

*Clergy Women*, by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis and Patricia M. Y. Chang

reviewed by [Barbara Troxell](#) in the [February 2, 2000](#) issue

During nearly 40 years of full-time ministry, I have experienced many of the changes and "uphill" journeys explored in this well-researched, carefully organized book. Not only does it discuss its subject from many angles, but the data and stories ring true to the experiences of clergy of both genders. Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair Lummis and Patricia Chang provide detailed analysis of data on nearly 5,000 pastors obtained through lengthy questionnaires, significant phone conversations and a few in-depth interviews.

Funded by a Lilly Endowment grant, the staff of the Center for Social and Religious Research at Hartford Seminary set out to assess ordained ministry as it was lived out by clergywomen in the '90s and "to understand how these patterns are the same as or different from those experienced by men." Zikmund, a United Church of Christ pastor, church historian and president of Hartford Seminary, brings solid experience and wisdom to her task of interpreting the research data. Lummis and Chang are meticulous researchers whose careful attention to detail is evident throughout.

This follow-up to the 1983 book *Women of the Cloth* includes responses from people in 15 predominantly white Protestant denominations (eight more church bodies than the earlier study). The authors group the denominations into three categories reflecting the ways in which "authority is perceived and located": congregation-centered denominations (American Baptist Churches, Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], Church of the Brethren, Southern Baptist Convention, Unitarian-Universalist Association, United Church of Christ); institution-centered denominations (Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], United Methodist Church); and Spirit-centered denominations (Assemblies of God, Church of God [Anderson, Indiana], Church of the Nazarene, Free Methodist Church, Wesleyan Church).

Differences in denominational culture and patterns of authority are important factors in the history of women in ministry. Other criteria, such as age differences, marital status, economic situation, physical health, time of entering seminary, parenthood,

career paths, and other variables within the complex lives of clergywomen, are also helpfully described and analyzed.

The authors explore challenging issues, such as the multifaceted reasons why women are leaving parish ministry, ordained ministry and sometimes the church altogether in higher numbers than men. They also present significant statistics. For example, after describing in detail possible factors for wage discrimination, they state (*italics theirs*), "*Even discounting all of these factors, we find a 9 percent difference between the salaries of clergy women and clergy men.*" This figure is significantly higher than the wage gap in other service professions.

Stories abound of women facing discrimination in congregations because members are accustomed to maleness as a "component of clergy character." The authors analyze the differences between the "call" and the "appointment" systems of finding employment as a pastor. Though in an appointment system (as in the United Methodist Church) every pastor is guaranteed a position, adequate support for women in ministry is only as good as the denominational executives who manage the appointment processes and the perspectives of the congregations to which the pastors are appointed.

Whether those who leave formal employment in the church stay connected to it as clergy primarily depends on two factors: the valuing of the person's contributions by denominational executives and the support of a group of clergy colleagues. This parallels the findings of a smaller study by the Anna Howard Shaw Center of Boston University School of Theology on reasons why large numbers of United Methodist clergywomen are no longer serving local churches (*United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Study*, by Margaret Wiborg and Elizabeth Collier, October 1997). The Shaw Center researchers affirmed the need for the denomination to consider systemic ways of support and to work collaboratively to improve the system, especially through the appointment process, conference leadership and clergy colleagues, congregations and seminaries, and among clergywomen themselves.

The Hartford study examines how the influx of women into ordained leadership is changing the practice of ministry. A majority of women clergy think that women share power more than male leaders do, but only one-fifth of the men who responded agree with this assessment. Zikmund and her colleagues surmise that clergywomen, many of whom have been associates, may remember more autocratic senior pastors, while male respondents think about how open they themselves are.

They also note that women senior pastors appear to want to empower congregations more than do women in other pastoral positions, whereas the reverse is true for men. The research shows that the spiritual dimension undergirding and infusing clergywomen's vocation is extremely important in sustaining them throughout their ministry.

The authors challenge women not to get caught in seeing their own "failings" as the primary problem, but rather to recognize where their difficulties are exacerbated by denominational systems that must become more hospitable to women. I find their affirmations that "women are expanding expectations and definitions of religious leadership for the whole church" and "clergy women are reinventing ministry for the future, refusing the old definitions and expectations" enormously hopeful and encouraging.