

From the Pantry to the Pulpit: Anglican Clergywomen in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyze the narratives of the first nine women to have broken through the proverbial stained-glass ceiling, and who now serve as female deacons and priests in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago. We discuss the demographic characteristics of these pioneering clergywomen; the paths they took to become ordained clergy; the challenges they faced along the way; the strategies they used to overcome these challenges; and the lessons they have learned from their journeys. We argue that these clergywomen's stories highlight that despite personal characteristics such as resilience and tenacity supported by faith, which help them overcome their challenges, infrastructural and policy requirements need to be strengthened in the Diocese if more and younger women are to enter the clergy and rise to the highest ranks of leadership.

Keywords: Anglican; clergywomen; pioneer ordinands; leadership; Trinidad and Tobago

Introduction

This study had its genesis in a call for papers for this special issue of *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*. This call indicated that submitted articles should focus on “both historical and contemporary views of African and African descended women serving as religious leaders.” The call for papers inspired one of us (Joyanne) to contact the other (Shelley-Ann) via email and suggest to her that this was an opportunity to relate an untold story of the experiences of Anglican clergywomen in Trinidad and Tobago, most of whom are of African descent. We agreed that we should not pass up this chance. We met and discussed the project over breakfast one Friday morning and so this enquiry was born.

We are committed to this pioneering research project on clergywomen within the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago. In our written proposal for this project, Joyanne declared:

This paper presents an opportunity for me to realize my parish’s motto ‘to use God’s gifts of time, talent and treasure to reconcile the Community of God.’ I am currently a teacher educator who was educated at an Anglican high school for girls in Trinidad and who has spent over 15 years as a teacher at Anglican schools in Trinidad. I have always been fascinated by the intersection of narratives, Anglicanism and its role in promoting women leaders. Therefore, this study will provide an opportunity for me to intersect my personal, spiritual, and professional lives. I look forward to sharing the conversation with these Anglican leaders and enabling their voices to be heard.

Shelley-Ann pronounced:

I have long hypothesized that lasting change in individuals and among communities is effected and sustained best through interdisciplinary enquiry and application. This paper offers me an opportunity to begin to test this hypothesis through application and further exploration of some of the theories and principles of both my Psychological and Theological training. Both my undergraduate and graduate studies facilitated opportunities for research. In the first instance, through simple research projects (more qualitative research), and then through independent study. I am a young female Anglican Priest in my fifth year of parish ministry. This study provides a unique opportunity for me to reflect on my formation and ministry experience up to this point. It will also be a privilege to participate in scholarly work that will begin to lay the foundation for future study in this area.

For this project, we explored and analyzed the narratives of nine clergywomen who now serve as pioneering female deacons and priests in 31 parishes of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago. These are the first women to have broken through the proverbial “stained-glass ceiling” (Adams 2007; de Gasquet 2010; Morgan 1994; Purvis 1995; Sullins 2000) in this diocese.

As we examined and made sense of the experiences these women had in their journey of becoming religious leaders in a patriarchal system, we were guided by the theme for this special issue *Breaking the stained glass ceiling: Women as religious leaders*. The questions we address in this paper are:

- a. What are the key demographic characteristics of these pioneering clergywomen?
- b. What paths did they take to become ordained clergy in the Anglican Church in the diocese of Trinidad and Tobago?
- c. What challenges did they face along the way?
- d. How did they overcome these challenges?
- e. What lessons have they learned from their journeys?

The narratives from these nine “pioneering ordinands” (Sullins 2000, 244) were explored, interpreted, and analyzed through various theoretical lenses such as the concept of the stained-glass ceiling and the issues of gender, identity, position, power, authority and narrative inquiry.

While some research has been done on the experiences of clergywomen in the worldwide ministry (Charlton 1997 and 2000; Purvis 1995; Stevens 1989), no research has yet been done on Anglican clergywomen in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, this is an important baseline and pioneering study, which will add to the sparse work on women religious leaders in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. This project gave these clergywomen an opportunity to reflect on and make sense of their own experiences of becoming priests and deacons in Trinidad and Tobago. A new generation of younger women (see Albee 2000), who can now choose religious leadership as a career, can read these stories and may be able to make sense of their own experiences through the stories of women who have gone before them.

This study can also serve as a basis for comparative studies on clergywomen within the Anglican Province of the West Indies and/or other religious institutions in the local and wider Caribbean region. In addition, the data and analysis generated from this study may also impact on the institution of the Anglican Church of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the considerations and mechanisms necessary for the smoother preparation, education and integration of women into the life of religious leadership in a system dominated by men. Most importantly, this study will give voice to a group of pioneering Caribbean Anglican clergywomen whose stories have never been heard publicly before.

Stained-Glass Ceiling: Issues of Gender, Identity, Position, Power and Authority

Historically, the church has been a patriarchal system that is controlled by men (Chowdhury 2009; Walby 1989). Up until the 1970s, the Anglican Church worldwide resisted the admission of women into the ordained ministry (Foss 1984; Jones 2003; Sani and Reicher 1999). Foss (1984) used a cluster analysis to “gain insights into the process of and motivation for the events and actions that occurred in the development of this controversy” (Foss 1984, 3). She argued that:

A cluster analysis of the rhetoric of the establishment concerning the issue of women priests reveals that in the minds of the establishment, the Episcopal Church [name of Anglican Church in the US] was a traditional, orderly, and unified structure based on the highest possible authority, God. It was a feminine structure in its proper relation to the priest, who, because he symbolized God and Christ, belonged to an exclusive male group. Men were defined by a special connection to God and energetic activity, both of which made them superior to women. Women’s inferiority resulted from a focus on their bodies and sexuality as a central feature of their being. The negative qualities that they were seen to possess included their emotionality and their reliance on intuition as a source of knowledge. Their potential as mothers, because it could be negative as well as positive and required women to focus on child rearing, provided further support for their inferiority (Foss 1984, 6).

Foss’ analysis highlights that the issues around admitting women into church leadership were based on negotiating issues of gender (Charlton 2000; Watling 2002), identity, authority and position. As Charlton argued:

The story of clergywomen of the pioneer generation is a story about gender, work, religion and the church. Ordained clergywomen by their very presence as well as their actions in positions of power—and in this case in positions symbolizing and representing divinity—are involved in changing the nature of work within the church, and perhaps changing some fundamental religious understandings as well (Charlton 2000, 421).

After years of struggle and debate around the issues that prevented women from becoming ordained clergy (Jones 2003; Sullins 2000), the Anglican Church began to officially ordain women in the 1970s. This came after the decisions taken at the once-per-decade, 1968 Lambeth Conference (meeting of the Anglican Church’s bishops), recommended the ordination of women to the diaconate.

In the Anglican Church, most clergy are ordained sequentially (Nesbit 1993) as deacons, priests and bishops. As Nesbit (1993, 14) explained, “the first ordination (e.g., transitional deacon) typically regarded as a probationary or preparatory status prior to the second ordination (e.g. priest, elder) which grants full liturgical privileges and normally is required for holding senior leadership positions”. She added, “The distinctive occupational difference between the permanent deacon and the priest today is that priests hold authority to do all of the activities of the permanent deacon, but the latter cannot perform the priestly duties of celebrating the Eucharist, giving blessings or absolution” (Nesbit 1993, 15).

Charlton (1997) further clarified that:

To be ordained means, technically, that a minister can officially perform the sacraments of the church: marriage, burial, and communion. But organizationally, it is much more. Only those who are ordained...can serve as pastors to congregations and can occupy the central leadership positions of the church (Charlton 1997, 599).

Therefore, the official ordination of women as deacons and priests signaled the entry of women into leadership positions in the Anglican Church because authority could then be vested in them to lead congregations. However, the increasing presence and role of women in the church has stirred great debate because there are those (both men and women) who believe that women are not equal to men and should not be allowed to function in the same way as men.

Hedberg (2010) in her book *Women, Men and the Trinity: What does it mean to be equal?* put forward an argument to explain the subordinate role of women in the Church. She argued that the premise in Trinitarian theology is that functionally the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father. This position influences the relationship between men and women in the church in terms of essence (being) and function (roles they play). If in the godhead one member is subordinate in function and essence, the position will forever frame the relationship in the church of women being subordinate to men who are the leaders. In other words, if the Church represents God in the world, then the leadership should be male. Hedberg further argued that there is equality in the Trinity; therefore, men and women should be equal in essence and function.

In 1994, the Church of England ordained its first set of female priests (Jones 2003; Nason-Clark 1987). By 2010, 28 of the 38 Anglican provinces worldwide had ordained women as priests, with seventeen having removed all barriers to women serving as bishops. However, the debate on the admission of women as bishops continues (Roberts, Robbins, Francis and Hills 2006).

In 1995, the Anglican Church in the Province of the West Indies voted and agreed on the ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood. Episcopal ordination remained closed and reserved only for men. In 1996, the first women were ordained priests in the Province. The Province officially indicated this vote to ordain women at the Lambeth Conference in 1998. The Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago, which is one of the eight dioceses in the Province of the West Indies, ordained the first two women as deacons in 1997. In 2001, two women were ordained as priests. Since then, ten women have been ordained as clergy; one has since died. In 2011, seven of them serve as priests and two as deacons.

Administratively the diocese of Trinidad and Tobago is organized in regions and parishes. The leadership positions in these regions and parishes are as follows:

- (i) Assistant Curates who serve under the direct supervision of a Rector;
- (ii) Priests in Charge who serve under the direct supervision of the Bishop;
- (iii) Rectors who have full control and responsibility for a parish under the supervision of an Archdeacon;
- (iv) Canons who may be given specific ministry responsibilities and serve as part of the Cathedral Chapter, which is an advisory body to the Bishop and led by The Dean of the Cathedral;
- (v) Archdeacons who assist the Bishop in pastoral and administrative duties and is responsible for a cluster of parishes in a given geographic area;
- (vi) The Dean, who has an administrative and pastoral responsibility for the Cathedral which holds the seat of the Bishop and represents the Church in the community;
- (vii) The Bishop who has administrative and pastoral responsibility for the whole Diocese.

None of the pioneering clergywomen in Trinidad and Tobago hold positions as Rectors, Canons, Archdeacons, the Dean or the Bishop. This is similar to the international scenario where, even though women are enrolling in increasing numbers in seminaries around the world (Hedberg 2010; Purvis 1995), they are generally restricted to lower ranks of religious organizations (Sullins 2000) and are underrepresented at the highest administrative levels. For example, according to the *Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance*, in the Anglican Church worldwide, even though women have been ordained as priests since the 1970s, in the 1998 Lambeth Conference, there were 800 Anglican bishops, 11 of whom were women. On its web site the organization *Women and the Church* (WATCH) indicated that since 1998, only 26 women have been consecrated as bishops. In 2011, according to the official website for the Anglican Communion (<http://anglicancommunion.org>), of the 38 Provinces in the Communion, there is only one female primate (Archbishop). This slow movement of Anglican Clergywomen up the ranks prompted us to wonder, what barriers are preventing more women from rising to higher ranks in the worldwide Anglican Communion?

The *glass ceiling* is the term used to describe barriers that prevent women and minorities from advancing to management positions in corporations and organizations (Maume 1999 and 2004). The term *stained-glass ceiling* (Adams 2007; de Gasquet 2010; Morgan 1994; Purvis 1995; Sullins 2000) draws on a reference to church architecture, and is used to describe the difficulties that women experience as they seek to occupy leadership roles in organized religious institutions. These barriers may exist as a result of church law or practice that discriminates against women. Charlton (2000, 422) suggested that:

A 'glass ceiling' for women exists....Those in my sample believed that women are less likely to get the jobs at the biggest and most popular churches, and are less likely to get administrative appointments at the levels of district superintendents and bishops.

In this study, the collection and analysis of stories of Anglican clergywomen in Trinidad and Tobago may give some insight into the challenges that some women may face as priests and deacons in an organization that has historically been male. It will be interesting to examine how the themes of gender, patriarchy, position, power and authority play out in this local setting.

Narrative Inquiry

Since the 1980s, narrative inquiry has been used in varied fields of research including psychology, sociology and education (Clandinin and Connelly 1998; Clandinin and Connelly 2007; Clandinin, Pushor and Murray-Orr 2007; Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Connelly and Clandinin 1999). Connelly and Clandinin (2000, 18) explained:

For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a way of writing and thinking about it.

These authors and those who are influenced by their narrative inquiry approach to research, use stories in three ways: as a "phenomena under study" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 4); as a method of study; and as a way of thinking and writing their research (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Narrative inquiry places value on people's stories and taps into their knowledge from their perspective. Narratives also have a temporal, social and spatial dimension (Clandinin, Pushor and Murray-Orr 2007).

Narrative inquiry has also been used as a method of research in theological studies (Savage and Presnell 2008). Sawyer (2008) in his review of *Narrative Research in Ministry: A postmodern research approach for faith communities* (Savage and Presnell 2008), described the approach as delving into “mostly uncharted territory” as the ministry sought to explore new methods of advancing theological study in the 21st century. In 2000, a special volume of *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28 (5) entitled *Qualitative research on narratives of spiritually-based communities* carried three articles which focused on research on faith-based organizations (Mankowski and Rappaport 2000; Maton 2000; Stuber 2000). According to the Editor-in-Chief, the analysis in the articles “add to the discipline’s [Psychology] capacity to understand and ultimately contribute to the well-being of communities and those who inhabit them” (Lorion 2000, 477).

Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) identified several reasons why the analysis of narratives is appropriate for the study of faith-based communities. They argued that:

First, narratives about spiritual life have shaped worldwide religious institutions, local religious congregations and the personal lives of individual members....Second, religious narratives are repeatedly told, internalized, and enacted giving them great power to shape individual and collective life....Third, spiritually based communities are defined and guided by [discourse, practices and] texts [such as the bible in Christian churches] characterized by the narrative form of exposition (Mankowski and Rappaport 2000, 480).

Stuber (2000) focused on the interplay between community narratives and the personal stories from a group of nuns in a religious Catholic community. She explored how the community narratives shaped the identity of the nuns. Researchers such as Yust (2009) and Adeney (2009) also found the use of narrative inquiry useful in their work. Bruce (2009, 330) argued that in the fields of Religion and Education, narrative inquiry is a spiritual and liberating approach to research that is also “a potentially empowering, ethical and transformational means of doing research”. She added that it is spiritual because “in its method it deeply values and affirms the power of life to offer us meaning” (Bruce 2009, 324); it is liberating because it “acknowledges the importance of grounding education in human subjectivity, emphasizes the importance of claiming one’s voice, while also respecting and empowering the human person”.

Our review of the literature on narrative inquiry helped us to understand that our choice of narrative as a means of investigation and telling was suitable and in keeping with the developments in research within religious communities. For this study, narratives from the nine female Anglican clergywomen were used as expressions of the practical understanding that these women have of their experiences of becoming priests and deacons within a religious institution. As they narrated their stories, they too began to make sense of their experiences of being and becoming clergywomen.

While narrative inquiry provided a space for each woman to tell her personal stories, this method of research also gave us as researchers an opportunity to compare the clergywomen's stories and pull out themes and anomalies. Overall, the story we tell may be quite different from those of women in other religious groups or Anglican clergywomen from other parts of the world. Therefore, the phenomena under study was what the women had to say and the method of inquiry were the techniques used to collect and make meaning of these women's experiences as they journeyed to become clergywomen.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this qualitative study was produced from transcribed interviews and other written sources such as written field notes, personal journals and printed newspaper articles. We were quite pleased that when they were informed about the study, all nine Anglican clergywomen agreed to being interviewed. These interviews "enabled the participants...to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard the situations from their own point of view" (Cohen and Manion 2007, 349). All participants gave their informed consent before they participated in the interview. They had the option to stop the interview if they wished to; no one did.

The interviews were based on a schedule of questions that elicited stories on the clergywomen's experiences of their processes of becoming ordained clergy, the challenges they faced along the way, especially those related to them being female, and the ways in which they overcame these challenges. The interviews took place in various places and spaces: interviewees' homes, churches and church offices. The interviews lasted between 31 and 84 minutes and were digitally audiotaped and transcribed by an independent transcriber. The printed transcript documents were returned to the women for a final review. To ensure the security of the data, all digital recordings of interviews were stored in a secure location and were only accessed by us the authorized researchers and the transcriber.

Joyanne conducted the interviews for this study. The interview was the first time she met with most of the women. We decided that she would conduct the interviews because we felt that Shelley-Ann's insider position of being a priest might have influenced what the clergywomen would share and may have increased the possibility of misinterpreting the narratives from an insider's perspective. However, we were mindful that some of the participants may not have been willing to share some details with an outsider. Despite the freedom of allowing them to speak frankly, not being an insider may have limited Joyanne's understanding the importance of a story in connection to the wider Church narrative.

It was important that our interpretations of these stories reflected the clergywomen's interpretations, so a focus group interview (Cohen and Manion 2007) was held with six of the women who were able to turn up on the day of the interview. During that interview, specific themes that had come out from our initial reading of the transcripts were elaborated upon. In this way, we were able to refine the emergent themes and interpretations of the data and get an even more detailed description of events.

In a small country, with a population of about 1.3 million and an Anglican community of 7.8 percent of the population (Central Statistical Office 2000), these nine women are easily identifiable. Therefore, in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, we used pseudonyms for all people and places mentioned in the paper. Only two clergywomen, Lights and Jacqueline opted to choose their pseudonyms. All of the other women were assigned a name depending on the order in which they were interviewed. For example, Clergywoman Two was the second woman interviewed for this study. Pseudonyms are also used for all identifiable characteristics such as the names of people and places so as to make it difficult to identify each clergywoman. However, even the pseudonyms are left out when the context will make the woman easily identifiable. Secondary data sources such as the newspaper of the Anglican Church in Trinidad and Tobago, *The Anglican Outlook*, church records, personal journals, newspaper articles, other published or private documents such as journals, were used to provide a thicker description of the stories the women told.

This qualitative data was analyzed using the “three notes” suggested by Seidel (1998) of “Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking about interesting things” (para. 3). However, the data analysis process was not linear. As Seidel (1998) suggested it was iterative and progressive, recursive and holographic. The data analysis phase began as soon as the first interview was completed. We summarized the biographical data provided by each of the participants on their biographical data forms. Then, we each read the first transcript individually and listened to the taped interview to get a general sense of the data. As we read, we also identified and coded the places in the first clergywoman’s narratives that addressed our specific research questions. We then read and analyzed all transcripts in the light of the codes and themes from the previous transcripts. We added, compared, combined and simplified codes with each successive reading. Each of us also noticed, identified and discussed emerging themes, which we continually reviewed in our weekly meetings and discussions. We looked for emergent and recurring themes that appeared within and across the stories. We then looked for patterns, processes and sequences (Seidel 1998) in the coded data.

This process was done without the use of qualitative software because of the limited time and resources for analysis at this phase of the study. However, it would be very interesting to use data analysis software such as QDA Miner, Ethnograph, NVIVO or MAXQDA to analyze the data further.

In the next sections of this paper, we discuss the key demographic characteristics of the nine pioneering clergywomen in the Anglican Church in Trinidad and Tobago. We examine the paths these women took to become ordained clergy and explore the challenges they faced along the way and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Finally, we discuss the lessons that they learned from their journeys of becoming ordained clergywomen.

Key Demographic Characteristics of Clergywomen in Trinidad and Tobago

The key demographic characteristics discussed in this section are based on some of those identified in Stevens' (1989) demographic portrait of ordained clergywomen. These characteristics include age, regional spread, civil status, ethnicity, education, and career path. These characteristics give some insight into who these women really are and may help to dispel the notion of the clergywoman as an elderly, matronly spinster.

Trinidad and Tobago has a multi-religious and multi-ethnic population comprising 1.3 million persons. The most recent available census data (Central Statistical Office 2009) indicated that 7.8 percent of the population was Anglican. Persons of East Indian and African heritage make up almost 80 percent of the population of the islands. All of these clergywomen fall within this demographic group; seven are of African descent, one is mixed and the other is of East Indian descent.

Of the 56 clergypersons in the diocese, nine are women. These nine clergywomen are the first to be ordained in the history of the Anglican Church of Trinidad and Tobago; therefore, they are the pioneer ordinands. They were ordained as deacons between 1997 and 2005 and ordained as priests between 2001 and 2006. [Since 2006, there has been no ordination of clergy, male or female, in the diocese of Trinidad and Tobago.] The women hold various positions in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago. Seven are currently serving as priests and two as deacons. However, none is currently serving in central leadership positions (rectors, canons, or archdeacons).

The women currently work in six parishes of the 31 parishes in the diocese. Seven are based in North East/West region—five at three churches in the urban centre and capital city, Port-of-Spain and two in the urban centre in east Trinidad. One person is based in Tobago (in the parish of the village of her family) and the other is retired, but was based in a parish in Port-of-Spain before retirement. Although two of the clergywomen were raised in south Trinidad, no clergywoman is based in any of the more rural southern parishes and only one woman has ever been sent to train in the urban centre of the south.

The nine women were born between 1933 and 1976 and had a mean age of 63.3 years at the time of the interviews. The average age of ordination as a deacon was 53.6 years and the average age of the seven ordained as priests was 56.2 years. The youngest ordination occurred at age 29 and the oldest at age 68. The age of ordination suggests that ordained ministry is a second career for eight of the nine clergywomen.

The most common profession before they were ordained was teaching, with others serving as educational administrators, civil servants, and a draughtsman. Most of the women had held long careers and several entered the clergy full-time after retirement. Three had maintained their jobs and worked part-time as clergy. Three of the clergywomen are married; three are single; two are divorced; and one is widowed. Six were mothers with one to three children; one person had six children.

For the most part, these women have all been educated, lived, and worked in the Caribbean. Eight were born in Trinidad or Tobago and one in another Caribbean country. They participated in primary and secondary schooling in Trinidad, Tobago or another Caribbean country. Five of the participants completed their tertiary education outside of the Caribbean region. Eight hold Bachelors degrees and three hold Masters Degrees. These women represent about three generations (youth, middle age, seniors) but socially represent the established middle–upper middle class.

This collection of pioneering women to enter ordained ministry dispels the myth that ordained ministry is just for men and for old matronly retired women who want to keep themselves busy. The homogeneity around race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status reflects the wider cultural reality that post-colonial development since the 1970's saw the establishment of a very strong middle class and the rise of persons of both African and East Indian descent (the majority groups) to the highest leadership positions in the core institutions of the society.

Paths Taken to Ordination by Pioneering Clergywomen

There was no single path to ordination for these women. As Clergywoman Six explained, “How I came into the ministry seems to be something that just evolved over time.” The first ordinands had to wait until the Church and Province had taken the position to admit women into leadership positions. As Clergywoman Two explained:

The thing is that we all know it's only a new phenomenon now that women have become clergy because like in the States it's like about 30 years now. In the United Kingdom, England it's not so many [years] as the United States and we just started having women and allowing women into the Ministry because well one our diocese is part of the province. The province is made up of eight dioceses in the West Indies and all of them had to say yes. It was not just a majority. So it took years for eventually all the dioceses to say yes and when finally it happened...I called the Bishop and said well there can be an opportunity for me to get my training.

When asked to explain their reasons for entry into the vocation, several of the women identified that they were directly or indirectly “called by God.” Some spoke of a direct call through dreams and visitations: “I was called by God to do it...I was always interested from since childhood in praying and turning to God for everything” (Clergywoman Three). Sometimes, the women may not have responded immediately to this direct call, but eventually they responded. One person spoke of her response to the call in terms of her responsibility or Christian duty. When asked why she went into the Ministry, she explained:

For me the why would be if He could come and die for me I can't tell Him no....I can't say no because I feel you know He is the one who saved me...you know like somebody is drowning and you say you will do anything for that person who has saved your life. I would say that's where the why came in (Clergywoman Six).

Other women experienced a more indirect call into the ministry. For example, Clergywoman Three indicated that people around her told her that she would make a good priest. She said: "what actually propelled me besides my doing things within the church....people start telling me 'why don't you become a priest?'" (Clergywoman Three).

All of these women had been involved in the Church for all of their lives. They were raised for the most part in a traditional Anglican/Christian "God-fearing home," went to church often, three times on a Sunday in two cases, engaged in family prayers and had religious parents or adults around them. As Clergywoman Four explained: "I know many a Sunday night...we were around the bed and they [parents] are doing family prayers along with little other religious things."

This strong Christian foundation at home was also supported at school and church. Anglican traditions, reinforced at primary and high school for some, paved the religious foundation. Lights summed it up in the following way: "There was chapel service and scripture, religious instruction. So the foundation was paved." Eight of the nine clergywomen attended Christian based primary schools and six attended Christian based secondary schools.

These women were also involved in Church activities from their youth. The women served in various areas such as the Sanctuary Guild, Servers Guild, Sunday School as teachers, youth group leaders, lay ministers, and bible study leaders. They all spoke of the influence this strong family, education, and spiritual foundation had on their lives.

This involvement in the Church led to their deeper understandings of the Scriptures and the traditions of the Anglican Church. This knowledge served as the basis of their formation, which we define as the process by which one learns his/her craft as a clergy person and forms a sense of identity and competence in the context of practicing that craft.

The ordination track (Nesbit 1993), or preparation for becoming clergy, involved academic, spiritual, pastoral and administrative training that took these women on their journeys from active lay leaders to deacons and for some to the priesthood. The nine clergywomen experienced one of three routes:

1. On the job training provided by experienced priests and the Bishop of the time. Persons who took this route may have completed a few courses at the regional Anglican Seminary, a Diploma in Theological Studies, training in preaching by an experienced priest, and retreats to prepare spiritually for ordination;

2. A combination of regional seminary or postgraduate work in Divinity or Theological Studies instead of seminary and on the job training;
3. Seminary training outside of Trinidad and Tobago, with support from the institution and foreign seminarians upon graduation.

Each of these women had strong academic preparation for their leadership roles. However, some of those who only experienced on the job training spoke about what they think they may have missed by not going to seminary—“the churchmanship and the academic part of it that I feel one benefits” (Clergywoman Six). Those who went to seminary spoke about how they felt that the process solidified what they were about. They enjoyed the camaraderie of the seminary experience and the support provided by classmates from other Dioceses.

The spiritual preparation involved retreats for individual and groups, individual and group theological reflection, and personal engagement with and guidance from a spiritual director. The pastoral preparation involved each of the women working alongside a senior priest and with other lay-leaders in different parishes throughout the diocese. The majority of this training happened during the deaconate period. The administrative preparation was the least defined. The women explained that they developed these administrative skills by observations of priests in the job and by drawing on the administrative skills they had gained in their own careers.

The movement from lay-person, to seminarian, to deacon, to priesthood, is controlled and managed by the Commission on Ministry, a group of persons appointed by the Bishop for this task. The process involves a series of interviews, evaluations and recommendations from clergy to whom one is assigned. The Commission on Ministry makes recommendations to the Bishop about entry to seminary and ordination. The final authority for ordination rests with the Bishop.

Despite the varied routes to ordination the hallmarks of the process were a sense of call to serve God, a deep and abiding faith and a strong affiliation and active participation in the Church, which converged before the Commission on Ministry and the ultimate authority of the Bishop. Given that this process is heavily driven by the metanarrative of the community, but is finally decided upon by the one male authority figure, the Bishop, one can understand why and how chipping away at the stained-glass ceiling in the Church has been and continues to be a slow and arduous, but urgent, enterprise. We believe collecting, analyzing and sharing these stories will significantly aid in moving that work along.

Challenges Faced and Ways of Overcoming Them

The nine clergywomen experienced personal, professional and institutional challenges. As Clergywoman Four asserted:

I have come to realize that challenge is a part of growth; it's a part of life. As my dad used to say to me all days can't be sunshine there must be a little rain sometime. Now I appreciate the challenges in my life because they draw me closer to the Lord.

The challenges they described reflect the complexity of the system into which they were being admitted and those that come with life changes and vocational discernment.

Personal Challenges

Some of the clergywomen struggled with their emotional wellbeing while working out their personal/priestly Identity. As Jacqueline discussed:

I think personally my biggest challenge was my own emotional wellbeing because I think for me it was a real crisis of identity and of understanding and a realization that this work demanded of me and required of me a cleaning out of my insides that I did not anticipate.

Some clergywomen expressed that they felt self-doubt in the face of opposition and sacrifices to be made. One clergywoman said she wrestled with worthiness required for this work. She said:

Well doubt always creeps in of course...and you never really know whether you're worthy and all that kind of thing. But you know wondering if you are making the right decision and all these sorts of stuff creep in (Clergywoman Seven).

In addition to the emotional well-being and self-doubt, some women also indicated that they missed the presence of female "clergy company-you know clergy people to talk to too and to share your problems with as a minister of religion" (Clergywoman Three). She further explained:

We used to meet as deacons before because the Bishop used to bring us together quite often when we were lay ministers and budding deacons to train us right. But when we all got scattered around there was no contact with each other and therefore you looked for contact with the priest (Clergywoman Three).

One other clergywoman explained that her personal challenge was a fear of being ridiculed, especially when there were some congregation members and senior male clergy who may not have agreed with the admission of women to be ordained. She worried about how female clergy would have been perceived.

Professional Challenges

The women also explained that they faced professional challenges. Because their training paths were so varied, there was no clear sense of the process of becoming ordained clergy. Persons who got on the job training had concerns about what they may have missed not having the seminary experience and persons who went to seminary abroad had concerns about translating what they had learnt to make it relevant to the local context. As Jacqueline said,

My greatest challenge was figuring out how to translate all that I had been learning to the context into which I was coming back.....A lot of my class time and my interactions with my professors was about how do I make this real.

The other challenge faced by the women was working out their place and space as leaders in the church. Jacqueline explained:

It is a great challenge because I think my experience has caused me to be aware of it and that is so different from what I read in the gospels...that is a struggle....People ask me so what do we call you? Automatically everybody expects Reverend because that sets up [a] you and them and we are an 'us'. [The] title says that you are a 'them'. And I say to folks all the time Jacqueline is just fine because it is on my baptismal certificate and if it is good enough for God it's good enough for me. That makes people very uncomfortable and of course in my little pea brain I don't understand why that would make people uncomfortable. Because my thing is if I am giving you permission to drop the title you can relax.

Institutional Challenges

The policy of not ordaining women as clergy in the Diocese before the mid-1990s required that the first women had to wait until the policy was changed for them to be admitted. Even when the policy had changed, the process for admission and progress was unclear. Some of the women said that they experienced pressures being put upon them during their training because as Lights explained, other male clergy were against women being ordained.

I understand there was a group; they had a special name. They called themselves "Against Women Being in the Ordained Ministry." So there were a lot of challenges out there but I was able through the grace of God to keep my focus (Lights).

She further explained the pressures put upon her as a woman at seminary:

They had things like initiation rites, so they made it tougher for us as ladies and there was something called ragging too. So you know they would take your assignment paper and hide it or take your plane ticket, you have to go back home during the holiday time you can't find it or you're walking along the passage way there under the building next thing you know you're drenched with water. But I didn't have it that tough you know. It was just a matter of pulling out things out of my mail-box or so or when you had to clean like the chapel or something they let you clean it. They [did] not help you (Lights).

The language, policy, and structures of the institution still do not fully make provision for the inclusion of women and the related issues that accompany that change. For example, several of the women spoke of not having a separate space for women in churches for changing and dressing. There is still resistance from some congregation members and clergy. For example, a few of the women spoke about resistance from members of the congregation:

I think there are still a few people who do it they won't come to take the sacrament from you....They would come up to the rail and if it is I giving the chalice they would not take the chalice or just have the bread if it is from a male priest. And if I am just giving the bread you would see them not coming at all but they are in the minority (Lights).

The disparity in the preparation process is an institutional challenge, particularly since one's training did not commence unless one had approval from the Bishop and that all evaluative instruments and responses were forwarded to the Bishop. Those who went to foreign seminaries had a different experience and process from those who went to the regional seminary and different still from those who went through only on the job training. The perception is that those sent to seminary were better equipped for ministry, had some advantage, and would be more readily accepted and consequently progress more quickly. Since one's ministry formation process impacts one's ministry, we believe that there needs to be some consistency in the preparation and promotion of all clergy. The criteria for entry and promotion need to be clearly articulated and understood by all. In that way, individuals would know the processes involved in becoming clergy.

Overcoming Challenges

The women indicated that they were able to overcome their personal, professional and institutional challenges through their own fortitude as well as the support and mentorship they received from other people around them. Clergywoman Two explained:

Well as a leader I sit and I pray, I don't go to bed early and I wake up very early. So like 5 o'clock I am out here with all my books and my little crèche that don't ever come down and I just sit and focus and meditate for about two hours and then the same in the night.

Praying and "trusting in the Lord" (Clergywoman Four) for guidance would be the expected response for women of the Church. However, several of the women spoke about the support from others—groups who prayed for them and welcoming congregations and parishioners. This helped to give them the confidence needed to face up to the challenges. They also spoke about ignoring the challenge. For example one woman said:

You just can't let it bother you. You know what they are saying but you are not going to [take them on]. You just go with your normal self and say, "Hello! How are you? How are the kids doing?"what else could you do? (Clergywoman Seven).

Lessons Clergywomen Learned from Their Journeys

Many of the women agreed that the regular stresses of ministry, together with the additional responsibilities of family and personal commitments and having to negotiate being a woman in a predominantly male, sometimes resistant context, was sometimes taxing. They spoke of the individual strategies they have used to cope emotionally, to avoid burn out, and to keep them going. These are discussed as the lessons they learned from their journeys of becoming clergy.

Stay Focused

All the women talked about the many things along the way that were potential distractions: balancing the demands of ministry and family and personal life; negative attitudes and comments from lay persons and some of the clergy; the lack of clergy support or "clergy company"; inconsistency in processes such as training, placement, other forms of support; a feeling of being overlooked when they see themselves as willing and able to do a job; and poor collegial cooperation and communication.

Despite these challenges, most of the women indicated that they were able to stay focused because they had a strong inner drive—a compulsion almost—to serve as ordained persons in the church, because they understood that they were called by God and they promised to serve faithfully and intended to keep that promise. These women had a perspective that allowed them to see these distractions, not as hurdles that could prevent them from attaining their goals, but as simple challenges that they could face and overcome. These women believed that the joy that comes from serving seemed to keep them focused. The women also saw that their past experiences were forms of preparation for dealing with some of the situations that arose in their lives as clergywomen. Finally, they employed the careful art of ignoring attitudes, comments, and behaviors that were unhelpful.

Build and Nurture a Strong Spiritual Foundation

Every woman spoke about her relationship with God and her reliance on her spirituality as a key component of her journey. The women's strong spiritual foundation began with their close connection with the church but became the internal driving force of their lives. Prayer, bible study, retreats and spiritual directors factored as key elements to their strong spiritual foundation and the means by which they continued to nurture their faith. A strong and deep faith fueled a strong hopefulness that came through the stories. This strong faith and hopeful, resilient attitude allowed them to persevere through shabby living conditions, unfair expectations, and unkind attitudes and actions by both clergy and laity, which is what truly makes these women pioneers in their vocation.

Be Consistent and Be Yourself

A sense of calling and an understanding of spiritual or religious phenomena informed each woman's understanding of herself. None of them dismissed or avoided those strands of their being, even when ordained leadership in the church was not possible. These women nurtured those spiritual parts of themselves through various church related activities and exercised those gifts in the other careers they pursued. As Clergywoman Nine put it:

I always wanted to be a priest. When I realized women were not priests, I said okay, I'll be a nun. [However, when] I heard stories about how nuns were treated I said no nun for me. So I just became more involved in the church, I was still working, but when the opportunity arose [to become a priest] I grabbed it.

A strong sense of self allowed each woman to be assertive at varying stages of her formation and ministry, which allowed her to make important decisions and to thrive in ministry. For example, one of the clergywomen described having to put up with unacceptable living conditions and when she chose to remove herself from the situation she was accused by her clergy supervisor of abandoning the job. Despite opposition, clashes in personality and leadership style, and the other prevailing expectations, for all these women staying true to themselves was an essential lesson learned.

Develop and Maintain Professional and Emotional Support Networks

A common thread within the clergywomen's stories was the need for strong professional and emotional support networks as they carried on their jobs. Most of them lamented the paucity of clergy company or persons who they could turn to for professional guidance and emotional support. There were only two or three persons within the Diocese, whose names some of the clergywomen frequently mentioned as persons who provided them with support. Those who could not find those support networks within the local Anglican clerics looked outside of that body. For example, one clergywoman talked about attending a seminary where professional and emotional support was facilitated and encouraged. She forged networks with other clergymen and women outside of the Diocese. Seminary training and other professional development opportunities provided some of those networks and those who were not afforded the opportunity to attend seminary lamented that deficiency and hoped for that in the future, this step would be included in the preparation of all clergy.

Be Committed and Strong

Another common learning point upon reflection was the strong sense of commitment, the strength of character and the strength of personality that each woman felt was important. Each demonstrated that commitment through their activities in the church and fulfilling their ministry duties and responsibilities. It was this commitment and strength that saw them through "ragging" in seminary, deplorable living conditions, being ignored by Bishops, priest and lay persons, being rejected, and perceived misuse of power and authority.

Discussion

This study should help to debunk some of the myths about clergywomen in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago. While the size of the population of clergywomen is too small to make generalizations, we noted that there is great diversity among the women in terms of age, paths taken to ministry, social status, and life circumstances. The prevailing image of clergy in the Trinidadian context may be the strong, dominant, articulate, older male. As women began to enter the landscape this image was slightly augmented to include an older, matronly like school-teacher figure, who dressed conservatively and was "well brought up" in terms of manner and deportment.

This small sample points to a more diverse image of clergy in the Anglican Church in Trinidad and Tobago. We hope that priests will no longer be seen as only men or a particular kind of woman, but any person who is strong, committed and focused with a sense of call to serve God's people and to preside over worship and the sacraments. This more inclusive image of a priest in terms of age, social status and life circumstances will more easily allow individuals to identify themselves in the collective narrative and more readily consider this vocation as a truly viable option.

These nine clergywomen represent a wide cross section of circumstances of persons who have managed to persevere in ministry and have established themselves in many instances as persons with much to offer and capable of leading and making things happen. This dismantles some of these very entrenched ideas about women being too emotional, too dependent on intuition as a reliable source of knowledge, and too weak to be fit for ordained ministry.

The women have all demonstrated that the skills and competencies they acquired, whether pantry skills or others, are transferable and become assets when opportunities present themselves for leadership, even religious leadership. Some of these women were pioneers in other aspects of their lives. One was the first and only woman to be in her job; another was one of two women in her class. Those who trained and worked outside of the Caribbean were often ethnic or racial minorities. Therefore, these women were able to embrace the opportunity for religious leadership as pioneers. As the first group, they did not get discouraged or simply sit and wait for the inclusion of women to happen. They continued to be available and open to learning in other disciplines and in matters related to ministry in the church. This open, pioneering spirit comes out in their stories particularly in their response to God's call when the opportunity presented itself and how they used their skills and experience to overcome, to grow and to thrive in ministry.

Community narratives influence individual identity formation and how one tells one's personal story (Stuber 2000). These women's stories make up a divergent strand from the traditional community narrative. On some level, this narrative challenges the strength of the traditional narrative particularly in terms of how power and authority is assigned and exercised. Priests represent God's ultimate power and authority. Men have traditionally been seen as the only ones to fully be able to represent and hold such a status/responsibility. With women now being included in the story, the community gate-keepers, story holders and tellers and the members of the community itself must wrestle with this shift and the necessary redistribution of power and authority. These stories help the community become aware of and begin to articulate some of the issues, assumptions, contradictions, and implications of expanding the community narrative.

These women's stories highlight that women who have become Anglican clergy in Trinidad and Tobago possess personal characteristics such as resilience and tenacity supported by faith. They also displayed throughout their lives a strong faith-walk in god's presence and guidance. However, they were still challenged. The challenges that they had the least control over were the institutional challenges that initially restricted their entry to the profession. There is the need for institutional policies and programs that better facilitate the integration of women into Church spaces and places. There is also the need for a clearly articulated policy to enable these women to move up the leadership ranks.

As we go past the pioneering stage of Anglican clergywomen in Trinidad and Tobago, and as a second generation of younger women seeks to be ordained, vocational formation needs to treat with identity questions in an intentional way. As Jacqueline expressed: “I don’t have to be old and I don’t have to look matronly. I could actually be a young person and be a clergy person that could be a possibility.” The unique experiences of younger women entering into patriarchal organizations also requires that structures such as specified routes for training and preparation be more streamlined. Additionally, some infrastructural and policy requirements need to be strengthened to signal the commitment of the Anglican Church to include women as leaders.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

This study was first envisioned as a collection and analysis of data for an academic journal article. However, this effort turned out to be a pioneering piece of work that needs will now be shared among the local, regional and international Anglican community. We collected and analyzed a significant amount of data that can be used for future publications within and outside of the religious community.

This study also gave these clergywomen an opportunity to talk about their experiences in a group on at least two occasions. They shared how happy they were to come together and have vowed to continue to meet on a more regular basis to provide each other with support. They have also expressed a desire to hear the stories from other Anglican women in the Province of the West Indies and other women in other Christian and non-Christian denominations. To this end, they have all agreed to plan a conference for the latter part of 2012. Such a conference will enable us to document even more narratives from women within the church. We also intend to put forward a proposal to the Province to extend this study throughout the Caribbean region.

This study also highlighted issues of faith formation among young people and identity formation in relation to vocational choices. It also raised questions such as how are persons in the Anglican Church prepared for leadership within the organization? How does the presence of women in religious leadership impact leadership development in the Church and wider community? How do congregations view women as religious leaders? What are the opinions of male clergy about women clergy in the Anglican Church? There is scope for several investigations and others may be inspired to research these issues as they proceed to masters and doctoral level work.

We recognize that if we had not accepted this call for papers, these stories may have remained untapped. We are certainly pleased at our decision to do this project. We also managed to discuss our work in a research in progress conference on Narrative Research in Anchorage, Alaska in May 2011. That experience helped to reinforce the suitability of narrative inquiry methods for our future projects on clergywomen’s experiences.

What stands out for us most of all at this point is the current absence of women as Rectors and Canons in the Anglican Church of Trinidad and Tobago. We are also concerned about the few numbers of women Bishops at the international level and the continued stance of some dioceses in the Province of the West Indies not to accept women. This raises the issue of mobility options and realities for current and future clergywomen, locally, regionally and internationally. Therefore, some shards of the stained-glass ceiling still need to be broken.

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