SOUL SISTERS: THE INTERSECTION OF AMANDA BERRY SMITH
AND SELECTED WOMEN IN MINISTRY OF THE
ATLANTA NORTH GEORGIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE AME CHURCH

by
LIBYA BAAQAR

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
2019
SOUL SISTERS: THE INTERSECTION OF AMANDA BERRY SMITH
AND SELECTED WOMEN IN MINISTRY OF THE
ATLANTA NORTH GEORGIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE AME CHURCH

by
LIBYA BAAQAR

Approved:

Peter Rhea Jones, Ph.D
Faculty Supervisor

3/12/2019
Date

Graham B. Walker, Jr., Ph.D
Faculty Reader

3/12/2019
Date

Teresa L. Fry Brown, Ph.D
Preaching Consultant, Candler School of Theology

3/12/2019
Date

Graham B. Walker, Jr., Ph.D
Interim Associate Dean, D.Min Degree Program
James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology

3/12/2019
Date

C. Greg DeLoach, D.Min
Interim Dean, James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology

3/12/2019
Date
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mother, Khaleelah Williams, and my family for their support. They have encouraged me throughout this journey. I am grateful for their love and confidence in me. They have been my inspiration since the inception of this project. My love for them is eternal.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my pastor, Dr. Thomas L. Bess, Sr. and his wife, Dr. Gretchen Bess for their confidence in me to complete this project. They have been my support system from day one. They reassured me that I could reach the finish line. My life is truly enriched by their love for me.

Thank you also to the late Dr. Kenneth E. Marcus, former Dean of the Board of Examiners of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference, who gave his permission for me to conduct my research study. Without his kindness and support, this project would not have been successful. I will never forget his words of encouragement to “finish strong.”

Thank you to Allen Temple AME Church, Atlanta, GA for their support and love for me. To the evening bible study members who encouraged me to take a leave of absence to conduct my research, thank you for being understanding and gracious.

Thank you to the selected women in ministry of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference for their willingness to participate in this research study. I appreciate your transparency and honesty in your responses. Your input has greatly enriched this project.

Thank you also to the readers of this study for their feedback and suggestions that helped shape this project. A special thanks to Dr. Peter Rhea Jones and Dr. Teresa L. Fry Brown for lending themselves to this project and making me better. I appreciate your time and expertise.
Thank you to my editor Nancy Penton for ensuring my project met the required standards and for your patience with me. I appreciate the time spent, even on vacation, dedicated to my project. Your keen eye and incredible skills were significant in helping me finalized my thesis. I am grateful for your assistance.

Thank you to the Joseph Campbell Foundation for the usage of the Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey schema from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New World Library) copyright © 2008 by the Joseph Campbell Foundation (jcf.org), used with permission.

Lastly, thank you to McAfee School of Theology, a place that has contributed much to my spiritual growth, theological education, and overall ministry. I could not have chosen a better institution to complete my theological education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Goals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Historical Support</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the Amanda Berry Smith and the AME Church</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the AME Church</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Context</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Method Approach</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interest in Project</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Assumptions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms and Definitions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority of Scripture</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical and Theological Support</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements of Call Narratives</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham’s Call Narrative</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses’ Call Narrative</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah’s Call Narrative</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel’s Call Narrative</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther’s Call Narrative</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah’s Call Narrative</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary’s Call Narrative</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Analysis of Call Narratives</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

## 3. MINISTRY CONTEXT: DEMOGRAPHICS AND RESEARCH DESIGN
- Board of Examiners ...........................................57
- Research Design ..............................................59
- Focus Groups Design and Adjustments ..........................60
- Adjustments to the Project .....................................61
- Challenges of the Project ......................................62
- Strengths of the Project .......................................63
- Weaknesses of the Project .....................................63
- Conclusion .....................................................64

## 4. FINDINGS: RESULTS AND INFERENCES FROM DATA COLLECTED
- Inferences from Survey Results ..................................67
- Results of Topic No. 6 of the Survey ..............................69
- Results of Topic No. 9 of the Survey ..............................73
- Board of Examiners Results ....................................75
- Results of Topic No. 13 of Survey .................................78
- Call Narratives Assessments .....................................79
- Inferences from Focus Groups ...................................87
- Focus Group 1 Results ..........................................88
- Focus Group 2 Results ..........................................90
- Inferences of Call Experiences ...................................91
- Holy Spirit as Liberator ..........................................94
- Conclusion .....................................................96

## 5. IMPLICATIONS FROM PROJECT RESEARCH
- Conclusions from Research ......................................98
- Personal Impact and Reflections ..................................99
- Possibilities for Future Study ....................................100

### BIBLIOGRAPHY
- ........................................................................103

### APPENDICES
- ........................................................................109
- A. Results from the 2018 Atlanta North GA Annual Conference ........................................110
- B. Letters of Permission ..........................................113
- C. Focus Group Outline ..........................................116
- D. Survey and Focus Groups Email Invitation and Informed Consent ..............................118
- E. Focus Group 1 and Survey Questions and Participation ..................................121
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F. Focus Group 2 Structure and Questions</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Text of Survey and Focus Groups Responses</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Abstract Modified for Focus Groups</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Picture of Amanda Berry Smith</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. IRB Approval</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Six Elements of Call Narrative of Amanda Berry Smith and WIM of ANGAC from Survey Results ..........................................................80
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Organizational Chart of the AME Church .........................................................10

Figure 2. The Call Experience Model ............................................................................51

Figure 3. Chart of Ministerial Vocations .........................................................................68

Figure 4. Chart of Call Acceptance Year ..........................................................................89
ABSTRACT

LIBYA BAAQAR
SOUL SISTERS: THE INTERSECTION OF AMANDA BERRY SMITH AND SELECTED WOMEN IN MINISTRY OF THE ATLANTA NORTH GEORGIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AME CHURCH
Under the direction of PETER RHEA JONES, Ph.D.

This project juxtaposes the ministry and call narratives of randomly selected women in ministry ("WIM") of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference ("ANGAC") and Amanda Berry Smith, a nineteenth century evangelist of the AME Church. Her ministry is important to the study of clergywomen in the AME Church, particularly the ANGAC. The call narratives provide an avenue to examine critical intersections between Smith and WIM of the ANGAC as it relates to affirmation of call, the Holy Spirit as liberator, and challenges with gender imbalances in clergy leadership in the AME Church. They show the challenges these women faced in locating their calls amidst the structures of a culturally controlled ecclesiology shaped by a historical patriarchal institution.

The object of this project is three-fold: 1) to show a connection between the ministries and call narratives of the selected WIM of ANGAC and Amanda Berry Smith; 2) to show disparities in the ANGAC and Board of Examiners regarding gender and ministerial vocations; and 3) to show that Amanda Berry Smith’s ministry recognizes the
importance of the Spirit in the call process and forces the church to reconsider how it looks at ministry.

To significantly show the similarities between Amanda Berry Smith and the selected WIM of ANGAC, this project examines six elements found in their call narratives: 1) Divine confrontations; 2) Visions; 3) Commissions; 4) Objections; 5) Reassurances; and 6) Signs/Symbols. These elements help to identify compelling parallels between the two to introduce an AME heroine whose ministry encourages women in ministry to unapologetically pursue their divine call and ministerial vocation. As a result, this study will provide opportunities for the ANGAC Board of Examiners and conferences alike, to view ministry from a larger scale and recognize the role of the Spirit in the call process.

In terms of research, this project uses qualitative research, collecting data from a survey and two focus groups. The participants consisted of twenty, randomly selected women in ministry from the ANGAC. They were Senior Pastors (Itinerant Elders) and not bi-vocational, Deacons (non-Itinerant Elders) currently in the Board of Examiners, bi-vocational clergywomen, and former AME clergywomen who are no longer part of the denomination. They were divided into the two groups, one with women in ministry currently in the ANGAC and one with those who left the AME Church. The women currently in the ANGAC received a survey of interview questions. Those who left the church participated in a focus group. Both instruments captured the participants’ experiences, beliefs, and reactions, resulting in beneficial data for this project.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Brother Gould, then pastor of the Fleet Street Church, took his text... I was sitting with my eyes closed in silent prayer to God, and after he had been preaching about ten minutes, as I opened my eyes, just over his head I seemed to see a beautiful star, and as I looked at it, it seemed to form into the shape of a large white tulip; and I said, "Lord, is that what you want me to see? If so, what else?" And then I leaned back and closed my eyes. Just then I saw a large letter "G," and I said: "Lord, do you want me to read in Genesis, or in Galatians? Lord, what does this mean?" Just then I saw the letter "O." I said, "Why, that means go." And I said, "What else?" And a voice distinctly said to me "Go preach.""1"

The quote above is taken from the call narrative of Amanda Berry Smith, a nineteenth century evangelist rooted in the African Methodist Episcopal Church ("AME Church"). Although opposed by many in her denomination, she followed the compelling guide of the Spirit to do what religious leaders and institutions said women could not do, preach. Not only did she preach locally for Methodist churches, she was the first black female preacher to travel globally as an itinerant minister.

Smith was a child of slave parents whose father worked hard to purchase their freedom. Although, she lived during a time of oppression, racism, classism, and gender inequality, she found freedom through sanctification. She also felt liberated by the Spirit

to answer the call to preach as a woman. She did ministry by her own terms, beyond denominational borders, regardless of rejection and opposition. Her ministry is paramount to women in ministry in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference (“ANGAC”). Her resolute disposition to carry out her call despite denominational expectations, gender inequality, criticisms, or stigmas is admirable. Women in ministry in the ANGAC would benefit from such heroine whose ministry compels the church to view ministry from a wider lens and consider the role of the Spirit in the call process.

Purpose and Goals

This project is designed to juxtapose the ministry and call narratives of randomly selected women in ministry ("WIM") of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference ("ANGAC") and Amanda Berry Smith. It offers a unique study of Smith and women in ministry as they navigate their calls in a male dominated institution that historically excluded women. An institution that, albeit progressive in its ordination of women, still suffers from inclusivity in leadership roles for women in ministry. This study shows the issues and challenges faced by these women as they seek to understand their voice, authority, and theology. It examines how many women in ministry struggle with birthing emerging passions amidst a system historically designed to support pastoral ministry.

This study shows that the issues faced by WIM of the ANGAC are not unique, but from a long history of a controlled patriarchal institution designed to preclude women from preaching or having leadership roles in the church. Smith’s ministerial path was unique in that it allowed her to preach, as a black woman, beyond the borders of her denomination. She challenged the traditional approach to ministry for black women. She
showed that women in ministry, if deemed necessary, will carve out roles for themselves outside of the church to seek affirmation of their call.

This study also shows the similarities in the call narratives of Smith and the selected WIM of ANGAC using the following six elements: 1) Divine confrontations; 2) Commissions; 3) Visions; 4) Objections; 5) Reassurances; and 6) Signs/Symbols\(^2\). This comparison gives validity to the connection between WIM of ANGAC and Amanda Berry Smith. It justifies the importance of her role for women in ministry who are called to non-pastoral ministerial vocations.

The use of these elements gives a personal, autobiographical perspective of their call, coupled with a unique experience with God. It reveals cultural and ideological concerns with the role of women in ministry in the church. There is also the intertwining thread of the Holy Spirit as liberator, giving them permission to preach as women, as well as carry out the call God has purposed for them. It shows that ordination does not necessarily give affirmation when there is still inadequate representation of women in ministry in denominational leadership, in the ANGAC, and Board of Examiners. Ultimately, it concludes with the common thread that both Smith and the selected women in ministry of the ANGAC yearn for adequate space to navigate their call without gender biases or pressures to become senior pastors.

\(^2\) These six elements are derived from Amanda Berry Smith’s call narrative presented on page 163 of her autobiography.
Background and Historical Support

Historical support for this project can be found in the ministry and call narrative of Amanda Berry Smith. Her ministry reflects similar issues women in ministry face currently in the AME Church. These challenges relate to affirmation of their call, unequal opportunities, sexism, and stigmas surrounding the role of women in ministry. Similar to the women in ministry in the AME Church, Smith felt the weight of her womanhood as she endured the scrutiny of what is considered appropriate clothing for women, appropriate titles, and appropriate roles. Smith’s ministry shows how women struggle to navigate their call under a structure that has historically functioned to disempower women.

History of Amanda Berry Smith and the AME Church

Smith’s connection to the AME Church cannot be denied. She was married to a deacon in the AME Church. She attended one of the most controversial General Conferences in 1872 where women pushed for ordination. She was also eulogized at Quinn Chapel AME Church in Chicago, IL. Although she had a relationship with the AME Church, she met many challenges and oppositions in the denomination.

The AME Church was not pleased with her decision to carry out her call under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The tension between her and the AME Church became contentious, causing controversy within the denomination. Some in leadership wanted her to come back to the church to help her sisters instead of pursuing ministry through the Methodist Episcopal Church. They felt she had abandoned the
church for selfish gains. This backlash is captured in an article from the church's official newspaper stating:

Where is Amanda Berry Smith? She belongs to us, and we ought to set her to work. Tell me nothing about the work she is doing among our white brethren. They don't need her. They are rich in spiritual gifts and work. We are poor, languishing and dying. We tell Amanda Smith to come home...Let her not give a death ear. Let her not prefer the riches of Egypt. Her own sisters need her (emphasis added).³

Smith felt led by the Spirit to go where her gifts took her and not to confine them to AME Church. However, this did not fare well with leaders of the church. They felt she used her gifts to help the white congregations instead of helping to revive the Parent Mite Society, a women’s missionary group known for raising funds for the denomination. With her popularity, they believed Smith could have raised significant monies for the denomination. Smith, however, believed that God called her to preach and not to simply raising money for an organization or institution. More importantly, she knew that such confinement to the AME Church alone would limit her access to many pulpits and stages to proclaim God’s word. As a result, she was accused of being avaricious and inconsiderate. Her decision not to be influenced by the preferences of her religious institution caused dissension and denominational rejection.

Despite the opposition, she continued to preach. “She preached in African Methodist Episcopal churches, to gatherings of Methodists, and at ‘holiness’ meetings

throughout the eastern and Midwestern parts of the United States.”⁴ As her preaching platform increased, she began to receive resistance from the AME Church who did not approve of her preaching in white congregations. Smith was not deterred from her ministry. Instead, she continued to “persevere and gained popularity. She began to receive special requests for her preaching and singing at meetings and religious gatherings. By 1870, ministry was Smith’s full-time vocation, and she became known all the way from Maine to Tennessee.”⁵ Yet, the dissension of the AME Church was constantly at the forefront of her ministry.

This dissension was felt even as she attended the AME Church’s General Conference in Nashville, Tennessee in 1872 where the issue of ordaining women was the center of attention. The male clergy was adamant to fight this action. Because of her popularity, she received the brunt of criticism as she approached a male minister to inquire of the cost of the trip. His response was indicative of the culture and perception of women preachers at that time. She states,

He looked at me with surprise, mingled with disgust; the very idea of one looking like me to want to go to General Conference; they cut their eye at my big poke Quaker Bonnet, with not a flower, not a feather. He said, ‘I tell you, Sister, it will cost money to go down there; and if you ain’t got plenty of it, it’s no use to go; and turned away and smiled. Another said, ‘what does she want to go for?’ ‘Woman preacher. They want to be ordained,’ was the reply. ‘I mean to fight that thing,’ said the other. ‘Yes, indeed, so will I,’ said another…but in spite of it all I believed God would have me go.⁶


⁵ Ibid.

The conference was predominately male clergy who were not in support of women in ministry and would not support any legislation to ordain them. Smith, however, was not attending the General Conference to fight for the ordination of women. She was attending as her right as an AME and as a woman called by God. It was not that she didn’t support ordination for women. She, however, felt that God had ordained her. She believed she did not need the permission of men to affirm her call. Many women did not agree with her position of not engaging in the fight for ordination. However, Smith was a product of the Holiness tradition which “was central to black women’s preaching. It was the source of empowerment, rooted in African spirituality. Black women decided they did not need the sanction of the church because God had already authorized their ministry.”

Smith believed the Spirit had sanctified, liberated, and affirmed her. She says, “[God] knew that the thought of ordination had never crossed my mind, for I had received my ordination from Him who said, ‘Ye have chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you might go out and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit might remain.”

Her position was not well received by her peers and further caused controversy for her within the denomination. Nevertheless, she continued to preach and “[became] the

---

first black woman to work as an international evangelist in 1878.”

Her determination, despite opposition, to remain resolute in her call is important for WIM of the ANGAC and the denomination as a whole. This history is imperative as they face similar issues in traversing their call, particularly if it is a non-traditional vocation.

Unfortunately, Smith’s legacy would become insignificant in the AME Church. Despite hundreds who filled Quinn Chapel AME Church in 1915 for her funeral, “the memory of her accomplishments faded in obscurity.”

Her legacy in the AME Church crumbled, with marginal mentions of her in books and articles detailing AME women in ministry. Her work is often overshadowed by Jarena Lee and Sarah Hughes. Her relevance to AME women in ministry lost its significance. However, it is important to recognize her as one who richly contributed to the history of women in ministry in the AME Church.

History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

The AME Church grew out of the Free African Society (FAS) which Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others established in Philadelphia in 1787. The spark to the inception of the denomination began one morning at St. George Methodist Church. The church was praying when Allen heard considerable scuffling and low-talking. As he

---


9 Adrienne M. Israel, From Washerwoman to Evangelist, 147.

raised his head, he saw the trustees pulling Absalom Jones and William White off their knees telling them that they could not kneel at the altar. When the prayer was over, the black people, led by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, withdrew from St. George's Methodist Church. When officials at St. George pulled blacks off their knees while praying, FAS members discovered just how far American Methodists would go to enforce racial discrimination against African Americans. Hence, these black members of St. George made plans to transform their mutual aid society into an African congregation. Although most wanted to affiliate with the Protestant Episcopal Church, Allen led a small group who resolved to remain Methodists. Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, William Gray and William Wilcher were appointed to find a lot to build a church where the worship of God could be carried out without interference. A lot was selected on Sixth Street near Lombard, in Philadelphia. The building was dedicated as the first church of the denomination in July of 1794 with Allen as its pastor. Bishop Francis Asbury preached the sermon for the opening worship service. Reverend John Dickins, pastor of St. George, sang and prayed that the house be called "Bethel" for the gathering of thousands of souls. The convention of independent African Churches was held in this building in April of 1816, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church was officially organized. At that time, Richard Allen was elected and consecrated the first African American Bishop.

Notably, women also contributed to the formation of the AME Church. Although their work is marginally or scarcely recorded, they continued to work in the shadows to fulfil their call. Moreover, just because “women [did not hold] positions of authority does
not mean they were powerless.”¹¹ They were actively involved in the organization of the AME Church. “They served as teachers, exhorters, evangelists, class leaders, and preachers without any official assignment.”¹² Women like Sarah Hatcher Duncan, Sarah Allen, and the women who walked out of St. George’s Church in 1787 all were influential in the organization of the church. Therefore, their contributions are important and should be included in the history of the church.

Today, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has membership in twenty episcopal districts and thirty-nine countries across five continents. The work of the Church is administered by twenty-one active bishops and nine General Officers who manage the departments of the church. The church has eighteen institutions of higher learning. It is governed by the General Conference, the supreme body of the denomination. It meets quadrennially (every four years). See Figure 1 below.

![Diagram of Organizational Structure of the AME Church](https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-structure/)

*Figure 1: Organizational Structure of the AME Church¹³*

---


¹² Ibid., 50.

All local churches are part of a district and report to an annual conference, the governing body under the auspices of the bishop. All clergy are members of an annual conference. To receive ordination as an itinerant elder, clergy must complete five years of the Board of Examiners process, as well as obtain a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary.

Ministerial Context

The Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference (“ANGAC”) governs ministers from Atlanta, GA and the surrounding areas. It is the conference that ordains clergy and appoints pastoral assignments for ministers of this conference. Also, it is where issues of alleged clergy misconduct are addressed by the Ministerial Efficiency Committee. This conference is also responsible for electing delegates from Georgia, the Sixth Episcopal District, to the General Conference. This is the conference of my membership and ordination. It is the largest of six conferences within the state of Georgia. It is presided over by a bishop, who is appointed quadrennially by the Connectional Episcopal Committee at the General Conference to serve a maximum of eight years per district. The ANGAC also has four subconferences that are divided geographically throughout the state: North, South, East, and West. It is comprised of four hundred and thirty-five clergypersons with a slight majority being female, specifically two-hundred and twelve male and two-hundred and thirteen females. From this population, twenty women in ministry were randomly selected to participate in this study.
Qualitative Method Approach

The method used for this project was the qualitative method. Two instruments were used with this method, a survey and focus groups to collect data from the selected participants of various ordination status and vocations. The twenty women in ministry also participated in a survey of open-ended questions that “allow[ed] the interviewee to describe [her] experience.”¹⁴ The survey questions returned information showing parallels between the call narratives of Amanda Berry Smith and the selected participants. They showed similarities in the challenges faced by both Smith and the participants. These questions also returned responses by the participants regarding support for non-traditional vocations. Lastly, the questions revealed the role of the Holy Spirit as liberator for both Smith and the selected women in ministry.

In terms of the focus groups questions, they were designed to help engage the participants in dialogue and discussions. They also were designed to further study the participants’ opinions, expressions, experiences, and reactions. Both instruments collected data to emphasize the need for gender equality and inclusivity. Finally, the data shows the importance of creating space for persons seeking alternative paths to pastoral ministry.

Personal Interest in the Project

My personal interest in this project stems from my experience in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference Board of Examiners. I have never felt called to pastor

a church. Throughout my five-year process in the Board of Examiners, there was no non-traditional vocations offered or discussed as possible paths of ministry in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference. The Board of Examiners process was designed for pastors only. In the admissions year, all candidates were required to take “The Call” class. In this class, each person had to give a description of their call. There was no inquiry of the type of call it was. No one asked whether I was called to preach, teach, pastor, evangelize, counsel, or to the chaplaincy. The call course was to confirm that we were called to pastor.

At the end of the Admissions year, right before Annual Conference, the Board of Examiners examined the candidates to see if they were ready to pass on to First Year studies. One of the questions asked by the panel was “do you want to pastor?” Most people responded yes. Others were hesitant but ended up responding yes for fear of being shunned. I was one of them. I was afraid to say no out of fear of being ostracized or shunned. I responded yes. I knew I was called to preach, but I wasn’t called to pastor.

Later, after completing the Board of Examiners process, I attended a women’s conference. The afternoon preacher was Bishop Vashti McKenzie, the first female bishop elected in the AME Church. In her sermon, she credited Amanda Berry Smith for being resolute about her call and becoming the first international black woman preacher. I had never heard of her. To satisfy my curiosity, I decided to learn more about her ministry.

I read her autobiography and her story was fascinating, yet relatable. She had endured challenges many African American women in ministry endured. Her call narrative captivated me. I saw many similarities in her call and mine. More importantly
she was an AME woman in ministry who stood firm in her call. Her confidence and uncompromising disposition were admirable. She was socially conscious and compassionate about her community. She did not wait for a title, permission, or approval from her peers. She was Spirit-led, and purpose driven. Her identity was defined by her God-ordained purpose. She was not just a preacher, but a philanthropist, missionary, evangelist, and entrepreneur. She was a black woman in the nineteenth century, who despite racism and sexism, was determined to excel.

Smith placed no limits on her ministry nor any boundaries on her call. She just wanted to preach wherever God led her. Her story “illustrates how an ordinary individual attuned to the Spirit of God and living at a favorable historic moment can have an extraordinary impact on her times in spite of restrictions and oppression based on race, gender, and class.”\(^\text{15}\) Her legacy of being the first black woman international evangelist, as well as the first black person to open an orphanage in Illinois is unparalleled. Her message to women in ministry is to “Go preach.”\(^\text{16}\)

Being a female clergy in the AME denomination, I am often questioned about my call. It is of the opinion of others that I should be pastoring. It was once said that remaining in the position of associate pastor, as I have for twenty years, is selfish when there are so many empty churches that need senior pastors. I was told it is an insult to the denomination that has invested much in my training and development for ministry. I should give back to it. Surely, this statement was mean and insensitive and not the

\(^{15}\) Israel, *Washerwoman to Evangelist*, 153.

sentiments of all. However, it is the sentiment of far too many in leadership. I recall similar sentiments were found in Smith’s story when she was told she had neglected her sisters and denomination. Nevertheless, she remained resolute in her call despite the opinion others. I was determined to do the same.

Limitations and Assumptions

As mentioned earlier, the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference is divided into four subconferences. Each of these subconferences have WIM coordinators that keep records of the clergywomen in their conference. However, an accurate account was impossible to measure as the records are limited to dues paying members. The most accurate record would have to come from the conference roll. This roll is not separated by gender and is based on conference attendance. This role is manually completed and may not have the most recent demographics. Therefore, there was a chance that this could possibly limit the pool of women to select from. It was also a challenge to get an adequate number of full-time female senior pastors. There are twenty-seven female pastors in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference with nineteen of them being bi-vocational.

The other limitation was getting adequate participation for the survey and focus groups. The wrestle with calendars made it difficult from a scheduling perspective. Attempting to get twenty women clergy with various schedules to participate in both a survey and focus groups was difficult. Even more difficult was getting participation from those who left the church as they may not want to participate for various reasons.
In terms of assumptions, a primary assumption would be that this project will generate conversations about Amanda Berry Smith and WIM in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference. It also assumes that it would spark interest to restore her legacy as an AME heroine who paved the way for WIM to pursue their divine calling without reservation. Her distinguished story of wisdom and prowess is exemplary for women in ministry. In contrast, however, this study could unearth resentment for her lack of support of women’s ordination, limitations and abandonment by the AME Church.

The other assumption would be the interest of the Board of Examiners in this project to consider Smith’s story, institute discussions on various paths of ministry, and ensure the Board leadership is gender inclusive with diverse vocations represented in the leadership. In a process that is designed to produce pastors, it may be difficult to convince a predominately male led process to see the importance of the history of a woman who seemed to prefer the Methodist Episcopal Church over the AME Church.

Terms and Definitions

Annual Conference\textsuperscript{17} - A geographical grouping of congregations in a specific geographical area form the legal entity of Methodists polity. This is where mission, resource personnel (clergy and lay), and property are administered and where the bishop is president. It resides in an Episcopal District of the AME Church.

\textsuperscript{17} AMEC Sunday School Union, \textit{The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2012} (Nashville: AMEC Publishing House, 2013), 85.
Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference (ANGAC) - This is the designated ministerial context for this project and is one of 6 conferences in the state of Georgia, which make up the 6th Episcopal District of the AME Church.

Board of Examiners ("BOE")\textsuperscript{18} - The governing body for ordination. There is a BOE for every Annual Conference which has a Dean of Ministerial Training appointed to each Board by the bishop of the episcopal district. The BOE is a 5 year, required process of ministerial education. It is the Annual Conference's course of study for all candidates for ordination.

Call Narratives - These are the call stories where persons are called to ministry by God, including but not limited to the preaching ministry.

General Conference\textsuperscript{19} - The General Conference is the supreme body of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It is composed of the Bishops, as ex-officio presidents, according to the rank of election, and an equal number of ministerial and lay delegates, elected by each of the Annual Conferences and the Lay Electoral Colleges of the Annual Conferences. Other ex-officio members are: the General Officers, College Presidents, Deans/Presidents of Theological Seminaries; Chaplains in the Regular Armed Forces of the U.S.A. The General Conference meets quadrennially (every four years), but may have extra sessions in certain emergencies.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} African Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Structure."
Itinerant Elder (AME Church) - Has completed the five-year BOE requirement and received ordination. Has obtained a Master of Divinity Degree from an accredited seminary by the Association of Theological Studies.\textsuperscript{20} Can baptize, consecrate and administer communion, perform weddings, and funerals. An Itinerant Elder can be a pastor or non-pastor and is part of the "traveling ministry"\textsuperscript{21} of the AME Church by which "itinerant ministers are appointed to their charge by the bishop."\textsuperscript{22}

Non-Traditional Vocations - Ministerial vocations, excluding Senior Pastors, inside and outside of parish ministry, including but not limited to, Associate Pastors, Executive Pastors, Counselors, Chaplains, or other specialized ministries like prison ministry.

Sanctification (Wesleyan-Holiness Theology)\textsuperscript{23} - This theology is grounded in the teaching of John Wesley (1703-1791). Wesley and his brother Charles. Wesley taught that genuine faith produces inward and outward holiness. The regenerative process inwardly cannot help but find expression in an improved moral character outwardly. The doctrine of holiness is grounded in the command to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 19:2 and other Old Testament loci). Jesus commanded, “Be perfect therefore as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48)... Therefore, whenever Wesley discussed holiness,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} AMEC Sunday School Union, 85.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 706.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
sanctification or perfection (all theologically synonymous), he preferred the expression “Christian perfection...” Christian perfection, for Wesley, is achievable in this present life because it has to do with the affections.

Women in Ministry (“WIM”) - For this project, these are clergywomen of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference. This is separate from the WIM auxiliary of the AME Church which is an organization of active, dues paying, clergywomen of the denomination.
CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Many women in ministry deal with the assumptions and perceptions people bring to controversial texts concerning the role of women in society and the church. Their views are indicative of their positions on whether women are called to preach or to leadership positions in the church. The biblical argument against women in ministry stems largely from texts like 1 Timothy 2:12 where Paul says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” This text is used to justify their lack of support for women preaching, pastoring, or holding leadership roles in the church. This argument assumes that these texts are “directions [from God] for women for all time and places rather than for a specific time and place, even specific congregational circumstances.”¹ It neglects to consider the culture or the author’s perception of women. Moreover, “believers, tend to confuse the voice of the author with the voice of God” and dismiss the context surrounding the passage.² Just because Paul suggests that women should be silent is not indicative of God’s role for women in ministry or a mandate to ban them from church leadership or preaching.


²Ibid., 4.
Moreover, “the preoccupation for male authority over women is pagan, anti-Gospel. It cannot be redeemed; it only can be aborted. It is a negation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Authority of Scripture

Like 1 Timothy 2:1, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 cosigns Paul’s command on the role of women and the household order. “Women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.” Paul not only reiterates what he says in 1 Timothy 2:11, he also indicates that it’s God’s desire for the Christian community to obey this command. It is absolute and prevents women from speaking in public, even if they had questions. Paul says they must reserve those questions for their husbands at home.

1 Peter 3:1-6 also imposes the household order for wives and reiterates their position as subject to their husbands. In similar language seen in the other texts, wives are to “be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and [a]respectful behavior.” This text depicts the behavior of wives as the means to course correct their husband’s sinful behavior. It insinuates that their disposition of purity and reverence will restore them back to righteous behavior.

---

The writer also uses Genesis as support text for his argument about the role of women. “As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children…do what is right without being frightened by any fear.” This suggests that Sarah is the role model for appropriate behavior for wives. Any behavior against this example would be “subversive of societal stability.”

It would render wives disrespectful and disobedient, a behavior despised by God.

Titus 2:3-5 does not shy away from its contribution to the argument on women’s role and behavior in church. Older women should exhibit the “proper” behavior and encourage younger women to do the same. They are commanded “to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.” Any position against the expected norm for women is contrary to God’s will. Again, this text, as with the others, seeks to disempower women and subject them to their husband’s authority.

Similarly, Colossians 3:18 issues the same command for wives to “be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” This seems to accentuate that the household order is not Paul’s but “fitting for God.” It is the structure God desires for Christians and should not be dishonored. The basic relationship in this verse is that of subordinate. In fact, from Colossians 3:18 to 4:1, there are three relationships discussed, wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to master. This is to officially set the household

---

order to ensure political and social stability. “Any upsetting of the household’s traditional hierarchical order could be considered a potential threat to the order of society.”

To enforce the household order, Paul uses codes from Greco-Roman culture. “If a woman’s role in the church cannot be undermined by specific texts that seem to forbid it directly, the next best step is to wage ancient hierarchical social structures to seal the deal.” The adoption of these codes would explicitly express proper decorum, behavior, and roles for women. Paul uses them to interrelate family and church. They would circumvent any resisting behavior against the culture and patriarchy, preventing women from exercising their social, economic, and political power. Moreover, these codes would set the order as directives from God to avert an uprising by women. “[They are examples] not so much of accepted Greco-Roman social practice aimed at women’s decorum in worship, as the culture’s unabashed hatred of women’s freedom within everyday life, inclusive of worship. Such hatred was a part of a larger Greco-Roman cultural movement directed at women who were resisting patriarchal oppression.” Clearly, a threat to the social order was imminent.

Furthermore, “in the early days of Christianity there were wives who, in exercise of prophetic or other gifts, had been seen to be teaching or exhorting their husbands. Conceivably, this may’ve been acceptable church, but since church was also household, the practice was too easily understood as subversive of the good order of the household

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 24.
and of the authority of the *paterfamilias*.“7 Since church was essentially household, it was imperative that they pattern one another to avoid a crisis. Also, fear of women exercising their power was a real threat and needed addressing. Perhaps, there was a Spirit-led movement by women to disrupt the social order. “When social disruptions occur, the traditional authority structure crumbles…The symbols of sacred other no longer represent the tradition…It is in such situations that prophets emerge.” This would explain the texts silencing wives and subjecting them to their husbands. Possibly, there were women using their gifts of prophesy and praying that intimidated the hierarchal structure.

Ultimately, when these disruptions happen, it is the Spirit that balances the structural order. Through the Spirit, religious movements occur to dismantle the traditional authority in exchange for new patterns in the culture. A movement like the walkout by Richard Allen and others of St. George’s church to establish a free place of worship for African Americans. It is in these situations of crisis that prophets emerge to challenge religious systems, traditions, and social orders. Therefore, it is likely these codes were established to prevent disruptions of the social order to engender change.

Essentially, all these texts seek to justify the argument why women should not be in leadership or called to preach. Unfortunately, they have been influential in many churches causing rejection of women’s call. They have allowed Paul’s position to overshadow Jesus’ open invitation for women to join his ministry. This negates the fact

---

that the early church was populated with women as helpers to Jesus and even Paul himself. Moreover, to use these texts as a basis for the argument against women, contradicts Paul’s position in 1 Corinthians 11:5 where women are asked to cover their heads while praying and prophesying in public. “The basic exegetical problem is that Paul in 11:5 also affirms the public prayer and prophecy of women.”\(^8\) The mere notion that women were praying and prophesying in public is an indication that they were ministering and preaching. Moreover, there was the notion that “a new spirit of emancipation was spreading in the young Christian congregations.”\(^9\) Again, a disruption of the social order was on the horizon and fear ensued. The structures of the hierarchy were facing a crisis that would emerge change.

In 1 Corinthians 11:4-15, Paul gives more evidence that women were preaching and teaching. Women “who pray or prophesy aloud in meetings to wear a veil; the impression left is that he grudgingly recognizes the position, presumably because women concerned were under the influence of the Spirit.”\(^10\) The Spirit brought freedom of the expression of gifts. Women felt spiritually liberated to prophesy and teach in the church. This freedom posed a threat to the patriarchy and social structure. However, Paul seem to recognize their spiritual gifts by identifying women who were praying and

---

\(^8\) Risto Saarinen, *The Pastoral Epistles with Philemon & Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 56.

\(^9\) Ibid., 68.

prophesying. Even amidst his conflicting views, he gives evidence of women as exhorters, prophets, and leaders in the church. Moreover, many people using these texts are often tied to an ontological view of scripture. This view holds that the Bible is the sole authority of understanding God, life, and faith. People with this view believe the Bible is infallible and the guide for Christians’ understanding of God. “The Bible is God’s Word, dictated by God, where human agency has no other role but scribe.” Therefore, if Paul says women should not be permitted to teach, preach or have authority over men, the perception is women who do so are going against God’s order for creation and the church. This view limits the ability of women in ministry to engage in productive dialogue surrounding preaching and leadership roles in the church. It presents a great challenge to attempt dialogue with a person who does not have an open view about scripture or God.

This view also uses proof texts like the creation stories in Genesis chapters 1-3 to justify the role and position of women as designed by God. The notion that the woman was created second and from man suggests that she is inferior to him, establishing a subordinate rather than a companion. It purposely positions the woman as secondary and supports the argument that she is unable to make decisions or lead, especially with the mishap in the Garden of Eden. However, this argument is flawed as it does not “acknowledge that Creation offers no biblical precedent to the notion that we are created qualitatively differently as males and females; in Genesis 1 and 2, both genders were

---

Lewis, *Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry*, 5.
created with equal expressions of God’s image, equal authority over earth, and equal
value as human beings.”

Furthermore, the Hebrew term “adham” in Genesis 1:26-30 is a universal term used for both male and female. It is not to be confused with the individual name given in Genesis 5:3. “Adam here becomes a proper name, but the basic idea of the creation of ‘Man’ as male and female is retained.”

Moreover, God was intentional when God created humankind in God’s image. God created male and female alike, (‘ish) and (‘ishshah). They were created as equal partners, responsible for all of God’s creation (Gen. 1:26, 28). The patriarchal mindset that women are subordinate to men and are unable to lead or preach is not God’s plan for mutuality between genders. “In the creation narrative of Gen. 1:26-30 there is no subordination, unless this be inferred from the listing of ‘male’ before ‘female’ in v. 27…Both are created together: ‘male’ and female he created them.”

Although it can be argued that the rib narrative places the woman as subordinate, there is also evidence of God’s intention for equality in marriage. “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one

---


14 Ibid., 20.

flesh” (Gen. 2:24). One flesh indicates that God’s intentions are of parity and equality for men and women. God’s desire is for partnership not subordination for women.

**Biblical and Theological Support**

In considering the biblical and theological support for this project, one must consider the question, are women called to preach? This question has been a topic of debate for centuries. Certainly, in the nineteenth century, it was incomprehensible. The role of a woman was defined as homemaker or teacher. For African Americans, it was mostly domestic servant. Public speaking for women would suggest that women were equal to men. This is a notion that men were not willing to accept.

As mentioned above, 1 Timothy 2:12 is the premise of the debate over this question. “The letter writer has placed the two sections together as a series addressing both the specific issue of women’s dress and the more general social issue of their role in relation to men.” Strategicall, it is positioned after Paul addresses the dress code of women of the congregation. This makes it an easy segue to the issue of women being silent in the church as he was conveniently addressing the behavior of women. This verse, as well as similar verses, have negatively influenced cultural perceptions of the role of women in church leadership.

As stated above, this section of text concentrates on the behavior of women in public worship to prevent them from teaching, preaching, or prophesying in church. Moreover, this verse is similar to 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 where Paul not only

16 Ibid., 50.
reemphasizes that women are not permitted to speak in church, but also prevents them from asking questions in public worship. “If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home” (1 Cor. 14:35). Again, women are gagged to appease insecurities of the patriarchy and to satisfy the status quo.

Consequently, it seems Paul himself was not consistent in his thought process on the matter. In Galatians 3:28, he states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.” This directly conflicts with 1 Timothy 2:12 as it shows equality in the kingdom of God. Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 2:12 also conflicts with his message at the end of Romans where women were actively involved in proclaiming the gospel. "Ten of the twenty-nine prominent people addressed are female.”¹⁷ One of the ten is Phoebe, a deacon of the church of Cenchreae. The Greek word diakonos given as a description of her position suggests she oversaw the house community, similar to the duties of a pastor.

Another one is Junia whom Paul considers “distinguished among the apostles’ who had already ‘confessed Christ’ before him. Apostle is the highest predicate Paul can bestow.”¹⁸ Priscilla is also a woman who contributed greatly to Paul’s ministry. She is mentioned in Romans 16:3-4, Acts 18:18-19, 26, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and 2 Timothy 4:19, usually before her husband Aquila, “which is significant in Jewish writings. The

---


¹⁸ Ibid.
more important a person was usually mentioned first.”¹⁹ It is evident that she had an impact and was respected as a woman in ministry.

There are also the women of Philippi like Eudonia and Syntche who Paul describes as fellow workers who fought for the gospel. The others, Paul calls coworkers in Christ or hard workers for the Lord. It is apparent that women were instrumental in spreading the gospel and the work of the early church. Moreover, “the Pauline literature and Acts still allow us to recognize that women were among the most prominent missionaries and leaders in the early Christian movement. They were apostles and ministers like Paul, coworkers, teachers, preachers, competitors, [and founders of house churches, prominent patrons, and influencers of other Christians].”²⁰

Moreover, outside of the Pauline Epistles, there were women who were pivotal to the spread of the gospel. Mary Magdalene is one of them. She is considered the first woman to deliver a sermon on the resurrection of Jesus. She was commissioned by Jesus to go tell the disciples that “He is risen.” "So it can be truthfully said, a woman is the first preacher to deliver the Gospel."²¹ Women were the bearers of the gospel, the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. They were followers of Jesus and intricate parts of his ministry.


²¹ Ibid.
Also, in the gospels, we find positive views of women at the hem of Jesus’ ministry. In both John and Mark, the Samaritan woman operates as an evangelist who crosses gender boundaries in conversing publicly with Jesus as a woman.\textsuperscript{22} In John chapter 11, “Martha seems to be conducting the funeral activity of her brother. In Luke nearly one-third [of his] material deals with women.”\textsuperscript{23} His handling of their stories shows that they had a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus and the spread of the gospel. He opens with three notable women:

“Elizabeth, [who] functions as a prophet when ‘filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41);’ she blesses Mary and the fruit of her womb (1:42) and she utters the only Christological confession by a woman in the Gospel when she speaks of the ‘mother of the Lord’ (1:43). Mary, [in Luke 1:46-55], is the only woman in the Gospel to be given a speech of proclamation; and the widow Anna is called prophet”\textsuperscript{24} who fasted and prayed at the temple daily. She “continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

All three are examples of many women, named and unnamed, who helped shape the gospel narratives and their contributions to Christianity.

There is also Joel 2:28-29 which is frequently used to challenge the argument that women aren’t called by God. It asserts that God will pour out God’s spirit on all humankind, male and female alike. Daughters and sons will equally prophesy with no limitations of roles. It justifies “that the Bible had already mandated spiritual


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 103.
egalitarianism in terms of who could prophesy.” It does not limit the ability to class, gender, race, or ethnicity.

Likewise, this passage of scripture shows that God calls women, as well as men, to preach. It is an open invitation to women despite obstacles found in religious institutions. It validates women in ministry’s place in God’s mission in the world. It asserts that women should receive equal treatment as men in proclaiming the gospel. They should not be limited to select roles in the church but placed on equal footing with men. Women are welcome to participate in societies of the church. However, preaching would be reserved only for men “because preaching brought with it authority and public visibility generally associated with masculinity.”

It should be noted that there is a conservative approach to this scripture that contends Joel is not speaking of women being called by God, but is referring to Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. It says that Joel was speaking of salvation for all, and not to whom God calls. This is far from accurate and omits the significant part of the text that says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy.” (Joel 2:28). “The Spirit of God throughout the OT was a gift of power, given in order that the recipient might do a particular job for God. It is this understanding that Acts 2:4 adopts: The disciples are given the Holy Spirit in order that they may be witnesses to Christ.” This was later reiterated by Peter’s first sermon in Acts 2. Also, as mentioned above, Galatians 3:28 lends its support by stating, “There is nor male of

---

female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Therefore, there is no distinction in God’s call to men and women. This is supported by scripture, as well as by the call narratives in the Bible.

Elements of Call Narratives

Biblical support for women in ministry is also seen in the call narratives of Abraham, Moses, Deborah, Samuel, Esther, Jeremiah, and Mary. There are six elements found in these call narratives: Divine Encounters; Commissions; Objections; Reassurances; Visions, and Signs/Symbols. These six elements will show that there is no distinction in the call experience for men and women in scripture. There are strikingly similar and provide evidence of inclusivity in the call process by God. To fully capture the call process using the six elements, I will used Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey as a model showing the common patterns in the call experience for, not only the previously mentioned biblical characters, but for Amanda Berry Smith and the WIM of the ANGAC. A complete review of their call experiences will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

Abraham’s Call Narrative

Beginning with Abraham’s call, God tells him to “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). This call was a call of transformation. Abram would leave his homeland as Abram but arrive at his new home as Abraham. The changing of the name is a symbol of metamorphosis or conversion into the call experience. Abram, in a sense, died at the acceptance of the call. His purpose would be tied to Abraham not Abram. In the call experience, something must die for something else to live. God transforms Abram to Abraham to fulfil God’s
purpose. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “When Christ calls a [person], he bids [them] come and die.”26 The will of a person is exchanged for the will of God. Smith said, “It seemed wonderfully sweet to die to my own will, and sink into God.”27 Abram, like Smith, had to die to live fully for God. He would be called to “represent the second Adam…a new humanity… [the path through which the one seed to come will be the lion of Judah].”28

In short, there was nothing simple about Abraham’s call. It was difficult, challenging, and full of obstacles. His call came with a great mantle. He was to:

- Leave his home country and go to an unknown land (Gen. 12:1).
- Be a vessel for God to make a great nation (Gen. 12:2).
- Carry the weight of a great name that would be attached to God’s blessings and curses of others (Gen. 12:2-3).
- Uproot his family, taking them and their possessions to a foreign place (this included Sarah and Lot (Gen. 12:5).

This call was a weighty one. It was overwhelming and incomprehensible at times.

Abraham’s call was connected to the entire nation of Israel. It was the stepping stone to the development of the relationship of humankind and God. His acceptance of the call would be the start of God’s plan for humanity.

In Abraham’s call narrative, there were several elements found. He experienced a divine encounter by God where he was commissioned to leave his current home for a


foreign land. God also appeared to Abram at Shechem showing him the land given to his descendants (Gen. 12:7). This was a promise by God to assure him of the call. It was God’s way of showing Abraham that God was with him. It was also a way of helping Abraham see that the call comes with sacrifices, as well as rewards.

There is no objection by Abraham nor any expression of uncertainty. However, God still reassures him of his purpose by telling him that God will make him a great nation, bless him and his descendants (Gen. 12:2). A similar reassurance by God is also seen in Genesis 13:14-16 where God shows Abraham the vast amount of land he will receive. Abraham builds altars to God, after each appearance, as a symbol of gratitude for God’s provision. Abraham’s call is evidence that the call by God can come with peculiar instructions amidst a great promise. The process requires sacrifice and resilience.

Moses’ Call Narrative

In Moses’ call narrative, we can identify all six elements. Elements that will be used as an example for the Joseph Campbell Hero’s Journey model at the end of this section. Moses’ narrative begins with a vision at the burning bush in Exodus 3:1-6. He had a divine confrontation with God through an angel of the Lord. The symbol of God’s power was seen in the burning bush itself. “And he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed” (Exod. 3:2). Another symbol was the ground which he stood. It represented holiness. “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). When God saw that he was completely enthralled by the burning bush, he commissioned him to go tell Pharaoh to release God’s people (Exod. 3:10).
Moses objects to God’s call five times before he accepts. He attempts to convince God of his inability to carry out this call. Moses feared, not only the response of Pharaoh, but also the responses of the Israelites. He had murdered an Egyptian and was afraid of their reactions. So, he objected to the call. He uses these objections to stall for time in hopes that God would change God’s mind.

Moses also did not have faith in himself. However, God overlooked his reluctance, reassured him, and continued the commission. God also gave him signs to validate his role as the deliverer of the message. Moses’ feeling of inadequacy and insecurity is not abnormal to the call experience. Many who are called feel inadequate to be the vessel by which God speaks. Moses’ call experience is a great example of how ministers feel when God calls them, unqualified for such an assignment. Moses felt unqualified because of his past and his inability to speak eloquently (Exod. 6:12). He felt no one would listen to him. He felt inadequate to deliver such a difficult message. However, God had patience with him and continued to encourage him after each objection. God gave Moses signs to help reassure him that he is the person for the assignment despite his insecurities. God wanted Moses to know that he will protect him as he delivers this message. God gives him signs that he will be with him.

The first sign is turning the staff into a snake to convince Pharaoh of God’s power. “The Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ And he said a staff…Throw it on the ground…and it became a serpent” (Exod. 4:2-3). The second would be the hand in the cloak trick, turning his hand from leprosy and back. “The Lord furthermore said to him, Now put your hand in your bosom…and he took it out, behold, his hand was
leprous like snow… and when he took it out… it was restored like the rest of his flesh” (Exod. 4: 7). Ultimately, God used the rod as a symbol of power to deliver the Israelites (Exod. 14:21-31). Despite his hesitancy, Moses would go on to accomplish one of the greatest miracles in history, the great Exodus. God called Moses to be a deliverer for God’s people. His role as God’s representative gives him a unique position in canonical and non-canonical literature. He would also later be the recipient of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

Deborah’s Call Narrative

Like Moses, Deborah was called by God as a prophet of Israel. Her call came during some tumultuous times. God called her to a position of leadership during a time of oppression and distress. They had been under a twenty-year stronghold of King Jabin. He had an army of nine-hundred chariots. This not only gave King Jabin a military advantage, but it gave him power to continue his oppression of the Israelites. Therefore, they cried out to God for help.

Deborah was leading Israel when God called her. This call was different than the others “because the rule of women was not normal in Israel; [therefore,] her prominence implies a lack of qualified men.” Deborah’s position in itself was unusual. She had authority over men and the ability to make decisions, something uncommon during this time. “She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came up to her for judgment” (Judg. 4:5). With

29 Ibid., 336.
this position as a prophet or judge, she was able to use wisdom and discernment to judge the issues of the community. She was “responsible for leading the military, resolving disputes, advocating for the powerless, and making decisions.”

Deborah’s call was to give a message to Barak to annihilate King Jabin’s army. There was no recorded divine confrontation by God for Deborah. However, it can be implied that at some point God gave Deborah the message for Barak. This is evident in the text that begins with “The Lord, the God of Israel commands you: Go…” (Judg. 4:6). Surely, God gave Deborah a message through a divine encounter.

In Deborah’s call narrative, we find that the objection is not from Deborah per se, but from Barak. He was willing to accept the challenge but objected to the call based on his inability to fulfil the call without a helper. As with Moses, he was uncertain of his ability to carry out the call alone. He “expressed his willingness to go, but only if Deborah accompanied him. Her presence as prophetess would assure contact with the Lord, just as the presence of Moses and the ark of covenant brought victory in battle.”

Deborah was key to the victory over Sisera. Her word from God proved true. Barak slew all the troops, but he would not get the credit as the death of Sisera came from the hands of a woman, Jael’s wife. God had orchestrated a plan through Deborah to free the Israelites from oppression:

She was not elected by popular vote; she was not appointed by a governor, mayor, council member, or president. She was not voted in by majority in an electoral

---


31 Ibid.
college; she was not nominated by the Israel senate. Deborah was assigned by God. No ‘if, ands, or buts.” She judged with the authority of a prophetess, called and empowered to be God’s mouthpiece to Israel during the oppression of Jabin.  

Samuel’s Call Narrative

Samuel’s call narrative is an unprecedented one. This is the first time God calls a child to ministry. God calls Samuel from a temple errand boy to a prophet. This call is special as Samuel would go on to anoint David as king connecting him to the lineage of Jesus. Samuel’s call begins with his mother Hannah. She was barren and asked God for a son. “She, greatly distressed, prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. She made a vow and said, “O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head” (1 Sam. 1:10-11). Hannah’s petition to God was conditional. In exchange for God giving her a son, she would give him back to God for service. God answered Hannah’s request and she bore a son. When Samuel was weaned from his mother, she brought him to Priest Eli for God’s service as promised (1 Sam. 1:25-28).

In Samuel’s call narrative, God begins with a vision. Samuel’s call does “not show the typical pattern of a prophetic call narrative. There is neither a formal commissioning of Samuel to be a prophet nor the typical expression of a prophet’s unworthiness of the call.” Instead, his divine encounter came through God’s voice and

32 Ella Pearson Mitchell, Women to Preach or Not to Preach (King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 1991), 72.

33 Ibid., 991.
presence. “The Lord came and stood there, calling as the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’” (1 Sam. 3:10). God calls Samuel three times before Samuel responds. Samuel thought Eli was calling him and rushed to his side. It is not that Samuel is “naïve or dense. He is still young and living in a time when the word and vision of the Lord was rare.”\textsuperscript{34}

After the second call, Eli realized God was calling Samuel and told him how to respond. God called Samuel a third time. However, this time God appeared to Samuel in a vision. God charged him with the task of delivering a disturbing message to Eli regarding his house. Samuel did not explicitly object to the call. However, “he was afraid to tell Eli the vision” (1 Sam. 3:15). This is an indication that Samuel had reservations about the message and perhaps the call. The next morning Samuel does not readily deliver the message to Eli. He busies himself with tasks at the tabernacle. Although Samuel made no formal objections to the call, his fear of telling Eli God’s message shows his reservation. Samuel wrestles with delivering disheartening news to his mentor. His call shows how unsettling and discomforting the call experience can be.

However, this is only the beginning of Samuel’s ministry. God continued to speak to Samuel throughout the years. God was “with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground…all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.” (1 Sam. 3:19). God ensured that every word Samuel spoke on God’s behalf came true. The Lord’s word become equivalent to Samuel’s word (1 Sam. 4:1). God continued to appear to Samuel at Shiloh, reassuring

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 992.
him of his call. Unlike Moses and Deborah, Samuel was not an adult commissioned to deliver a message. He was not charged to deliver a message to an oppressor to let God’s people go. He was a young boy charged with delivering bad news to his mentor, the only father figure he knew (1 Sam. 3:11-14). Yet, God understood that Eli would easily receive the message from Samuel, a faithful, pure and innocent vessel. One whom he had no issue trusting or believing. There was no push back from Eli. He received the message from his child mentee with respect.

This call story demonstrates the challenges met in the call experience. It also demonstrates how God takes the least expected, least sophisticated, and least powerful to use them for service. God does not base God’s selection on society’s opinion of who should be called. Samuel’s call narrative gives a different perspective of God’s call to a child. A child who God chose to carry out a message, by society’s opinion, only appropriate for an adult.

This call narrative shows that God can orchestrate the call before one is born. God has purpose for the called. Samuel’s narrative clearly confirms that God’s call is without limitations or preference. Moreover, his narrative displays that “God will find possibilities for new life and hopeful futures in persons and circumstances that seem impossible by human standards.”

Esther’s Call Narrative

---

Turning now to Esther’s call, we find Esther’s call significantly different from the others. There is no mention of God at all in the Esther’s call narrative. There is no divine confrontations, visions, or symbols in this call story. Nonetheless, Esther’s call was needed and paramount to the salvation of a nation. It was a clarion call to Esther “for such a time as this,” (Esth. 4:14) a time where a chain of events happened at the palace.

Queen Vashti, the King’s wife, refused to respond to the king’s command to “satisfy the male egocentric agenda.” He was offended, embarrassed and enraged. After consulting with his officials, he banished Queen Vashti and sought out another wife. Although Queen Vashti was banished and never mentioned again, it is important to point out that her actions may’ve been the cause for the king’s gentler deposition towards Esther. “But the king’s second wife, Esther, had much for which to thank Queen Vashti. King Ahasuerus might not have been so predisposed to forgive Queen Esther her brazen disobedience had not his first wife taught him that, like it or not some women make their own decisions. At least with Esther, the king was willing to hear her out.”

After Queen Vashti’s dismissal, the king sent out a decree that all beautiful, young virgins should be brought to the palace. This decree included Esther. Esther went to the palace and found favor with the attendants. This was unusual in that Esther, by society’s standards, was not a suitable wife for King Ahasuerus. She was an exiled Jew, a


non-Persian by birth, who was considered an outsider in the Persian kingdom.

Historically, Persian queens were chosen from selected royal families. However, in this special circumstance, Esther was chosen. Additionally, she fit the requirements, virgin and beautiful. It was this beauty that caught the attraction of the king. Therefore, Esther was an unexpected replacement for Queen Vashti.

As part of the preparation process to be queen, Esther would undertake twelve months of beauty treatments. After just ten months of treatments, she would be invited into the king and ultimately crowned queen. Shortly after her crowning ceremony, her uncle Mordecai uncovers a conspiracy to kill the king and informs Esther. After the king was saved from death and punished the conspirators, he decided to promote Haman, commander of his army, to a high position (Esth. 3:1). All the royals at the king’s gate, would kneel paying respect to him. Mordecai, however, would not kneel before Haman (Esth. 3:2). Haman was outraged and vowed to destroy Mordecai and his family.

Mordecai gets word to Esther. His message initiates her call narrative. He commissions her to go to the king to save her people. Esther’s call, like Moses, charges her to be a deliverer of her people. She is used as an agent of God to change the trajectory of the Jews and the palace.

Although Esther does not have a divine confrontation with God, her uncle Mordecai acts like a divine messenger of God by charging her with a divine task. Similar to the other biblical characters, Esther objects to the call for fear of the king’s actions. She understands the rules of the palace, as well as Persian law. She had not been invited into the king’s court. “If any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court
without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death” (Esth. 4:11). She did not have permission to enter the king’s court and could lose her life.

Moreover, as a woman, it was unorthodox for her to defy the king or any man. She had no authority or power. The deposal of Queen Vashti was not so long ago and in the forefront of her memory. Esther was afraid that King Ahasuerus would not have mercy on her, let alone be willing to save the Jewish people. She hid her ethnicity as a Jew for fear of rejection or disposal. There was so much at stake entering the king’s court uninvited.

Therefore, Esther is troubled by the call and continues to object out of fear. However, God sends Mordecai to reassure her. He says, “If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esth. 4:14)? This statement sends Esther on a corporate fast. She declares, “I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish” (Esth. 4:16). This is her response to God’s call. Quickly, she devises a plan to expose Haman and deliver the Jews.

Esther uses the scepter to seek permission to speak to the king. Like Moses’ staff, this is a symbol of power and authority. This extension of the scepter makes Esther the most powerful person in the royal court. With this control of power, she reveals Haman’s plot, deliver the Jews and have Haman executed. Esther’s call makes her a hero. Her call is distinctive in that God is not mentioned, but God’s miraculous power is evident throughout her call experience. Because of her call, “the oppressed and endangered
minority has become the most powerful group in society. This reversal has been accomplished by human action of [a woman], a powerless member of a powerless group.”38 God may not have been mentioned in the text, but God’s hand orchestrated the use of Esther to save many lives.

Jeremiah’s Call Narrative

The call and commission of Jeremiah “came five years before the important reforms of Josiah.”39 His call came during kingship and conflict. Like the other call narratives, Jeremiah was called amidst a national crisis. He is charged to speak a scathing, prophetic message to the kings and people of Israel. He is to persuade God’s people to turn back to God. The message promises calamity and destruction if they do not listen to Jeremiah. How they respond to the message will shape their future. This message is not an easy one for Jeremiah to deliver. He is to bring Israel a word that will pluck up, pull down, destroy, overthrow, build, and plant. It is a difficult message with much at stake.

By the end of his ministry, he would have pronounced judgment as far as Babylon. Realizing the magnitude of the charge, Jeremiah objects to the call in two-fold. He complains that he is too young and ineloquent in speech. “Jeremiah protested to God his unreadiness and unfitness for such a high responsibility.”40 Like Moses, God


39 Barker and Kohlenberger, Old Testament, 1157.

overlooks his insecurity and reassures him by telling him “I am with you” (Jer. 1:8). Then, God touches his mouth as a symbol of affirmation and consecration. “I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9). This is God’s response to Jeremiah's professed inability to speak.

Through this act, God essentially has given Jeremiah the words needed for his international ministry. With Jeremiah still reluctant about the call, God reassures Jeremiah saying, “They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord” (Jer. 1:19). “Against him would be ranged virtually the entire leadership of his nation: the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land (v.18). [However,] it would be Jeremiah’s words that would prevail, not theirs.”41 It is because of this protection that Jeremiah is able to preach the same message for more than forty years. God predestined Jeremiah for a lengthy, disheartening ministry. His call is unique and evidence that God’s will is fundamental in the call process. God never makes a mistake in choosing God’s servants.

Unlike other prophets, Jeremiah received no divine appearance or vision from God. There is, however, a divine encounter through the voice of God when delivering the divine word to Jeremiah. It is in this moment that God commissions Jeremiah. God says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5). The Hebrew word for “prophet” used in this text is navī, the one who’s called by God. Jeremiah was

41 Ibid., 22.
specifically called as an ambassador for God. The other word used to show God’s unique call for Jeremiah is the word “formed.” This word is like the word used in the creation story in Genesis 2:7. It shows that God intentionally created Jeremiah for the prophetic ministry. He was chosen for a specific call and ministry. Albeit full of disappointments and spiritual struggles, his call was special and extraordinary.

Two final elements seen in Jeremiah’s call narrative are visions. God asks Jeremiah twice what he sees. Jeremiah responds that he sees a rod of an almond tree and a boiling pot. “These two visions express truths about the divine intentions towards Israel which remained valid and secure for almost twenty years of the prophet’s ministry.”

God explains their meaning as God is watching over God’s word and destruction is coming to the people of Israel. They have angered the Lord with their sins. These visions are used to affirm his call. This is how God’s messages would come to Jeremiah throughout his ministry, through visions. In his darkest hours, he would remember God’s words. They would guide him in moments of distress.

Although Jeremiah’s ministry was sad and denunciatory, he endured much to save his people. He was chosen to be a prophet of compassion to sympathize with the condemned. One who would still pray for his people even when God forbade him to. Jeremiah would experience rejection and heartbreak in his ministry. His is an example of how the call can be challenging, difficult, and emotionally draining. Although he is considered one of the most misunderstood Old Testament prophets, “he has been credited

---

with the survival of his people after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., a veritable savior of the Jews.”

Moreover, Jeremiah’s call helps one to understand that the call is about God’s purpose and God’s power. Being God’s mouthpiece is not easy. There will be rejection and ostracism. There will be emotional distress and unsettling times. Yet, God will not leave the called in the call experience. God will be with them and rescue them (Jer. 1:8).

Mary’s Call Narrative

The last call narrative is Mary’s, the mother of Jesus. Mary’s call narrative opens with a divine encounter with the angel Gabriel, a representative of God. Gabriel brings a remarkable, yet peculiar message to Mary. She is chosen by God to conceive and give birth to the Messiah (Luke 1:26-33). Unlike, the other call narratives, Mary’s commission involves a greeting with a positive outlook.

It begins with a declaration, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). From the onset of the call, God positions Mary as special, richly blessed, and protected by God. Astonished by the words of the angel, Mary was perplexed by the call. To reassure her, Gabriel repeats the salutation and tells her not to be afraid. God proceeds to give Mary her commission.

Mary has reservations in accepting the call. She is unconfident because of her status as a virgin and unmarried. Also, the greeting “favored one” was unusual, “normally reserved for girls of a noble background than her own. Rich girls were favored ones, not

---

poor girls from poor, working-class towns like Nazareth.” Yet, Gabriel assures her that she is the one and explains God’s divine plan. She would not be impregnated by Joseph, but by the Holy Spirit. This is a huge undertaking. She would be the vessel by which the messiah is born. She and Joseph would have to endure shame, isolation and rejection if she accepts this call. Gabriel gives Mary a sign of confirmation by telling her Elizabeth is pregnant in her old age. Elizabeth’s pregnancy also serves as symbol of the power that nothing is impossible with God. This is “sufficient proof for Mary; under these conditions she easily accepts the [call] and enters into divine service.”

These call narratives serve as support texts that women are called by God. It also lends credibility to the argument that God would not confine the call to one gender. Unfortunately, despite the support of the call narratives to validate the call of women, people will continue to confuse their church doctrines with biblical concepts of ministry as it pertains to women. They will continue to use proof texts to marginalize women’s call to ministry, despite the salvific work of Christ that rejects the notion of distinction of roles based on gender, economic status, or ethnicity (Gal. 3:28). They will hold to their doctrinal traditions and perspectives. However, these call narratives undeniably show God’s purpose for equality in the call experience.


These call narratives also affirm the equal distribution of gifts by God. Gifts that confirm that God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). God’s gifts are not subject to human rules, doctrines, or traditions. God gifts are for the benefit of God’s mission. The distribution of these gifts is concrete evidence that God’s call is not limited to a select group, gender, social class, or culture. God is not concerned with age, gender, race, ability or ethnicity. God has no preference or limitation when it comes to the called.

Comparative Analysis of Call Narratives

The call narratives are essential to highlighting equality in the call process. As discussed above, there are common elements found in each call narrative whether male or female. They are universal patterns found in any call experience. To highlight parallels in the call experience for the biblical characters above, I have adopted a model from Joseph Campbell’s *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This model shows a consistent path taken in the call process, along with the elements associated with each stage. Like the hero, the minister sets out on a quest for his or her divine calling. The minister begins with an ordinary life that is disrupted by a commission from God, followed by a divine encounter, visions, symbols or signs. See *Figure 2* below.

---

Using Moses’ call narrative as an example, we can see Moses’ journey in quest of the call. Moses starts out in an ordinary world of caring for his father-in-law’s sheep. Like the hero, Moses by divine encounter, is called by God to depart this world to embark on an adventure to liberate God’s people. As the hero, he makes a conscious decision to cross the threshold and accept God’s call to the unknown. This journey would come with objections, oppositions, divine encounters, and helpers. At the end of the journey, Moses is rewarded with the deliverance of the Israelites.

Although Moses’ narrative is used as an example, this pattern is seen in most call narratives and can be used to observe any call experience. This model helps to understand
the call process as a journey led and orchestrated by God. It is a spiritual quest to go wherever the call takes you. This model also helps others to understand their call process and the cycle of events that are attached to it. Even though the journey is filled with trepidation and reluctance, there is a reward. The reward can be a means for celebration, self-realization, deliverance, affirmation or salvation. This same model will be used to identify the parallels in the call narratives of WIM and Amanda Berry Smith in the fourth chapter.

In summary, these call narratives show biblical and theological support for God’s call of both men and women. They refute gender ideologies that women should and could not preach. They dismantle ontological views of proof texts and church doctrines. These narratives display God’s equality in choosing who would go for us. They show that God’s call is not contingent upon gender, historical traditions, or misogynistic views. God’s call is for all persons. It is intentional, purposeful and divinely orchestrated. It is designed to carry out God’s mission without gender inequality. It is a process, a journey, that has no limitations or bounds on who can be called to embark on a quest for God.
CHAPTER 3
MINISTRY CONTEXT: DEMOGRAPHICS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The context of this project is the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference ("ANGAC") of the Sixth Episcopal District of the AME Church (Georgia). This annual conference is held the third week in May and opens officially on Tuesday mornings. The 2018 Annual Conference roll is comprised of four hundred and thirty-five clergy members, two-hundred and thirteen females and two-hundred and twelve males. Nine were relocated, left the church, transferred or moved to another conference. See Appendix A.

It is the largest in the Sixth Episcopal District and one of the largest conferences in the AME denomination. Clergy members are classified in the conference by pastor, supernumerary, board of examiner candidate by class year, ordination status, and superannuate. Supernumerary clergy are ordained preachers without a church appointment either by request or because no appointment is available. Superannuate clergy are ordained preachers retired from active ministry. They are clergy who have met the AME Church’s retirement age of seventy-five.

All clergy, regardless of status, must report to Annual Conference for roll call. The secretary of the conference conducts roll call. Clergy and connectional officers’ names are called to record who is present for roll call. This is important because the AME Church’s policy is to remove persons from the roll if they have not answered the roll in
two years, without an excused absence. Typically, when persons have not answered the roll in two years, without an excuse, they have left the denomination.

The Annual Conference members on the roll are chaplains, associate ministers, presiding elders, general officers, and bishops. The majority are supernumerary. Mostly, the supernumerary clergy are in voluntary positions as associate ministers on staff at a church. Typically, they are bi-vocational. Because all clergy must be actively serving at a church, many serve in support positions until deciding on their path of ministry.

From this same pool, there were ninety-six pastoral appointments by the bishop, sixty-nine men and twenty-seven women. These numbers show that there is still a disproportion between appointments for men and women. Moreover, clergywomen have historically made up the majority for this conference. However, they are not equally represented in the role as pastor. This could be for various reasons. Many of them make up the supernumerary number as associate ministers on staff at a church. It is uncertain why so many women remain unassigned to pastoral roles. Perhaps they feel the weight of the position is too great. Maybe they feel their family responsibilities are too great. Maybe they seek alternate paths to ministry outside of the pulpit. Whatever the reason, it cannot be ignored that the number is staggering and suggests further study is needed regarding this issue.

Of the twenty-seven women who received pastoral appointments, many of them are the first female pastors of their church. Although this is a major step towards progression for the church, this appointment carries a burden that male clergy do not have to experience. Many of these female pastors feel the pressure of having to prove
themselves as worthy of the appointment. They also feel the pressure of being just as good or better than their male colleagues in the same position. They understand what comes with this appointment. They are essentially creating a path for female pastors coming after them. In their tenure at these churches, it is critical that they dismantle stereotypes about women’s ability to preach, pastor, or lead. Where clergymen are given respect by virtue of their gender, clergywomen must earn respect from the congregation. They have to “win them over” to convince them that women are called to preach and pastor.

Also, regardless of education, experience or ordination status, women often receive small, commuter, deteriorating buildings as appointments with memberships that are diminishing instead of first churches. These appointments typically come with little to no pay as salaries. First churches, however, are mostly given to men and are considered prominent churches, significant in size with better salaries, mostly positioned in favorable locations. For example, a first church appointment in the ANGAC would be in downtown Atlanta, GA verses a smaller city like Palmetto, GA. Notably, women have received first church appointments in smaller conferences in Georgia, but not in the ANGAC.

Therefore, even with a slight majority over men in overall membership, clergywomen in the ANGAC are still under represented as senior pastors. This is not just an issue in the ANGAC, but also an issue for women in ministry throughout the denomination. Although clergywomen make up the majority membership of most annual conferences, they still receive lesser appointments. There is still a significant difference in the representation. With the number of women pastors significantly low in comparison
to the membership of the conference, it is possible that clergywomen may feel called to a different path of ministry than senior pastor. It is also possible that the appointments offered are so insufficient that they seek higher salaries elsewhere; or they could have family or other demands that take priority. Either way, the fact that the number is unquestionably lower than male clergy is significant.

Although progress has been made for women in ministry in the ANGAC and the AME Church in general, the push for equality or parity with men is still an issue of concern. Despite the exponential growth of appointments and leadership positions, women in ministry do not have comparable clergy positions as men. Unfortunately, the AME church is an institution with remnants of patriarchal views stemming from historical traditions. There are still apprehensions about clergywomen in the pulpit and denominational leadership.

Notably, clergywomen do not have an issue with equality in the ordination process. The AME Church’s policy on ordination is standard for both women and men. As mentioned above, it is governed by the Board of Examiners process and based on education requirements. However, this was not always the case. Since its founding in 1816, men monopolized clergy positions of the AME Church. In 1872, women in ministry of the AME Church banded together at the General Conference to push for ordination. It would be seventy-six years before the first woman, Rebecca M. Glover was ordained in 1948. Sarah Hughes was ordained earlier in 1884 to the office of deacon by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner. However, the General Conference in 1888 overturned her ordination. Thus, it would be sixty-four years later before a woman was ordained again in
the AME Church without being rescinded. It would not be until 1960 before women received the right to ordination throughout the denomination. Furthermore, it would be in the year 2000, two-hundred and thirteen years from the inception of the AME Church, before a female bishop is elected in the AME Church.

Since that time, there has only been three additional women elected to office of bishop. However, there are twenty bishops serving, two of them are female. There are nine general officers serving, one is a female. In the history of the denomination, there has only been three women elected as general officers, only one ordained. Therefore, without question, there is still room for improvement of gender equality in the AME Church, as well as the ANGAC.

Certainly, the opportunity of ordination did not suffice the issue of gender equality nor did the elections of female bishops or general officers. Women in ministry still face the challenge of acceptance in a male-dominated institution. They are still viewed as incapable of being in positions of authority or decision making. As such, women in ministry in the ANGAC, and throughout the church, constantly push for equal representation both in clergy positions and committees. In the ANGAC, there are thirty-four women serving on committees. This number is inclusive of laity which indicates that clergywomen are underrepresented here as well.

Board of Examiners

The same disparity is seen in the Board of Examiners (“Board”). There are sixty-four candidates in the Board, thirty-six women and twenty-eight men. There are more women candidates in the Board than men. However, the current leadership of the Board
is imbalanced. There are thirty total Board members and advisors, ten women and twenty men. All of them are or have been pastors. Therefore, not only is the current Board leadership underrepresented in women, it also lacks diversity in vocational representation.

The Board of Examiners sole responsibility is to receive candidates who have been licensed to preach in their respective Quarterly Conference. These candidates are recommended to the Annual Conference Board of Examiners for admission to the conference. The Board is to examine teach, counsel, and nurture the candidates. During Annual Conference, the Board submits a report of the candidates’ status for deacon and elder ordination. Included in the report are also candidates remaining in the Board due to not meeting college and seminary requirements. To receive deacon orders, a candidate must complete a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution. For Elder’s orders, they must meet all requirements of the Board and obtain a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary.

Most candidates make it through admissions and first year. However, many are held up in the second year by the Board for not meeting the education requirement. Until they meet this requirement, they are placed “on hold” by the Board to the Annual Conference. The same scenario goes for fourth year candidates who have not met the requirements of a seminary degree. They will also be placed “on hold” until they have obtained the appropriate degree.

There are also candidates who are classified as “locals.” These are candidates who have met the local ministry requirements of the Annual Conference. These requirements
are to have at least an associate degree and permission from the pastor in charge to be ordained with local status as a deacon or elder. Locals are confined to their local church for the duration of their ministry. They are not on the itinerant track and cannot travel from church to church. They are dedicated to the local church and must serve under the supervision of their pastor, an itinerant elder. They are subject to abrogating their ordination status and will have to surrender their license if they do otherwise.

Typically, locals are over fifty years old and do not meet the requirements of itinerancy. Mostly, they have been in their local church for a significant time and are content with the status of local deacon or elder. They carry all the rites to perform sacraments under the supervision of a pastor at their local church. They are licensed or ordained for the sole purpose of ministering in the local church that recommended their ordination.

Research Design

Turning now to the research design of this project. There were twenty women selected as participants from the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference and the Board of Examiners. The participants were comprised of senior pastors (Itinerant Elders), bi-vocational clergy (non-pastors), ordained deacons, and women who have left the AME Church to navigate their ministry elsewhere. In preparation for the study, I received permission from the Dean of the Board of Examiners to conduct the survey. I also received permission from the pastor of Allen Temple AME Church, Atlanta, GA for the focus groups. See Appendix B. After receiving the permissions and starting the research, I was met with a challenge of deciding on the type of method for this study.
After looking at the research, the best method was the qualitative method. This was the best approach because it returned the data needed. Moreover, the selected instruments would accurately measure the participants’ reactions to the study to show what the participants felt or thought about the problem or issue.¹ Using qualitative measures was crucial to understanding the participants’ experiences, social realities, and perceptions. This method afforded a semi-structured design that would provide open-ended questions for the instruments. These open-ended questions were essential to getting accurate data reflecting the participants’ knowledge and experience. These questions would allow transparency and full knowledge on the subject by the participants, returning incredibly valuable information for the project.

The first instrument used was a survey designed by Survey Monkey via Mercer University’s Office of Research and Compliance. There were fourteen questions asked of each participant. The structure of the questions allowed for the participants to respond in their own words with unlimited text, adding depth and context to the responses. This design was a significant way to draw inferences from the selected participants. The survey was anonymous and confidential and allowed the participants to give candid answers. They were very open and honest in their responses. Therefore, the open-ended questions reduced the chance of collecting ambiguous responses.

Focus Groups Design and Adjustments

The second instrument used was the focus group design. Initially, the focus group structure would separate the twenty women into four different groups to observe their

¹ Creswell, 186.
behaviors, expressions, and interactions around each question. The focus groups would
be held at Allen Temple AME Church in Atlanta GA. Each group’s design would
ultimately collect data from “purposely selected participants to [help] understand the
problem and research question.” It would obtain detailed information individually and
collectively as a group providing knowledge on an issue. These focus groups afforded an
opportunity to clarify the survey responses of the twenty participants.

The design of the focus groups was semi-structured with questions by the
moderator with opportunities for participants to ask questions for discussions. A light
meal would be provided for the participants. The outline for the focus groups was kept
simple beginning with greetings by the moderator, introduction to the project,
introductions of the participants, and the structured questions to follow. See Appendix C.

Unfortunately, there were challenges with the original focus groups design. Many
of the participants had scheduling conflicts with the days presented, particularly the
senior pastors. Many were attending denominational or district meetings. Others were
planning activities within their churches to raise money for their budgets. This posed an
issue with getting adequate participation for the study. Therefore, an alternative and
convenient approach was needed to get at a majority of participants for the data.

Adjustments to the Project

In order to make adjustments to the focus groups design, I had to first find the
best tool to use for this study. I wanted to ensure the new design would return the
necessary data needed for research. I researched ways to conduct online focus groups and

\(^2\) Ibid., 189.
decided the best option would be a web-based software. I thought of the platforms like Google Hangout or Skype. However, they had limited number of functions and a cap on attendees. I decided to go with a premium focus group software with capabilities needed for the success of this project. I chose the web-based software FocusGroupIt. It was free with ten participants but had price packages for over ten participants. The software was user-friendly with a platform designed for discussion among participants for dialogue. It had an option to choose the structured template or customize your focus group. It also had an email template to invite participants to the focus group discussion.

The platform also had an anonymous and private feature for confidential purposes. Participants were given anonymous names upon sign in. This identification number allowed them to sign in at any time, from anywhere, and remain anonymous. Since this feature was active for the focus groups, I left the discussions live for weeks after the deadline to respond. The participants were sent weekly reminders of the active groups. I also received daily activity reports of the progress of the discussions. Therefore, this adjustment worked well to meet the challenges of the participants. Although the participants still wrestled with their schedules, the convenience of the web-based focus groups was a favorable option. It allowed the participants to login from multiple devices for discussions at their leisure.

Challenges of the Project

Despite the adjustments, there were still challenges with the project. The timing of the data collection was in the middle of the holidays which made scheduling very difficult. Also, the AME Church was sadly impacted by the sudden deaths of both the
Dean of the Board of Examiners of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference and a retired Senior Bishop of the AME Church. These were huge loses to our denomination and was a very sad time. It halted the process as the participants had significant connections to them and were respectfully mourning. Therefore, getting responses back for the survey were slower than expected.

The other challenge was the Sixth Episcopal District (Georgia) was preparing for two big meetings, Turner Theological Seminary at the ITC’s Founders Day celebration, and the district-wide Founders Day in Savannah, GA. Many of the participants were preparing to attend these meetings and would need additional time. There were reminder emails sent out to the participants to attempt to keep the process moving. However, it was challenging to get responses in a timely fashion.

Strengths of the Project

One of the project’s strengths was the semi-structured design. The anonymity also helped to return candid and invaluable information. The open-ended structured questions were beneficial in collecting data for this project. They helped to bring order to the design and return more information than requested. The qualitative method was also instrumental as it gave opportunity for the participants to expound on their responses. Lastly, the ability to use a reliable, web-based program for the focus groups helped to complete the study amidst challenges.

Weaknesses of the Project

In terms of weaknesses for this project, the original focus groups design would have been a good addition to this project. It would have provided observations of
expressions, body language, group decisions, and an idea of which topics were significant to the participants. The web-based structure limited the comments and dialogue between the participants. It would have been helpful to observe how the four different groups responded to the focus group topics. Also, it would have possibly expanded data collected for this research study.

Another weakness was the difficulty in finding female, full-time senior pastors in the ANGAC who were not bi-vocational. Possibly due to the insignificant salaries received from smaller church appointments, many women work outside of their church appointments. Therefore, I decided to go with senior pastors who were itinerant elders in the church. I also decided to select bi-vocational clergy (non-pastors) as participants as well. This helped to get enough participation from the membership in the ANGAC. It made the selection process easier to find adequate participants.

Conclusion

Despite the adjustments and challenges met with this study, the project returned ample data for research purposes. Also, the ministry context proved helpful in finding participants for this study. Unfortunately, there was a delay in the data collection process with the adjustment to the focus groups design. However, valid and sufficient responses were retrieved from both instruments, providing enough data for the project. This data is outlined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: RESULTS AND INFERENCES FROM DATA COLLECTED

This chapter presents research findings of the call narratives and data collected from the survey and focus groups. It outlines the responses from the participants and lends support to the thesis of this project. The results from each instrument are summarized and outlined throughout this chapter. Some of the data is extracted from the instruments to highlight the responses. The data is presented in various forms to capture the results.

The data collection plan began with invitation emails sent to the twenty selected participants with a survey link and consent form for permission to use their data. See Appendix D. The email also expressed anonymity and that no personal information would be collected or used. The email explained that a focus group would follow the survey to expound on the responses collected. Participation in the study would take approximately ten minutes for the survey and one hour for the focus group. See Appendix E.

Out of the twenty women selected, eighteen responded to the invitation. One of the women called to decline the invitation due to church obligations and scheduling issues. The other never responded either way to the invitation. Fifteen of the eighteen women received the survey. The other three women were part of a separate group of women who left the AME Church to navigate their ministries elsewhere. They were not included in the survey because the questions were geared towards the women presently in
in the ANGAC. Instead, a separate focus group was designed with customized topics specific to their circumstance. See Appendix F.

In both focus groups, questions were designed to foster group discussions and additional topics of interest. Each topic would be presented by the moderator for discussion. There would be unlimited text and time allotted for each topic with the ability to respond to one another. The participants could also make comments or “like” a response using the FocusGroupIt platform. They could ask questions of the group or moderator. This was a great way to capture the reactions of the participants on certain topics. None of the focus groups responses were done in video or audio, only in text format. This was expressed to the participants with assurance that no recording would take place.

For the first focus group, there were six topics for discussion among the fifteen participants. These six topics were designed to elaborate on the responses collected from the survey. They were to capture specific information from the participants. Also, the structure was designed to not overload the participants with topics without leaving enough room for discussion in the group.

The second focus group had twelve questions. Since this group was not part of the fifteen surveyed, it was important to capture as much data using this one instrument as possible. The questions were strategically designed with an overarching goal to get honest and candid responses from the participants. Since this group was comprised of those who left the church, it was important to design topics that would not only capture
their call experience, but their experience with the AME Church. It was also important to know their reason for leaving the denomination and what their current ministry is.

Both instruments were adequate for research needed for this study. The topics were designed with the participants in mind, as well as the overall goal of the project. They were structured to include clear and concise topics to avoid obscurity. Also understanding the possible reservation felt with speaking about issues of the denomination, it was imperative to protect the anonymity of each participant. As a result, the participants seemed comfortable participating in both the survey and focus groups. The results from both instruments are detailed below.

Inferences from Survey Results

The first question on the survey asks the participants’ consent to participate in the survey. All fifteen participants responded to this question in the affirmative. The second question, however, captures the ministerial vocations of the participants to show diversity in the selected. This aspect is crucial to this study to show various levels of ministry for the participants. This was key to return enough data to support this study. See Figure 3 below.

[Space intentionally left blank]

1 Brackets indicate the removal of possible participant’s identifiable information.
Although it was explained that the survey was anonymous, some participants chose to skip this question. It could have been an oversight or persons may’ve misunderstood the question to ask for specific church names that would possibly identify them. Unfortunately, the reason cannot be determined as there weren’t any additional questions or steps to capture this information. Nevertheless, the data collected was enough to draw inferences for this project.

The chart above is analogous to the make-up of women in the ANGAC. It is important to show that each group of women was represented. To get responses from various perspectives with mixed views, it was essential to have a diverse group of women. The experiences they bring to the study is compelling. Their individual contributions helped to shape this project.

Turning now to Question 3. This question was significant in that it focused on the
participants’ knowledge of Amanda Berry Smith. I posed this question without any background knowledge of her and or her ministry. It was interesting to see the responses. Nine people responded to this topic and six skipped the question. Out of the nine women who responded, six of them knew Amanda Berry Smith. Five of them elaborated on her characteristics. One called her a trailblazer, preacher and woman in ministry. She was also called a “shero” and relentless in pursuing her call. One participant admired her for being persistent amidst disappointment and adversity. These responses affirmed the importance of Smith’s ministry to women in ministry in the ANGAC.

Question six was also significant to this study. It addresses the perceptions of non-traditional vocations in the ANGAC. Ten participants gave responses and five skipped this topic. To give voice to the participants’ views, I have chosen to give full text of their responses.²

Results of Topic No. 6 of the Survey

Describe any differences you note between those called to non-traditional (non-pastoral) vocations as generally viewed by the ANGAC, please explain.
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

• We continue to [only] recognize those in ministry that acknowledge the call to the pastoral ministry, but we know that God gives numerous calls as supported by scripture. The level of support for non-pastoral ministry is lacking or basically nil.
• It is frowned upon. To be totally honest non-traditional ministerial vocations are not acknowledged or even recognized. The focus is on those who have expressed that they have been called to pastor a church.
• I believe that some may see it as a distraction why others understand that some of us are called to multiple task, not just one.

² Full texts of all survey responses can be found in Appendix G.
• Simply put, those that seem to be called to non-traditional vocations seem to be viewed as ineffective and useless as if their call doesn't matter if they are going to become ordained clergy in the itineracy.
• Non-traditional vocations seem to take second place to the rather traditional vocations (pastoring). The ANGAC seems to give priority to pastors and chaplaincy. From a secular viewpoint the profession and title determine your status. We are admonished to be bi-vocational, depending on the status of the charge. However, in my opinion, being bi-vocational in many instances hinders and prevents the work of ministry.
• I think the ANGAC has a much better perspective as relates to non-traditional roles. The question that does always surface is if you aren't going to pastor or chaplain do you need an ordination.
• Those called to non-traditional vocations typically are not viewed in the same light as those of us who serve the church full-time. Although chaplaincy and other vocations are essential, this seems to not have as great of a sense of value within the church.
• The ANGAC does not support roles outside of the Senior Pastor. There is no purposeful attempt to support counseling, evangelism, teaching or congregational care ministers.
• It appears that calling is regularly questioned in its authenticity as well as those individuals seem never to be compensated adequately for the use of their gifts.
• What are you considering "non-traditional" vocations? If this is referencing callings to chaplaincy or Christian education or evangelism or missions or even serving in an associate pastor role, then there is a great disparity, The Connection as a whole in an orthodox hierarchical thinking places more value on pastoral ministry than it does on the many other roles that help to shape the well-being of the church.

As seen in the results above, most participants had similar perspectives. They seem to parallel one another. Most of the women felt there is a disparity in views of non-traditional vocations versus traditional vocations in the ANGAC. There is not enough support for these roles. Although there may be districts or conferences more open than others, this seems to mirror many perspectives throughout the denomination, in my
experience and conversations with colleagues. I would suggest further study be conducted to give more attention to this issue.

Another topic that returned interesting results is number eight from the survey. This topic focused on traditional vocations, pastoral ministry. The question was posed to participants who felt called to pastor. It asked how they felt their call is perceived by their colleagues. I specifically left out any references to gender to not sway the responses. I wanted very candid and honest answers as to whether it included males or females. Ten participants responded to this topic and five skipped it. Notably, one of women responded with “not applicable.”

This topic returned mixed results. It appears that some of the pastors felt they are respected by their colleagues. One woman said, “They honor the call but fail to honor you in the fullness of the call when it comes to leadership and male views of women in ministry.” There was also a participant who felt respected by her colleagues. However, some of them are intimidated by her “giftedness” and try to minimalize her gifts. She recalls one experience where a colleague told her to “scale back” herself to not be so intimidating. In contrast to her experience, another participant expressed how her peers hold her in high esteem. She felt she has gained their respect. This was not the sentiment of all participants. In fact, one of them felt she received mixed views from her colleagues about her being a pastor. Some are very supportive while others seem to look down on her because of her age, gender, and tenure in ministry.

There were two women in ministry who felt they did not have to justify or explain their calling to those who questioned their ministry. One participant said they were “not
accepted by [their] colleagues and not believed to be equipped to handle pastoral ministry.” From these women in ministry, it appears that their experiences have not been as positive as others. They seem to have been subjected to colleagues who questioned their call and ability as women in ministry. However, there seems to be a determination to continue their path of ministry without permission or affirmation from their colleagues.

Although mostly pastors responded to this question, there were two non-pastors who responded. One said, “I have not received confirmation from God that I am called to pastoral ministry or shall I say traditional pastoral ministry. Many tell me they see me pastoring or that I have been called to pastor, but until God confirms that I will not pursue pastoral ministry.” Another one had a very similar response and has not received the call from God to pastor. She says, “I'm not called to pastoral ministry, though that seems to be the desire of others FOR me.” These responses indicate that these two women are still navigating their ministry and feel pressure from outside forces to be pastors. The reasons are not given. Perhaps they are still praying and waiting to hear from God. Perhaps they are still wrestling with the path of ministry they seek. Either way, the pressure of pastoring is evident, at least from the perspectives of these women in ministry. It is apparent that the leadership desires for clergy in the ANGAC to pastor with no other options for alternative paths of ministry.

Question 9 asked the participants to describe any challenges they faced as female preachers in the ANGAC. Ten participants responded to this topic and five skipped it. This topic returned very candid responses from the participants. The common thread in all responses was the lack of equal opportunities for women. The other sentiment was the
lack of support for women in ministry. The tone of each participant seemed to communicate frustration and disappointment that these issues still plagued women in ministry. It is still a struggle to get full acceptance of a woman’s call and ability to lead. There are still stereotypical roles associated with women in ministry in the ANGAC. To give full exposure to this issue, detailed responses are outlined below in the voices and experiences of these women. I felt a summary of these responses would remove the validity and candidness of each participant.

Results of Topic No. 9 of the Survey

Describe any challenges you feel female preachers face in the ANGAC as it relates to their ministerial calling?
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

- Validity, lack of support, stereotyping, and compromise their uniqueness as females and what positive attributes that brings to the ministry discipline vs reminders that they may not be strong enough to handle it as their male counterparts.
- The primary challenges I have noticed are being respected as a woman, being granted preaching opportunities comparable to male preachers, and being represented equally during district/annual conference services. I also notice a difference in how appointments are made with female pastors vs male pastors. In addition, female pastors tend to get appointed to smaller less vibrant congregations.
- The challenges I have noticed would be it appears that even though there are a large number of women now in ministry, it still feels as though women do not get the same opportunities as men to speak at local churches as a guest for events unless it is "women's day" or a "WMS" day.
- More often than not, the call is challenged and questioned that if we are in the process and looking to be ordained and not go into the pastoral ministry then why are we in the process?
- Female preachers do not appear to have the same opportunities as men within the conference.
• The majority of people coming through the Board and completing requirements are women. The majority of Board members are men and several do not have the appropriate credentials.

• Some individuals still struggle with female preachers and pastors. These struggles are not based on anything other than superficial gender issues. For this reason, female preachers are often met with the challenge of proving themselves as worthy even before they have preached their first sermon. They are seen as not having the ability to do what their male counterparts can or have done without being given the chance.

• Female preachers who are called to pastor would often be sent to the churches [with] limited potential. (Circuit churches, aged, few members). Female preachers do not support and empower each other as much. Single women preachers were treated less seriously.

• Likely never to be given an opportunity to exercise their gifts of their ministerial calling. Never compensated financially because of the belief by those in authority that unless you are in pastoral ministry you have not been called or chosen. Rejected by female congregates more than others because of how they have been socialized. People in general perceive God as having a male gender. Spiritual formations are flawed and skewed due to a lack of Christian education doing formative years. Gender biases in leadership! Fear of leadership to take a stand against sexism.

• (I am defining "female preachers" as those who pastor). First, it is my contention that many female pastors in ANGAC are their own stumbling blocks. Too many seem to look for validation from "the boys" and do not take risks to expand themselves. Female pastors are often assigned to smaller congregations and truthfully the congregations remain that under most female pastors but the pastor (like many of the same-minded male pastors) still expects to be "given a larger charge" even though she has not bloomed where planted. Second, it is a great challenge that female pastors are not afforded the opportunities to pastor, as male counterparts. Often females are more versed, and educated, and skilled, but are either not considered, or have not made the necessary connections to have a decision maker (a sponsor) call her name when opportunities are being discussed. A third challenge is support for one another. Because of the insecurities brought about by the first challenge mentioned, many are unable to be genuine in their support of other. For those who are called to the preaching ministry (not pastors but for some other non-traditional vocation as you have defined it) a challenge is to be resonant in the fact that everyone is not called the pastoral ministry but that the ministry to which you are called is so needed in the kingdom.
Board of Examiners Survey Results

In terms of the Board of Examiners, there were mixed responses. Participants expressed what they liked best about the Board of Examiners and what they disliked. Mostly, they appreciated the Board for helping them to examine their call. The call class in the admissions year of the Board was a great asset. It helped them to get clarity of the call. Participants expressed the comradery with classmates in their Board classes. It was agreed that the Board process fosters relationships, mentorships, and networking opportunities for candidates. One participant expressed that “the BOE is an excellent opportunity to be introduced to and learn the basic tenets of Theology and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The BOE is an excellent vehicle for individuals to expand upon and further develop their Call narrative.” The learning opportunities in the Board seem to be a common sentiment, particularly in learning local church operations, pastoral duties, and advice about administration.

One of the women asserts the Board is a good vehicle to examine your call. However, “if you are not strong in your calling, the process can challenge you to compromise your [call] to fit the limited expectation of the board.” An example was given by one of the participants who said, “I was very clear I was not called to Pastor. The BOE acted as if I was then not called. We would often have to say we were called to

---

3 Brackets indicate the removal of typos and the insertion of suggested wording for sentence structure.
Pastor just to avoid the backlash.” The overall expectation of the Board is for those in the process, seeking ordination, should seek also parish ministry.

More of this sentiment is found in the responses to Topic 12 about whether non-traditional vocations are incorporated in the Board of Examiners. Nine participants responded to the topic and six skipped it. Out of the nine, two persons responded with “not applicable.” However, unanimously all responses said non-traditional vocations were not incorporated in the Board process. Notably, one of the responses said candidates “should decide if they are seeking ordination when a license will do.” This response seems to suggest again that ordination is for pastoral ministry only. It also seems to speak implicitly about the Board process in the ANGAC. It is heavily concentrated on the pastoral side. According to a participant, “it has been firmly stated that if you are not going into pastoral ministry then they don't want to ordain you.” This parallels to the participant above who felt compelled to say she was called to pastor to avoid any backlash.

One must wonder whether administering sacraments and performing ceremonies should be conducted by pastors only or ordained clergy. In other words, is ordination the authority to pastor or is it authorization for full rights as ordained clergy? These responses call for a closer look into this notion. It is obviously the opinion of many of the participants that the Board process is geared towards those who desire to pastor and does not create spaces for those on non-traditional tracks. This is certainly not an issue just for women. However, it is the opinion of some women in ministry. Male colleagues are more
prone to seek a pastoral assignment than women. This makes sense if they are receiving the better appointments as stated in Topic 9.

When the participants were asked if they were in position to make one change to the Board process what would it be? They all gave positive responses. The suggestions were all centered on creating a track for non-traditional vocations with teachers operating in that vocation. One suggested to incorporate a ministry exploration course to cover other components of ministry. Another participant had a similar response, “I would create a track that recognizes and acknowledges non-traditional ministerial vocations and avenues to pursue such vocations. This would entail required classes being taught by ministers who have pursued such a track. Ordination (deacon/elder) should also be available to persons who God is leading in this direction.”

Both responses speak to the need for diversity in the Board process and its leadership. In fact, one of the women captures this in her response that the ANGAC should “diversify the Board members. Utilize non-traditional vocational roles to assess and evaluate candidates. Urge the church to balance the board with experienced gifted individuals in non-traditional vocations. Demonstrate the value of women in leadership to affect change in the general church.”

Therefore, it is without question that the participants want to see more diversity on the Board. As stated in Chapter 2, there is unequal representation of women on the Board, in annual conference appointments, and leadership in the AME Church in general. There is a direct correlation to the demographics in both the ANGAC and the AME Church. Certainly, this disparity is felt by the women in ministry in the ANGAC. Not
only is there an imbalance of women in these areas, there is also vocational inequality in the Board process and leadership. Both levels of diversity are lacking and needed for the Board to parallel the demographics of its community.

Turning to Topic 13 which expresses how the participants felt about the perception of women in ministry in the Board. Although this question has been addressed throughout the participants’ responses, it is beneficial to see their responses and reactions. The responses to this topic again prove that there is still much growth and development needed within the Board to create spaces where women can freely navigate their call without discrimination, trepidation or intimidation. An attempt to summarize these responses would silence these women from being heard. I chose to give space here to their voices in the responses outlined below.

Results of Topic No. 13 of the Survey

How do you feel about the perception of women in ministry in the Board of Examiners’ process?
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6

- There needs to be more inclusion on the part of the development of the teaching staff personnel selected to present more female leadership other than just the secretary position and more mentoring of women to develop them as is done with the male students.
- Although more women than men are entering the BOE process, my overall perception of women in the BOE process is that WIM are devalued [and] not groomed for ministry as the men are. Most often men are mentored, and women are not unless one seeks a mentor. Despite having women bishops, our BOE process and church in general still has a way to go when it comes to respecting WIM. The WIM organization is denied the recognition, credence and validity it is due, although it’s a bona fide organization.
- Women appear to be the majority currently in our BOE classes as indicated.
- Expectations seem to be higher, questions are harder and there is no regard for the complexity of the roles that women play in their individual lives. I
also think that those that are sincerely called to the pastoral ministry are met with mind games and other challenges that they themselves begin to question their call to that office.

- There still seems [to be] somewhat a disconnect when it comes to women in ministry. Women are readily becoming the majority students in the BOE, but the minority leaders on the Board.
- I think men are intimidated by the numbers of women and the skill set of the women that come through the BOE.
- I felt dehumanized during my BOE process. Remarks were often made about my beauty which was uncomfortable. When I was pregnant a Pastor stated, "I know you and your husband have a lot of fun" (as this was my second child). Not one woman on the BOE ever spoke up against the male remarks.
- They can teach but they cannot provide adequate leadership roles because most have not had the required years of traditional vocational roles to serve on the Board.
- I feel that women in ministry are seen as smart and skilled ministers.

From these responses, there seems to be a notion that women aren’t valued the same as men in the Board by some. Although women make up the majority of the Board, they are not reflected in the leadership. They are still limited to roles deemed for women like secretarial positions. They are allowed to teach but are marginally given roles requiring decision making or influence. It is interesting to see this pattern throughout the responses. It is obvious that improvements are needed in the Board structure and leadership.

Call Narratives Assessment

Another result from the survey are the call stories of the participants. Some were very detailed in their responses about their call while others were very limited. This data allowed me to compare the six elements found in Amanda Berry Smith’s call narrative to those found in the call narratives of the participants. Interestingly, many of the
participants knew Smith as a preacher, but not as an AME preacher. They were not able to give much information, if any, about her ministry. Many did not know her history with the AME Church. Nevertheless, their call narratives and ministry experiences are similar to hers. I have outlined my comparative study in Table 1 below. Notably, most participants like Smith, experienced two or more elements in their call narratives. See Table 1.

Table 1. Six Elements of Call Narrative of Amanda Berry Smith and WIM of ANGAC from Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Divine Confrontations</th>
<th>Commissions</th>
<th>Objections</th>
<th>Reassurances</th>
<th>Visions</th>
<th>Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the participants’ narratives described their commissions from God similar to Amanda Berry Smith. Her commission came in a vision from God as she sat in a church

---

Data from this chart was drawn from Question 4 of the survey. Participants 1, 5, 12, 13, and 14 represent the five women who skipped this question.
listening to a sermon. She saw the letters G and O followed by God’s voice telling her to “go preach.” In some form, God commissioned both the women in ministry and Smith to “go preach.” They all felt called by God for a particular assignment. Although, the commissions came in various forms, all were essentially called by God as women without reservation.

Four of the participants experienced visions in their call. Participant 11 describes her experience as a dream. She recalls being awaken at two o’clock every morning until she answered the call. She was “shown a vision of [her] preaching to a sea of people all across the world.” She doubted she could be called as a woman. She had fear and anxiety about the dream. Finally, she decided to pray and seek God. “Once I realized why I was being awakened, I began to pray to God and read God’s word. In these moments God confirmed my call.” Participant 10 also had a vision as a child of her preaching in a pulpit. As she got older she recalled the dream and felt a yearning in her spirit to accept the call to preach.

Similarly, Smith’s experienced visions in her call experience as expressed above. In 1855 she became gravely ill and her father encouraged her to pray. After praying, she fell into a deep sleep. She recalls a visitation by an angel telling her to “go back.” She did not understand the message but knew she could not die. God had called her to something larger than herself. The vision confirmed her call by showing her preaching at a large camp meeting in front of thousands of people.

Another key element for some of the call narratives is reassurance. Many of the women expressed fear and doubt in accepting their call. Participant 11 said, “God calmed
my doubts and fears and gave me the courage to move forward.” Fear and doubt seem to be common emotions in the call narratives. Smith doubted her call for fear of being rejected as a woman called to preach. She also feared her message of sanctification would not be received by the church. “When she began promoting sanctification in the AME Church, she said she became, a speckled bird among my own people on account of the professing of the blessing of holiness.” This same fear and doubt is felt by many of the women in ministry in the ANGAC. They have fear of acceptance or being worthy of the call. This fear is seen throughout their call narratives. Therefore, reassurance by God is essential to the call experience. It was for Amanda Berry Smith and is for the women in ministry in the ANGAC.

Smith also felt rejection with her Quaker style dress. She decided to let go of her membership with the ladies’ societies where they wore elaborate outfits and adorn hats. Instead, she adopted the Quaker style as her signature style for years to come. See Appendix I. This outfit was an issue of concern for her fellow delegates at the 1872 General Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. They felt she was improperly dressed and did not belong at the conference. However, as fortune would have it, the conference meetings were moved to Fisk University and one of the Fisk Jubilee Singers recognized her. He asked her to join them on stage and sing a solo. Her voice drew an enthusiastic applause that silenced her critics. “The AME newspaper account of the incident called Smith ‘an evangelist in the truest sense of the word,’ noting that her career in the East has

---

5 Israel, *Washerwoman to Evangelist*, 49-50.
been to the glory of God.”⁶ Therefore, the rejection felt by Smith did not hinder her from carrying out her call.

Another element seen throughout the call narratives is objection. Both Smith and WIM in the ANGAC objected to their calls. Smith’s objection would not only be because she was a woman. It would also be because she wrestled with the need for salvation. She had not been converted and felt her sins interfered with her acceptance of her call. After a near death experience, she vowed to “pray and live a Christian life. [She] thought God had spared [her] life for a purpose, so [she] meant to be converted, in [her] own way quietly.”

This conversion would not come easy. Smith constantly struggled internally about her call and conversion. She also felt tormented by the devil who constantly tempted her, making her feel unworthy of conversion. Conversion for Smith was the salvation she needed to bring her peace. She had fasted and prayed, but nothing would lift the burden of living as a sinner. Determined to receive salvation, she vowed to not give in, but to “pray once more,” and if there [was] any such thing as salvation, [she was] determined to have it this afternoon or die.” She kept praying until she felt peace. She said, “the burden rolled away… [She] felt it when it left [her], and a flood of light and joy swept through [her] soul…. God helped [her] and He had settled it once and for all.” Smith, in her heart, had received conversion. Like Paul, she was transformed from sinner to saint.

⁶ Ibid., 56.
She was a “new creation, free from bondage to sin and fit for service as an instrument of divine will.”

Even with salvation, she could not escape life’s troubles. She continued to struggle with her call and sought advice from her neighbor who told her she needed sanctification, a second blessing acquired after conversion. One Sunday, Smith went to Green Street Methodist Episcopal Church to hear John S. Inskip preach and received sanctification. “She believed she had come at last into ‘the blessed light of full salvation.’ She remembered feeling at the time that if there was a platform around the world I would be willing to get on it and walk and tell everybody of this sanctifying power of God.”

This conversion moved Smith from the fearful washerwoman to the called evangelist.

Similarly, the women in this study also wrestled with whether they were worthy of the call. They also struggled internally with factors regarding being chosen by God to preach as a woman. They too needed a conversion experience to feel the presence of the Spirit within them, giving them affirmation of their call. They also wrestled with whether they were truly called as a woman. Participant 3’s call narrative is a great example of the wrestle she felt as a woman. She said,

[My] calling consisted of a dialogue between God and I wherein I objected to my call as a woman. [I] had emotional stress because I had been socialized to believe that only men were called and chosen. In the past I had refused to attend my local church when a woman preached. My objection to my calling cont’d until I linked my refusal to [me not wanting to] accept my calling. [I would experience] challenging health [and] near death experiences before I accepted my call.

---


8 Ibid., 43.
You could feel the weight and struggle of her call. The misogynist views of what roles
women should have in the church overshadowed her call experience. She felt stressed and
uncertain about her call. Like Smith, she too struggled with the strain of being called as a
woman.

There were also participants who received their calls amidst grief and hardship. Participant 6 said her call “was born in a space of deep grief during which I felt God
telling me, I did not put more on you than you can bear...preach.” Participant 4 said she
“was going through a very difficult time and in [her] anguish asked God why this was
happening. God replied, I would use it for my ministry.” It is evident from these
responses that out of grief came purpose, a calling aligned with the will of God.

Comparably, Smith also endured grief and hardship amidst her call. In fact,
tragedy and grief were critical points in accepting her call. Her first husband left for the
Civil War and never returned. She later married James Smith, an ordained deacon of
Bethel AME Church, who deceived her about his desires for the itinerancy. This was
disappointing to Smith as she felt the only way to carry out her call was as a pastor’s
wife. Her tragedy did not stop there, four out of Smith’s five children died in infancy. To
make matters worse, James abandoned her at the death of their last child in the summer
of 1869. In November 1869, James died of stomach cancer. Therefore, Smith was twice
widowed and a single mother.

However, this was a turning point for Smith’s ministry. In 1870, she attended a
worship service at Fleet Street AME Church in Brooklyn, New York. She testified about
her struggles with her call. She also expressed that God gave her a message for another
congregation, Mount Pisgah AME Church in Salem New Jersey. She would later preach that message to that congregation. In fact, she “preached to that church between January 25 and March 12, 1871, and was publicly credited with 156 conversions and 112 ‘accessions’ to Mount Pisgah.”

Shortly thereafter, Smith decided to go into ministry full-time to pursue her call. “For the next nine years, she preached in African Methodist Episcopal churches, to gatherings of Methodists, and at “holiness” meetings throughout the eastern and Midwestern parts of the United States. By 1870, ministry was Smith’s full-time vocation, and she became known all the way from Maine to Tennessee.” Her pastor, Nelson Turpin, gave her a letter of recommendation to preach for any pastor that would allow her to speak. In October 1870, she was invited to preach a revival by the pastor of an AME Church in Salem, New Jersey. Under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, her “spiritual journey impelled her to preach in spite of place, time, and lack of ordination…Smith [would hold] prayer meetings in Virginia and any place people let her speak.”

In conclusion, the survey results revealed similarities in both Smith and the women in ministry of the ANGAC. They both wrestled with accepting their calls as women in an historical patriarchal institution. They found that even through grief and tragedy, calls are birthed. Lastly, they both experienced gender inequality in the church as

---

9 Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 79.


11 Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 79.
it relates to women in ministry. Although there has been progress over the years, the responses show women in ministry do not feel as valued as men. Like Participant 15, they feel constantly under scrutiny and marginalized because of her femininity. Moreover, the issue of inferiority to men is still felt today as in the nineteenth century.

Inferences from Focus Groups

In the focus groups, I presented a modified version of my abstract as topics in both groups. See Appendix H. The abstract was a good introduction to the project and Amanda Berry Smith. Its purpose was to give background information of Smith’s ministry and history with the AME Church. In the original focus groups design, I was going to verbally present the background of the project to the participants. However, since we did not have any in person focus groups, I decided an abstract would be sufficient.

The responses to the abstract were positive. Most participants knew of Smith but were not aware of her ministry or connection to the AME Church. They also were not aware of her renowned career as an international evangelist amidst resistance from the denomination. It was interesting to see how the women were enlightened and encouraged by Smith’s call experience. They were intrigued by her boldness and ministry success.

Another factor retrieved from the data was the need for women clergy to support one another in the ANGAC. Participant 7 felt a connection with Smith’s story and shared a very detailed response stating,

In reading the abstract my first thought (really a question) is has anything really changed? She was also limited by her denomination who did not embrace her non-traditional ministry in her reach. This is all too familiar. This [woman of
[God] struggled with her call to ministry and faced many obstacles and oppositions along the way as we all do. She did not appear to have the much needed sisterhood and support of other women that we truly need in ministry. She persisted with her call despite these denominational and family/marriage challenges which I am sure took a toll on her. I am encouraged by her story. I am hopeful and prayerful that our denomination would get to a point that non-traditional ministry is formalized in the BOE process and that it is not frowned upon and negated.

Similar to the other participants, she felt encouraged by her ministry and tenacity. She also expressed her hopes for future inclusion of other paths of vocations within the Board process because of Smith’s influence. Her question, “has anything really changed?” draws parallels between Smith’s challenges within the denomination and hers. It is evident that she is drawing from her own experience. She states, “This is all too familiar.” A statement that indicates that there are still issues of acceptance and affirmation within the ANGAC for women in ministry. It is felt and prevalent. To use her words, there is still the challenge of “not being taken as seriously as male preachers.”

Another notable factor was the importance of prayer on the call journey. Many participants highlighted this as an essential part of their call and ministry. Another one wanted to ensure that upcoming women in the Board receive genuine, authentic advice about navigating ministry as a woman. Lastly, there was the importance of having a female mentor. Although most of the participants were influenced by both males and females, there was an emphasis on the importance of having a female mentor.

Focus Group 1 Results

Focus Group 1 was a follow-up to the survey questions presented to the fifteen selected participants. It was used to clarify or expound on the survey questions. The
survey began with an informative question as Topic 1. Its purpose was to share the year each participant accepted their call. See Figure 4. With no personal information extracted for this study, it was a way to further show the variation of ministerial experience for each participant. Only seven women participated in the focus group. Since there was a detailed description of results from the survey, I am only highlighting a couple of focus groups responses for this section.

![Chart of Call Acceptance Year](chart.png)

**Figure 4: Chart of Call Acceptance Year**

Many of the participants credit their acceptance of their call to persons who influenced or affirmed them. Participant 4 said it was her son who saw God’s calling on her. She recalled him saying, “Mommy, do it.” Participant 5 said she shared her calling with her pastor who encouraged her to do what God called her to do. Participant 7 vividly recalls being affirmed by her parents and husband. Later she would receive confirmation of her call from a mentor, another woman in ministry.
Focus Group 2 Results

This focus group was designed for women in ministry who left the AME Church. Invitations were sent to five participants and only three responded. The three participants varied in ministerial experience. Participant one accepted her call in 2006, Participant 2 in 2005, and Participant 3 in 1994. All three have different ordination statuses. Participant 1 was ordained as a deacon in 2009 and left the church shortly thereafter. Participant 2 was only licensed by the ANGAC. She left just short of being ordained a deacon. Participant 3 was ordained an Itinerant Elder in 2008.

After reading the abstract in Topic 3, only one of the participants knew Amanda Berry Smith. However, their responses to her experience were positive. Participant 1 called her “an excellent example of spiritual freedom.” She felt Amanda Berry Smith did not wait for permission from man, but chose the call commissioned by God. “Amanda Berry Smith sets the tone that ‘the call’ can only be fully realized through a divine encounter. This divine encounter(s) awakens us to a realm of spiritual activity whereby one cannot simply accept the limitations humanity attempts to place upon us or our ministry for that matter.” Participant 2 felt Amanda Berry Smith’s story showed “the need to share the relevance of women in ministry in the past in connection with the challenges faced today.” Each participant seemed fascinated by her resoluteness and persistence in pursuing her call. Many found similarities in her experience.

Brackets indicate the removal of typos and the insertion of suggested wording for sentence structure.
Inferences of Call Experiences

The call experience for these participants was very similar to the other fifteen candidates. They all described elements of their call. Participants 2 and 3 were more detailed in their experiences. Participant 2 had reservation about ministry from her experience as a daughter of an AME pastor. She also described the fear she had in answering her call. Participant 3 did not have the family dynamics as Participant 2, but she felt pressure of her call as a teenager. She recalls a vision by God in a dream where she was preaching to a crowd. She objected to the call because of her fear. However, once she got over the fear, she answered her call. She was supported by her family and her pastor. This was the reassurance she needed to pursue her call. Participant 1 did not outline any visions in her call, but she too met God’s commission with trepidation. She too received support from either family, friends, mentors, or her pastor.

In terms of the Board of Examiners, most participants had positive views about their experience. They felt the Board was a great place to network and meet fellow ministers. It was also a great way to find ministerial opportunities. This is often true for those enrolled in seminary and live in another state. Through the Board of Examiners, they can find a church and become a minister on staff under “watch care.”

The Board process was one that helped to shape their current ministries. However, all experiences were not positive. There were some experiences where some participants didn’t feel supported by women or men. Participant 3 says, “It's interesting that I sometimes felt that it was women ministers who did the most in trying to keep women in a certain traditional perception of being less than men.” However, she also felt men
didn’t take a woman’s call seriously and saw women in roles as spouses to minsters instead of possible ordained clergy. Participant 2 had a very different perspective. She recalls her father being “adamant about standing up for women in ministry as some of his co-laborers exhibited a rather chauvinistic mindset.” Two different perspectives, but very beneficial for this study. Although there are challenges, there is still support for women in ministry.

In terms of their experiences with the ANGAC, the participants shared very candid responses. Participant 1 felt the AME Church was “somewhat oppressive.” Participant 2 felt lonely and often an outsider with women in ministry as there were cliques among them. Participant 3, however, enjoyed her experience in the ANGAC and was given great opportunities in her local church because of it. It was in her local church that she experienced growth and development as a minister. She does add, “On the conference level, I have to admit I didn't like the conference, they seemed very political and fear based - a fear I think that is instilled in its leaders from the BOE onward. However, I didn't leave because of those things. I left because I sincerely felt that I was simply called somewhere else and I realized that every denomination has its strengths and weaknesses.”

The other two participants had the same sentiments in terms of their reasons for leaving the AME Church. It was a call from God that was the determining factor. A divine encounter with God propelled them to go and navigate their ministry elsewhere. Participant 1 said she felt a need to “relocate her gifts.” She felt the ministry God called
her to couldn’t be done in the AME Church. Participant 2 says her call to leave was an extension of her actual call from God. She states,

My decision to leave the AME Church was one that was an extension of the call on my life. I was not necessarily called to be AME but called to be one to minister the Gospel wherever God saw the need to place me. In addition, the politics of the denomination shifted my train of thought as it no longer was the church I grew up in and loved. Tradition was replaced with position and what seemed like status driven agendas. However, I must say there are things that I learned in the AME Church that I will always treasure that carry me even now through ministry.

Her decision to leave gave her freedom and more opportunities. Despite her leaving, she still credits the AME church for her ministerial learning experience. Participant 3 also expresses a sense of freedom in leaving the denomination. She currently serves as an assistant pastor at a nondenominational church. She says, “I think leaving has allowed me to discover ministry on my terms without being tied to a tradition or church…. But being there and leaving has also given me the desire to find ways to minister to and in various denominations.”

From these call narratives of women who left the AME Church, it can be beneficial for a conference, ANAGC especially, to hear that the deciding factor for these women to leave the denomination was the Holy Spirit. Unable to carry out their ministries in the AME Church, the Holy Spirit gave them freedom to fully utilize their gifts elsewhere. This further confirms that the role of the Holy Spirit is paramount in the call experience. It is critical in deciding paths of ministry. If anything, these results should prompt the AME Church to reconsider their position on what ministry looks like.
Holy Spirit as Liberator

One similar aspect found in both the survey and focus groups was the role of the Holy Spirit. Like Amanda Berry Smith, it was the influential factor in the participants call journey. The Holy Spirit affirmed them as women called to preach. The Holy Spirit also liberated them from the perceptions of others and ushered them to accept their calls. Both Participants 1 and 9 wrestled with their calls because of their gender. They described the fear and doubt felt in their call stories. Participant 6 also describes her struggle with feeling unworthy of the call. These responses are seamlessly parallel to Smith’s responses to her call. However, it was the Holy Spirit that freed them to walk fully in their calls. It was the Holy Spirit that removed the fear, doubt, and unworthiness that came with the commission from God. The Holy Spirit helped them to discern the path of ministry parallel to their gifts. It liberated them to use those gifts without reservation. Because of the liberating factor of the Holy Spirit, these women have pursued their calls amidst inequality and sexism in a male denominated institution.

For all, the Holy Spirit validated and affirmed them as women called by God. The Holy Spirit accepted them when others denied them. They realized that progress has been made. Women are now being licensed and ordained in the AME Church. However, ordination does not mean the fight is over. There is much work to be done to ensure that women in ministry are not just tolerated but celebrated by all. This is the effect of the Holy Spirit as it pertains to women in ministry. It deems them chosen by God and liberates them from the perceptions of others.
To capture the voice of women in ministry in the ANGAC as it relates to the Holy Spirit, I have included responses from Question 5 of the survey below:

How important is the Spirit as it relates to your calling? Please explain your answer.
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6

- I believe it is the Spirit that calls us and leads us in the process of defining the call that we receive. It is that same spirit that we come to rely on as we answer and strive to live out the calling, it gives us strength, clarity of vision, answers in the time of doubt and comfort in the midst of challenges.
- The Spirit is important in my call because it leads, guides and directs me and my life. I am in relationship with the Spirit of God such that I don't want to do anything unless the Spirit has led me to do so.
- The Spirit leads me. Some people may refer to it as their gut feeling or an inside voice, for me it is the Holy Spirit. It is important to me to be aligned with what it is the Holy Spirit is calling me to do.
- The Spirit is important because it's important to discern my own voice, feelings and emotions compared to an unction that cannot be mimicked or put off.
- The Spirit is the guiding force in my life and in my calling, which propels and leads me into learning, leading and serving humanity.
- I seek the Holy Spirit direction in all things. I need to feel the Power and Presence.
- The Spirit is incredibly essential to my calling. I do not believe that I preach out of my own power or might. I believe that the Spirit takes over and prompts my language, embodiment, and delivery.
- The Spirit is what has called me and keeps me called. This is not something I would choose for myself. Even when I think about stopping the spirit reminds me I don't have that option.
- It was the Spirit that spoke to me and the Spirit that is what pricked my heart to answer the call.

It is evident that the Holy Spirit is a critical factor in the call experience of both women in ministry of the ANGAC and Amanda Berry Smith. Not only does the Holy Spirit serve as a liberator, it also serves as guider in confirming paths of ministry. God
commissioned, but the Holy Spirit led them through the call experience. It not only affirmed them but helped them remain resolute in their call.

Conclusion

The results of the data collected from both the survey and focus groups were interesting and compelling. The results showed that representation of non-traditional vocations is non-existing in the Board of Examiners of the ANGAC. Moreover, there is little to no discussion about various paths of ministry. This could easily be woven into the “Call” class during the admissions year. Also, it appears that non-traditional roles are not supported or affirmed. The results suggest that there needs to be diversity on the Board with persons in non-traditional vocations part of the leadership.

The results also show that there is a lack of female leadership among the Board of Examiners which is counterproductive to the growth of the ANGAC and the denomination. The responses show that participants feel there is still inequality between male and female clergy in the conference. Even with those who left the church, there were challenges expressed as well. They felt stifled and unable to fully navigate their ministries within the denomination.

Although there are challenges with the Board, the results highlighted the attributes of the process. They showed the process is important in helping candidates understand ministry. It examined them and taught them an effective way to carry out their calls. It made persons accountable for their ministries. The process was also a great way to build lasting relationships and network. Overall, the participants were open and candid with their responses, returning significant results for this study.
Both the survey and focus groups helped to shape this chapter and substantiate this project. It helped to show that, not only the ANGAC, but the church needs to reconsider how they view ministry. They need to also reconsider the role of the Spirit in the call process. There needs to be consideration different paths of ministry. Moreover, there needs to be a critical look at the role of the Spirit in the call process as it relates to paths of ministry.

All the participants came to this project with views of women in ministry outside of Amanda Berry Smith. At the end of this project, their views transformed to include the perspective of Amanda Berry Smith’s call narrative. They respect and are encouraged by her tenacity to follow the Spirit. Furthermore, they agree that the Spirit needs to be considered in the call process. There needs to be a reconsideration by Board of the Spirit’s role in navigating ministry.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FROM PROJECT RESEARCH

The results from both the survey and focus groups proved that the qualitative method worked well in collecting data for this project. This chapter discusses the interpretations and conclusions from the results in the previous chapter. It considers possibilities for future research of this study. Included also are personal inferences and reflections of the impact of the project.

Conclusions from Research

The open-ended questions proved to return adequate feedback in support of the study. It also gave the participants freedom and space to be as detailed as possible in their responses. Many of the participants submitted extra details which were not only insightful, but informative as well. Also, the free-form written responses allowed the participants to express themselves and be as descriptive as possible. The responses showed how impactful the study’s design was in engaging a select group in a process that allowed them to express themselves while connecting around an experience. This research study confirmed that there needs to be inclusive representation in the Board of Examiners’ process and on the Board.

The results of this project confirm that the conference and the Board must examine how they view ministry. It should not be that one has to pastor to leverage significant leadership positions in the conference or denomination. Moreover, if one desires to pastor, it shouldn’t be disparities in opportunities for leadership roles and
churches. The results of this research make this project an invaluable resource for the ANGAC and similar situated conferences who don’t have adequate representation of women in leadership or pastoral appointments. Also, the results force the Board and conference to seek a process that exhibits gender equality and diversity in ministerial vocations.

Personal Impact and Reflections

This project dealt with a sensitive topic of black women in ministry whose history with the AME Church is challenging and complicated. I took a risk in doing this project because it required transparency about the Board of Examiners’ process, as well as issues for female preachers within the ANGAC and AME Church. I wondered if I would be able to get women in ministry to respond and agree to participate in this study. I also wondered if I would get approval to conduct the research. I was uncertain about the responses I would get on questions about the Amanda Berry Smith, the Board of Examiners’ structure, and non-traditional vocations. I was most surprised to see how seamlessly parallel most of the responses were. It was interesting to see the emphasis on sisterhood and supporting one another. In a denomination where the political aspects can easily produce selfish ambition, it is hopeful to see aspirations for sisterhood, equality, and interest in making staple structures in the AME Church, like the Board of Examiners, inclusive of all vocations.

The purpose of this study was to compare the call narratives and ministry experience of Amanda Berry Smith and WIM of ANGAC. This research allowed me to unearth the legacy of an AME woman in ministry who gave me affirmation of my call.
For many years, I felt like a nomad wandering around looking for purpose in my call. I knew I was not called to pastor. However, it took me awhile to understand that preaching and pastoring are not necessarily synonymous. They are individual callings, gifts by God that work well together. They can accompany one another; however, they are not identical. My Board of Examiners’ process developed pastors. If you were called to preach or to ministry all together, you were called to pastor. You could still work as a counselor, but you were in a pulpit as pastor on Sunday. I knew God did not call me to the pastoral ministry. I was relentless not to be convinced otherwise. Thanks to Amanda Berry Smith for being resolute about her call. It was her resoluteness that led me to this journey. I am grateful that I have produced something that could possibly be used to help enhance a process important to our denomination, a process that I remain grateful for. It developed me into the minister I am today. It afforded me the opportunity to get practical ministerial experience in sacraments, pastoral care, and church administration. The process stretched me and helped me navigate the terrain of my call journey. More importantly, it connected me to lifelong friends and colleagues who support and encourage me throughout my ministry.

Possibilities of Future Study

Future implementation of this study would include a presentation to the Board of Examiners of the ANGAC for post-reflections and supplemental research. In addition, an article highlighting the results could be a good resource for both the Board and the ANGAC. This resource could also be a reference for other conferences in considering how they view ministry, the role of the Spirit, and inclusivity in leadership.
There is also room to expand the research through visits to sites associated with Amanda Berry Smith and AME resources like the Christian Recorder or the AME Publishing House. Also, expanding this research to women in ministry in the AME Church would provide significant insight for future study. Particularly, a closer study of the role of the Spirit in call narratives of women in ministry in the AME Church would be a great way to expand research for this project.

In conclusion, this project examined the call narratives of Amanda Berry Smith and WIM of the ANGAC of the AME Church. The research shows the ministry of Amanda Berry Smith is important to the history of the AME Church and the legacy of the women in ministry of the denomination. Her approach to ministry was non-traditional as she walked unchartered territory for black female preachers in the nineteen century. Her sacrifice and efforts should not be forgotten, dismissed, or overlooked. Her ministry is admirable. The elements of her call narrative are no different from the call narratives of biblical characters and other women in ministry in the ANGAC.

The research also confirms she deserves a place in our denomination’s history. Her life, calling, and ministry encourages clergywomen to continue to pursue their divine call without hesitation or reservation. Her ministry is a testament of how women in ministry can carve out roles for themselves to pursue ministry on their own terms following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, this seems to be the missing element in the ANGAC Board of Examiners process, the role of the Spirit. Therefore, the research forces them to reconsider the importance of the Spirit in navigating ministry. It shows that it is the Spirit that directs the path of the women in ministry. It is fundamental
to the call experience. It is through the Spirit that these women in ministry have emerged to balance the structural order and promote change.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Dieter, Melvin Easterday. *The Holiness Revival of The Nineteenth Century.* Lanham,


Find a Grave. “Rev Amanda Berry Smith.”

Fisk Jubilee Singers. “Our History.”


Historical Marker Database. “Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1915).”

Historical Marker Project. “Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1915).”


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row Labels</th>
<th>Count of Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Church</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left the church</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOVED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to SC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELOCATED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(blank)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishops</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectional Officers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episcopal Officers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presiding Elders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Officers</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational institutions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant Elders</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant Deacons</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Elders</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Deacons</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Yr Itinerant</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Yr Local</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Yr Itinerant</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Yr Local</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD, ? Other Districts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>435</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

LETTERS OF PERMISSION
D.Min. Committee
McAfee School of Theology
3001 Mercer University
Atlanta, Georgia 30341

RE: Board of Examiners Ministry Context for Rev. Libya BaaQar

Dear D.Min. Committee:

Please allow this letter to give expressed permission to Rev. Libya BaaQar to submit her project thesis analysis to a select group of clergy in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference Board Examiners to secure feedback for her project as it relates to the Doctor of Ministry program at McAfee School of Theology.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Marcus
Dean of Board of Examiners
Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference

cc: Dr. Robert N. Nash, Jr., Associate Dean of D.Min. Program
Allen Temple
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
The Reverend Dr. Thomas L. Bess, Sr. – Pastor

October 25, 2017

D.Min. Committee
McAfee School of Theology of Mercer University
3001 Mercer University
Atlanta, Georgia 30341

RE: Off-Site Study for Focus Groups - Rev. Libya BaaQar

Dear D.Min. Committee:

Please allow this letter to serve as a letter of permission for Rev. Libya BaaQar to use our facility at Allen Temple AME Church - Atlanta to conduct her focus groups and study in support of her project thesis in an effort to meet the requirements for your Doctor of Ministry program.

Sincerely Yours,

Rev. Dr. Thomas L. Bess, Sr.
Pastor

1625 Joseph E. Boone Boulevard, N.W. † Atlanta, Georgia 30314
Telephone#: (404) 794-3316
Fax#: (404) 794-3302
Email: allentempleam221@bellsouth.net
View Us on the Web at: www.allentempleameatlanta.org
APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE
Soul Sisters: The Intersection of Amanda Berry Smith and Selected Women in Ministry
of The Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference of the AME Church

Allen Temple AME Church, Atlanta, GA
Rev. Libya BaaQar, Moderator

January 27, 2018, 12:00pm -1:00pm
February 1, 2018, 6:00pm -7:00pm
February 3, 2018, 11:00am - 12:00pm

Focus Group Outline

I. Gathering of participants, receipt of Informed Consent forms and blessing of meal
II. Greetings, Purpose, and Instructions by moderator
III. Focus of study
IV. Introductions of participants
V. Opening question presented
VI. Discussions begin
VII. Conclusion of focus group
VIII. Closing questions and comments
IX. Prayer and dismissal
APPENDIX D

SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS EMAIL INVITATION AND
INFORMED CONSENT
Good Afternoon,

In connection to my thesis project for my Doctoral of Ministry program, you are being asked to participate in a research study, including a survey and focus group. Please also see attached an Informed Consent form detailing the project and research study. Please sign it and prepare to bring it to the focus group or you may sign and return it to me via email.

Please note, no personal identifiable information will be collected through the use of the survey or focus groups. All participants will be discussed anonymously in the project. Focus group dates and times will be sent in a separate email.

You may click the link below to start the survey.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/D2Z2WPE

Thank you for your time and participation.

Rev. Libya Baalgar
Hi ladies,

Thank you so much for your note of well wishes and prayers. I appreciate it. I am recovering slowly, but well and getting some much needed rest. For the sake of convenience and in consideration of upcoming schedules for Founders Day, I have decided to do an online Focus Group study. It does not require you to do any video conferencing, only to share your responses to 6 topics with the ability to reply to others comments in a group session. All participants are anonymous and responses will remain confidential. Please take a moment to engage in this focus group discussion at your convenience. I will keep the group active until Sunday February 11th at 11:00 p.m.

You may sign and scan your consent forms to me as soon as you can. If you would like for me to mail one to you with an enclosed stamped envelop, just reply to this email with your address.

Please click this link to begin your focus group discussion

https://www.focusgroupit.com/groups/a0a19637

Again, thank you for your time and participation.
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP 1 SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PARTICIPATION
SURVEY QUESTIONS

What is your current ministerial vocation?

Have you ever heard of Amanda Berry Smith? If so, what comes to mind when you think of her?

Describe your calling (visions, imagery, signs, symbols, emotions, challenges, or objections).

How important is the Spirit as it relates to your calling? Please explain your answer.

Describe any differences you note between those called to non-traditional vocations as generally viewed by the ANGAC, please explain.

If you feel you are called to a non-traditional vocation, how do you feel your call empowers you for ministry?

If you feel you are called to a traditional vocation (pastoral ministry), how do you feel your call is perceived by your colleagues?

Describe any challenges you feel female preachers face in the ANGAC as it relates to their ministerial calling?

What do you like best about the Board of Examiners’ process as relates to the call experience?

Describe how the Board of Examiners support non-traditional vocations.

Describe any challenges met in the Board of Examiners’ process as it relates to non-traditional vocations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Created</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>2018-02-03 19:13:09 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>2018-02-05 00:17:43 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>2018-02-05 10:27:24 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>2018-02-11 05:42:36 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>2018-02-11 21:30:37 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>2018-02-12 21:04:21 -0500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>2018-02-13 08:45:46 -0500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**About this focus group**

**Focus group name**

Libya

**About this focus group**

Hello and welcome to a focus group research study for Rev. Libya BaaQar's project thesis: Comparative Analysis of the Call Narratives of WIM ANGAC and Amanda Berry Smith. This is an online focus group discussion of several topics to expound on the survey questions you provided. It is part 2 of the research study for this project. Due to rescheduling the live focus group, this is an attempt to be sensitive to schedules, conflicts, and upcoming obligations. It is a more convenient way than video conferencing to adequately capture the responses of the participants. The focus group is meant to be engaging with the ability to respond to other participants. I ask that you be completely transparent and honest to assist in adequate research for this project. The focus group is completely voluntary and no monetary contribution will be given. Please be advised that this focus group is moderated by Libya BaaQar, with no observers. This group is confidential with consideration to anonymity. All responses will be privately kept and protected under privilege. Thank you for your participation and assistance in this study.

*Note: This is an anonymous focus group. None of your personal information (e.g., email, name, username and bio) is ever visible to anyone in this focus group, including the focus group moderators and observers.*
FOCUS GROUP 1 QUESTIONS

Can each of you tell the group the year you accepted your call into ministry?

Describe any differences in opportunities given to non-traditional vocations and traditional vocations.

Who or what influenced your decision to accept your call to ministry? Please explain why.

Suppose you had a chance to speak to an ANGAC woman in ministry who just answered her call, what advice would you give her?

If you had to pick only one factor that is important to your ministry, what would it be? You can pick something you have already mentioned or what has been mentioned by others during the discussion.

Describe at least one challenge for Women in Ministry in the ANGAC. Please explain your answer.
APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP 2 STRUCTURE AND QUESTIONS
About this focus group

Focus group name
Libya's Project

About this focus group
Hello and welcome to a focus group research study for Rev. Libya Baqar's project thesis: Soul Sisters: The Intersection of Amanda Berry Smith and Selected Women In Ministry of the AOGAC of the AME Church. This is an online focus group discussion specifically for former women in ministry who have left the AME Church to pursue their calling outside of the denomination. It is part of the research study for this project. It is a more convenient way than video conferencing to adequately capture the responses of the participants. The focus group is meant to be engaging with the ability to respond to other participants. I ask that you be completely transparent and honest to assist in adequate research for this project. The focus group is completely voluntary and no monetary contribution will be given. Please be advised that this focus group is moderated by Libya Baqar, with no observers. This group is confidential with consideration to anonymity. All responses will be privately kept and protected under privilege. Thank you for your participation and assistance in this study.
FOCUS GROUP 2 QUESTIONS

Can each of you give the year you accepted your call to ministry?

Were you ordained by the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference? If so, when?

Have you ever heard of Amanda Berry Smith? If so, what comes to mind when you think of her?

Please read the abstract of my project thesis for background information. What is your first response (emotions, thoughts, or revelations, etc.)?

Describe your calling (visions, imagery, signs, symbols, emotions, challenges, or objections).

How important is the Holy Spirit as it relates to your calling? Please explain your answer.

Can you tell us who or what influenced your decision to accept your call to ministry? Please explain your answer.

How do/did you feel about the perception of women in ministry in the Board of Examiners process?

Describe your experience as an AME woman in ministry in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference?

Describe how you came to the decision to leave the AME Church and pursue your calling outside of the denomination. Outline any factors that influenced your decision.

How has your decision to leave the AME Church impacted your ministry? Please explain.

Describe the most or what was the most influential or positive factors about being a woman in ministry in the AME Church in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference?
APPENDIX G

TEXT OF SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS RESPONSES
Survey Results

Question 2: What is your current ministerial vocation?
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

- Pastor
- Ordained Clergy. I am not involved in a paid ministerial vocation.
- I am currently a licentiate in the AME church. I am the current [_____] for Young Adults at [____] AME Church.
- I am an ordained Deacon in the AME church providing support to the [_____] at [_____] AME Church.
- Presiding Elder
- Senior Pastor
- Senior Pastor
- Pastoral Counselor
- Senior pastor of a rural church
- Pastor of [_____] AME Church (1/16/2018 12:26 AM)

Question 3: Have you ever heard of Amanda Berry Smith? If so, what comes to mind when you think of her?
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6

- Yes. Persistence in the face of disappointment and adversity is the ultimate challenge that has the power to derail our dreams.
- Yes. Trailblazer, woman in ministry, denied, brave, determined, oppressed, discriminated against and shero.
- No, I have not heard of Amanda Berry Smith.
- Yes, I have and the primary thing that comes to mind when I think of her is her relentlessness in pursuing the call she believed in.
- A heart for the people of God
- Yes; preacher
- No
- I have not heard if Amanda Berry Smith
- Yes, Maryland because I am from Maryland.

---

84 Brackets indicate the removal of possible participant identifiable information.
Question 4: Describe your calling (visions, imagery, signs, symbols, emotions, challenges, or objections).
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

- My calling is a culmination of a lifelong preparation that I was a part of but unaware of the ultimate plan that God had for me. The emotional part was the battle with what my human side saw as life options vs. what that same side saw as possible difficult challenges of pursuing the dream and vision God was speaking to me in the restlessness of my spirit. The challenges have been many and while not physical, they challenge your spirit and your emotional state of mind; in which because of your gender you are constantly under scrutiny of all that you do, you say, your dress, your hair, etc. you are marginalized because of your femininity! There is still underlying and covert objections to fully accepting and allowing access to women in ministry but with the power of the Holy Spirit, we persist just as Amanda Berry Smith did.

- My call came through visions in the form of a dream. On multiple occasions I was shown a vision of me preaching to a sea of people all across the world. I was also awakened at 2 am in the morning almost on a daily basis until I responded to the call that was on my life. Once I realized why I was being awakened, I began to pray to God and read Gods word. In these moments God confirmed my call and calmed my doubts and fears and gave me the courage to move forward. Before the visions/dreams, God began calling me out to pray in public settings which was totally outside of my comfort zone and something I would never do on my own. After praying people would tell me they experienced God speaking and felt heaven come down.

- I have always had visions since I was a child. As a child I had a dream of myself being in a pulpit. A few years ago, I started having that dream again. As well as yearning in my spirit where I was being called into ministry. I hesitated because I compared myself to my brother who is a minister.

- I was initially called when I was 12 and confirmed it at 13 at a Youth Revival in San Antonio, TX before my 8th grade school year; however, I was told that I was crazy. I didn't accept it until March 15, 2001 when I had a vision and told God yes. It wasn't

- Call to Love, lift and to lead the least among us, as well as those who have professed to know Christ.

- A conversation with God, really an argument about worthiness.

- My calling was born in a space of deep grief during which I felt God telling me "I did not put more on you than you can bear...preach"! In my vocation, I
have been the first female to serve the three congregations I have served. Typically, that has been met with resistance from at least one member.

- I was going through a very difficult time and in my anguish asked God why this was happening. God replied I would use it for my ministry. Five years later God reminded me of that day. Emotions, challenges, speaking.

- Calling consisted of a dialogue between God and I wherein I objected to my call as a woman. Had emotional stress because I had been socialized to believe that only men were called and chosen. In the past I had refused to attend my local church when a woman preached. My objection to my calling cont’d until I linked my refusal to accept my calling to challenging health/near death experiences before I accepted my call.

- On March 5, 1999, I was leaving a 3-day women's retreat in Baltimore, MD to return to our church for service on Sunday morning as the women's bible study had done for 5 years prior. I was driving south on I-83 to [_____] AME Church in my Nissan Altima. I clearly heard a male voice say to me: "Tell Rev. [_____] that you are going to stand in that pulpit and preach the word of God." I looked around in the car to see if another person was with me, tested the radio to see if it was on (I had had the radio off for at least one month because there were ads running on the Christian radio station for the National Inquire that were contrary to my spirit) I did not hear the voice again. Three of us who attended were to give testimonies about our time at the retreat during the "announcement" portion of the service. When I arrived, one of the sisters asked what I was going to say. I told her I did not know. She responded, "You always have something today. Don't worry about it." I told her that God had already told me what to say, but that I was not going to say that. The service began, and the Spirit was so high in that after the opening hymn, my pastor called for the testimonies. I was second. I rose and took the microphone, and I began to reflect on one workshop reciting a nugget about "being still and knowing that God is God." After that, I began to ramble and wrestle with God about not saying what he said all while I was speaking because I was clearly told what to say. Then finally, I turned to my pastor (seeing the whites of his eyes) who was sitting in the pulpit listening and said, "And God told me to tell you that I am going to stand in that pulpit and preach the Word of God." The church erupted, and I went to the ground in submission. My pastor came from the pulpit after what seemed forever, and he called for the last testimonial. He then called me to the altar and asked me if it is my declaration that the Lord had called me to preach, and I responded yes. We prayed at the altar, and he called Steward [_____] to come and stand with me. He gave her the charge (which she took seriously until her death. She even surprised me driving to GA to be present when I
stood as pastor of my first appointment) of examining me and preparing me to be presented at our next church and quarterly conferences. I went home that Sunday. My husband was in the basement and I told him what happened. I remember him saying, "I know." I still declare that my husband, who is now my ex-husband, has a calling on his life, but he will not receive it. Both his mother and father (now deceased) pastored in the UMC. What I recall about the next day, was how when I left the house for work how clear God's world appeared. The sun shone brighter. I could hear birds and other insects clearly, and I remember the smell of my pine trees in the front yard. I was walking in divine connection.

Question 5: How important is the Spirit as it relates to your calling? Please explain your answer.
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6

- I believe it is the Spirit that calls us and leads us in the process of defining the call that we receive. It is that same spirit that we come to rely on as we answer and strive to live out the calling, it gives us strength, clarity of vision, answers in the time of doubt and comfort in the midst of challenges.
- The Spirit is important in my call because it leads, guides and directs me and my life. I am in relationship with the Spirit of God such that I don't want to do anything unless the Spirit has led me to do so.
- The spirit leads me. Some people may refer to it as their gut feeling or an inside voice, for me it is the Holy Spirit. It is important to me to be aligned with what it is the Holy Spirit is calling me to do.
- The Spirit is important because it's important to discern my own voice, feelings and emotions compared to an unction that cannot be mimicked or put off.
- The Spirit is the guiding force in my life and in my calling, which propels and leads me into learning, leading and serving humanity.
- I seek the Holy Spirit direction in all things. I need to feel the Power and Presence
- The Spirit is incredibly essential to my calling. I do not believe that I preach out of my own power or might. I believe that the Spirit takes over and prompts my language, embodiment, and delivery.
- The Spirit is what has called me and keeps me called. This is not something I would choose for myself. Even when I think about stopping the spirit reminds me I don't have that option.
- It was the Spirit that spoke to me and the Spirit that is what pricked my heart to answer the call.
Question 6: Describe any differences you note between those called to non-traditional vocations as generally viewed by the ANGAC, please explain. Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

- We continue to seemly only recognize those in ministry that acknowledge the call to the pastoral ministry, but we know that God gives numerous calls as supported by scripture. The level of support for non-pastoral ministry is lacking or basically nil.
- It is frowned upon. To be totally honest non-traditional ministerial vocations are not acknowledged or even recognized. The focus is on those who have expressed that they have been called to pastor a church.
- I believe that some may see it as a distraction why others understand that some of us are called to multiple task, not just one.
- Simply put, those that seem to be called to non-traditional vocations seem to be viewed as ineffective and useless as if their call doesn't matter if they are going to become ordained clergy in the itineracy.
- Non-traditional vocations seem to take second place to the rather traditional vocations (pastoring). The ANGAC seems to give priority to pastors and chaplaincy. From a secular viewpoint the profession and title determine your status. We are admonished to be bi-vocational, depending on the status of the charge. However, in my opinion, being bi-vocational in many instances hinders and prevents the work of ministry.
- I think the ANGAC has a much better perspective as relates to non-traditional roles. The question that does always surface is if you aren't going to pastor, or chaplain do you need an ordination.
- Those called to non-traditional vocations typically are not viewed in the same light as those of us who serve the church full-time. Although chaplaincy and other vocations are essential, this seems to not have as great of a sense of value within the church.
- The ANGAC does not support roles outside of the Senior Pastor. There is no purposeful attempt to support counseling, evangelism, teaching or congregational care ministers.
- It appears that calling is regularly questioned in its authenticity as well as those individuals seem never to be compensated adequately for the use of their gifts.
- What are you considering "non-traditional" vocations? If this is referencing callings to chaplaincy or Christian education or evangelism or missions or even serving in an associate pastor role, then there is a great disparity, The Connection as a whole in an orthodox hierarchical thinking places more value on pastoral ministry than it does on the many other roles that help to shape the well-being of the church.
Question 7: If you feel you are called to a non-traditional vocation, how do you feel your call empowers you for ministry?
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6
- I have chosen to pursue the calling of pastoral ministry as combined with non-traditional in the formation of Outreach ministries to youth and young adults that is not traditional church based. My call enables me to pursue both with the passion and power of the Holy Spirit; to not rank one above the other but to realize that God called me to both and by honoring that call it will enrichment and enlarge both callings.
- My call empowers me for ministry because it is a ministry without walls that reaches the nation and has been confirmed and affirmed by God.
- My call to social work and my calling to ministry are intertwined. They are both meant to work together to help heal individuals and empower them.
- I feel like I am called to campus or prison chaplaincy/ministry and I'm empowered all the more at the revelation because of my spiritual formation and life experiences. Being able to assist in the transformation of others at pivotal points in their lives is exciting to me.
- N/a
- N/A
- I am not sure I understand the question
- The non-traditional vocation would empower me to utilize my God given gifts to bring about social and political change!
- I have specifically been called to the preaching ministry, but what I have come to recognize, as a 27-year public educator, is that that role undergirds all that I do as a pastor. The strategies, connections, organizational and communication structures and a myriad of other skills used in both arenas are symbiotic and help to bolster my ministry as an educator and a pastor.

Question 8: If you feel you are called to a traditional vocation (pastoral ministry), how do you feel your call is perceived by your colleagues?
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5
- Questionable, they honor the call but fail to honor you in the fullness of the call when it comes to leadership and male views of women in ministry.
- I have not received confirmation from God that I am called to pastoral ministry or shall I say traditional pastoral ministry. Many tell me they
see me pastoring or that I have been called to pastor, but until God confirms that I will not pursue pastoral ministry.

- Interesting question. As for my colleagues in social work some of them wonder how I will be able to do both. Not everyone understands my call and it really is not for me to explain or justify to those that don't get it. It is interesting also that not all ministers understand your call to pastoral ministry. Some feel that is overwhelming. I resolved that we are all called to different things. Everyone is not called to pastor.
- I'm not called to pastoral ministry, though that seems to be the desire of others FOR me.
- I am called to pastoral ministry and appear to be held in high esteem by my colleagues. For the most part, I have appeared to have gained their respect and admiration.
- I have never thought nor cared about their perception
- It is perceived in a mixed fashion. Some colleagues are very supportive while others may look down on me based on my age, gender, or even my tenure in ministry.
- NA
- Not accepted by my colleagues and not believed to be equipped to handle pastoral ministry.
- My colleagues respect my call. By respect here I mean reference and appreciate my giftedness. However, I also recognize that there are those who are intimidated and try to minimalize (not to my face) my calling. I have had very few colleagues in my tenure in ministry speak negatively to me about my gifts, but for those who have, I do feel that they were cautioning me based on reservations that they had about their own empowerment. For example, I had a colleague once tell me that I should "scale myself back" because I can be intimidating to others. On the other hand, most of my colleagues are extremely encouraging and push me to excel, expand my horizons, and walk more boldly into what they can see in me that as one who has always struggled with self-esteem.

Question 9: Describe any challenges you feel female preachers face in the ANGAC as it relates to their ministerial calling?
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

- Validity, lack of support, stereo-typing, and compromise their uniqueness as females and what positive attributes that brings to the ministry discipline vs reminders that they may not be strong enough to handle it as their male counterparts.
• The primary challenges I have noticed are being respected as a woman, being granted preaching opportunities comparable to male preachers, and being represented equally during district/annual conference services. I also notice a difference in how appointments are made with female pastors vs male pastors. In addition, Female pastors tend to get appointed to smaller less vibrant congregations.
• The challenges I have noticed would be it appears that even though there are a large number of women now in ministry it still feels as though women do not get the same opportunities as men to speak at local churches as a guest for events unless it is "women's day" or a "WMS" day.
• More often than not, the call is challenged and questioned that if we are in the process and looking to be ordained and not go into the pastoral ministry then why are we in the process?
• Female preachers do not appear to have the same opportunities as men within the Conference.
• The majority of people coming through the board and completing requirements are women. The majority of Board members are men and several do not have the appropriate credentials
• Some individuals still struggle with female preachers and pastors. These struggles are not based on anything other than superficial gender issues. For this reason, female preachers are often met with the challenge of proving themselves as worthy even before they have preached their first sermon. They are seen as not having the ability to do what their male counterparts can or have done without being given the chance.
• Female preachers who are called to Pastor would often be sent to the churches that limited potential. (Circuit churches, aged, few members). Female preachers do not support and empower each other as much. Single women preachers were treated less seriously.
• Likely never to be given an opportunity to exercise their gifts of their ministerial calling. Never compensated financially because of the belief by those in authority that unless you are in pastoral ministry you have not been called or chosen. Rejected by female congregates more than others because of how they have been socialized. People in general perceive God as having a male gender. Spiritual formations are flawed and skewed due to a lack of Christian education doing formative years. Gender biases in leadership! Fear of leadership to take a stand against sexism.
• (I am defining "female preachers" as those who pastor). First, it is my contention that many female pastors in ANGC are their own stumbling blocks. Too many seem to look for validation from "the boys" and do not take risks to expand themselves. Female pastors are often assigned to smaller congregations and truthfully the congregations remain that under most female pastors but the pastor (like many of the same-minded male pastors) still expects to be "given a larger charge" even though she has not bloomed where planted. Second, it is a great challenge that female pastors are not afforded the opportunities to pastor, as male counterparts. Often females are more versed, and educated, and skilled, but are either not considered, or have not made the necessary connections to have a decision maker (a sponsor) call her name when opportunities are being discussed. A third challenge is support for one another. Because of the insecurities brought about by the first challenge mentioned, many are unable to be genuine in their support of other. For those who are called to the preaching ministry (not pastors but for some other non-traditional vocation as you have defined it) a challenge is to be resonant in the fact that everyone is not called the pastoral ministry but that the ministry to which you are called is so needed in the kingdom.

Question 10: What do you like best about the Board of Examiners’ process as it relates to the call experience?
Answered: 10; Skipped: 5

• It requires you to examine your calling and to become clear on where God has called you; but if you are not strong in your calling the process can challenge you to compromise your calling to fit the limited expectation of the board.
• What I like best about the BOE process is that it makes one really examine and be held accountable to their call, call story and the authenticity of the call. It also requires one to study and become knowledgeable about the AME church of which one is a member and be held accountable. The process also teaches you the various roles associated with pastoring.
• I enjoy being able to learn information about the local church as well as network with fellow classmates from throughout the ANGC.
• I appreciate the class on the call experience, because it allows one to reflect on the overall experience of being called and preparing us to articulate it well.
• The BOE is an excellent opportunity to be introduced to and to learn the basic tenets of Theology and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The BOE is an excellent vehicle for individuals to expand upon and further develop their Call narrative.
• It makes sense to walk with those who are called to hear their stories and to help them discern God's instruction. Everyone who hears from the Lord is not necessarily called into ministry. I think this also helps folk to discern if God or man is calling.
• There is an opportunity for true mentorship for individuals in the call process. Members of the Board can provide not simply academic expertise but also practical, ministry-based assistance and experience.
• The fellowship of other ministers.
• The necessity of candidates to understand and to be able to articulate their calling however different their experiences are.
• I only participated in the BOE process at my home conference during Annual Conferences as I was enrolled in seminary and allowed to not be present. I cannot accurately share in this from a personal perspective; however, question 11 speaks to a concern that I have about the connectional process.

**Question 11:** Describe in any manner how non-traditional vocations are incorporated in the Board of Examiners’ process.
**Answered:** 9; **Skipped:** 6

• None at the time.
• To my knowledge non-traditional vocations are not incorporated in the BOE process other than chaplaincy.
• I cannot think of a way they are incorporated non-traditional vocations.
• They really aren't and I think that does a huge disservice to the AME church and the Kingdom of God overall because [their focus] is on pastoral ministry. And because of that focus, I believe there are people that went into the pastoral ministry that felt like they had no choice though that wasn't their true calling.
• n/a
• I have not experienced or witnessed the presence of non-traditional vocations.
• NA
• In some instances, individuals are allowed to utilize their gifts to assess the candidates’ fitness for ministry.
• Now as an Elder having the opportunity to work with many females in ministry from BOE and beyond in the ANGC, I cannot readily see that the BOE incorporates the impact of nor that it encourages non-traditional vocations in ministry. We have so many who simply want to preach, but who are not purposed to a vocation. It is not apparent that non-traditional vocations are a focus nor that they are encouraged. (My caveat remains, that I have not been through the ANGC BOE process)

Question 12: Describe any challenges met in the Board of Examiners' process as it relates to non-traditional vocations.
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6

• Limited validity; no course to support the exploration of non-traditional ministry vocations.
• The challenge with non-traditional vocations in the BOE process is that it is not encouraged or acknowledged. No one even ask questions related to this as part of the process. Many don't feel empowered to discuss it either, other than chaplaincy, for fear of being criticized, shunned or even denied ordination.
• The challenges would be managing the assignments along with what you are tasked to do every day in school or your full-time job.
• It has been firmly stated that if you are not going into pastoral ministry then they don't want to ordain you.
• The actual time relegated to attending and committing to the process is sometimes a hindrance to participation in the process.
• I do not think there are challenges, but I think people should decide if they are seeking ordination when a license will do.
• I was very clear I was not called to Pastor. The BOE acted as if I was then not called. We would often have to say we were called to Pastor just to avoid the backlash.
• Non-traditional vocations are not recognized as being as valuable as the traditional vocations
• One that was brought to my attention by a sister who simply wanted to go as far as becoming a deacon for the ministry that she wanted to do with her local church is that she was counseled to become an Itinerant Elder because she would not be able to be a pastor. She was clear that that was not her calling, but she continued the process. Paid for and finished seminary and is grateful for the education, but the road was not one that she wanted to travel.
Question 13: How do you feel about the perception of women in ministry in the Board of Examiners' process?
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6

- There needs to be more inclusion on the part of the development of the teaching staff personnel selected to present; more female leadership other than just the secretary position and more mentoring of women to develop them as is done with the male students.
- Although more women than men are entering the BOE process, my overall perception of women in the BOE process is that WIM are devalued are not groomed for ministry as the men are. Most often men are mentored and women are not unless one seeks a mentor. Despite having women bishops, our BOE process and church in general still has a way to go when it comes to respecting WIM. The WIM organization is denied the recognition, credence and validity it is due, although it’s a bona fide organization.
- Women appear to be the majority currently in our BOE classes.
- Expectations seem to be higher, questions are harder and there is no regard for the complexity of the roles that women play in their individual lives. I also think that those that are sincerely called to the pastoral ministry are met with mind games and other challenges that they themselves begin to question their call to that office.
- There still seems [to be] somewhat a disconnect when it comes to Women in Ministry. Women are readily becoming the majority students in the BOE, but the minority leaders on the Board.
- I think men are intimidated by the numbers of women and the skill set of the women that come through the BOE.
- I felt dehumanized during my BOE process. Remarks were often made about my beauty which was uncomfortable. When I was pregnant a Pastor stated, "I know you and your husband have a lot of fun" (as this was my second child) Not one woman on the BOE ever spoke up against the male remarks.
- They can teach but that they cannot provide adequate leadership roles because most have not had the required years of traditional vocational roles to serve on the Board
- I feel that women in ministry are seen as smart and skilled ministers.

Question 14: Suppose you were in position to make one change to enhance the Board of Examiners' process as it relates to non-traditional vocations, what would you do?
Answered: 9; Skipped: 6
Incorporate a ministry exploration course into the training which covers the other components of the ordained ministry other than pastoral calling.

I would create a track that recognizes and acknowledges non-traditional ministerial vocations and avenues to pursue such vocations. This would entail required classes being taught by ministers who have pursued such a track. Ordination (deacon/elder) should also be available to persons who God is leading in this direction.

I would provide opportunities for candidates to learn more about non-traditional vocations. Everyone will not pastor and there are some that are indeed called to ministry but not pastor.

Implement training for the different tracks...be it chaplaincy, evangelism, etc. Some of the classes they seem too have are redundant, there should be a progression not a repetition.

Incorporate the non-traditional with the traditional ministerial calling.

Admissions would include a class that shows the different opportunities in non-traditional vocations so people would better know what they are in for.

Offer a non-traditional class or track that introduces non-traditional vocations.

Diversify the Board’s members. Utilize non-traditional vocational roles to assess and evaluate candidates. Urge the church to balance the board with experienced gifted individuals in non-traditional vocations. Demonstrate the value of women in leadership to affect change in the general church.

I would structure BOE for candidates to work at other churches for an extended period of time, particularly those in the rural settings, with the express purpose of understanding the need for varied vocations.

Focus Group 1 Results

This is a transcript of the focus group discussions exported from FocusGroupIt.

Topic 1. Introductions: Can each of you tell the group the year you accepted your call to ministry?

---

85 Brackets indicate the removal of typos and the insertion of suggested wording for sentence structure.
Participant 1 2002
Participant 2 1999
Participant 3 Fully accepted my call to ministry in 2001 (though called in 1989)
Participant 4 2016
Participant 5 2003
Participant 6 1993
Participant 7 I accepted my call to ministry in 2004.

Topic 2. Background on the Project: Please read the abstract of my project thesis for background information. What is your first response (emotions, thoughts, or revelations, etc.)?

Participant 1 Astonished. Such a rich history of a woman most has never heard of even though her life has portions we all can relate to.

Participant 2 "I learned about a new woman in ministry. It is intriguing that Smith was not "revered" in her home denomination but encouraged by leaders to work within the denomination. I am unclear about the opposing positions.

Participant 3 Her story encourages "stretching" beyond limitations.

Participant 3 Her confirmation of her call to preach is similar to mine which is what I found compelling. Though somewhat familiar with her story, I find it encouraging and fascinating that her passion for preaching wasn't watered down by the politics of the AME church. If anything, it seems as if she used it as fuel to disrupt the status quo.

Participant 4 I admire your desire to want to add to the ANGAC BOE. I wonder how often they reassess what they are presenting and teach new ministers as they enter the conference.

Participant 5 Wow what an awesome and courageous woman of God. She didn't allow the leaders of the AME church to restrict her willingness to share God's word with people despite their race or denomination. Additionally, she didn't allow her challenges or circumstances to paralyze her move forward.

Participant 6 Revelations. First of all, the courage to stay true to her calling. Within the AME System we fill lead to allow others to dictate our destiny. However, work such as [so you] can bring revelations to the process of ones calling in our Zion.

Participant 7 In reading the abstract my first thought (really a question) is has anything really changed? She was also limited by her denomination who did not
embrace her non-traditional ministry. This is all too familiar. This WOG struggled with her call to ministry and faced many obstacles and oppositions along the way as we all do. She did not appear to have the much-needed sisterhood and support of other women that we truly need in ministry. She persisted with her call despite these denominational and family/marriage challenges which I am sure took a toll on her. I am encouraged by her story. I am hopeful and prayerful that our denomination would get to a point that non-traditional ministry is formalized in the BOE process and that it is not frowned upon and negated.

Topic 3. In your survey, you were very detail in your call experience. Can you tell us who or what influenced your decision to accept your call to ministry? Please explain your answer.

Participant 4 If I had to pick a “who” it would be my child. Him being the closet person to me and seeing me daily. It got to a point I was having conversation out loud with God where I kept fulling this pull on my heart that was pushing me to step forward. My son could see this and one Sunday he was just like mommy "do it" as if God himself was speaking through him. The interesting thing is that morning I was rationalizing with God about why I should wait and accept my call later. Funny...

Participant 5 God spoke to me during my prayer time that he wanted me to preach the gospel. After that time, I spoke with my Pastor and he encouraged me to do what God called me to do.

Participant 6 First and far most God. Then I attend an AME Women in Ministry Conference back in the early 90's that revealed the revitalization of the movement of WIM in the AME Church.

Participant 7 My husband and my parents affirmed my call to ministry and urged me to go forth. At the time that I shared it with my pastor, my pastor affirmed my call as well and encouraged me to be obedient to my call. I was fortunate to have this level of support. My mentor who is also a WIM indicated that God revealed my call to her before I shared it with her. She was elated and wholeheartedly encouraged me to go forth and extended her support.

• Participant 2 (comment): Do you see parallels to your work in your professional life prior to God's calling on your life and your current ministry? If so, what are they?
Topic 4. Ministry Outlook: If you had to pick only one factor that is important to your ministry, what would it be? You can pick something you have already mentioned or what has been mentioned by others during the discussion. Please explain.

Participant 1  Being God’s vessel of healing and love for others.

Participant 2  Teaching

Participant 3  Authenticity

Participant 4  Prayerfully Transparent
I believe that experiences are meant to be shared prayerfully. That does not mean making yourself an open book but I believe it allows others to know they can overcome obstacles as well. It something beautiful about being able to preach about what you have survived. It empowers others I do believe.

Participant 5  Willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to use me however and whenever he chooses.

Participant 6  The one factor is hearing God. For me it took many years for me to obtain the ordination of Elder because of the education requirements. It was my class when the Board of Examiners declare no ordination without Seminary degree. If it was about the AME Church I would have abandoned my call. My Call has been about hearing God's purpose for my life and call. If I hear God say it's time to move from Pastoring to another area of ministry, I am truly open to follow God.

Participant 7  Prayer is essential to my ministry!!! Prayer is how I was called into ministry. I consider prayer the air that I breathe, the strength that carries me when I want to quit and the one thing I can do when I don't know what else to do. Ministry has to be undergirded in prayer because that is where we can hear from God to get direction, reflection and connection. When all hell breaks loose prayer is the answer. When we want to quit prayer is the answer. When we are being questioned about our call and our ministry prayer is the answer.

Topic 5. Any Advice You Can Give? Suppose you had a chance to speak to an ANGAC woman in ministry who just answered her call, what advice would you give her?

Participant 1  Find a good female support team. I did not have much support from women in ministry yet I recognize I did not look for it either. Now I try to
be that support person for others while also surrounding myself around positive women in ministry.

- **Participant 7 (comment):** Sisterhood is important. We must not allow ministry to divide us or cause us to compete with one another, but instead complement one another. Genuine sisterhood is necessary!

**Participant 2**  
First, God called all of who you are, so embrace all of who you are and what you have experienced. Second, men and women alike in ministry will not be supportive equally. There are too many brothers and sisters who will... Focus on connecting with them. Third, remember we are a connectional church. It is important to be present and involved. Finally, say yes to opportunities and craft some where there seen to be none.

**Participant 3**  
Be open to receive advice, yet apply it as needed. One size doesn't fit all in ministry, and look at the totality of your life, ministry and everything else to determine how to navigate the course best for you. Also, establish a strong support system of clergy, laity, family and friends. This will be important on the journey as they will stand with you in prayer, to encourage you and to also give different perspectives...because it may be challenging. Lastly, just continue to preach Jesus, to yourself. Don't allow the tension of the environment to keep you out of relationship with God. Because ultimately your call is for you to answer and fulfill.

**Participant 4**  
Be true to yourself and the one that called you. Be open to advice and listen but always check with God first about anything you do.

- **Participant 7 (comment):** I wholeheartedly agree with this. As WIM we must not give into the pressure to go with the status quo but to follow where God is leading.

**Participant 5**  
Be intentional about being in relationship with God through prayer and study. Establish a support team with family, friends and others in ministry. Take your call serious; God knows your past, present and future and he can still use you to bring others to Christ. Be willing to listen because you don't have all the answers.

**Participant 6**  
Be true to hearing God not Man or Women. Spend time with God and herself and follow her passion and the gift that drives that passion. Her Gift will make room for her.

**Participant 7**  
I would affirm her, lend my support and encourage her to be true to what and where God is leading her to. I would encourage her to make prayer a
priority in all that she does and to never sacrifice her family. I would also encourage her to commit to ongoing development and education in order to remain relevant in ministry.

Participant 7 In adding to my comment I would say LIVE and HAVE FUN while doing ministry.

Topic 6. Challenges for WIM: Describe at least one challenge for Women in Ministry in the ANGAC. Please explain your answer.

Participant 1 Not being taken as seriously as male preachers.
- Participant 3 clicked “agree” to this response.

Participant 2 For the component, it is maximizing or presence through dues paying members. We have over 275 ANGC women, but fewer than 15% have become members of WIM. This tangible presence would speak volumes within the ANGAC and the connection. For women who are in ministry, it is not taking initiative to walk in our authority not in an adversarial role, but in a kingdom building stride. We tend to wait for permission, not out of humility but rather not to make waves when we so really have a flood--no a tidal wave of giftedness that God is waiting on us to let lose in the places where God plants us.

Participant 3 Wholly supporting one another.

Participant 4 To not lose themselves. I find that it seems some women change to take on a more masculine persona when preaching by changing their voice and the way they carry themselves while in the pulpit. I don't understand why. God called you, all of you so be who he created you to be. Another challenge would be to get more women that are in prominent roles in the church actively involved in WIM.

Participant 5 Although there are many powerful women preachers during the preaching moment, there's a lack of representation in premier roles or prominent churches.
- Participant 7 (comment): I agree. We seem to only have 1 or 2 that give the appearance of being token in the moment. This has to stop. We should have equal representation especially with the number of women in and entering ministry.

Participant 6 The one challenge for WIM in the ANGAC is the same challenge of Women in relationship in general. No, it's not so much of the AME
system but more of the celebration and encouragement for other Women. We can be the "Game Changer" if we [accept] the diversity of one's call. God is not in a box and neither is his Call.

Participant 7 Competition. We must learn to complement and respect our sisters instead of competing for space, place and opportunities. There is enough room for all of us. We must celebrate and not just tolerate one another. We must not allow men in ministry to divide us. We are ONE!

Focus Group 2 Results:
Topic No.1: Can each of you give the year you accepted your call to ministry?
Participant 1 I accepted the call to ministry in 2004 but didn't preach my trial sermon until 2006.
Participant 2 2005
Participant 3 1994

Topic 2: Were you ordained by the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference? If so, when?
Participant 1 Yes, but left after being ordained a Deacon in 2009
Participant 2 No
Participant 3 Yes, I was in 2008.

Topic 3: Have you ever heard of Amanda Berry Smith? If so, what comes to mind when you think of her?
Participant 1 I have not heard of her.
Participant 2 I have never heard of Amanda Berry Smith.
Participant 3 Yes, I have. I immediately think of her tremendous labor to establish family units for displaced (orphan) children of color.

Topic 4: Please read the abstract of my project thesis for background information. What is your first response (emotions, thoughts, or revelations, etc.)?
Participant 1 "Amanda Berry Smith is an excellent example of spiritual freedom. I say “spiritual” rather than religious freedom because the plight to fulfill one’s
call extends beyond the pulpit or merely leadership in the church. Amanda Berry Smith sets the tone that “the call” can only be fully realized through a divine encounter. This divine encounter(s) awakens us to a realm of spiritual activity whereby one cannot simply accept the limitations humanity attempts to place upon us or our ministry for that matter. Sometimes systems that we blindly (I use the term blindly not in a disrespectful manner, but it truly must be a received revelation to enlighten our eyes; Isaiah 59:10) submit to are so oppressive that they force us to focus on the role (or title) rather than on the assignment.

Ms. Berry chose the assignment. This is evident in the opportunities our Supernatural God extended to her by allowing her to travel abroad. While I have not done extensive study into her life I believe the AME church was not a contributor to her successful international work as an Evangelist. My initial response is that Ms. Berry saw beyond an opportunity offered by man and accepted an assignment extended by God."

Participant 2  The revelation that came to mind is the need to share the relevance of women in ministry in the past in connection with the challenges faced today. An immediate thought that came to mind was the continuous fight for equality even in ministry.

Participant 3  My first impression is that I'm surprised that her opportunities outside of the AME church would cause such a rift and that more women wouldn't instead follow her example and see more opportunities outside the AME church.

Topic 4: Describe your calling (visions, imagery, signs, symbols, emotions, challenges, or objections).

Participant 1  "My call is in the ministry of deliverance. God has appointed me to be a vessel of freedom from demonic hindrances and activity in the lives of his people. My assignment is to set His people from powers of darkness (i.e. witchcraft, Jezebel, Ahab, etc.) and replace corrupt thought patterns with the truth of God's word. My vision (in local ministry) is to empower God's people to live victoriously; evangelize, deliver, develop and deploy His disciples."

Participant 2  My calling was one that I denied for quite some time. Due to the fear of being out in front, I held off on sharing the call with others for a while. In addition, I saw what ministry did to my father and family in terms of time spent and the degree of people being ungrateful.
Participant 3  I actually felt called as a teenager. I grew up in the United Methodist Church. I think it was a convergence of 3 things, the first being my sincere love of church and scripture, the second being a gift of dreaming where my dreams often come true and then having a dream of being asked to preach, and the third was continuing to have people, even strangers, prophesy into my life that I was called ministry. My only challenge was overcoming my shyness and fear. My desire was welcomed and encouraged by both my family and my pastor who was a female at the time and the one who asked me to preach my first sermon.

Topic 5: How important is the Holy Spirit as it relates to your calling? Please explain your answer.

Participant 1  The Holy Spirit is EXTREMELY relevant. He is the empowering person that makes the call possible. Where there is NO HOLY SPIRIT there is no manifested power; no signs, no wonders, no creative miracles, no healing, no deliverance, no glory, no tongues, no prophetic anointing, no word of Knowledge, no discernment, no revelation, no victory over witchcraft, etc.

Participant 2  The Holy Spirit is the catalyst for my calling. Before answering the call, I prayed for confirmation and it came through the leading of the Holy Spirit as having an encounter that I had never experienced before was earth shaking.

Participant 3  If God is the why of my ministry and Jesus the what of my ministry, then the Holy Spirit is the How of all that I do. I see my life as yielded to the Holy Spirit’s desire and my prayer is always that I am cultivated ground for the spirit's fruit, a reflection of the spirit's nature, and a conduit of the spirit's gifts. I believe everything in the scripture that is said about the Holy Spirit which was a source of tension being in the AME church because it seems as if there is a limit placed on what a person can do through the Spirit.

Topic 6: Can you tell us who or what influenced your decision to accept your call to ministry? Please explain your answer.

Participant 1  One of my mentors; Rev. Marcus R. Green..... Personal conversations that helped me to open my eyes to a specific need in God's kingdom.

Participant 2  The influence on my decision to answer the call was that of my father and friends who were not saved. I had to realize that the call was bigger than my personal desires and ultimately there was the desire to please God.
Participant 3  I think my family played a huge decision in accepting my call to ministry. They consistently remind me of my calling and are covering me in prayer. Besides my family, as I began to read historically about great men and women of God in ministry, I was encouraged by what they were able to overcome. People such as Kathryn Kuhlman, Smith Wigglesworth and even Christian writers such as C.S. Lewis or Thomas Merton really impacted my acceptance in ministry and my understanding of my faith.

Topic No. 7: How do/did you feel about the perception of women in ministry in the Board of Examiners process?

Participant 1  I had NO PERCEPTION about women ministry during the BOE.

Participant 2  My experience with the BOE was one that I shall never forget. My father was adamant about standing up for women in ministry as some of his co-laborers exhibited a rather chauvinistic mindset. Although the treatment was sometimes rude even by those in "high" positions, I had to remain focused on my reason for being there.

Participant 3  It's interesting that I sometimes felt that it was women ministers who did the most in trying to keep women in a certain traditional perception of being less than men. Whether it was requiring us to wear skirts or dresses or constantly reminding us that women in leadership roles were the exception and not the rule. As far as my male colleagues, I felt as if they viewed women as potential spouses and not co laborers in the Gospel.

Topic No. 8: Describe your experience as an AME woman in ministry in the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference?

Participant 1  "While I had some VERY significant men and women supporters during my AME stay I also encountered inappropriate propositions. These propositions were presented as "opportunities" to be recognized for promotion. I found that the AME system was somewhat oppressive. But my supporters encouraged me to stay focused on God and the assignment. Much like Ms. Berry Smith the assignment takes you places that man-made processes and people cannot."

Participant 2  My experience as a woman in ministry in the ANGAC was somewhat lonely as I saw cliques begin to form based on what church you were from and who one affiliated with. It sometimes became a name-dropping challenge instead of getting to know each other and creating a sense of competition.
Participant 3  I actually enjoyed my experience in the Atlanta North Georgia Conference. I was giving some great opportunities at my church and I know that I was able to grow as a minister there. I met some amazing women in the conference who I know who are doing great work. On the conference level, I have to admit I didn't like the conference, they seemed very political and fear based - a fear I think that is instilled in its leaders from the BOE onward. However, I didn't leave because of those things. I left because I sincerely felt that I was simply called somewhere else and I realize that every denomination has its strengths and weaknesses.

Topic No. 9: Describe how you came to the decision to leave the AME Church and pursue your calling outside of the denomination. Outline any factors that influenced your decision.

Participant 1  My decision was based solely on an encounter with God. This encounter led me to an apostolic foundation rooted in the book of Acts. I understand that the 5-fold ministry is GOD's design for church and anything outside of that does not fit his pattern. The flow of the Holy Spirit in worship experiences was much more evident and witnessing signs and wonders helped confirm my decision to relocate my gifts.

Participant 2  My decision to leave the AME Church was one that was an extension of the call on my life. I was not necessarily called to be AME but called to be one to minister the Gospel wherever God saw the need to place me. In addition, the politics of the denomination shifted my train of thought as it no longer was the church I grew up in and loved. Tradition was replaced with position and what seemed like status driven agendas. However, I must say there are things that I learned in the AME Church that I will always treasure that carry me even now through ministry.

Participant 3  Like I said previously I heard God tell me to leave and that is enough for me. I went through the board of examiners and did everything required to become a deacon. My family was even preparing to come to my ordination but I heard God say move on so I did.

Topic No. 10: How has your decision to leave the AME Church impacted your ministry? Please explain.

Participant 1  I have been blessed to raise spiritual sons and daughters in ministry that are called to the offices of Pastor, Prophet/Prophetess and Evangelists. I have witnessed signs and wonders in ministry. I have watched men and women that did not know Jesus reach their destiny in God's kingdom without going through processes that would otherwise deny them; keep
them from truly understanding the God-ordained power they walk as a child of God.

Participant 2  The decision to leave the AME Church has afforded me a freedom that I had not known before. It has allowed me to interact with people from other denominations and ministries in addition to gaining greater insight of ministry as a whole.

Participant 3  I'm currently serving as an assistant pastor in a nondenominational church. I think leaving has allowed me to discover ministry on my terms without being a tied to a tradition or church. The AME church would have guaranteed me a church or a place had I followed through its system and leaving that guarantee has forced me to lean all the more on God and his leading. But being there and leaving has also given me the desire to find ways to minister to and in various denominations.

Topic No. 11: Describe the most or what was the most influential or positive factors about being a woman in ministry in the AME Church in the Atlanta North Georgia annual Conference?

Participant 1  Not sure how to answer this as I never really considered the WIM perspective. But I can say that I encountered some truly powerful women in ministry that inspired me.

Participant 2  The most positive factor about being a woman in ministry in the AME Church was the ability to look around and realize that although lonely. I was not the only one standing in that position and that every woman had a story. It also taught me a level of structure and discipline that have been embedded in my character that I will always appreciate.

Participant 3  The most positive factor about being in the AME church was seeing the desire of pastors and members to support other AME churches. There seemed to be a sincere care for the church at large and a willingness to share resources and learn from each other.
APPENDIX H

ABSTRACT MODIFIED FOR FOCUS GROUPS
ABSTRACT

LIBYA BAAQAR
SOUL SISTERS: THE INTERSECTION OF AMANDA BERRY SMITH AND SELECTED WOMEN IN MINISTRY OF THE ATLANTA NORTH GEORGIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AME CHURCH
Under the direction of PETER RHEA JONES, Ph.D.

This project is designed to juxtapose call narratives of selected WIM of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference (“ANGAC”) to the call narrative of Amanda Berry Smith. It answers the question: How are the call experiences and ministries of selected WIM of the ANGAC similar and different from the call experience and ministry of Amanda Berry Smith (18th century evangelist of the AME Church). It will parallel the challenges and struggles of women clergy in the ANGAC as it relates to their calling and ministerial vocations. This project will show the importance of Amanda Berry Smith’s story to the AME Church, particularly women in ministry. In addition, the results of this study can provide opportunities for future expansion of the ANGAC Board of Examiners process to include discussions and pedagogies that support different types of callings both in and outside of parish ministry.

AMANDA BERRY SMITH AND THE AME CHURCH

Amanda Berry Smith was born one of thirteen children to slave parents in Long Green, Maryland in 1837. She was the oldest of thirteen children. Her home served as a station for the Underground Railroad. Her father spent his life working hard to pay for their freedom and was successful. He was an advocate for slaves and was a key figure in transporting them to Canada for freedom. Amanda was married twice. She had five
children from her first marriage, all died, except one. He enlisted in the Civil War and never returned. Amanda lost hope and no longer had a zeal for God. Shortly afterwards, she became gravely ill. Her father encouraged her to pray. After praying, she fell into a deep sleep and was visited by an angel that confirmed her call to preach. She was healed after she woke up and later moved to Philadelphia, PA. She joined Bethel AME Church and met her second husband, a local preacher and ordained deacon in the AME Church. They had a tumultuous marriage. There were not many black churches in her community, so she attended a white Methodist church where she was later converted. She eventually took up work as a domestic servant. Her son was ill and died. Her husband did not come to the funeral nor help pay the expenses for it. She was very active in the church and kept busy to suppress her grief. Her husband died shortly after her son of cancer.

After his death, she began fulltime ministry as an itinerant preacher, preaching in AME Churches from Maine to Tennessee. She also preached at Methodists’ holiness revivals and camp meetings. She became extremely popular with her gift of singing and preaching. In 1872, at the first AME General Conference in the South in Nashville, Tennessee, she was greeted with a thunderous applause and asked to sing a hymn. The conference erupted in shouts and tears. From this point on, her preaching career continued to rise. She would preach to over 8,000 people and travel internationally to preach in India, Africa, and Europe. She became the first black woman international evangelist and the first black to open an orphanage in Illinois.

Because of her dissension with the leaders of the AME Church, her legacy became almost obsolete. Her decision to take a non-traditional path caused her legacy to
be tarnished in the AME Church. She is more revered by the United Methodist Church and the Pentecostal Church than the AME Church. This was the Church of her membership and where she was eulogized. She also was shunned by some of the women preachers of the denomination after she did not align with them to push for legislation to ordained women at the Nashville General Conference. The AME leaders wrote the following in an AME newsletter:

Where is Amanda Berry Smith? *She belongs to us*, and we ought to set her to work. Tell me nothing about the work she is doing among our white brethren. *They don't need her.* They are rich in spiritual gifts and work. We are poor, languishing and dying. We tell Amanda Smith to come home...Let her not give a death ear. *Let her not prefer the riches of Egypt.* Her own sisters need her (emphasis added).¹

They wanted her to come back to help revive the Parent Mite Society, a missionary society group at the time. She chose not to limit herself to just the AME Church. This decision would cause a divide between her and the AME Church as they accused her of abandoning the denomination and the women. Her legacy would be all but forgotten by the AME Church. Yet, like many women in ministry in the ANGAC, she faced challenges of racism and sexism. She was also, like many women in ministry, called to preach the gospel wherever the Spirit led.

¹ Israel, *Washerwoman to Evangelist*, 69.
APPENDIX I

PICTURE OF AMANDA BERRY SMITH
APPENDIX J
IRB APPROVAL
Tuesday, October 9, 2018

Ms. Libby R. BarGar
3001 Mercer University Drive
School of Theology
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: Soul Sisters: The Intersection of Amanda Berry Smith and Selected Women in Ministry of the Atlanta North Georgia Annual Conference of the AME Church (K171331)

Dear Ms. BarGar:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 04-Oct-2018 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.108(j) and 45 CFR 46.108(d) (for expedited review) and was approved for continuation under category(ies) 07 on 09-Oct-2018.

The approval period of your continued protocol is for one year of study and expires on 08-Nov-2019.

Remark(s) Approved:
Request for Continuation Application with no changes.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and ALL accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ava Chambliss Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CCM
Director of Research Compliance
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."