

Why I don't talk a lot about feminism, and why I should

By [April Yamasaki](#)

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I don't talk a lot about feminism.

I serve my congregation as [lead pastor](#), having grown from not at all thinking about pastoral ministry to being called and curious, and now having been in ministry for over 20 years. From my initial call to ordination to increasing responsibility with other staff, I feel as if my church has been one step ahead of me, more ready for me to take on leadership than I envisioned for myself.

The congregation had worked at their understanding of women in the church back in the 1980s well before they became my congregation. And even though not everyone was quite on the same page, by the time I arrived, it didn't seem fruitful to keep belaboring the point. After all, the church had a woman pastor and a woman council chair. Women and men were already taking responsibility as deacons, council members, worship leaders, preachers, and in other leadership roles. So instead of talking about gender—or for that matter, talking about any of the many things that could divide us, such as race, age, language, education, and socioeconomic and other differences—I chose a different approach to focus on our commonality in following Jesus.

Of course, as I understand it, following Jesus includes valuing the presence, participation, gifts, and leadership of women as part of his body. It means that some of our church members are active at the [Warm Zone](#) which provides support for street-engaged women, and others connect with women at the [Christine Lamb Residence](#) for women and children. Beyond our own community, the [G12 project](#) enables girls in Guatemala to get an education, and was developed as a response to the discrimination they faced.

Instead of talking a lot about feminism, I see these as some of the different ways we embody it in practical, lived expressions of faith. I know that's partly my own bent. By temperament I'm more diplomat than rebel, more peacemaker than prophet, more likely to quietly do something than to talk about it. Then too, on the continuum between contemplation and activism, I tend toward contemplation. I value being

grounded in worship and having a sense of the sacred for its own sake, [not primarily as a tool for activism](#).

That's why I don't talk a lot about feminism. Not that we've already arrived, but my immediate environment has generally been supportive, there is some good work being done, and more broadly, I tend to focus on the big picture of what we have in common and to locate my understanding of faith and feminism within the broader framework of what it means to follow Jesus.

I'm extremely thankful for the freedom and support to do this, but I also know that feminism is about much more than my personal experience in the microcosm of my own church. So I also know that I need to say more.

Why? Just as contemplation is not simply a tool for the activist, so activism is not simply an option for the more contemplative. Being grounded in worship and having a sense of the sacred will also mean valuing and honoring the image of God in others, including women. Not only by quietly living that out, but by saying it out loud. Contrary to the quote often (mis)attributed to St. Francis of Assisi to "use words if necessary," words *are* necessary.

While women may hold up half the sky, they are [70 percent of the world's poor](#). They face discrimination, neglect, sexual assault, spousal and other abuse, violence, famine, war, lack of health care and other resources, and many more challenges.

Even in a wealthy country such as Canada, where I live, [women are still disproportionately affected by poverty](#). For example, 23.6 percent of female lone-parent families live in poverty compared to 10.8 percent of male lone-parent families. What's more, statistics indicate that women's experience of poverty tends to be harsher and more prolonged.

There have been [1,200 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women](#) in Canada in the last 30 years. While Aboriginal women make up 4 percent of the population, they account for 12 percent of missing women and 16 percent of murdered women.

A Bible college student tells me her adviser discouraged her from taking a Bible major because "you'll never be called as a pastor anyway"—perhaps a small example compared to the others on this list, but it reminds me that for all the progress that's been made, we can and should do more.

A high school student asks to interview me about women in ministry because her teacher disagrees with it, and she wants to know [what I think](#).

Years ago, when I preached my first sermon at a church that had never had a woman preach before, the pastor who invited me said, “You’re our first woman preacher, but we’re not going to introduce you that way, or explain it to people, we’re just going to do it as if it’s part of our theology and understanding of church—because it is. You just go ahead and preach it, sister!”

For all the above, this is why I don’t talk a lot about feminism, and why I should. I’m standing at the intersection of faith and feminism—living, working, writing, and serving there.

*Originally posted at [Yamasaki's blog](#)*