical Protestant groups at the time.<sup>39</sup> The Church of the Nazarene and the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) are good examples of this process. While 20 percent of Nazarene clergy were women in 1908, and almost a third of Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) pastors were women in 1925, the share of clergywomen in both denominations declined for several decades of the 1900s. By 1973, women composed only 6 percent of all clergy in the Church of the Nazarene. Within the Church of God (Anderson), women made up only 10 percent of all clergy by 1994.<sup>40</sup>

The Christian Fundamentalist movement began as a reaction to other ideologies shaping American culture, such as science, modernism, and secular humanism. This movement held the position that women are to be subordinate to men. The National Association of Evangelicals was formed in 1942, and the new evangelicals of the 1940s and 1950s sought to define themselves against the mainline Protestant denominations that belonged to the Federal Council of Churches and then the National Council of Churches.<sup>41</sup> Women's ordination and authority in congregations became the symbolic boundary-marker between these two umbrella organizations. During the 1970s and part of the 1980s, a feminist movement arose within evangelical Christianity, calling "for women's equality in both church and home."<sup>42</sup> Debates over women's roles in church, home, and society continued during the 1980s. The Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest denomination within the evangelical Protestant tradition, passed a resolution in 1984 that opposed women serving as pastors or other roles requiring ordination.<sup>43</sup> In 1987, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood was founded. This organization held the position that men and women are equal, but have different, God-ordained roles, and that women are to be in a subordinate position to men.<sup>44</sup> Most often this view is called "complementarian" in which men and women have different but complementary roles in marriage, family, and religious authority.

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39 Susie C. Stanley, "The Promise Fulfilled: Women's Ministries in the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement," 148-150.

40 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "State of Clergywomen in the U.S.," 5.

41 Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 101-116.

42 Jo Ann Deasy, "Women Leaders in Evangelical Congregations," in *Religious Leadership: A Reference Handbook, Vol. 1*, ed. by Sharon Henderson Callahan (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 279.

43 Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, "Women and the Baptist Experience," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 162-163.

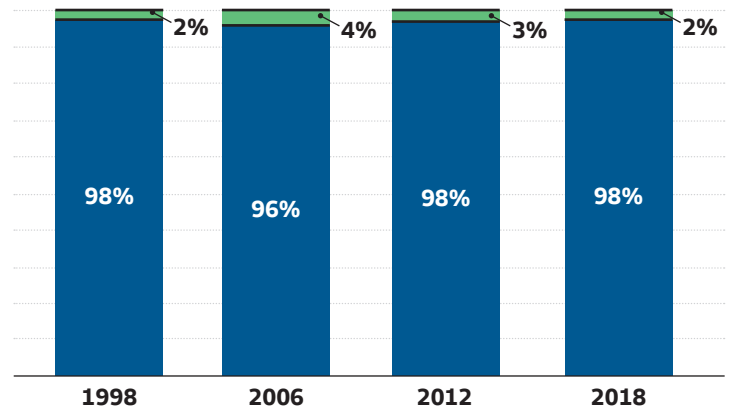
44 Jo Ann Deasy, "Women Leaders in Evangelical Congregations," 280.



An analysis of National Congregations Study data clearly shows the impact that these cultural trends within the evangelical Protestant tradition has had on women’s prospects of becoming pastoral leaders of congregations. Almost all lead clergy of evangelical Protestant congregations in the study were men (figure 4). In 1998, 98 percent of evangelical Protestant congregations were led by men, and this was also the case ten years later.

How do male and female graduation trends in evangelical Protestant seminaries compare with the clergy gender trends of evangelical Protestant congregations? To find this out, we examined data on Master of Divinity graduation trends of evangelical Protestant seminaries that are members of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). We found that the share of graduating Master of Divinity seminary students composed of women was much higher than women’s share of evangelical Protestant lead pastors (figure 5). Over the past two decades, the share of graduating M.Div. students comprised of women increased a modest amount, reaching a little less than 20 percent by 2018. While this percentage is lower than the share of women graduating with an M.Div. from Black Protestant seminaries, women’s share of graduating M.Div. students from evangelical seminaries was still ten times the share of women who pastored evangelical Protestant congregations in the same year (2 percent).

**Less than 5 percent of evangelical Protestant congregations are led by women.**

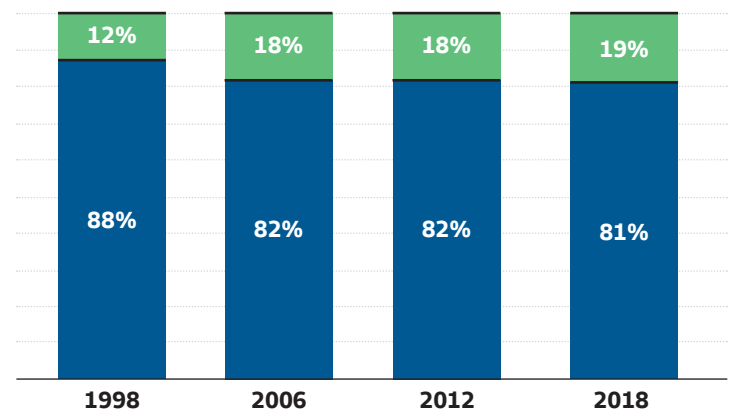


Source: Chaves, M. (2021) *National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019)*

Men Women

**Figure 4. Share of clergymen and clergywomen leading evangelical Protestant congregations**

**The vast majority of M.Div. students graduating from evangelical Protestant seminaries have been men.**



Source: [Association of Theological Schools](https://www.ats.edu/)

Men Women

**Figure 5. Share of men and women M.Div. students graduating from evangelical Protestant seminaries, 1998, 2006, 2012, 2018**



## Mainline Protestant

The ordination of women in Mainline Protestant denominations is common but has not always been so. Each denominational tradition has its own history that often includes predecessor denominations with varying policies on women's ordination. The Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and others each have their own history, traditions, and theological understandings that have influenced the course of women's ordination. Women in mainline Protestant denominations first started to be ordained in the mid to late 1800s. A Congregational church ordained the first woman in any mainline denomination in 1853, and the Disciples of Christ started ordaining women in 1888.<sup>45</sup> Northern Baptists (now called American Baptist Churches USA) first ordained a woman in 1894. While these denominations formally allowed women to be ordained pastors starting in the 1800s, during this era there was not much difference between mainline and evangelical denominations in terms of actual numbers of clergywomen pastoring congregations.<sup>46</sup>

As discussed earlier, there were two external factors that placed pressure on denominational leaders to change the formal denominational policies and allow women to become ordained clergy. They faced external pressure from the wider cultural norms of U.S. society that favored greater gender equality, as well as from the first and second waves of the women's rights movement. The issue of women's ordination became the symbolic boundary marker between more liberal, mainline denominations that embraced gender equality and more conservative, evangelical denominations that resisted these cultural changes.<sup>47</sup>

Women have been preachers in Methodism throughout its history in the United States, though they have not always been eligible for ordination. During the Second Great Awakening from the late 1790s through the early 1830s, Methodist women and men alike preached to large crowds during revival meetings.<sup>48</sup> Debates about women's ordination started in the 1800s among Methodist denominations. The Methodist Protestant Church ordained the first Methodist woman in 1892, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, North started ordaining women as local preachers in 1924.<sup>49</sup> The

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45 Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women Leaders in Mainline Protestant Churches," in *Religious Leadership: A Reference Handbook*, Vol. 1, ed. by Sharon Henderson Callahan (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 293.

46 Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 28.

47 Ibid, 33-39.

48 Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women Leaders in Mainline Protestant Churches," 288-289.

49 Ibid., 293.

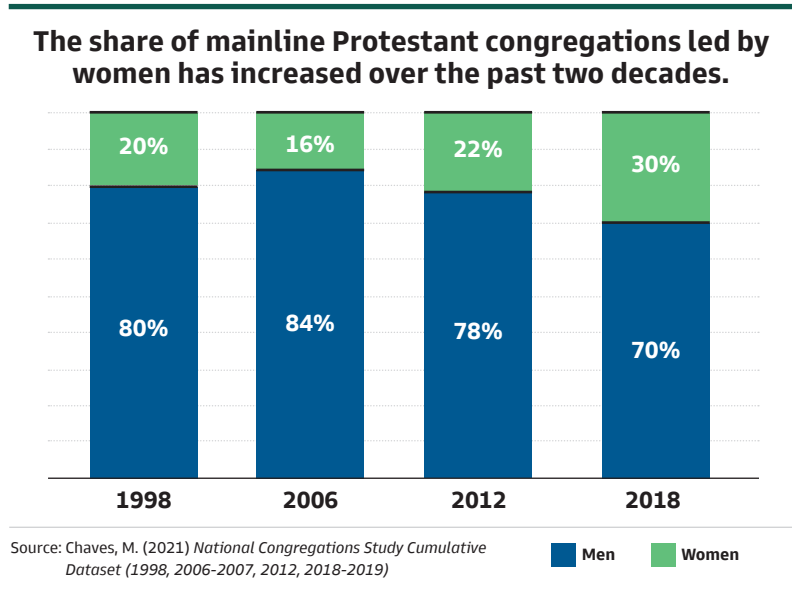




Methodist Church, a merger of several Methodist denominations, did not approve women’s ordination until 1956. Ordained women also gained Conference membership, which gave them authority equal to that of ordained men. Another merger took place in 1968, and the resulting United Methodist Church granted all women clergy from predecessor denominations Conference membership and clergy status equal to that of men. The first woman to be elected as a bishop was Marjorie Swank Matthews in 1980.<sup>50</sup> As of January 2023, women made up 44 percent of all United Methodist active bishops in the United States.<sup>51</sup>

When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America formed in 1988, two of the uniting denominations had ordained women since 1970, and the third had begun ordaining women in 1977.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, when the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) formed in 1983, both united traditions had ordained women since the mid-1950s. The Episcopal Church approved women’s ordination in 1976. The United Church of Christ formed in 1956 but traces its ordination of women to the 19th century through predecessor bodies.

An analysis of National Congregations Study data clearly shows the impact that the increasing acceptance of gender equality and the formal rule changes allowing women’s ordination within the mainline Protestant tradition have had on women’s prospects of becoming pastoral leaders of congregations. Although most mainline Protestant congregations were led by men in all four years of the National Congregations Study, the share of women pastors did increase significantly over this period from 20 percent in 1998 to 30 percent in 2018 (figure 6).



**Figure 6. Share of clergymen and clergywomen leading mainline Protestant congregations**

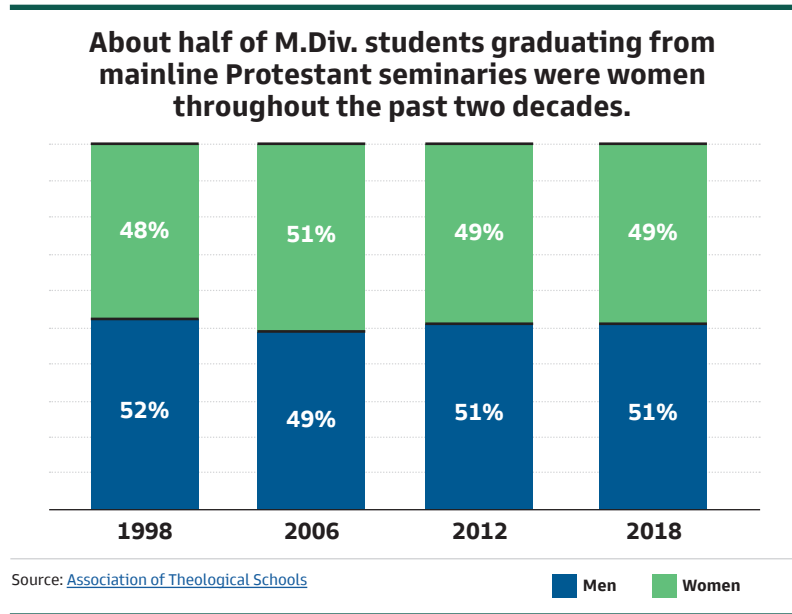
50 General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the United Methodist Church, “[Clergy leaders: Clergywomen](#)” (2021).

51 UM News staff, “[U.S. Bishops Receive Assignments](#)” (Nov. 4, 2022).

52 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “[We are Church, We are Called: 50.40.10.](#)”



While men composed a greater share of lead pastors than women among mainline Protestant congregations, men and women made up an almost equal share of graduating M.Div. students in mainline Protestant seminaries (figure 7). In 1998, the share of women M.Div. students graduating from mainline Protestant seminaries was over twice as high as the share of mainline Protestant congregations led by women. While the proportion of graduating women M.Div. students remained the same between 1998 and 2018, the proportion of mainline congregations led by women increased during this period. Despite this fact, the share of mainline congregations led by women was still almost 20 percentage points lower than the share of graduating M.Div. students made up of women in 2018.



**Figure 7. Share of men and women M.Div. students graduating from mainline Protestant seminaries, 1998, 2006, 2012, 2018**



# Section 2.

## Men and women lead pastors across denominations: a comparative analysis

There have been numerous studies from the 1980s and 1990s that documented trends in women's representation among clergy across denominations, as well as other aspects of the experiences of clergywomen. One relatively recent report was done in 2018 by Eileen Campbell-Reed, "State of Clergywomen in the U.S.: A Statistical Update." In this section, we seek to add to the research that she has done by updating the statistics on women's representation as lead pastors—that is, senior or solo pastors of congregations—across several denominations. We look at data from the following denominations for which we have sufficient information: Church of the Nazarene, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), United Methodist Church (UMC), and United Church of Christ (UCC). We supplement this with publicly available data from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

### Key findings:

- The United Church of Christ had the largest share of congregations that were led by women in 2019 (41 percent), followed by the Episcopal Church (39 percent).
- The Episcopal Church, the ELCA, and the UCC all had a greater percentage of congregations led by clergywomen than the overall percentage of mainline Protestant congregations that were led by clergywomen (30 percent).<sup>53</sup>
- While the PC(USA) and the ELCA denominations had close to the same share of congregations that were led by women in 2000, by 2019 the share of ELCA congregations led by clergywomen had surpassed the share of PC(USA) congregations led by clergywomen.

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<sup>53</sup> Chaves, M. (2021) *National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019)*.



- Women's share of lead pastors in the United Methodist Church reflected the overall percentage of mainline Protestant congregations in the National Congregations Study that were led by women. Women composed 30 percent of lead pastors of mainline congregations in 2018, and they also made up 30 percent of UMC lead pastors in 2019.
- Of the denominations in our study, the Church of the Nazarene had the smallest percentage of congregations that had women as lead pastors throughout the past two decades. However, by 2019 the Nazarene church had a greater share of congregations led by clergywomen (9 percent) than the overall percentage of evangelical Protestant congregations led by women in 2018 (2 percent).<sup>54</sup>

## Change in women's representation as lead or solo pastors across denominations

### Church of the Nazarene

From the founding of the denomination, Nazarenes have affirmed women and men as being “equally called” to ministry, and historically all ministry positions have been open to both women and men, including the position of ordained elder.<sup>55</sup> Women have been involved in such ministries as teaching, visitation, and evangelism by the local church. In practice, however, women experienced greater freedom to take pastoral roles in the mission field than they did in the United States. In 1925, women composed 12 percent of Nazarene pastors in the U.S. and Canada. By 1950, however, the percentage of female pastors dropped to just 5 percent. The majority of women who did serve as pastors served congregations in the region that spanned West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.<sup>56</sup> By the 1950s and 1960s, women were expected to take on more domestic roles, such as supporting husbands in their pastoral roles by hosting church members and managing the household. By 1975, only 2 percent of Nazarene pastors were women, and this percentage had further dropped to just 1.5 percent in 1995.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Floyd Cunningham, “Worshipping and Disciplining in Local Churches,” in *Our Watchword & Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*, ed. Floyd Cunningham et al. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 429-432.

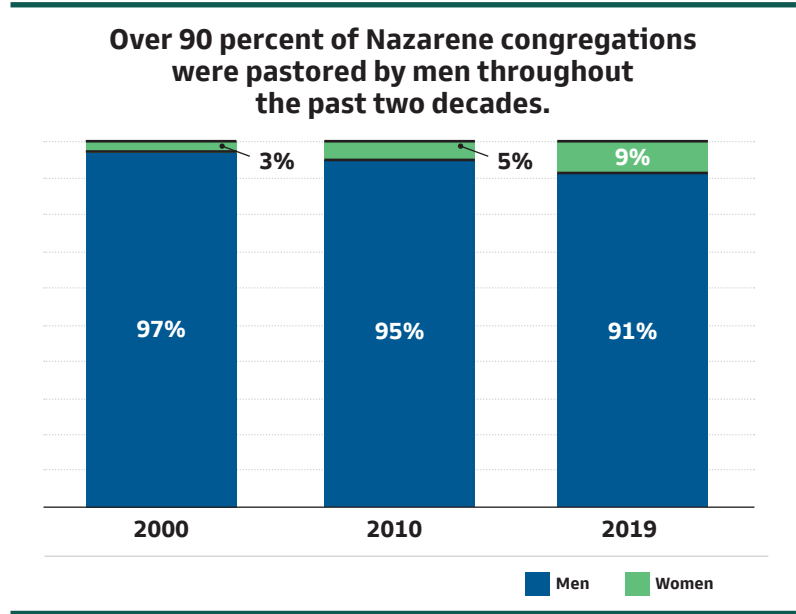
<sup>56</sup> Richard Houseal, “Women Clergy in the Church of the Nazarene: An Analysis of Change from 1908 to 1995,” (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1996), 22,72, cited in Cunningham, “Worshipping and Disciplining,” 429-432.

<sup>57</sup> Cunningham, “Worshipping and Disciplining,” 429-432.



Just five years later, our analyses show that this downward trend had begun to reverse, and about 2.6 percent (121) of senior or solo pastors of congregations were women (figure 8).<sup>58</sup> Women composed just over 9 percent of all senior and solo pastors by 2019.

While women make up less than 10 percent of all lead pastors of Nazarene congregations, they compose a larger share of all ordained Nazarene clergy. For the period of 2015-2017, women made up just over 20 percent of all ordained clergy in the Nazarene church.<sup>59</sup> And while the 10 percent seems low compared to the share of clergywomen leading congregations in most Mainline denominations, it is still higher than the overall share of evangelical Protestant congregations led by women. As discussed earlier in this report, only 2 percent of evangelical Protestant congregations have a woman as their lead pastor.



**Figure 8. Share of Nazarene congregations pastored by clergymen and clergywomen**

### Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church (formerly called the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States) is somewhat unique among Protestant denominations in the United States because it is a member of an international body, the worldwide Anglican Communion.<sup>60</sup> As such, its policies regarding women’s ordination have been at least partly dependent on the decisions of this worldwide church body. In the 1880s, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States started to “set apart” women as deaconesses. The issue of women’s ordination was brought up at the Lambeth Conference (a worldwide conference of bishops) in 1920 and again in 1930. In 1935 a commission to study the issue stated that even though there were no theological grounds against women’s ordination, it was still necessary for all priests to be men. The issue of women’s

58 Data on Nazarene congregations and clergy were generously provided to us by the Rev. Richard Houseal, Ed.D., Director of Research Services, Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center.

59 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 5, 7.

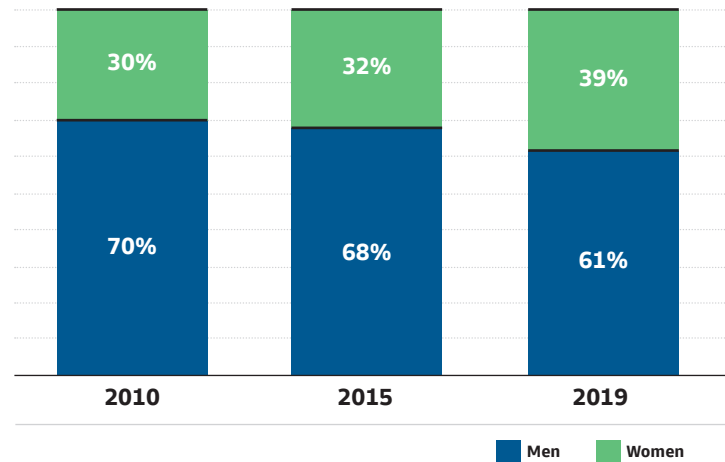
60 Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Women Leaders in Mainline Protestant Churches,” 295.



ordination continued to be raised beginning in the 1960s by the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. Finally in 1976 the General Convention agreed to establish a new canon law allowing women to be ordained to the priesthood. In 1986, women composed less than 6 percent of all ordained Episcopal clergy in the United States, and by 1994, women’s share of priests had increased to 12 percent.<sup>61</sup> These figures include women who were pastors as well as clergywomen serving in other roles.

The earliest year for which we have data on Episcopal lead clergy and the congregations they serve is 2010. By 2010, three out of 10 pastors leading Episcopal churches were women (figure 9),<sup>62</sup> and by 2019 women’s share of lead pastors increased to almost 4 out of 10.

**The percent of Episcopal congregations led by women increased from 30 percent in 2010 to 39 percent in 2019.**



**Figure 9. Share of Episcopal congregations pastored by clergymen and clergywomen**

### Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Lutheran women in the United States first gained the right to become ordained clergy in 1970 when the conventions of both the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (two of the predecessors to the ELCA) voted to approve the ordination of women that year.<sup>63</sup> In 1972, the Lutheran Church in America formed the Consulting Committee on Women in Church and Society, and the American Lutheran Church established the Task Force on Women in Church and Society to address

61 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 6.

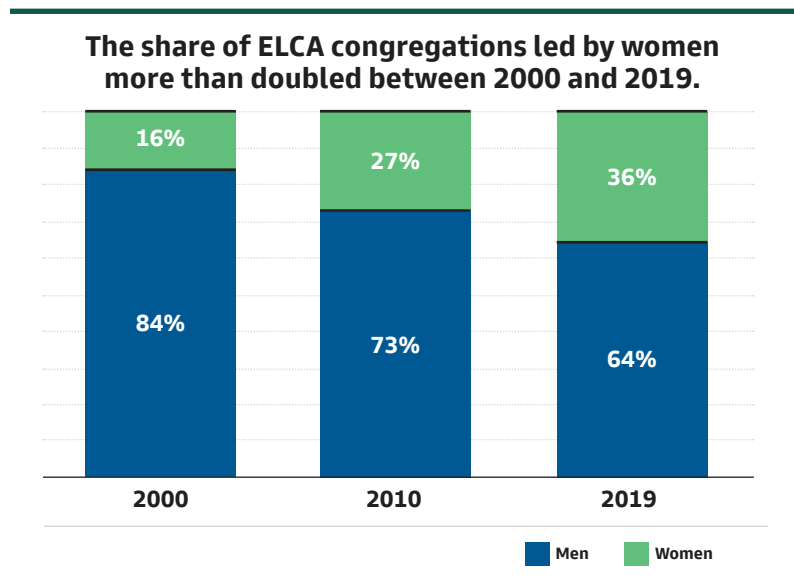
62 Denominational data provided to us by the Episcopal Church includes data on clergy beginning in 2010.

63 Gracia Grindal, “Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” in *Religious Institutions and Women’s Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 180.



concerns related to the ordination of women. In 1975, there were only 32 women serving as pastors,<sup>64</sup> and by 1977 this number had grown to 73 between the ALC and LCA.<sup>65</sup> Women composed less than 1 percent of clergy in either Lutheran denomination at this time. The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the third predecessor denomination to the ELCA, first ordained women in 1977.<sup>66</sup> In 1981, more than 10 years since women gained the right to serve churches as ordained clergy, only about 1 percent of ALC clergy and a little less than 3 percent of LCA clergy were women. Women continued to become ordained ministers in greater numbers in the following decades. In 1990, 35 percent (157 women out of 315) of all those newly ordained that year were women.<sup>67</sup> By 1994, 11 percent of all ELCA clergy (those in pastoral positions and otherwise) were women, and by 2017 women’s share of all clergy reached 37 percent.<sup>68</sup>

While the figures above describe women’s share of all ELCA clergy (regardless of job position), we wanted to find out what percentage of ELCA lead pastors are women. Our analysis of ELCA denominational data shows that throughout the period of 2000 to 2019, the majority of lead pastors were men.<sup>69</sup> In 2000, three decades after the first woman was ordained in the two predecessor denominations of the ELCA, women composed 16 percent (or 1,348) of all pastors leading ELCA congregations (figure 10). Twenty years later, the share of lead pastors who were women more than doubled to reach a little more than a third (or 2,155) by 2019.



**Figure 10. Share of ELCA congregations pastored by clergymen and clergywomen**

64 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “[We are Church, We are Called: 50.40.10.](#)”  
 65 Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers), 6.  
 66 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “We are Church, We are Called: 50.40.10.”  
 67 Adam DeHoek, “[45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women: Gender Differences in Retention Rates among Ordained Clergy.](#)” (ELCA Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop, 2016), 18.  
 68 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 6-7.  
 69 Data on ELCA congregations and clergy were provided to us by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation.

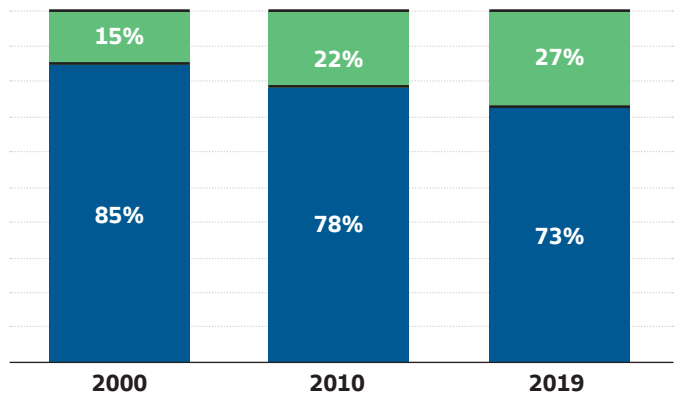


## Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

In the Presbyterian denominational family, women were first granted the right to be ordained in the early 20th century. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. first approved the ordination of women as ruling elders (those who govern the church) in 1930.<sup>70</sup> In 1955, women in this denomination were authorized to be ordained as teaching elders (that is, pastors of congregations or ministers of Word and sacrament). In 1964, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (the main southern Presbyterian denomination), authorized women to be ordained as ministers, ruling elders, and deacons. By 1977, less than 3 percent of all clergy in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. were women.<sup>71</sup> The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) formed in 1983 as a merger of these earlier Presbyterian denominations, and women from both predecessor denominations continued to be ordained in this new denomination. Between 1977 and 1994, women's share of all ordained Presbyterian clergy (including ordained, installed pastors of congregations, supply and interim pastors, and ministers serving in non-congregational settings)<sup>72</sup> experienced a seven-fold increase, reaching 19 percent by 1994.<sup>73</sup> Between 1994 and 2015, however, this growth in women's share of ordained clergy had slowed, increasing by only 10 percentage points during this time.

To determine what percentage of lead pastors serving congregations are women, we examined publicly available data found in various reports produced by the PC(USA).<sup>74</sup> We found that from 2000 to 2010, the vast majority of lead pastors and co-pastors were men (figure 11). However, the

**Women's share of PC(USA) lead pastors or co-pastors increased steadily from 2000 to 2019.**



Sources: Comparative Statistics 2005: Information about the Membership, Ministers, and Finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), p. 16; Comparative Statistics 2010: Information about the Membership, Ministers, and Finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), p. 16; Living by the Gospel: A Guide to Structuring Ministers' Terms of Call as Authorized by the 223rd General Assembly (2018), Appendix 6.

**Figure 11. Share of PC(USA) lead pastors and co-pastors made up of clergymen and clergywomen**

70 Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women Leaders in Mainline Protestant Churches," 294.

71 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "State of Clergywomen in the U.S.: A Statistical Update" (October 2018), 6.

72 John P. Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2010: Information about the Membership, Ministers, and Finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," (Louisville, KY: General Assembly Mission Council Research Services, 2010), 16.

73 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "State of Clergywomen in the U.S.," 6-7.

74 Lewis Wilkins, "Comparative Statistics 2005: Information about the Membership, Ministers, and Finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," p. 16; John P. Marcum, "Comparative Statistics 2010: Information about the Membership, Ministers, and Finances of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," p. 16; Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Living by the Gospel: A Guide to Structuring Ministers' Terms of Call as Authorized by the 223rd General Assembly (2018)," (Philadelphia, PA: Board of the Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), January 1, 2020), Appendix 6.





share of lead pastors composed of women increased during this period, going from only 15 percent in 2000 to 22 percent a decade later. By 2019, women made up a little more than a quarter (27 percent) of lead pastors and co-pastors.

## **United Church of Christ**

The United Church of Christ was established in 1957 from the merger of four predecessor denominations.<sup>75</sup> One of these predecessor denominations, the Congregational Church, was the first of any mainline Protestant denomination to ordain a woman in the United States. Antoinette Brown was ordained by a Congregational church in 1853. Another of these predecessor denominations, the Christian Church, first ordained a woman (Melissa Terrell) in 1867.<sup>76</sup>

Although women were first ordained in the Congregational Church and the Christian church in the mid-19th century, women's ordination was hardly the norm during this period or the first half of the 20th century.<sup>77</sup> By 1919, women composed only 1.2% of all ordained Congregational clergy. Less than half of these women served as pastors. During the decades following the 1920s, Congregational women continued to face many barriers to becoming ordained clergy.

Within the Evangelical Synod and the Reformed Church, the other two predecessor denominations of the United Church of Christ, women were not allowed to be ordained pastors until much later.<sup>78</sup> It wasn't until 1948 that the Evangelical and Reformed Church (a merger of the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States) formally changed their policy to allow women to become ordained clergy.<sup>79</sup> Beatrice M. Weaver was the first woman in this denomination to be ordained to clergy status in the same year, and she served as an assistant pastor.<sup>80</sup>

In 1957, the Congregational Christian Churches merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to become the United Church of Christ. Once this occurred, the new

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75 United Church of Christ. "[Short Course in the History of the United Church of Christ](#)," (Cleveland, OH: National Setting of the United Church of Christ), 2.

76 Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women Leaders in Mainline Protestant Churches," 293.

77 Dorothy C. Bass, "The Congregational Training School for Women," in *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, Vol. 2*," ed. by Barbara Brown Zikmund (New York: United Church Press, 1987), 164.

78 *Ibid.*, 106-109.

79 Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 16.

80 Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women's Ministries within the United Church of Christ," 70-71.



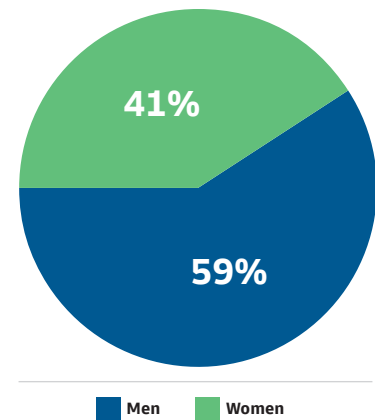
denomination opened the doors of all UCC seminaries to women who were seeking ordination.<sup>81</sup> The share of UCC clergy composed of women grew by leaps and bounds over the decades since then. In 1977, only 8 percent of clergy were women, including those serving as pastors and those serving in other positions.<sup>82</sup> This percentage had tripled by 1994, when women made up a quarter of all UCC ordained clergy. By 2017, women made up half of all clergy but only 38 percent of all UCC pastors.

While other studies look at women’s share of all clergy or all pastors, we wanted to examine investigate women’s share of UCC lead pastors. To investigate this, we examine congregational data provided to us by the United Church of Christ.<sup>83</sup> Because this data includes information on pastors only from 2015 onward, we only provide results for 2019, the most recent year in our study. We find that about 4 out of 10 congregations are led by women (figure 12).

### United Methodist Church (UMC)

As noted earlier, women have been preachers in Methodism throughout its history in the United States, though they have not always been eligible for ordination. Each denominational tradition represented in today’s United Methodist Church had its own distinctive path to women’s ordination. Some ordained women in the 1880s only to have the practice reversed in future years either through policy changes or through mergers with other denominations. The largest body of Methodists, The Methodist Church formed in 1939, approved the ordination of women in 1956. Ordained women also gained Conference membership, which gave them authority equal to that of ordained men. The union of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church affirmed fully clergy rights for women. Despite women’s formal status in the UMC, by 1977 they composed less than 2 percent of all ordained clergy, regardless of ministry position they held.<sup>84</sup> Women’s share of all ordained UMC clergy grew over the next 16 years, reaching 15 percent of all ordained clergy by 1994. By 2017, women made up about

**In 2019, about 4 in 10 UCC congregations were led by women.**



**Figure 12. Share of UCC congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen in 2019**

81 Ruth W. Rasche, “The Deaconess Sisters: Pioneer Professional Women,” in *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, Vol. 1*, ed. by Barbara Brown Zikmund (New York: United Church Press, 1984), 108.

82 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 6-7.

83 United Church of Christ congregational and clergy data were provided to us by the Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARD) of the United Church of Christ.

84 Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the U.S.,” 6-7.



29 percent of all clergy (both pastors and those serving in other positions), and a little less than 27 percent of all UMC pastors, including associate pastors.

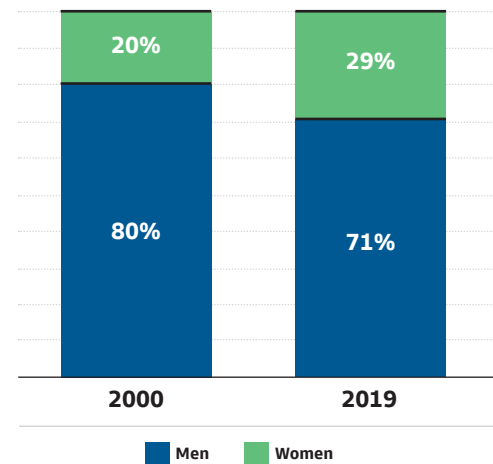
What percentage of *lead* pastors serving congregations are women, and how has this changed over time? We found that in 2000, a fifth of all UMC congregations were led by women, and by 2019 they made up just under 30 percent of all lead pastors of UMC congregations (figure 13).<sup>85</sup> This percentage is very close to the percentage of all UMC clergy that are women, regardless of job position that they hold.

## Clergy gender and characteristics of the congregations they serve

How do the characteristics of congregations led by women and those led by men compare across denominations? Do men and women tend to lead congregations of different sizes? Are there differences in the financial resources of congregations led by women and those led by men? These are important questions from an equity perspective because smaller congregations tend to have fewer financial resources and therefore have less money to spend on pastors' salaries and benefits. If women tend to pastor smaller, less-resourced churches than men, then they are likely to get paid less than men as well. From a personnel perspective, it is in denominations' and congregations' best interests to ensure that women have equal opportunities as men and receive equal pay based on education, experience, and effectiveness. If women find that they have more limited opportunities than men, they may decide to do ministry work in non-congregational settings instead or perhaps leave ministry altogether.

In this section we look at differences in average worship attendance and expenditures of congregations led by men and those led by women, for the Church of the Nazarene, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. We also examine how these trends have changed over time for those denominations for which we have sufficient data.

**The share of UMC congregations led by women increased from a fifth in 2000 to almost 30 percent in 2019.**



**Figure 13. Share of UMC congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen in 2000 and 2019**

<sup>85</sup> United Methodist Church congregations and clergy data were provided to us by the UMC General Council on Finance and Administration.



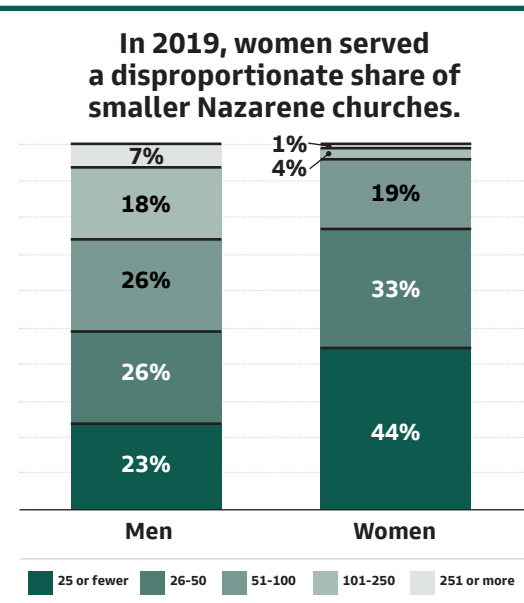
## Key findings:

- Among congregations in the ELCA and the UMC, gender disparities in terms of median worship attendance and median total expenditures of congregations led by clergywomen and those led by clergymen shrank between 2000 and 2019.
- Overall, the Episcopal Church had the greatest gender parity in terms of worship attendance of congregations led by women compared to those led by men. By 2019, the number of worshippers in congregations pastored by women was about 8 percent lower than the worship attendance of congregations pastored by men.
- The Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ had the greatest parity between congregations led by men and those led by women in terms of congregations' financial resources. Within these two denominations, in 2019 there was no difference in the median total expenditures of congregations led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen.
- Nazarene congregations had the greatest disparity between male-led and female led congregations in terms of congregations' worship attendance and total expenditures throughout the past two decades. The gap in median worship attendance narrowed over during this period, while the gap in total expenditures between congregations led by women and those led by men remained almost the same.

## Church of the Nazarene

### *Pastors' gender and worship attendance of congregations*

We want to analyze whether there are gender disparities in terms of the median worship attendance of congregations that male and female clergy lead. We begin by examining whether there are differences in the percentage of male and female clergy who lead congregations in different average worship attendance ranges. Because there was almost no change in the percentage of clergywomen leading congregations in the various worship attendance ranges between 2000 and 2019, we present figures for 2019 only (figure 14). We found that in 2000, a greater percentage of women pastored the smallest congregations than did men. A little more than three-quarters of women led congregations with 50 or fewer people in average worship attendance,



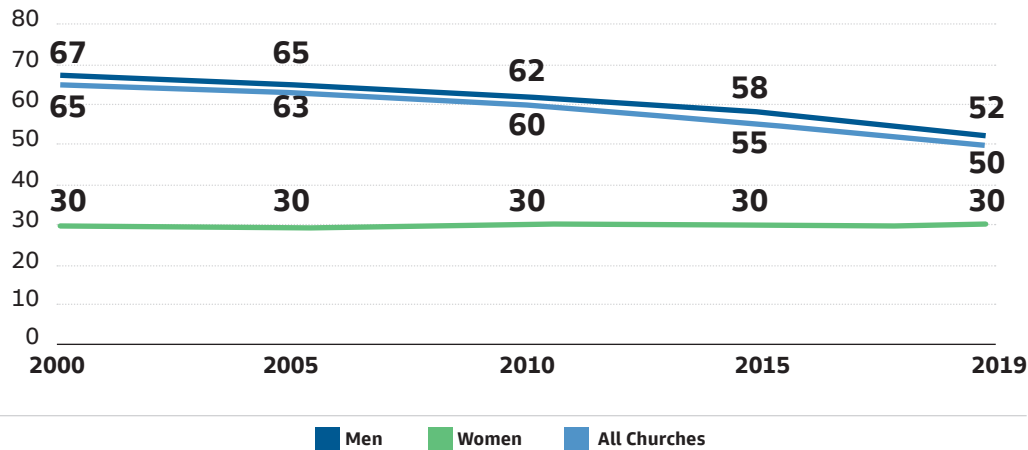
**Figure 14. Share of Nazarene congregations served by men and by women by congregations' average worship attendance range in 2019**



while almost 6 out of ten men led congregations of this size. The share of clergymen who served congregations with 101 to 250 attenders was more than four times the share of women who served congregations of this size.

By examining trends in median worship attendance of congregations led by women and those led by men, we can see if the gender gap in median worship attendance between congregations served by clergywomen and those served by clergymen has changed over time. In 2000, clergywomen served churches with less than half the median worship attendance as churches served by clergymen (figure 15).<sup>86</sup> Although the median worship attendance of churches served by women pastors fluctuated throughout the period of 2000 to 2019, by 2019 the worship attendance remained at the same level as in 2000. The gender gap in size of congregations pastored by women and men declined throughout the period of 2000 to 2019, but this is because the median worship attendance of churches served by clergymen declined by 22 percent, while the median

**The median worship attendance of Nazarene churches served by men declined from 2000 to 2019, while the attendance of churches served by women remained the same.**



**Figure 15. Median worship attendance of Nazarene congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen from 2000 to 2019**

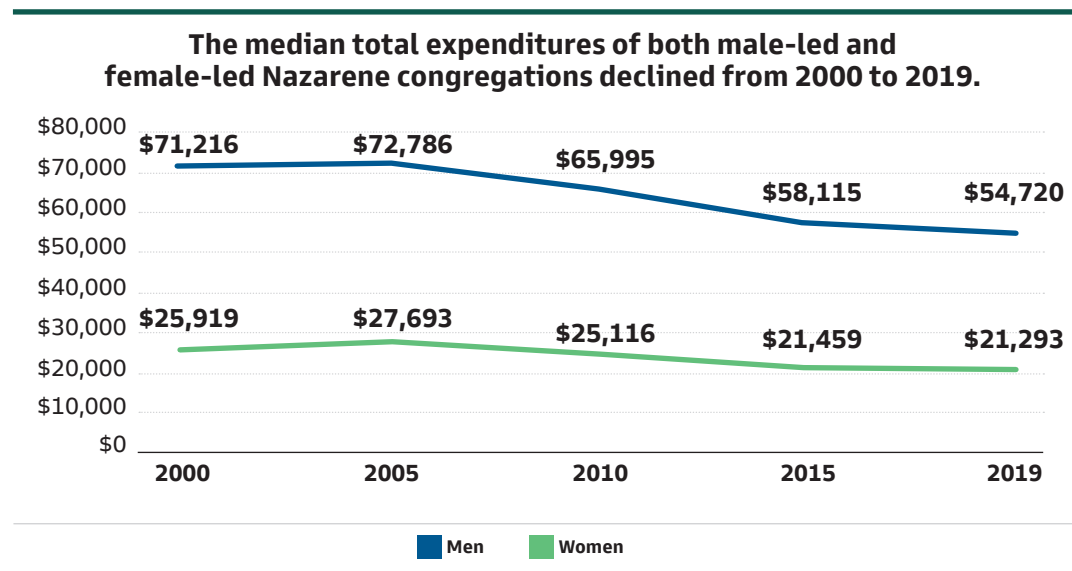
<sup>86</sup> These results were statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U = 125,004.0, Z = -10.101, p < .001).



worship attendance of churches served by clergywomen remained the same.<sup>87</sup> **Because about 90 percent of Nazarene congregations are pastored by men, this decline in worship attendance is really a reflection of the downward trend in worship attendance of *all* Nazarene churches.**<sup>88</sup>

### ***Pastors' gender and median total expenditures of Nazarene congregations***

Are there gender disparities in the financial resources of congregations led by women compared to those led by men? We found that the answer is yes. Over the past two decades, women led congregations with less than half the financial resources of congregations led by men (figure 16). In 2000, the median total expenditures of churches led by women was a little less than \$26,000, which was well under half that of



**Figure 16. Median total expenditures of Nazarene congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen from 2000 to 2019 (measured in 2000 constant dollars)**

<sup>87</sup> Mann-Whitney U test was run to analyze median worship attendance of churches led by women and men pastors in 2019. The difference in median worship attendance of the two groups was statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U = 482,590.5, Z = -12.066, p < .001).

<sup>88</sup> Median worship attendance for all congregations includes only those congregations for which pastor data is available.



churches led by men (around \$71,200).<sup>89</sup> While total expenditures of congregations led by women and those led by men decreased over the past two decades (in terms of 2000 constant dollars), by 2019 the total expenditures of congregations led by men were still over twice as high as expenditures of female-led congregations.

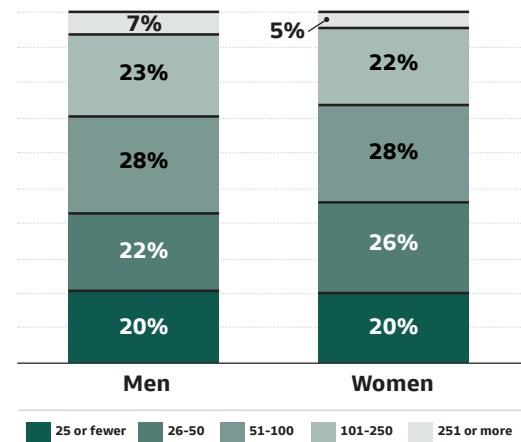
## Episcopal Church

### *Pastors' gender and worship attendance of congregations*

Just as we did with the Church of the Nazarene, we looked at the Episcopal Church to see if there are gender disparities in terms of the median worship attendance of congregations that clergymen and clergywomen lead. We first examined whether there are differences in the percentage of clergymen and clergywomen who lead congregations in different average worship attendance ranges in 2019. We found that there was very little difference between the share of clergywomen and the share of clergymen serving congregations in each worship attendance range (figure 17). Almost 3 out of 10 men and women served congregations with 51 to 100 worshippers, while a quarter of both men and women served congregations with 25 or fewer attenders.

We also examined the overall trend in worship attendance across all Episcopal congregations.<sup>90</sup> We found that while clergywomen tended to serve congregations that were about three-quarters the size of congregations served

**By 2019, an almost equal share of men and women served Episcopal churches in each average worship attendance range.**



**Figure 17. Share of Episcopal congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen by congregations' average worship attendance range in 2019.**

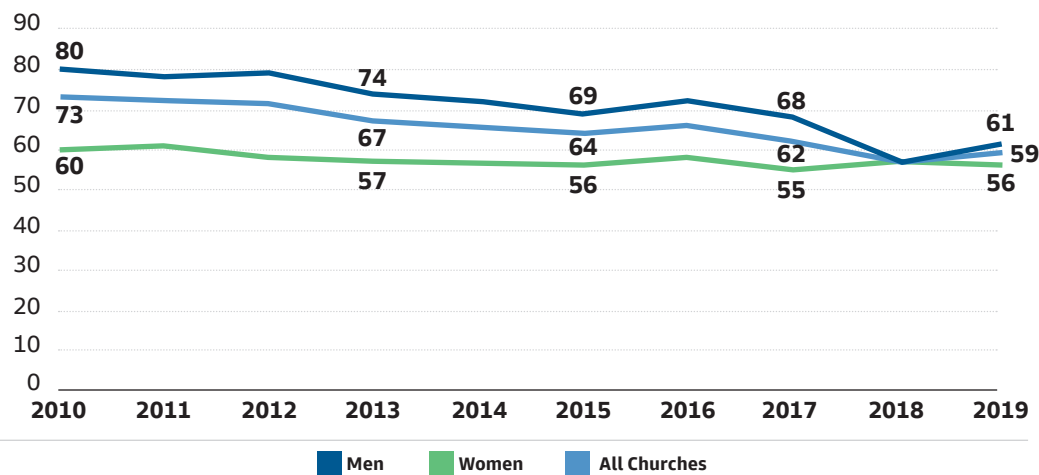
<sup>89</sup> Mann-Whitney U test was run to analyze data for year 2000. The difference in median total expenditures of churches led by female pastors and churches led by male pastors was statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U = 125,004.0, Z = -10.101, p < .001). A Mann-Whitney U test was run to analyze data for year 2019. The difference in median total expenditures of churches led by female pastors and churches led by male pastors was statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U = 460,319.0, Z = -13.016, p < .001).

<sup>90</sup> "All churches" includes only those Episcopal churches with a known pastor. This is because there is a large number of congregations that have no known pastor, and these congregations have a median worship attendance that is substantially lower than the attendance of congregations with a clergywoman or clergyman. For instance, in 2019 there were close to 1,500 congregations with no known pastor, and the median attendance of these congregations was 30 worshippers.



by clergymen in 2010, by 2019 this disparity had almost disappeared (figure 18).<sup>91</sup> This is primarily because the overall median worship attendance of all congregations decreased by about 19 percent from 2010 to 2019. Since men were already serving larger congregations to start with, these congregations shrank at a faster rate than the smaller congregations that women served. The worship attendance of congregations led by men shrank by 24 percent between 2010 and 2019, whereas the worship attendance of congregations led by women decreased by less than 7 percent during this period.

**Clergymen served larger Episcopal churches than those served by clergywomen for most of the past decade.**



**Figure 18. Median worship attendance of Episcopal congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen from 2010 to 2019.**

<sup>91</sup> An independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test was run to analyze the median worship attendance of churches led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen. The difference in median worship attendance of the two groups was statistically significant for years 2000-2017, and in 2019 (2000 Kruskal-Wallis = -587.872,  $p < .001$ ; 2019 Kruskal-Wallis = -131.206,  $p < .05$ )



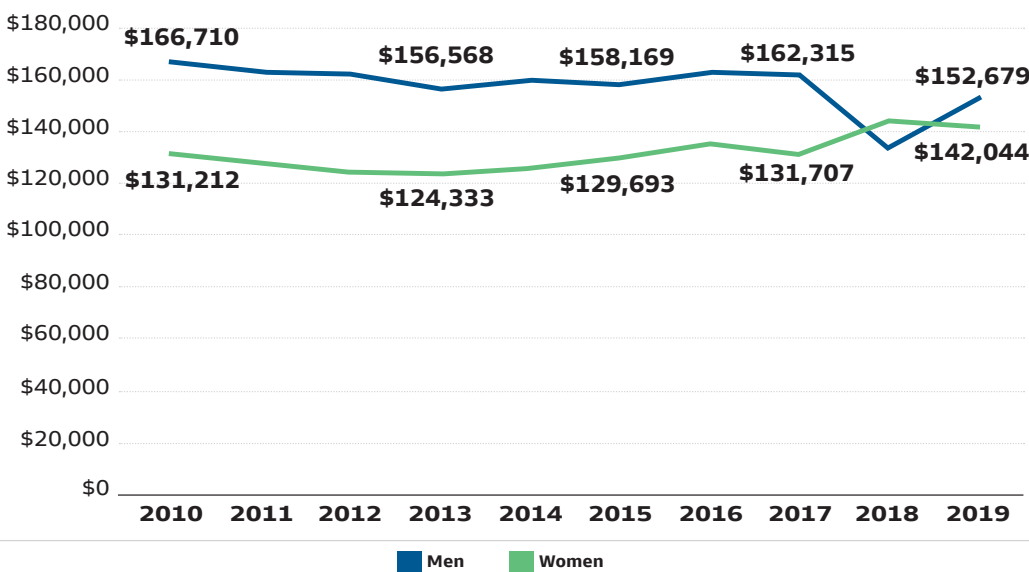


### ***Pastors' gender and median total expenditures of congregations***

We next looked at the median total expenditures of congregations led by women compared to the total expenditures of congregations led by men. Even though data for pastors is available starting in 2010, we adjust the expenditures to 2000 constant dollars. This is because for other denominations in our study, we have data beginning in 2000. By using the same metric, we can make more accurate comparisons between denominations.

We found that men led congregations with greater total expenditures than those led by women from 2010 to 2017 (figure 19).<sup>92</sup> While the figures for 2018 and 2019 appear to show differences in total expenditures between congregations pastored by men and those pastored by women, it is important to note that by 2018 these differences were not statistically significant.<sup>93</sup> This means that any differences in expenditures could have occurred by chance.

**From 2010 to 2017, the median expenditures of Episcopal congregations led by men were higher than the expenditures of those led by women.**



**Figure 19. Median total expenditures of Episcopal congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen from 2010 to 2019 (measured in 2000 constant dollars)**

<sup>92</sup> An independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test was run to analyze the median total expenditures of churches led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen. The difference in median expenditures of the two groups was statistically significant for years 2000-2017. (2010 Kruskal-Wallis = -451.001,  $p < .001$ ; 2017 Kruskal-Wallis = -311.935,  $p < .001$ ).

<sup>93</sup> The difference in median total expenditures of the two groups was not statistically significant in 2018 nor in 2019 (2018 Kruskal-Wallis = 92.206,  $p = .226$ ; 2019 Kruskal-Wallis = -110.988,  $p = .121$ ).



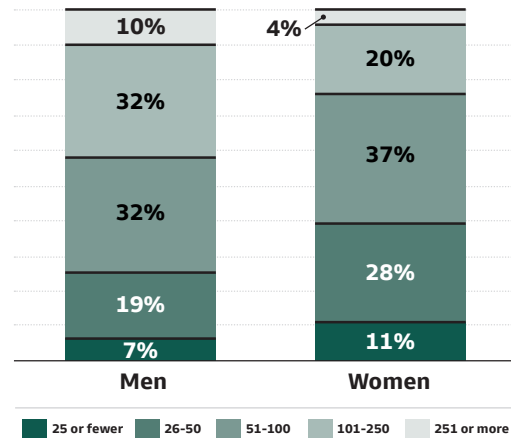
## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

### Pastors' gender and worship attendance of congregations

We look now at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to examine differences in the average worship attendance and total church expenditures between congregations led by women and men. We begin by examining whether there are differences in the percentage of men and women who lead congregations in different average worship attendance ranges in 2019 (figure 20). We find that a greater share of men than of women lead larger congregations. A little over 40 percent of men served congregations with 101 or more worshippers, while just under a quarter of women served congregations of this size. Almost 4 out of 10 clergywomen (39 percent) served churches with 50 or fewer worshippers, while just over a quarter of clergymen served churches of this size.

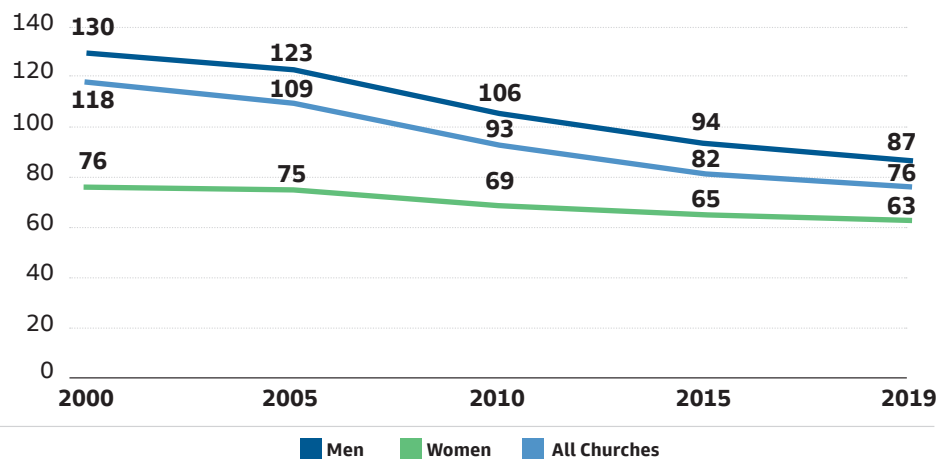
Once we examined the percentage of men and women who lead congregations in different average worship attendance ranges, we analyzed whether there are gender disparities in terms of the median worship attendance of congregations that men and women lead (figure 21).<sup>94</sup> Women served

**A disproportionate share of women led ELCA churches with 50 or fewer in average worship attendance in 2019.**



**Figure 20. Share of ELCA congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen by congregations' average worship attendance range in 2019**

**The gender gap in median worship attendance of ELCA churches served by clergymen and those served by clergywomen narrowed from 2000 to 2019.**



**Figure 21. Median worship attendance of ELCA congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen from 2000 to 2019**

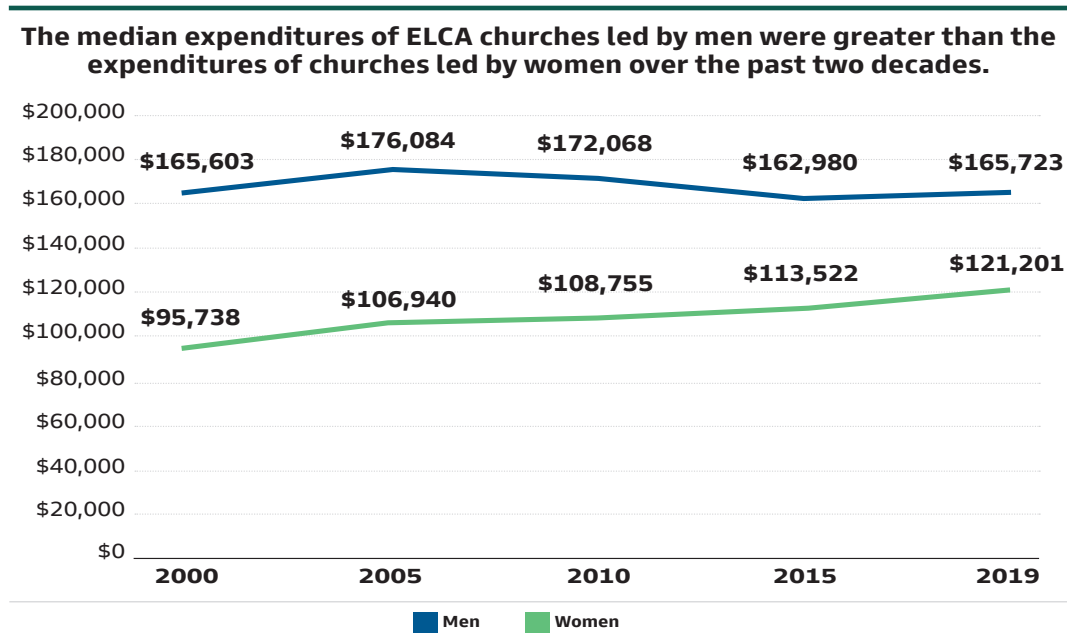
<sup>94</sup> "All congregations" includes all congregations for which there was a pastor listed. By 2019, there were almost 3,000 congregations that had no pastor listed, and the median worship attendance of these congregations was substantially lower (35 attenders) than the median attendance of congregations with at least one pastor (77 attenders).



at smaller churches than men throughout the past two decades.<sup>95</sup> In 2000, the median worship attendance of congregations led by men was 130 people, whereas the worship attendance of congregations led by women was only 76 individuals. By 2019, the disparity in worship attendance of congregations led by women and men had decreased, but this is mainly because all congregations shrank over this period. The median worship attendance of congregations led by men decreased by 33 percent, whereas the overall worship attendance of ELCA congregations decreased by 36 percent.

### ***Pastors' gender and median total expenditures of congregations***

We next examined the median total expenditures of congregations led by men and women from 2000 to 2019. We found that men led congregations with greater financial resources than those of congregations led by women throughout the period of 2000 to 2019, although this gap narrowed during this time (figure 22).<sup>96</sup> In 2000, men led churches with median expenditures of about \$165,600. Women led congregations



**Figure 22. Median total expenditures of ELCA congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen from 2000 to 2019 (measured in 2000 constant dollars)**

95 An independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test was run to analyze the median worship attendance of churches led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen. The difference in median worship attendance of the two groups was statistically significant for years 2000-2019 (2000 Kruskal-Wallis = -1,857.039,  $p < .001$ ; 2019 Kruskal-Wallis = 189.713,  $p < .001$ ).

96 An independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test was run to analyze the median total expenditures of churches led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen. The difference in median expenditures of the two groups was statistically significant for years 2000-2019 (2000 Kruskal-Wallis = -1,661.384,  $p < .001$ ; 2019 Kruskal-Wallis = 127.967,  $p < .001$ ).



with median expenditures of around \$95,700, which is 42 percent lower. By 2019, the median total expenditures of congregations led by clergywomen were 27 percent lower than the expenditures of congregations led by clergymen. This is true even though congregations led by women experienced a net increase in total expenditures of almost \$25,500, while congregations led by men experienced a net increase of just \$120.

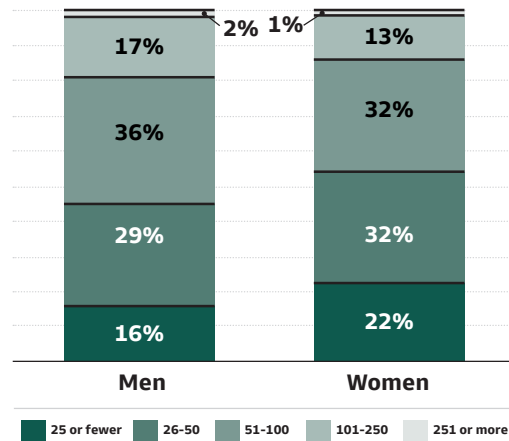
## United Church of Christ

### *Pastors' gender and worship attendance of congregations*

We turn next to the United Church of Christ (UCC) to see if there are differences in the average worship attendance and total church expenditures between congregations led by women and men. We begin by examining the share of women and men serving congregations in different average worship attendance ranges in 2019. We found that over half of clergywomen (54 percent) and 45 percent of clergymen served congregations with 50 or fewer worshippers, on average (figure 23). A little more than a third of men (36 percent) and just under a third of women (32 percent) serve congregations with 51 to 100 in average worship attendance.

We next looked at the median worship attendance of congregations led by clergywomen and of congregations led by clergymen. We found that from 2015 to 2019,

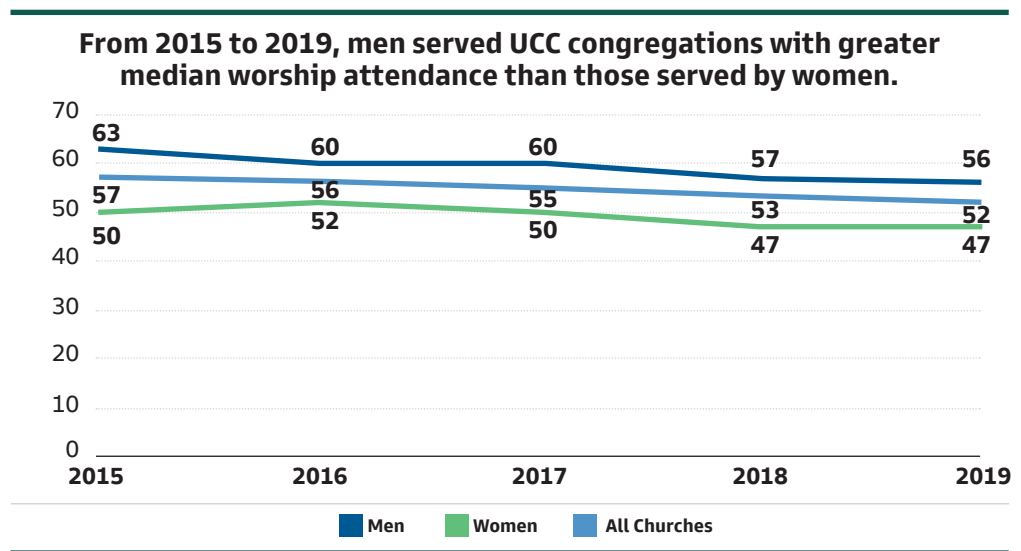
**By 2019, an almost equal share of women and of men served UCC congregations in each average worship attendance range.**



**Figure 23. Share of UCC congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen by congregations' average worship attendance range in 2019**



congregations led by women had fewer worshippers than congregations led by men (figure 24).<sup>97</sup> While it appears that there has been very little change in median worship attendance in the UCC compared to other denominations, it is important to note that for several other denominations the trends cover the years 2000 to 2019, whereas for UCC the trends cover only five years.



**Figure 24. Median worship attendance of UCC congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen from 2015 to 2019.**<sup>98</sup>

### ***Pastors' gender and median total expenditures of congregations***

There was almost no difference between UCC congregations led by women and those led by men in terms of their financial resources. In 2015, the median total expenditures of congregations pastored by women (\$115,660) was about 88 percent of total expenditures of congregations pastored by men (\$131,820).<sup>99</sup> From 2016 to 2019, there were no statistically significant differences in median expenditures of congregations led by women and expenditures of congregations led by men.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> An independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test was run to analyze the median worship attendance of churches led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen. The difference in median worship attendance of the two groups was statistically significant for years 2015 to 2019 (2015 Kruskal-Wallis = -396.153,  $p < .001$ ; 2016 Kruskal-Wallis = -198.641,  $p < .001$ ; 2017 Kruskal-Wallis = -298.121,  $p < .001$ ; 2018 Kruskal-Wallis = -293.916,  $p < .001$ ; 2019 Kruskal-Wallis = -276.871,  $p < .001$ ).

<sup>98</sup> "All Churches" includes all congregations with a pastor and where gender of pastor is known. By 2019, about 22 percent of UCC congregations either did not have a pastor listed or had a pastor with unknown gender. These congregations had a substantially lower median worship attendance than the worship attendance of male-led or female-led congregations.

<sup>99</sup> An independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test was run to analyze the median total expenditures of churches led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen. The difference in median expenditures of the two groups was statistically significant for year 2015 (Kruskal-Wallis = -148.751,  $p < .01$ ).

<sup>100</sup> The difference in median expenditures of the two groups was not statistically significant for years 2016-2019 (2016 Kruskal-Wallis = -70.265,  $p = .777$ ; 2017 Kruskal-Wallis = -57.658,  $p = 1.000$ ; 2018 Kruskal-Wallis = -19.187,  $p = 1.000$ ; 2019 Kruskal-Wallis = -3.972,  $p = 1.000$ ).



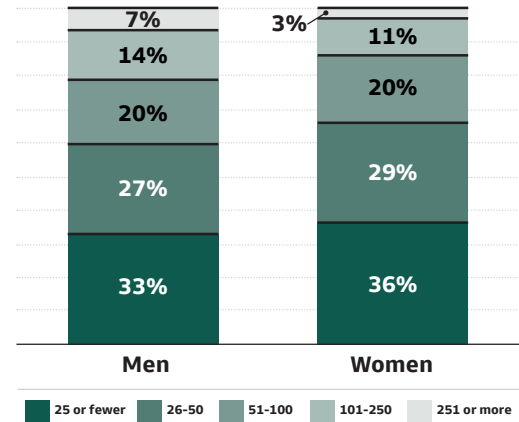
## United Methodist Church

### *Pastors' gender and worship attendance of congregations*

We conclude our investigation of denominational data with the United Methodist Church. For the UMC, we have data on congregations and the pastors who serve them for the years 2000 and 2019. We first looked at the share of clergymen and clergywomen serving congregations within average worship attendance ranges in 2019. There was little difference in the share of men and women leading congregations in each average worship attendance range. A majority of clergywomen (65 percent) and clergymen (60 percent) led congregations with 50 or fewer in average worship attendance (figure 25). A fifth (20 percent) of both men and women led congregations with 51 to 100 worshippers.

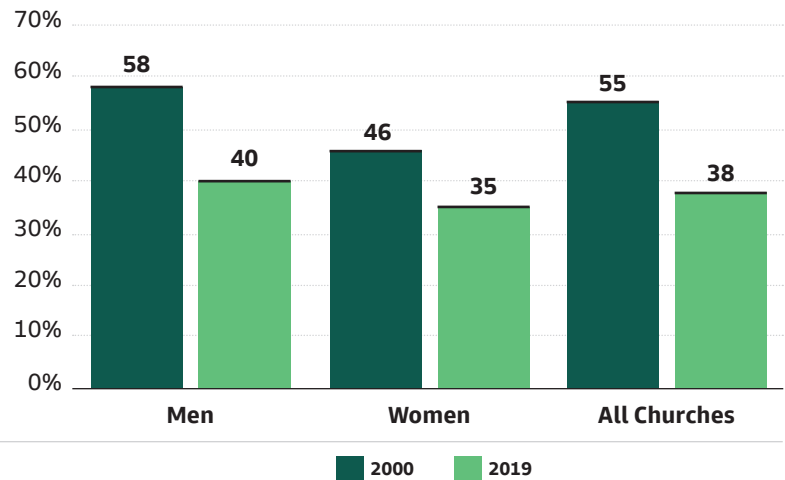
After we examined the share of women and men serving congregations in each average worship attendance range, we looked at the net change in median worship attendance and median total expenditures of congregations led by clergymen and clergywomen between 2000 and 2019. We found that there was a net decrease in median worship attendance of congregations led by men and of those led by women (figure 26). Two changes apart from gender shaped where both women and men served in 2019 compared to 2000—the overall decline in median worship attendance and the consequent increase in the number of smaller churches in the pool to which clergy could be appointed. Among congregations where men were appointed, there were 31 percent fewer worshippers,

**By 2019, the majority of clergymen and clergywomen served UMC congregations with 50 or fewer in average worship attendance.**



**Figure 25. Share of UMC congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen by congregations' average worship attendance range in 2019**

**The median worship attendance of UMC congregations served by men decreased more than those served by women between 2000 and 2019.**



**Figure 26. Median worship attendance of UMC congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen in 2000 and 2019**



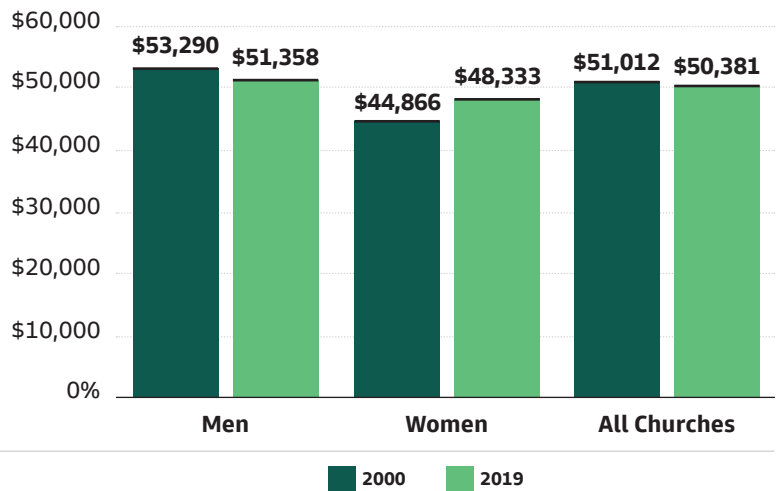
on average, in 2019 than in 2000. The worship attendance of congregations to which women were appointed was 24 percent lower in 2019 than in 2000.

The median attendance of both congregations led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen were closer to the overall median attendance of all UMC congregations in 2019 than in 2000.<sup>101</sup> In 2000, churches where women were appointed had a median worship attendance of 46 individuals, which was 16 percent lower than the overall median attendance of UMC churches. Churches where men were appointed had a median attendance of 58 individuals, which was 5 percent higher than the denominational median. By 2019, churches where women were appointed had a median attendance of 35 worshippers, which was 8 percent lower than the denominational median attendance, while churches where men were appointed had a median attendance of 40 worshippers, which was 5 percent higher than the UMC median. The overall median worship attendance of all congregations fell by 31 percent, going from 55 worshippers in 2000 to 38 worshippers in 2019.

### ***Pastors' gender and median total expenditures of congregations***

Interestingly, in 2019 the median total expenditures (in 2000 constant dollars) of congregations served by clergywomen were somewhat higher than the expenditures of congregations that they served in 2000 (figure 27). In contrast, clergymen served at congregations that had slightly lower total expenditures in 2019 than the expenditures of congregations that they served in 2000. The overall median total expenditures of all congregations remained essentially the same between 2000 and 2019. This suggests that the gender gap in expenditures between congregations led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen narrowed over this period.

**Between 2000 and 2019, the median expenditures of UMC congregations served by men decreased, while expenditures of congregations served by women increased.**



**Figure 27. Median total expenditures of UMC congregations served by clergymen and clergywomen in 2000 and 2019 (measured in 2000 constant dollars)**

101 "All Churches" includes all congregations with a pastor and where pastor gender is known. In the UMC, this includes over 90 percent of congregations in both 2000 and 2019.



The disparity in median worship attendance and total expenditures of congregations led by women compared to those led by men narrowed between 2000 and 2019 (table 1). In 2000, congregations pastored by women had 21 percent fewer worshippers and spent almost 16 percent less on total expenditures than congregations pastored by men. By 2019, the median worship attendance of female-led congregations was only 13 percent lower than the attendance of male-led congregations, and the median expenditures of congregations led by clergywomen were only 6 percent lower than the expenditures of congregations led by clergymen.

**Table 1. The gender gap in median attendance and median total expenditures between UMC congregations led by clergywomen and those led by clergymen narrowed from 2000 to 2019.**

Congregation characteristics	2000			2019		
	Men	Women	Percent difference	Men	Women	Percent difference
Median worship attendance	58	46	-21%	40	35	-13%
Median total expenditures	\$53,290	\$44,866	-16%	\$51,358	\$48,333	-6%





# Conclusion

Overall, there has been much improvement in gender parity in recent decades. While past research shows that there are more opportunities for women to serve in associate pastor positions than as senior or solo pastors, women have gained more opportunities to serve as lead pastors as well. There is also greater equity in terms of congregational size and financial resources. Still, these measures vary across denominations and religious traditions. The next few paragraphs summarize these differences and raise questions about what this could mean for the future of Christian congregations and/or denominations.

## Church of the Nazarene

One of the main findings of our research is that Nazarene congregations had the greatest gender disparity of all the denominations in our study, both in share of congregations led by clergywomen, and in the size of those congregations and the financial resources churches served by women have. In 2000, women made up 2.6 percent of all senior or solo clergy, which is slightly higher than the percentage of all senior or solo clergy serving conservative/evangelical congregations in 1998 who were women (2.0 percent).<sup>102</sup> By 2019, the percentage of Nazarene congregations led by female clergy increased to about 9 percent, which is close to the percentage of all lead pastors of U.S. congregations who are women (8.7 percent). Women clergy in the Nazarene church fared better than their female counterparts in all evangelical Protestant churches, however. The percentage of all evangelical Protestant churches led by women decreased slightly to 1.1 percent by 2018.<sup>103</sup>

Nazarene congregations had the greatest disparity between male-led and female led congregations in terms of worship attendance and congregations' total expenditures throughout the past two decades. While the gap in median worship attendance narrowed, by 2019 clergywomen led congregations that were 42 percent smaller than congregations led by clergymen. The gap in total expenditures between congregations led by women and those led by men remained almost the same throughout the past

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<sup>102</sup> Chaves, [National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset \(1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019\)](#) (Jan. 25, 2021).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



twenty years. These findings are consistent with the findings of past research studies that show female clergy tend to lead congregations with fewer human resources (in terms of active participants) and fewer economic resources.<sup>104</sup> They are also consistent with the overall cultural norms of evangelical Protestant denominations discussed previously.

## Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ

Out of the five mainline denominations and one evangelical denomination in our study, women seem to be faring the best in the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ. Both denominations have the greatest level of gender parity, both in terms of the share of women pastors leading congregations and in terms of the size of congregations and the amount of financial resources of congregations led by women compared to those led by men. Of the denominations for which we had data, the United Church of Christ had the largest share of congregations that were led by women in 2019 (41 percent), followed by the Episcopal Church (39 percent). Both denominations had a higher percentage of congregations led by clergywomen than the overall percentage of mainline Protestant congregations in the National Congregations Study led by clergywomen (30 percent).<sup>105</sup>

Overall, the Episcopal Church had the greatest gender parity in terms of worship attendance of congregations led by women compared to those led by men. By 2019, the number of worshippers in congregations pastored by women was about 8 percent lower than the worship attendance of congregations pastored by men. The Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ had the greatest parity between congregations led by men and those led by women in terms of congregations' financial resources. Within these two denominations, in 2019 there was no difference in the median total expenditures of congregations led by clergymen and those led by clergywomen.

It is not surprising that women fare so well in the UCC compared to other denominations. Two of the predecessor denominations began ordaining women in the mid-1800s, while the other two predecessor denominations began ordaining women in 1948. This is earlier than when the predecessor denominations of the ELCA, UMC,

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104 Mary Ellen Konieczny and Mark Chaves, "Resources, Race, and Female-Headed Congregations in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 3 (2000): 264-268; Charles W. Mueller and Elaine M. McDuff, "'Good' Jobs and 'Bad' Jobs: Differences in the Clergy Employment Relationship," *Review of Religious Research* 44, no. 2 (2002): 160-162.

105 Chaves, M. (2021) *National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019)*.



or PC(USA) formally allowed women to be ordained as official policy. What is rather surprising is that even though the Episcopal Church was the last of these mainline denominations to ordain women to pastoral ministry, women seem to be doing relatively well compared to other denominations.

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

While women in the ELCA seem not to be faring as well as they are in the Episcopal Church and the UCC, they still have made significant gains over the past two decades. Women's share of lead pastors more than doubled, starting at 16 percent in 2000 and reaching 36 percent of lead pastors in 2019. This is higher than women's share of lead pastors in the typical mainline Protestant congregation.

Men led congregations with higher worship attendance and greater financial resources than those of congregations led by women throughout the period of 2000 to 2019. This gap in number of worshippers narrowed throughout the period of 2000 to 2019, primarily because the worship attendance of congregations led by men fell more steeply than the worship attendance of congregations led by women. The gap in financial resources narrowed due in large part because the total expenditures of congregations led by women increased while the expenditures of congregations led by men remained about the same from 2000 to 2019.

## **United Methodist Church**


Just as in the ELCA, women have made significant gains in the United Methodist Church over the past twenty years. Women's share of lead pastors of UMC congregations increased more than 10 percentage points, rising from 19 percent of lead pastors in 2000 to 30 percent in 2019. Women's share of UMC lead pastors is almost the same as women's overall share of mainline Protestant lead pastors in the National Congregations study.<sup>106</sup> As discussed earlier, women made up 20 percent of mainline Protestant lead pastors in 1998 and their share of lead pastors increased to 30 percent by 2018. In addition to this, gender disparities in terms of worship attendance and total expenditures of congregations led by clergywomen and those led by clergymen shrank

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

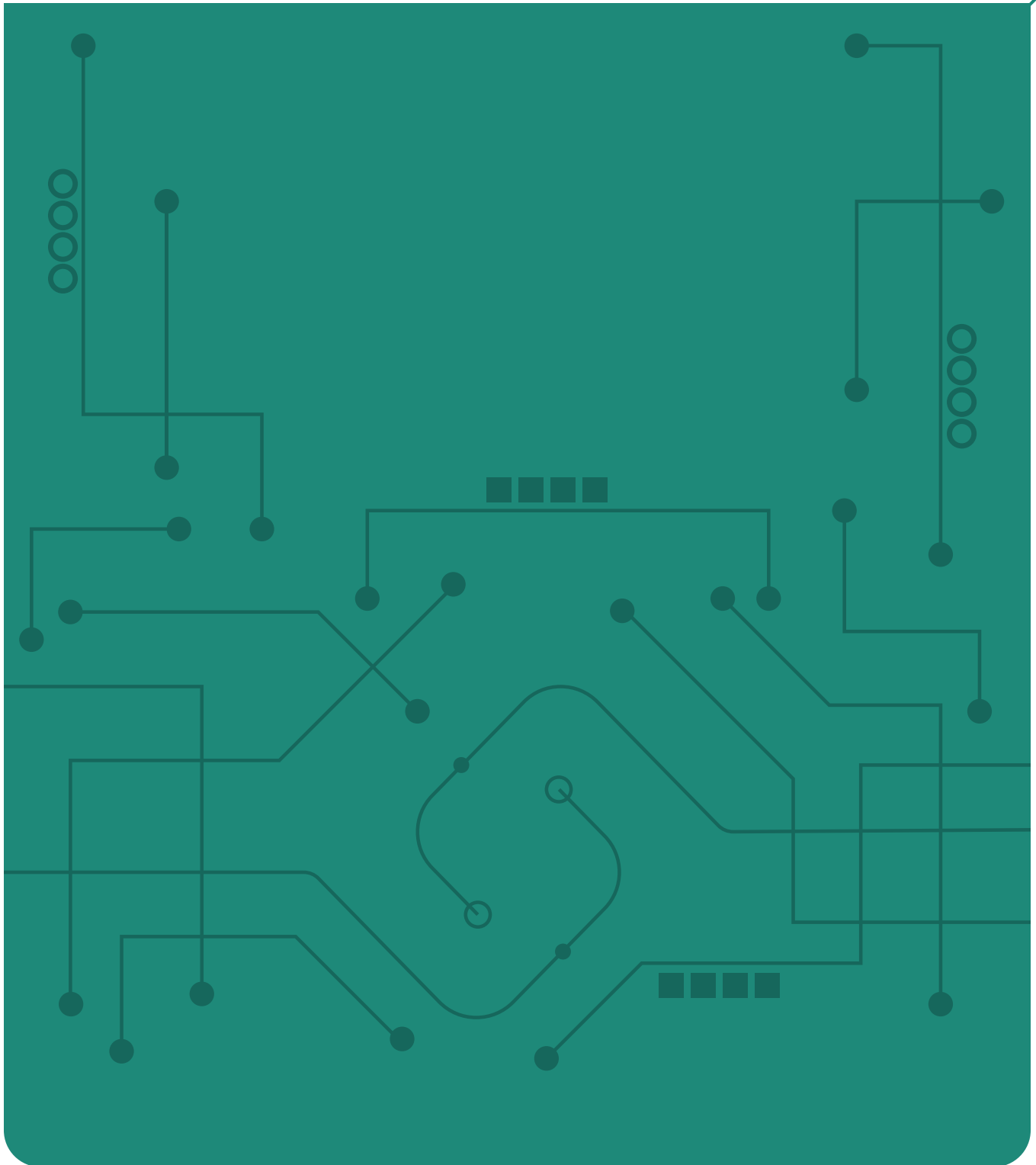


over the past two decades. In 2000, median worship attendance of congregations led by women was 21 percent lower than the median attendance of congregations led by men, and the median total expenditures of female-led congregations were 16 percent lower than the expenditures of male-led congregations. By 2019, the worship attendance and the total expenditures of congregations led by women were 13 percent and 6 percent lower than the attendance and expenditures of congregations led by men, respectively.

While the UMC has made great strides in terms of gender equality between clergywomen and clergymen, there is still more work to be done to close this gap. The most recent study carried out by the UMC's General Commission on the Status and Role of Women showed that in 2020, on average full-time clergywomen's salaries and housing allowance were 11 percent less than those of clergymen.<sup>107</sup> This was true even among clergywomen and clergymen who had the same membership status. For example, among full-time elders in full connection, clergywomen's salaries were 10 percent lower, on average, than the salaries of clergymen. Among full members and deacons in full connection, women earned 11 percent less than men. 

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107 Magaela Bethune, "[How Far We've Come and the Distance Still to Go: UMC Clergywomen are Still Significantly Undercompensated](#)" (resourceumc.org: online publication. 2020), 2, 7.



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