

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Summary of the Problem, Methodology, and Results

This study sought to strengthen the Christian ministry of seminary women by identifying their leadership challenges and discovering ways to address those challenges through the biblical training offered in a seminary setting. The research focused on the 923 women who graduated from Dallas Seminary from 1977 to 2003. These women were asked to evaluate the ministry experiences they have had since leaving DTS and to make recommendations that could help strengthen the program of preparing seminary women for a lifetime of Christian service.

The Problem

For fifty years, Dallas Theological Seminary focused on the preparation of men for Christian ministry. The seminary first admitted women students in 1975. This study asked and answered the question, “What are the leadership challenges facing the Dallas Theological Seminary women alumnae and how can DTS best prepare women students to meet these challenges?” This study represents the first of its kind to evaluate the unique leadership challenges facing women who have graduated from a conservative evangelical seminary.

Methodology

A descriptive survey (Appendix C) was designed and mailed to the 950 women alumnae from DTS since 1977. The DTS Office of Alumni and Church Relations provided the original list of 950 names and mailing labels. The survey was sent out in

February 2004 along with two cover letters (Appendices D and E) and a return postcard (Appendix F). The women alumnae received a reminder postcard (Appendix H) a month later.

A total of 418 surveys were returned. Forty-one surveys (37 from non-graduates and 4 late returns) were declared invalid, leaving 377 surveys used to compute the results of the study. The DTS Computer Services Department provided the official number of 923 women graduates as of December 2003. The survey responses represented 41% of DTS women graduates.

The information from the 377 surveys was entered into an EXCEL spreadsheet. Dr. Gene Pond, Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at DTS, used the statistical program SPSS to compute the results of the data. Dr. Pond's assistant, Laurie Weber Norris, transcribed all the written responses. The quantitative and qualitative data provided the necessary data and anecdotal information to answer the research question.

Overall Results

Demographic Summary

The response to the survey reflects the thinking of 41% of the 923 women who graduated from DTS from 1977-2003. These 377 respondents represent a broad age-range with the majority of the women currently in their 30s and 40s (63%). The remaining 37% of respondents represent women under 30 years old and over 50 years old. The respondents also represent an almost exact distribution according to graduation years. The response rate of the women graduating before 1991 was 39% and the response rate of the women graduating after 1991 was 40%. This even distribution allows the

answers to the questions to reflect a more accurate over-all representation of the ministry experiences of the women who have graduated from DTS over the past twenty-five years.

The data from the survey reveal that less than half of the women graduates are in vocational ministry (46%). This is primarily due to the fact that almost 70% of the respondents are married (260 women) and their responsibilities as mothers and/or their husband's job highly influence their choice to serve or not serve in paid ministry. Over half of the married women (54%) are married to men serving in Christian ministry. Many of these 140 wives chose not to seek a salaried position in order to partner with their husbands' ministry responsibilities. As one graduate explains:

One major factor is because of my husband's full-time position. Though I would like to serve in a full-time vocational ministry, it was not to our best interest, nor God's calling to assume such arrangement whether it's in the same church or different church/other Christian organization. My role as my husband's helper comes before a suitable salaried position of my first choice.

In addition, half of the married women have elected to stay home with their children. One respondent shared:

Motherhood definitely affects a woman's ability to use her education in a career sense, at least while her children are young. I've had to be creative in fulfilling my ministry calling without sacrificing my children for the sake of such. I have plenty of opportunities through our church to be employed full-time and therefore 'paid,' however have deliberately chosen not to pursue that for now. Prov. 31--*seasons* of a woman's life.

Marriage and motherhood also stand as top reasons that women graduates chose to leave a paid position. Marital status and the responsibility of raising children highly influence a woman who has trained for Christian ministry. One woman wrote: "I got married and my husband is a ministry-missions pastor and I wanted to be free to travel with him. I still train/consult and lead Bible studies." Another stated: "I left my salaried ministry position to go with my husband to participate in a church planting

residency program in another state.” Others left paid ministry positions “to stay home with my children” or to “have my first child.” Though preparing to serve God in a ministry position motivates most women to attend seminary, the priority of family relationships often determine whether or not they enter or remain in a salaried ministry position. This differs from male seminarians who rarely find marriage or fatherhood determining whether or not they remain in vocational ministry.

Half of the women graduates hold some kind of volunteer leadership position. Most of these women are not in vocational ministry. The vast majority of them serve in their local churches. A few give volunteer time in parachurch settings, academic institutions, or participate in short term mission trips. God uses them and their seminary training even though not in a salaried position.

Results Related to Research Question

This study asked and answered the question, “What are the leadership challenges facing the Dallas Theological Seminary women alumnae and how can DTS best prepare women students to meet these challenges?” The DTS women alumnae survey included a 32-part inventory that answered the first part of the research question. The results of the survey revealed that the top ministry challenges facing seminary women were:

- Time management
- Balancing motherhood and ministry
- Over-commitment
- Overly high expectation of myself
- Maintaining a close relationship with God
- Acceptance by male leadership
- Conflict resolution
- Burnout
- Public Speaking

Adequate skills in counseling women
 Loneliness
 Prejudice towards me as a woman
 Implementing change

In addition, the women listed other challenges they face which were not included on the inventory. Their suggestions (in order of most cited) included:

Men and women working together
 Missions/living in a different culture
 Being a pastor's wife
 Not being valued and/or respected as a woman/not being treated equally
 Lack of fellowship/friendship
 Expectations of others
 Role of women in ministry
 Finances
 Working with volunteers
 Lack of support/encouragement

A list of all the additional challenges listed by the women alumnae can be found in Appendix N.

The last question on the survey (F10) answered the second part of the research question regarding recommendations to strengthen seminary programs for women. The women graduates mentioned these topics most often:

Men and women ministering together (working with men)
 Valuing and respecting women in ministry
 Placement issues
 The role of women in ministry
 Speaking/communication
 Counseling skills
 Spiritual Formation for all women
 Leadership training
 Training in women's Ministry/ministry to women
 Mentoring by women at DTS – female role models
 Conflict resolution
 More practical application in teaching
 Mentoring by women presently serving in ministry

A complete list of the topics (written in the form of recommendations) mentioned by the women graduates can be found in Appendix O.

Results Related to the Hypotheses

First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis asserted that the DTS women alumnae would offer many helpful ways for DTS to better prepare women students for the leadership challenges women face in ministry. The last question on the survey (F10) contained an open-ended question seeking suggestions that could help strengthen the preparation of women at DTS. Of the total 377 respondents, 338 (90%) commented on the last question. The 338 women wrote approximately 1008 written recommendations. This amounted to 94 different recommendations. The comments comprised 60 single-spaced pages of transcription. The top recommendations cited by the women included:

- Prepare men and women to more successfully minister together.
- Help men value and respect women in ministry.
- Address placement issues for women.
- Include teaching the role of women in ministry in DTS courses.
- Emphasize speaking/communication skills.
- Emphasize counseling skills.
- Require Spiritual Formation for all women.
- Offer specific training/teaching related to Christian leadership.
- Offer courses in women's ministry and ministry to women.
- Provide more women mentors and female role models at DTS.
- Emphasize training/teaching in conflict resolution skills.
- Include more practical application in DTS courses.
- Provide mentoring by women currently serving in Christian ministry.

The women frequently mentioned how much they appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions through the survey. The respondents represent the women who have experienced life as seminary students and presently serve in ministry. These

graduates best qualify to know what women need most to be adequately equipped for a life of Christian ministry. As DTS President, Dr. Mark Bailey so well stated in his cover letter with the survey, “Whether you are at home caring for your husband and children, teaching in small or large groups, serving on a church staff, working a secular job, or ministering overseas, God is using you in significant ways to reach others with the love and hope of Jesus Christ. . . .Your opinions and suggestions can help strengthen our commitment to preparing men and women for ministry.”¹

Dr. Andy Seidel, Executive Director of the Center for Christian Leadership, also had encouraging words to say to the women alumnae. In the second letter that accompanied the survey, Dr. Seidel wrote:

This survey is an important opportunity for you to give critical feedback and helpful information to Dallas Seminary, information which we could get from no other source. It is your chance to help us learn from your experience, so that we can do an even better job of preparing women leaders for ministry throughout the church. We greatly value your thoughts, input, and suggestions; thank you for your cooperation.²

The alumnae who responded to the survey felt affirmed and valued by Dr. Bailey and Dr. Seidel. The women appreciated knowing that whether they serve in vocational or volunteer ministry, they remain “godly servant-leaders,” representing God in significant ways that has purpose and meaning. One graduate wrote, “Attending DTS was an immense privilege, for which I will always be grateful! It has prepared me to be effective in many different ministries at various life stages as a woman, missionary, pastor’s wife and mother.” Many of the women felt motivated to take the time to fill out

¹ Appendix D

² Appendix E

the survey and offer their recommendations to the seminary because the leadership of the seminary expressed their desire to hear from the women graduates.

The survey respondents expressed their appreciation numerous times on the survey as they offered their suggestions. One graduate who serves overseas wrote a page and half of recommendations and ended by saying, "I am thrilled that someone wants to know." Another expressed, "Thank you for asking for my input." These comments from the women alumnae reflect the research done by Gilligan³ and Helgesen⁴ and Belenky⁵ related to women wanting to have a "voice."

Other women included praise for their time as students at DTS. One woman wrote, "I believe that my DTS education contributed a great deal to my ability to minister in diverse situations." Another said, "I absolutely loved my seminary experience." Yet another said, "After completing my program at DTS, I felt very well prepared and equipped to do what God has called me to do--to proclaim the good news of the gospel."

Of the 377 women alumnae who responded, only eight (2%) expressed negative comments regarding their time at DTS. The comments primarily centered on not feeling valued and respected in their giftedness as women. All but one of these eight women attended DTS during the last ten years. So, they do not speak for the women who were part of the student body back in the 70s and 80s when the faculty and male students were learning to accept women on campus. One of these eight women graduates who felt wounded by the discrimination and prejudice she has experienced as a woman both at

³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁴ Sally Helgesen, *The Female Advantage*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990).

⁵ Mary Belenky and others, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

DTS and in ministry, offered some helpful suggestions related to better preparing the women students. She concluded with words of appreciation for the survey. She said:

“I want to thank you personally for all your work in this much needed area. Receiving and completing this survey has served to be a bit of healing for me and I thank you for that. It made me feel that there are people at DTS, like you, that truly care for the women students and who wish to see us flourish in our walks and ministries to others. Thank you for taking the time to listen and to strive for change.”

Most women desire the opportunity to express themselves. The studies cited in the literature review of this project such as Rosener⁶, Tannen⁷, and Green⁸ revealed that women tend to be verbal processors and appreciate the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions. After writing some of her thoughts, one respondent remarked, “I enjoyed thinking through the questions of this survey.” Women’s need to express themselves led to the decision to design the survey with space for written comments. The data became anecdotal in parts, but more accurately represents the full range of opinions held by the women who have graduated from Dallas Seminary. The latter part of this fifth chapter contains discussion of the specific recommendations from the women graduates.

Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis suggested that leadership challenges would differ between married and single DTS women alumnae. The data supported this hypothesis. Of all the ministry groups contrasted, married and single women experience the most

⁶ Judy B. Rosener, "Ways Women Lead," *Harvard Business Review* 68, no. 6 (1990).

⁷ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1990).

⁸ Michele Green, “The Preparation of Women for Ministry: An Exploratory Study of the Traditional Curriculum in Evangelical Seminaries” (Ph.D. Diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2002).

diversity primarily because of the different network of relationships in which they live. And yet, the study showed these women share many of the same ministry challenges also.

Common Challenges of Married and Single Graduates

Time management ranked highest on the list of challenges for single women, and managing time came in second on the list for married women. Trying to prioritize time plagues all women whether married or single. These results were similar to information gathered by Kelley⁹, Briscoe¹⁰, and Aburdene and Naisbett¹¹. In addition, both the married and the single women alumnae rated over-commitment, maintaining a close relationship with God, and overly high expectations of themselves as top challenges in their life of ministry. The busyness of life and the high demands of ministry remain a constant struggle for most all women in ministry.

In addition, many marrieds and singles struggle with having too high expectations of themselves. The rigors of study at Dallas Seminary tend to attract very competent, conscientious women who desire to excel in whatever they do. The majority of the women prove themselves excellent students and they carry those expectations of excellence into their ministry experiences. This often leads to problems when trying to balance their time commitments with their personal needs and the needs of those around them. Also, the same percentage of marrieds and singles mentioned struggling with a lack of confidence. These findings concurred with Julie Baker's study of women in

⁹ Rhonda Kelley, *A Woman's Guide to Servant Leadership* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2002).

¹⁰ Jill Briscoe, Laurie McIntyre, and Beth Seversen, *Designing Effective Women's Ministries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

¹¹ Patricia Aburdene and John Naisbitt, *Megatrends for Women*, 1st Ballantine Books, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993).

leadership.¹² Insecurity commonly exists among women as they venture into opportunities of ministry that in the past have been closed to them.

Finally, both the married and single seminary graduates included lack of acceptance of the male leadership in their ministry as one of the top ten challenges they face. These results were in agreement with observations by Kimberling¹³, Inrig¹⁴, and Edwards.¹⁵ The percentage was only slightly higher (1% different) for single women, although a few of the single women indicated in their written comments that they faced situations where their marital status was a stumbling block to serving in ministry. Particularly in church situations, preference is sometimes given to married women. One single woman shared her perspective on her inability to find a salaried position: “Positions aren’t offered, or aren’t paid, for women. Positions ministering to women aren’t available. Single women are seen as incapable to relate to/minister to married women.”

Differing Challenges Between Married and Single Graduates

Married women indicated balancing motherhood and ministry as their top challenge. Also high on the list for married women was balancing marriage and ministry. These findings are consistent with research done by Fortosis and McCall¹⁶ as well as

¹² Julie Baker, *A Pebble in the Pond: The Ripple Effect* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Publishing, 2001).

¹³ Cheryl Gray Kimberling, “The Sociological Factors Associated with the Career Development of Women Theological Graduates” (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Texas, 1988).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Inrig, *Release Your Potential* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Sue Edwards and Kelley Mathews, *New Doors to Ministry to Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002).

¹⁶ Stephen G. and Nancy K. McCall Fortosis, "Feminine Perspectives in Ministry: Interviews with Selected Women in Evangelical Christian Leadership," *Christian Education Journal* XII, no. 3 (1992).

findings by TerKeurst.¹⁷ Trying to balance marriage and motherhood logically surface as primary differences between married and single women since single women do not face the problems associated with marriage and few of them have children. One woman shared, “We [wives and mothers] try to do a little of everything we can to feel that we are helping our families and also doing something that we are called to do. At the same time the need of leaders around are great and we feel the pressure.”

A high number of single women mentioned the challenge of singleness along with excessive loneliness as two of their great challenges. Married women did not include loneliness very high on their list. The companionship needs of single women exist in far greater ways than for married women and cause many singles to struggle with feelings of loneliness. One graduate wrote, “Being lonely in a room full of people is hard. I’m not sure a lot of people get what it’s like to be single, female, and away from all of your support.” Loneliness compounds because many women who serve in Christian ministry find they are the only one or one of a very few women on a leadership team. Often the relational needs of single women cannot be met by the men with whom they work. Consequently single women can feel isolated and alone. They don’t have the advantage of coming home to a husband and enjoying the love, support, and encouragement of a mate.

The single women also indicated the challenge of implementing change. Singles often find themselves on the forefront of change as they seek acceptance by the male leadership. A single woman does not have the advantage of a husband’s income, so she needs a position and salary that can support her financially. Often men resist bringing

¹⁷ Lysa TerKeurst, *Leading Women to the Heart of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002).

women onto their ministry teams. For this reason, single women find themselves caught in the middle of changing times more so than married women. In addition, single women do not have the extra distractions faced by married women so they can give more attention to ministry and be instruments of change as God directs.

Married women ranked burnout higher on their list of challenges than did single women, though the same percentage of singles mentioned it. Married women who hold leadership positions in ministry face the daunting task of balancing the demands of work and home. The pressure of many “hats” causes a high percentage of those who are mothers of young children and those married to men in ministry to choose not to hold a salaried position in ministry. They recognize that they do not have the time or the energy to successfully accomplish both the responsibilities of vocational ministry and the responsibilities in the home. Even those holding volunteer leadership positions have to carefully monitor their commitments so as to successfully fulfill their roles as wives and mothers.

Third Hypothesis

The third hypothesis suggested that leadership challenges would vary among DTS women alumnae who work in small churches, large churches, parachurch ministries, overseas mission work, and academic settings. The data from the survey supported the hypothesis, but indicated also a few challenges common to the women in each of these areas of ministry.

Common Challenges of Women in Different Ministry Contexts

All of the women working in various ministry settings rated time management and over-commitment as one of their top three greatest challenges. One graduate described the dilemma when she said, “It is hard knowing that I am disappointing people (staff wives) in my area of ministry because I can’t/don’t meet everyone’s expectations of me; and if I seek balance in my personal life it will eventually disappoint others.” Over a third of the women working in large churches and those on the mission field stated time management as their greatest problem. Twenty-five percent of the women in small churches, parachurch ministries, and academic contexts identified time management as a big challenge. It would follow that over-commitment would rank high since committing to too many obligations makes managing time very difficult.

A high number of women in each group also mentioned the struggle to maintain a close relationship with God. Again, the demands of ministry press against taking time to be still and spend time with God in prayer and in His Word. This remains another time management problem that requires keeping the daily schedule free enough to give the needed attention to maintaining a strong and growing spiritual life and reap the benefits of serving God in the Spirit and not in the flesh. TerKeurst¹⁸ as well as Porter and Hamel¹⁹ each include a chapter in their books addressing the importance of making time with God a priority.

Dealing with conflict resolution surfaced as the only other challenge common to all five groups of women. No matter what the ministry setting, maintaining good

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Carol Porter and Mike Hamel, *Women's Ministry Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992).

relationships proves challenging, and the handling of conflict exists as a daily occurrence. The results of the survey reveal that knowing how to resolve conflict is not a challenge for just certain women, but for ALL women as they serve in ministry. Related to conflict resolution comes the problem of limited counseling skills. All but the academic women indicated a need for additional help in how to counsel women. The seminary women receive excellent training in biblical and theological truth, but often lack skills needed to apply those truths to the personal struggles that so many people face today. As one alumnae stated, “Even though not in an official counseling role, I am often meeting with a variety of women with various issues.” Another shared, “How to counsel people who come with (family) problems and needs was a big issue to me in working at a small local church which didn’t have so much resource [sic] or aid.”

Balancing marriage, motherhood and ministry appeared high on the list for all those working in small and large churches, as well as parachurch and missions ministry. Again, the data reveal a trend towards women feeling their responsibilities of home in tension with their desires to serve in Christian ministry. Their roles as wives and mothers contribute to the pressures they feel in balancing their time and they frequently find themselves over-committed.

Differing Challenges of Women in Different Ministry Contexts

Only the women serving in academic settings did not rank their family responsibilities as their highest challenges. It can be speculated that possibly working on a school calendar may give them the extra time they need to fulfill their responsibilities as wives and mothers. They often have time off during holidays and summer to free them to be home more. Only the academic women ranked high on their list the challenges of

prejudice towards them as women, lack of acceptance by male leadership, unequal salary to what men make in similar positions, and difficulty implementing change. These findings were similar to the results of Judith Briles' study of women in corporate America.²⁰ Her survey of over 1000 women working in the secular workplace revealed prejudice towards women to be the greatest problem for women. Briles' "gender traps" also included pay inequities and implementation of change.

Many women who teach in academic settings step into a world that has been exclusively held by men, especially in conservative, evangelical institutions. These women represent pioneers in their fields of education and they often encounter opposition from those who resist the idea of women teaching, especially women teaching men. This explains why, in the past, few conservative Christian women have pursued doctorates. There have not been places for them to teach without compromising their theological and biblical positions. Today many evangelical institutions now acknowledge that seminaries and Bible colleges are not the same as the church. The men in academic leadership recognize the value of hiring competent women onto their faculties both as educators as well as models and mentors for the growing number of women seeking seminary training.

The only other group to indicate implementing change as a challenge was the women serving in small churches. This may reflect the more traditional nature of many smaller churches that often have an older congregation. There tends to be more reluctance by the leadership and membership to embrace change. Lastly, the women in small churches listed public speaking as one of their great challenges. Many of these women do not have as many opportunities to speak in large groups and fail to develop necessary

²⁰ Judith Briles, *GenderTraps* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

communication skills. Julie Baker²¹ and Alice Mathews²² have each authored books included in the literature review which address public speaking and offer helpful ways to develop communication skills.

The women serving in larger churches and parachurch ministries joined the academic women in mentioning the problem of lack of acceptance by the male leadership. Again, it remains a fairly new phenomenon for women to serve on church staffs in conservative, evangelical churches, so these women would tend to encounter resistance from some of the male staff. Some men feel threaten by competent, gifted women. Parachurch women have partnered with men on ministry teams for a longer period of time, so they experience more acceptance, yet often encounter male resistance related to women holding high positions of leadership.

The survey revealed encouraging results that DTS women graduates have experienced value and respect from a very high percentage of the men with whom they work. These statistics may be due in part to the fact that 90% of the women alumnae acknowledge a complementarian view of the role of women in ministry. Those who hold this view tend to reflect an attitude of partnering with men rather than believing women are called to any and all positions in the church including senior pastor and elder. Men learn to appreciate these women and their cooperative spirit, rather than resent them for wanting to usurp the leadership responsibilities they believe God has ordained for men.

²¹ Baker.

²² Alice Mathews, *Preaching That Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003).

Saucy and TenElshof discuss the positive impact of the complementarian relationship of men and women in their book, *Women and Men in Ministry*.²³

Only the women in smaller churches and parachurch ministry indicated a problem with a lack of confidence. One graduate confided: I have a “lack of confidence, self-esteem issues, mostly a time of waiting due to not trusting God with myself, as I am, as a person of worth.” Books written by Kraft and Johnson,²⁴ Edwards and Mathews,²⁵ Briscoe,²⁶ and TerKeurst²⁷ all discuss lack of confidence among women in ministry. These women authors who have years of experience in ministry desire to equip Christian women to minister more effectively and help build the self-confidence so needed for women serving in the body of Christ.

The women on the mission field particularly mentioned feeling an excessive amount of loneliness. They live in different cultures with language barriers and often have very few other women on their ministry team. They usually live far from family and face the challenges of adapting to another country. A magazine such as *Women of the Harvest* helps to address the unique problems faced by women on the mission field.

Women graduates working in churches also mentioned struggling with loneliness. They routinely find themselves the only woman on a church leadership team and can often experience a sense of isolation. They recognize their relational limitations

²³ Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001).

²⁴ Vickie Kraft and Gwynne Johnson, *Women Mentoring Women* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003).

²⁵ Edwards and Mathews.

²⁶ Briscoe, McIntyre, and Seversen.

²⁷ TerKeurst.

with the men they work with yet so desire and need close human connection. One woman wrote, “Women are so relational and need to be aware that ministry can be lonely.” At the same time, it can also be difficult for women leaders to have female friendships with other women in a church congregation because of issues of trust and confidentiality. Women leaders find it most helpful to have close friendships with women serving in similar positions in other ministries to meet their deep relational needs.

Fourth Hypothesis

The fourth hypothesis suggested that leadership challenges would differ between DTS women alumnae who hold salaried versus non-salaried ministry positions. The data from the study supported this hypothesis. Again, as with other groups of women graduates, there exist some similar challenges among women in vocational and volunteer work, but also other problems that are unique to their ministry roles.

Common Challenges of Women in Salaried and Non-salaried Positions

Time management, over-commitment, overly high expectations of self, and maintaining a close relationship with God surfaced within the top five challenges women graduates face whether they serve in salaried or non-salaried Christian ministry. Women have great demands on their time no matter whether they work in vocational or volunteer ministry. They often have to remember that “the need is not the call” for the needs of people are endless and ministry greatly involves helping people. Early studies by Gilligan²⁸ and Helgesen²⁹ revealed the relational nature of women as well as more recent

²⁸ Gilligan.

²⁹ Helgesen.

studies by Rosener³⁰ and Rosenthal³¹. The results from the alumnae survey concur with the findings of these researchers and confirm the tension seminary women feel between tasks and relationships and the struggle they face if they think they have to be a “Christian superwoman in ministry” by trying to do it all and do it all well.

Paid and non-paid women alike also indicated a common struggle with loneliness. It is not unique to just one group of women leaders. Women serving on leadership teams, as mentioned before, experience the isolation that leadership often creates, especially when the women serve primarily with a group of men. Loneliness also results from being too busy ministering to others to take the necessary and needed time to cultivate friendships with other women. Many of the survey respondents indicated they have a number of close friends, and yet at the same time they also noted that they often struggle with loneliness. Quite possibly this paradox could mean that though the women say they have close friends, they may not set aside the time necessary to gain the encouragement and support that comes from extended and regular time with committed friends.

Balancing marriage and ministry represented a similar problem for women in vocational and volunteer ministry. Though the expectations placed upon a salaried woman can tend to be greater, often women in volunteer positions can face similar demands. Balancing responsibilities at home and in ministry remains a challenge for most all women as indicated also in the research done by Fortosis and McCall.³² Women

³⁰ Rosener.

³¹ Cindy Simon Rosenthal, ed., *Women Transforming Congress* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

³² Fortosis and McCall.

normally assume oversight of the domestic needs in their family even though they serve in ministry positions. Much of the pressure of balancing time comes from decisions made between the wives and their husbands. Finding that balance requires communication and cooperation between married couples to free the wife to serve in ministry yet not neglect the home. One of the best solutions to balancing ministry and home is to emphasize that ministry also exists within the home and encourage placing greater value on meeting family needs. The results from the alumnae survey revealed that many of the DTS women graduates place high value on their roles as wives and mothers because of the large number of them who have chosen to stay home with their children.

Differing Challenges of Women in Salaried and Non-salaried Positions

Women in vocational ministry also indicated some different kinds of challenges from the women in volunteer ministry. Salaried women have a harder time gaining the acceptance of male leadership. They serve on ministry leadership teams and church staffs and often the women find some of the men resistant to their presence and threatened by their gifts. Many men feel uncomfortable or fail to agree that women should serve as part of a pastoral staff. This situation makes women feel undervalued and not respected as an equal. Along with this, many women find their salaries lower than the men who hold similar positions. It remains a common problem that churches especially find it hard to start paying women when the women have been volunteering their time for so many years. As one graduate shared, “Many pastors do not recognize the need. Women have volunteered their time for centuries, so they are not perceived as having value for which there needs to be financial remuneration.”

Conflict resolution surfaced as more of a problem for salaried women. Quite possibly this may occur because of the unique challenges women face when working alongside of men in ministry. As Tannen³³ and Kelley³⁴ and others affirmed through their research, men and women tend to lead and communicate differently. These differences contribute to conflicts arising as each has a different perspective and way of handling problems in ministry situations. Only 60% of the respondents of the study found men easy to work with. This problem is not necessarily always the fault of men, but more often influenced by the innate differences between men and women and the unique way they tend to interact and communicate.

Women serving in volunteer ministry encounter a different set of unique challenges. They indicated that they struggle more with a lack of self-confidence and comparing themselves to other ministry leaders. This may very likely begin either during the seminary years or be more deeply rooted earlier in their lives and surface while training for ministry. A recent alumna shared, "Women need to deal with their lack of self-esteem and low confidence if these are problems while they are still in school. It really escalates once in ministry." Too often vocational ministry is elevated above volunteer ministry, embracing the world's view that work with a paycheck reflects higher value and importance than work without pay. This thinking has permeated the Christian world and especially hurts women who choose to stay at home to raise their children or support their husbands in ministry. These non-salaried women can tend to feel "less than" and fight the battle of low self-esteem which undermines their confidence. They see other

³³ Tannen.

³⁴ Rhonda Kelley, "Communication between Men and Women in the Context of the Christian Community," *Faith and Mission* 14, no. 1 (Fall, 1996).

women who hold paid positions and battle comparing themselves to those whom they admire and envy. Comparison remains a trap many women fall into and particularly women who choose to stay at home with their children and/or prefer to partner alongside their husbands in ministry.

These issues with confidence and comparison contribute to women in volunteer ministry facing greater challenges in balancing motherhood and ministry. As mentioned previously, a great number of them are mothers of young children yet they still desire to use their gifts and their seminary training. These women do not seek vocational ministry so that they can better fulfill their roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers, yet they also desire to volunteer their time in areas of Christian ministry. So, they struggle to find the ways to best meet the needs of their children and still assume volunteer leadership roles in their local churches and other Christian ministries.

Fifth Hypothesis

The fifth hypothesis predicted that the greatest leadership challenge for DTS women alumnae would be working with the male leadership in ministry. The data did not support this hypothesis. The respondents indicated seven other issues as more challenging than their acceptance by men in ministry: Time management, balancing motherhood and ministry, over-commitment, overly high expectation of myself, maintaining a close relationship with God, conflict resolution, and an excessive amount of loneliness. Acceptance by men in ministry was listed as the eighth highest challenge. All of the women graduates' top challenges except conflict resolution tend to focus on personal issues rather than problems that involve their relationships with other people.

Yet, when the survey asked the women alumnae to list additional challenges not included on the 32-part inventory, the challenge most often mentioned was working with men. Evidently many of the women feel accepted by men (question B18 on the inventory), but find it challenging to work with men. These findings concur with research done by Briles,³⁵ Kimberling,³⁶ and Green.³⁷ In addition, the 277 women (73% of the respondents) who responded to question C34 wrote 79 other separate challenges they face in ministry not included on the 32-part inventory (see Appendix N for the complete list).

Question C1 also addressed the topic of working with men. When asked to respond to the question, “I have found it easy to work with men in ministry,” only 60% of the respondents indicated that they have found it easy to work with men in ministry. Another 16% said they have not found it easy to work with men in ministry, and 23% checked “neutral” regarding working with men in ministry. These figures mean that 40% of the respondents have some level of reservation regarding working with men. One graduate expressed a problem she faces with men in ministry men by saying, “Some men I oversee (staff, interns and volunteers) won’t accept, listen to or even follow authority. Another male can say the same thing and it’s a great idea or they follow through.” When looking at all these different parts of the survey together, the data strongly supports the fact that many of the DTS women graduates do find working with men in ministry a significant challenge.

³⁵ Briles.

³⁶ Kimberling.

³⁷ Green.

Sixth Hypothesis

The sixth hypothesis proposed that the more recent women graduates (1991-2003) would report that during their time at DTS, they felt more accepted (treated as equals with the male students) and respected by the DTS faculty than those who graduated before 1991. The hypothesis proved true. One woman's comments reflect the majority opinion of the women alumnae: "I thoroughly enjoyed my experience at DTS and never felt different or belittled as a woman. The professors were excellent and treated women no differently than the men." Another student expressed her appreciation for the professors when saying, "Nothing influenced me more in seminary than the few profs who took the time to get to know me and invest in my life."

Although the data supports a positive improvement over the years by the faculty towards women students, the numbers indicate a significant margin between the faculty showing respect for the women students versus treating the women equal with the male students. Before 1991, 89% of the women felt respected by the faculty, but only 70% of the women felt treated equal to the male students. After 1991, 92% indicated respect by the faculty, but only 79% felt treated equal to the male students by the faculty. This indicates that though the faculty may think the women students worthy of respect (consistent with the biblical teaching in Gen 1:26-28 that both men and women are created in the image of God, equal in value and worth), some of the faculty tend to treat the women students differently than the men students.

Thankfully, this trend in the faculty's response to the women students shows improvement. Even so, a concern remains that 20% of women who graduated in more recent years still experienced not being treated equal to the male students by some of the

faculty. The survey did not define what “being treated equal to the male students” meant, so it could have been interpreted differently by the survey respondents, but it remains troubling that a 13% discrepancy existed in treatment and respect regarding the faculty’s response to the female students. One survey respondent expressed it well when writing in the margin of her survey: “I started classes at DTS during the 2nd year women were admitted. There was controversy and some negative feeling concerning the presence of women in classes at DTS. However, some professors were supportive. I find it sad that you are still asking this question today.”

Seventh Hypothesis

The seventh hypothesis proposed that the more recent women graduates (1991-2003) would report that during their time at DTS, they felt more accepted and respected by the DTS male students than those who graduated before 1991. The hypothesis proved true, but the level of improvement was very marginal. A slight increase of 3% improvement occurred over the last 25 years regarding the male students’ acceptance of women on campus and a 7% increase in men showing respect towards the women students. There still remained almost 25% of the female students who did not feel accepted or respected by the male students. One woman graduate commented, “A few guys would tell me I should be married, at home and raising kids.” Another woman wrote, “There seemed to be a *slight* undercurrent of disrespect towards women coming from male students during my time at DTS.”

Thankfully, the majority of male students accepted the female students. But, too often the following comment describes a woman’s experience at DTS: “The resistance from some, not all of the men, who were students at the time I was there, always/often

frustrated me. I felt I had to prove why I was there, as though the Lord simply could not have led me to seminary.” One other woman clarified her answer by saying, “I only disagree because of a small number of male students I encountered at DTS, not the majority.” The survey data indicated positive change over the years, but troubling that as of 2003, there remained a significant number of male students who reflect disrespect for female students. These findings are consistent with studies done by Spring and Menehan,³⁸ Kimberling,³⁹ Charlton,⁴⁰ and Dulaney.⁴¹

Eighth Hypothesis

The eighth hypothesis asserted that DTS women alumnae would indicate their awareness that men and women in general have different leadership and communication styles. The review of literature supports this hypothesis and the DTS women alumnae overwhelmingly concurred. Regarding leadership styles, 88% of the women graduates agree that men and women tend to lead differently. An even higher percentage of agreement (94%) of women graduates feel that men and women communicate differently. These differences most likely contribute to the challenges that men and women face working together in ministry. One graduate related her experience when saying, “One of my challenges is being one of only 2 [sic] women in male staff meetings (the way men run things and think about things is very different).” Much has been written and

³⁸ Beth Spring and Kelsey Menehan, “Women in Seminary: Preparing for What?” *Christianity Today*, September 5, 1986.

³⁹ Kimberling.

⁴⁰ Joy Charlton, “Women in Seminary: A Review of Current Social Science Research,” *Review of Religious Review* 28, no. 4 (1987).

⁴¹ Sharon Dulaney, “Motivations, Attitudes, and Factors Which Influence Women Seminarians: A Study of Female Students Enrolled in a Master of Divinity Program in the Nation's Seminaries and Theological Schools” (Ph.D. Diss., Baylor University, 1990).

documented related to the different gender dynamics existing in the marriage relationship. Now that men and women more often share leadership responsibilities in ministry, the same gender differences come into play and create new challenges and potential problems as women serve alongside men within the body of Christ.

Results Related to Additional Survey Data

Additional Challenges Not Included on the Survey Inventory

The women graduates listed additional challenges that they face which were not included on the 32-part inventory. Just over 10% of the respondents live overseas and many of them mentioned the difficulty of living and ministering in a different culture. One graduate shared, “It is difficult teaching the Bible to others in a different culture and language and hard understanding cultural differences and how to solve them in a foreign land.” Another woman added, “Living in a foreign country adds stress to everything. Response to the gospel is slow which is an emotional burden at times.”

The data reported 54% of the women graduates as wives of men in ministry. Many of these women have unique challenges, especially those married to pastors. One wrote, “As a pastor’s wife, it is hard to deal with criticism of my husband.” Another agreed, “As a wife I feel the challenges my husband faces. Although they are not directly my challenges they affect me, too.” One wife said she struggled with “forgiving people who wrong my husband,” and another mentioned a very common problem: “Perceived congregational expectations of my role as senior pastor’s wife.” All of these women have earned their own degree from DTS, but their roles as wives of men in ministry often present the greatest challenges.

A number of the women graduates mentioned four other challenges that were overlooked when designing the survey: expectations of others, finances, working with volunteers, and lack of support and encouragement. Many of the graduates discovered that having a degree from DTS caused people to have very high expectations, especially in the area of Bible knowledge. Others mentioned financial pressures related to low ministry salaries. One alumna voiced a very common problem: “Many ministries of which women lead are highly based on volunteers. The challenge of getting volunteers on-board is always there.” All total, the graduates mentioned seventy-nine different additional challenges. Appendix N contains a complete listing.

Relationships with Supervisors in Ministry

The survey asked the women graduates to evaluate their relationships with those who supervise them in their ministry contexts (questions A5 and A11). For those who serve in vocational ministry, 83% of the women work under men and 17% work under women. For those who serve in volunteer positions, 66% of the women work under men and 34% work under women. The difference in these figures reflect the fact that more men hold paid leadership positions, whereas in volunteer ministry, more women tend to hold leadership positions.

The DTS women graduates reported that in both vocational and volunteer ministry, over 90% of them feel valued and respected by the men and women they work under or with in ministry. This data indicates that overall, the women who have graduated from DTS experience satisfying relationships with those with whom they work. The words of one of the women graduates speaks for many: “I have had a very positive overall experience and have felt very valued by church staff as well as those I’ve

ministered under and alongside. I have not felt any negative treatment based on my gender in the roles I have filled.” It is encouraging to know that women who have been trained at DTS sense value and appreciation by those they work with in ministry.

The survey responses revealed fewer women given the opportunity of involvement in the over-all decision making of their ministry. In vocational positions, 77% share in major decisions, and in volunteer positions, 80% reported that they have a part in major decisions. One woman stated, “I don’t have as great a ‘voice’ in decisions or processes of ministry as I would like.”

A higher number (87% in vocational positions and 83% in volunteer positions) felt their opinions valued by the over-all leadership in their ministry. The somewhat lower percentages related to decision making may be due to the fact that most women do not serve on elder boards where many decisions take place. So, even though the women aren’t always involved in final decisions, the male leadership seems to recognize the importance of seeking their input and taking the women’s opinions into consideration when making ministry decisions. And yet, it is worth noting that about 15% of the survey respondents indicated that leadership in their ministry failed to even consider their opinions.

Role of Women in Ministry

This D.Min. project sought to gain a greater understanding of the kinds of leadership challenges faced by conservative evangelical women who attend a seminary that promotes a complementarian perspective on the role of women in ministry. Question C2 asked the survey respondents to indicate their personal position regarding the role of women in ministry. A very high percentage (91% of the respondents) indicated they held

a complementarian position. The remaining 9% of the women hold an egalitarian position (see Chapter 1 for definitions of these positions). These figures represent women of all ages, marital status, ministry contexts, and graduation years. Many have served in vocational and volunteer ministry for many years. The data showed that the great majority of DTS women graduates support men in positions of leadership as senior pastors and elders. They do not desire to usurp male authority or assume the responsibilities that they believe God has entrusted to men. These women desire to hold support roles in leadership and partner with men to carry out the work of ministry in the body of Christ worldwide. This high percentage of women graduates holding complementarian positions of women in ministry strengthens the survey results. The challenges that have surfaced from this study reflect a reliable indicator of what women holding complementarian convictions of the role of women in ministry face when serving in Christian ministry.

Definition of a “Leader”

Since the mission of DTS includes developing leaders for ministry worldwide, the survey asked the women graduates to define what “you believe ‘leader’ means.” Almost 92% (345 of 377 of the respondents) chose to answer the question. Almost a third (30%) included the word “servant” or “serving” as an important part of being a leader. Another 18% mentioned “visionary,” and 12% felt a leader focused on a goal and had followers. Other words that were frequently mentioned included: guide, direct, influence, encourage, motivate, inspire, equip, teach, train, shepherd, love, and disciple. The respondents also emphasized the importance that a leader model Christlike character,

maintain a close walk with God, delegate responsibilities, exercise authority, made decisions, and help others grow in their faith and reach their potential.

Women in the Bible

Most of the teaching done at Dallas Seminary tends to use men of the Bible as examples of leadership. This makes sense since men held most all of the positions of leadership in Bible times. The vast majority of Christian books that discuss leadership principles use men in the Bible as their examples. Again, this is understandable since God chose to place leadership responsibilities upon men in both the Old and New Testaments. But in the process, women in the Bible rarely receive mention in the context of leadership. Yet, many women throughout the Old and New Testaments found themselves in places of leadership and influence. Their roles may have been different from men, but still very significant.

Women can and do learn many valuable leadership principles from studying the lives of men in the Bible, but examples from the lives of biblical women can greatly affirm and encourage modern-day women in their uniqueness as females. Identifying with women in the Bible can help women today to realize the valuable contribution God intended women to make. Question C4 in the survey asked the women alumnae to indicate the woman of the Bible with whom they most closely identified.

The 309 respondents who chose to answer the question selected 33 different biblical women. The high number of different answers indicates the great diversity of women who have graduated from DTS. The women graduates selected Ruth the most often, followed by Deborah, Martha, Esther, Priscilla, Mary of Bethany, Hannah, Abigail, Mary the mother of Jesus, Sarah, Naomi, and the Proverbs 31 Woman. Eleven of the

respondents selected both sisters, Mary and Martha, explaining that their lives reflect both of these women at different times. Table 42 in Chapter 4 gives a complete list of all the women of the Bible chosen by the DTS women graduates.

Even though the survey specifically asked for the respondents to write down the name of a woman from the Bible, eight women graduates preferred to select a man in the Bible. One of the alumnae commented, “I can’t think of one. . . .Pastors never preach about women, and women teachers always rehash Mary and Martha or Esther.” The same situation often occurs in seminary classrooms. Professors rarely mention a woman from the Bible when discussing leadership principles. Unless women are given the opportunity to learn from and value the lives and contributions of women in the Bible, there will always remain a sense that leadership belongs only to men.

It is tragic to read a comment from one of our women graduates who states, “I’m going to choose not to make something up to finish this survey. Honestly, I’ve never considered this question and cannot think of any woman in the Bible I can identify with.” Or another shared, “None: Honestly could not think of one. . . .Perhaps due to a lack of knowledge about the women of the Bible. I’ve sat here for quite a while trying to identify with one.” The simple fact that over fifty of the respondents chose not to answer the question and a few others said things such as “never considered” and “I don’t know” revealed a lack of emphasis given to women in the Bible. Possibly one particular female graduate sums it up best when she wrote, “To be honest, this will be the first time I’ve even identified with a woman in the Bible! Wow! This is an eye-opener.” The responses to this question reveal the lack of attention given to women in the Bible in the coursework at DTS and the teaching within the wider body of Christ.

Mentors and Close Women Friends

Many of the more recent books on leadership emphasize the important place of mentors and friendships. Vickie Kraft, Gwynne Johnson,⁴² and Elizabeth Inrig,⁴³ all DTS graduates, focused on mentoring in books they have written. Often success or failure in ministry can be traced back to whether or not a man or woman in leadership had people in their lives to hold them accountable and to offer support and guidance. Question C5 asked, “Do you currently have anyone in your life you would consider a ‘mentor,’ someone who models a mature Christian faith and is a trusted source of wise counsel and guidance.” Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents reported that they do have a mentor. One woman wrote, “I am convinced that everyone in ministry needs a wise, trusted, older person to keep SANE [sic].”

Some of the women graduates indicated gratefulness for having a mentor, and others wished that they had a wise, older woman in their life. One graduate commented, “I have desperately sought one and though I am young, it has been very difficult to find someone to do this because they feel they have nothing to teach me. It’s been very frustrating.” Another shared, “This has been a constant discouragement. I mentor and disciple younger women but seems there is no one around for me. Women do not want to be mentors.” One other woman wrote, “Although I’m constantly on the ‘look-out’ and have tried to develop this type of relationship with a woman--it’s difficult to find someone willing.” It seems the younger generation desires and needs older, more mature believers to spend time with them, but often older women seem unwilling to give the time and commitment involved in a mentoring relationship.

⁴² Kraft and Johnson.

⁴³ Inrig.

Question F9 asked a question related to, but different from mentoring: “How many close women friends do you have at present with whom you can be open and honest, share concerns and struggles, and be held accountable in your personal life?” The literature review revealed the importance of friendships in the life of a woman leader, and the survey results indicated that 94% of the respondents have at least one or two close friends and 72% have at least three or four close friends. As one woman emphatically declared, “Women need other women in their lives and that’s the bottom line.”

All of the women who filled out the survey (100%) answered this question on friendships. Close relationships with other women exist as a foundational need for most women. The results from the survey revealed 23 women who indicated that they have no close friends. One woman expressed a common question, “This is a big issue for me right now. Where do I go to find a good friend?” Another voiced a similar concern: “I wish I had a close friend. I need one.” Since relationships play an important role in the lives of women leaders, a lack of friends would quite likely hinder a woman in leadership from feeling fully satisfied and content.

Placement Issues

Mr. Bob Kaumeyer, Director of Placement at DTS, has often stated the difficulty in finding ministry positions for female graduates. The survey indicated that 20% of the respondents continued in a ministry position they already held while a student. Only 40% percent of the respondents sought a paid position after graduation. Of those seeking a position, 25% found a place in ministry in less than a year, 10% took more than a year, and 5% still seek a position.

The fact that 40% of the respondents did not desire to find a salaried ministry position represents a very significant finding. Not seeking a ministry position stands unique to female graduates. Most all male graduates intend to secure paid positions, primarily in Christian contexts, though some plan to return to secular jobs. The data from the survey showed marriage to men in ministry and motherhood as the primary reasons women do not seek paid positions in ministry. Joy Charlton discovered the same findings in her study of women seminarians.⁴⁴ As one DTS graduate mentioned, “My choice was to seek training at DTS that would assist and complement my husband in ministry.” Family responsibilities tend to have greater influence on women than men and so bring a different dynamic for women when considering ministry goals.

Because of family priorities, some women will come to DTS for the biblical and theological training, yet realize that they may serve in volunteer positions if they marry and have children. A recent graduate explains, “I did not have a salaried position in mind while attending seminary and went to school to learn primarily and upon completion my husband and I took a position at a camp and started our family and I am a fulltime mom now!” Another shared, “I am married to a DTS grad who is a pastor. I have not sought a salaried position but have chosen to work alongside my husband and volunteer in varying capacities in ministry.”

Other survey respondents indicated that they have had trouble finding paid positions in ministry because so few churches hire women. Or, if a church indicates a willingness to hire a woman, it offers a salary not large enough to support a woman, especially a single woman. A graduate living in the United States explains, “My hope upon graduation was to find a full-time paid ministry position. What I found was that

⁴⁴ Charlton.

there were very few paid positions for women and the ones that did pay did not pay enough to support myself on that income alone.” Placement continues as a very challenging part of ministry for women. Thankfully more and more churches now recognize the advantages of hiring women as part of their leadership staff. Opportunities in vocational ministry for women will probably always remain a dilemma because ministry budgets are often so limited, but as additional women gain solid biblical and theological training more doors of paid ministry will open to them.

Summary of Survey Recommendations

The second part of this study asked the question, “How can DTS best prepare women students to meet these challenges?” The last question on the DTS women alumnae survey (F10) asked,

“Think back over your years as a student at DTS and your personal experiences in ministry. What are some specific ways DTS could strengthen its program to prepare seminary women more effectively for the challenges they will face in Christian ministry?”

Over 1000 recommendations came from the 338 women who chose to answer this last question. After compiling all the suggestions and combining all the similar answers, the total came to 90 individual suggestions (Appendix O). Some of the women wrote brief recommendations. Others filled a page and a half of written comments, sharing numerous thoughts and suggestions. The transcription of the comments resulted in over 60 single-spaced pages of remarks.

The following summary of the recommendations reflects the opinions of almost half of all the women who have graduated from Dallas Seminary since 1977.

Each recommendation is followed by the number of women who mentioned it and the percent of total respondents.

Discussion of Recommendations

Prepare men and women to more successfully minister together. 81 (24%)

The importance of men and women learning to work more effectively together surfaced as the number one recommendation made by the women graduates of DTS. The women alumnae expressed the need for DTS to develop ways to prepare the male and female students to a lifetime of partnering together in ministry. Since 90% of the women alumnae hold to a complementarian view of the role of women in ministry, they do not endorse women in all positions of Christian leadership, but rather value women supporting and partnering with male leadership. These women urge DTS to develop ways to help men and women understand the merit of men and women serving in complementary relationships in leadership responsibilities within the body of Christ. Faculty should be encouraged to integrate the concept of men and women serving together into their class sessions. This suggestion applies to all masters level courses as well as courses on the doctoral level.

Help men value and respect women in ministry. 61 (18%)

This second recommendation relates to the first suggestion. Over 60 women believe DTS needs to more specifically emphasize the importance of valuing and respecting women as leaders in Christian ministry. Whether in classroom lectures, during chapel messages, in small group discussions, or one-on-one interaction, the male students should be encouraged to recognize their sisters in Christ as partners in fulfilling God's

plan for the world. Some roles in the church may be different between men and women, but male and female alike possess equal value in the sight of God. Information about the different ways men and women lead and communicate would help both faculty and students understand gender differences and learn how those complementary differences can enhance and strengthen leadership teams.

Address placement issues for women. 47 (14%)

Potential graduates need more information related to opportunities open to them in ministry. The seminary women should receive encouragement that God has a plan to use them in ministry, but also be given realistic expectations of the challenges of finding a paid position in ministry. The seminary needs to investigate ways to help churches recognize the value of hiring women as part of their pastoral staff. The DTS Office of Alumni and Church Relations and the Center for Christian Leadership could distribute information, hold seminars and conferences, and promote the importance of hiring woman in vocational positions. In particular, church leaders need to recognize the value of hiring a Director of Women's Ministry.

Include teaching the role of women in ministry in DTS courses. 44 (13%)

The topic of the role of women in ministry needs to be integrated into the courses taught at DTS. The women alumnae emphasized that not just the female students, but the male students also need to study and understand this important aspect of ministry. A course on "Men and Women in Ministry" would be more comprehensive than just offering a course on the role of women in ministry. The emphasis needs to address men and women serving together. Men need to understand the important role they play in

opening doors of leadership opportunities for women. Women need to understand the important role they play in supporting men in leadership in the church and in the home.

Emphasize speaking/communication skills. 44 (13%)

The women graduates advise all women students to take communication courses that will equip them for the times that they will inevitably be asked to speak and teach. Suggestions included courses that address the specific types of speaking opportunities that await women serving in ministry, such as Bible studies, retreats, testimonies, luncheons, seminars, etc. DTS women students should have a requirement to take a class devoted to developing effective communication skills.

Emphasize counseling skills. 42 (12%)

Many of the DTS women graduates found that they lacked the necessary skills to counsel those they serve in ministry. Numerous graduates specifically mentioned the need to develop knowledge and basic skills in helping people address personal problems. The respondents acknowledged the need for professional counselors, but the women graduates have discovered that much of ministry involves helping people address the challenges of life so basic training in counseling skills should be part of a seminary education.

Require Spiritual Formation for all women. 39 (11%)

The alumnae urged all women students to participate in a Spiritual Formation group. The graduates emphasized the importance of experiencing life change through the support and encouragement of a small group of committed women friends. Some of the women alumnae reported they participated in a Spiritual Formation group while students

at DTS. Others wished that they had chosen to participate in Spiritual Formation. Others (if they attended in the early years) did not have the opportunity to be part of a small group. The women see participation in Spiritual Formation as valuable for personal growth during the years as a seminary student as well as for preparation for a lifetime of ministry. They also recognize the importance of friendships among women and see Spiritual Formation as one way to meet the relational needs of women.

Offer specific training/teaching related to Christian leadership. 38 (11%)

Specific training in leadership was mentioned by a large number of the survey respondents. Many felt a class on the principles of Christian leadership should be required of all DTS students. If the mission of Dallas Seminary is to equip “godly servant-leaders,” then the development of key leadership skills should represent a core element of the curriculum. The women alumnae recommended a greater emphasis on women as leaders, focusing on women from the Bible and women in church history, as well as including the dynamics of men and women partnering together as leaders in the body of Christ.

Offer courses in women’s ministry and ministry to women. 37 (11%)

Frequent suggestions included more training in women ministering to women. The women who have graduated from DTS recognize that women have a unique responsibility to teach and train women as Paul directs in Titus 2. Elective courses and the concentration in Women’s Ministry need additional development to adequately equip those women who feel specifically called to minister to women. The graduates also recommended that the faculty emphasize the need for women’s ministries in churches. In

addition, professors need to urge the men students to recognize the important responsibility men have in making women's ministries a priority in local churches.

Provide more women mentors and female role models. 35 (10%)

Women alumnae felt they missed an important element of their seminary experience by not having female role models and older women mentors. The women graduates expressed their appreciation for the men on faculty at DTS, but commented frequently that because of limitations in the relationships they could develop with the male faculty, they (the women students) felt deprived of the advantages of time with faculty. With the growing number of women students, the need for the availability of older women increases. In order to have more female faculty, more women need to aspire towards and be welcomed into doctoral programs both in Ph.D. and D.Min. so that they can earn the credentials necessary to teach on the graduate level.

In addition, it is worth noting that besides the thirty-five women who mentioned wanting women mentors, eighteen more specifically urged the seminary to consider additional female faculty members. Had these two groups been combined in the survey results, the recommendations for female role models would have represented the third highest recommendation made by the women graduates. Having women on faculty represents a great need for our women students. The women alumnae also felt the position of Advisor to Women Students needed greater emphasis and possibly carry the title of Dean of Women.

Emphasize training/teaching in conflict resolution skills. 35 (10%)

Another 10% of the women see the need for more training in the area of conflict resolution. They appreciate all the biblical and theological training they received at DTS, but find that much of ministry involves the challenges of people relating effectively with to one another. Leaders in ministry need to learn how to successfully resolve conflicts. Somewhere in the core curriculum DTS should include training related to the challenges faced in personal relationships and train their students in the biblical methods of addressing the many situations of conflict that surface in ministry.

Include more practical application in DTS courses. 35 (10%)

Another 35 women see a need to introduce more practical application into the coursework at DTS. They do not recommend that the seminary compromise on their commitment to train men and women thoroughly in the Bible and theology, but to integrate examples of how God's Word addresses the everyday experiences of life. The women recommend there be a balance of content with training in life skills so that truth becomes relevant to what will be encountered in everyday situations in ministry.

Provide mentoring by women currently serving in ministry. 34 (10%)

Some of the alumnae suggest the need for more exposure and connection to women who presently serve in ministry. The graduates recommend having more women speak in chapel, offer Brown Bag meetings on various topics pertinent to women, develop mentoring relationships for women students with older Christian women in the Dallas area, and encourage internships with women serving in Christian ministry positions.

Additional Recommendations

The previous thirteen recommendations reflect comments made by 10%-24% of the women alumnae. Some of the remaining topics relate to the ones previously mentioned but were individually mentioned by the women alumnae. Those mentioned by at least ten or more of the women graduates include (numbers indicate how many women mentioned the recommendation):

- 22 - Emphasize the importance of friendships among women at DTS.
- 22 - Prepare married students for ministry to/with their husbands.
- 21 - Address cultural differences among women.
- 20 - Teach time management skills.
- 19 - Encourage internships.
- 18 - Address issues unique to singleness.
- 18 - Include relational skills.
- 18 - Hire more female faculty.
- 16 - Have more women speakers in chapel/brown bags lunches/seminars.
- 15 - Emphasize the students' relationship with God.
- 15 - Require or recommend a women's ministry course.
- 14 - Emphasize mentoring and discipleship.
- 13 - Encourage church support of women.
- 12 - Offer information on financial issues while students and in ministry.
- 12 - Encourage faculty to connect more with students.
- 11 - Create ways for alumnae to connect.
- 10 - Teach Bible study preparation.

A complete list of all 90 recommendations can be found in Appendix O.

Research Conclusions

The women graduates of Dallas Seminary live and serve God throughout the United States and the world. They face multiple leadership challenges. Some challenges are unique to marital status, involvement either in vocational or volunteer ministry, or the specific ministry context in which they serve, but all women tend to share other challenges. This D.Min.study sought to discover these challenges and recommend ways Dallas Seminary could more effectively prepare their women graduates for a life of

ministry. Little research has been done related to seminary women in a conservative, evangelical seminary. Hopefully, the information and recommendations from the women who have graduated from DTS during the last 25 years will help the leadership of DTS to re-evaluate their program and make needed changes in order to best prepare their students for Christian service.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations for further research have developed as a result of this study:

1. A study of the challenges facing women graduates in other conservative, evangelical seminaries.
2. A study of the challenges facing women graduates in seminaries that hold to a different biblical and theological positions than DTS.
3. A study of challenges facing the male graduates of DTS.
4. A comparative study of the DTS women graduates ten years after this present study (2013).

Implications of These Findings

Through the survey used in this D.Min. project, almost half of the 923 women who graduated from Dallas Seminary between 1977 to 2003 gave the leadership of DTS a greater understanding of the specific challenges faced by the women alumnae in different ministry settings. A summary of these challenges and a list of the women graduates' recommendations to strengthen the program for women will be presented to Dr. Mark Bailey, President of Dallas Seminary. Hopefully, the administration of DTS will take

steps to adjust their programs and curriculum to best prepare their men and women students for a life of Christian ministry.

The study revealed that women face many personal challenges as they work in Christian ministry. They have struggles with time management, balancing their responsibilities at home and in ministry, over-commitment, maintaining a close relationship with God, and feelings of loneliness. In the midst of communicating these personal issues, the overwhelming concern the women graduates voiced was the challenge of acceptance by and work relationships with men in ministry. The problems inherent with men and women ministering together need to first be addressed on the seminary campus where men and women train together for a lifetime of ministry.

A seminary faculty has a tremendous influence on the lives of students. The men and women teaching in the classroom need to fully understand the strategic and necessary contribution women make to the leadership of the body of Christ. If women are to become “godly servant-leaders,” they need the sound biblical and theological training offered at a seminary such as Dallas Seminary. The faculty play a significant role in affirming and encouraging women students of the valuable contribution they can make as they join their brothers in Christ on leadership teams.

God designed women to partner with men to carry out His plan for mankind whether in the home or in the church. The male students at DTS need to accept and respect their sisters in Christ as co-laborers, complementing one another to more accurately reflect God together and more successfully fulfill God’s purposes in the world. The men who graduate from DTS will fill positions of authority and responsibility in the

family of God. They will determine the doors that will open for women to serve along side of them.

This study intended to contribute valuable information needed to further enhance the training of women at Dallas Seminary. Demographic data offered a clearer picture of the DTS women alumnae and where they serve in ministry. The results of the survey revealed the challenges women seminarians face in Christian ministry. The study also collected needed recommendations from women graduates in order to further enhance the preparation of women to serve and glorify God. The women who attend Dallas Seminary seek to be “vessels of honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). May God use the data from this project to further His plan to equip women more effectively for a life of service to the glory of God.