

women and senior church appointments

(revised March 2011)

As of March 2011 there were still only 4 women deans and 15 (soon to be 16) women archdeacons in the Church of England. Some might argue that it's only 17 years since women were first ordained priests, and it all takes time. In some ways a lot has changed. But there are many women who have extensive ministry and leadership experience, so we might expect more women in senior posts than this. One way of thinking about this issue is to see what is happening to women in business and the professions, where considerable research has been done.

Findings from business and the professions

While women outnumber men in many businesses and professions, the upper levels of leadership continue to be dominated by men. This situation has attracted a considerable amount of research, and a particular focus of some of this has been the lack of women in the 'boardroom', as directors of companies.

The main findings noted in *A Woman's Place is in the Boardroom* (Thomson and Graham, 2006) are that business organizations bear the imprints of masculine values, norms and patterns of behaviour, and that as a result of this, the culture of companies frequently does not 'fit' women, particularly at senior levels where women remain thin on the ground.

The book also notes that the 'supply' and 'demand' side both need to be addressed – i.e. what women can do to be more prepared for senior posts, and what companies and organizations can do to be more receptive to women.

Further key work on leadership was produced in 2007: *Through the Labyrinth: the truth about how women become leaders*, by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli [[click here for review](#)], and a report published by McKinsey, 'Women Matter: gender diversity, a corporate performance driver' (which can be found online).

The latter highlights the performance advantage of diversity, and suggests some 'best practice' for achieving gender diversity, including measures to improve work-life balance, adaptation to recruitment and appraisal systems, and help for women through mentoring, coaching, etc. It notes that a cultural revolution is required, and must be a priority of the top management.

A recent essay in a Demos publication, 'Gender and Professionalism' by Hilary De Lyon, points out that while the numbers of women in traditionally male professions have increased substantially, the leadership of the professions continues to be dominated by men. While it was expected that weight of numbers was likely to achieve change, this has not happened. It is clear that there are other factors preventing women from taking up senior leadership roles.

De Lyon's article notes research which suggests that 'the most important barriers to women's advancement include the challenge of combining work at senior levels and family life, stereotyping and inhospitable organizational culture, lack of role models and exclusion from formal networks.'

Another recent book based on UK research, *Women in Leadership*, also argues that while progress has been made, there are still many barriers to women's acceptance as leaders. This is echoed in the book *Coaching Women to Lead*, which makes a strong case for the need to treat differently in coaching, because of the different challenges women face, identifies success factors for women, key areas for coaching, and commends approaches which work. It also highlights the

importance of coaching/mentoring for women in their early 30s, a time when women are often juggling work with motherhood and are more easily discouraged from the path to senior leadership.

The areas which the book identifies as areas where women may need particular help are:

- Confidence, from a woman's perspective
- Building active, supportive networks
- Looking for role models
- Balancing home and work life effectively
- Becoming resilient with the capacity to bounce back from difficulties
- Navigating the 'labyrinth'
- Playing with the big boys/entering the 'boys's club'
- Developing presence
- Turning into a leader rather than a doer – ie more leadership and less ministry.

Women in the Church

In the meantime, what is happening in the Church of England? In 2006 Caroline Boddington, the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments, convened a consultation which brought the 'supply' (i.e. women clergy) and 'demand' (bishops) sides together to explore what could be done to increase the numbers of women being appointed as archdeacons and deans. The consultation noted the parity with discussions about lack of women in the boardroom, and outcomes included lists of possible skills and qualities expected in archdeacons and deans and recommendations to improved recruitment procedures, as well as issues for women clergy to consider.

In 2007 the report *Talent and Calling* was produced, to review of the law and practice regarding appointments to the offices of suffragan bishop, dean, archdeacon and residentiary canon, and this made further recommendations.

On the ground, some bishops are keen to balance their teams, and some are actively looking to recruit women to their senior staff. One bishop apparently got a group of women together and said, 'Tell us what we need to do and tell us how we are doing.' Are there issues in **how jobs are described or advertised?**

A piece of research carried out by Jane Hedges in 2008 found that out of 1083 women who responded to a questionnaire, 78% said they would be willing to take up a senior post, but only 5.6% of them would respond to an open advertisement! 80% would respond to a personal approach. The research has been written up as chapter 6 of *Apostolic Women, Apostolic Authority. As Coaching Women to Lead* identifies, confidence (or lack of it) is a huge factor for many women, yet taking steps to ensure women are encouraged to apply for a post is seen by some as positive discrimination.

Some women **lack self-esteem**, and when looking at a job description may feel there are some aspects they could not do – and therefore they will not apply. Men, on the other hand, may talk themselves into a higher job than their abilities suggest. There is evidence that these dynamics are true in church situations. Those involved in clergy appointments have noticed that male curates look at a 'leader' job next, while some women are more ambivalent about wanting to be 'in charge'. Some women **prefer working from the margins** rather than from the centre and having overall responsibility, partly through ambivalence about the 'power' of leadership. They may need help in learning how to use power appropriately, rather than just rejecting male models.

Then there is something known as '**imposter syndrome**'. Secular research highlights that sometimes even where women are well-qualified for a job, they feel that they will be 'found out'. Men rarely think like this.

Some women feel that they do not have the requisite **experience**. They often seem to be less able than men to acquire the kind of varied skills and experience which would equip them for leadership at a senior level. Women may be helped by being more intentional, identifying their strengths and gifts and building on them, and considering what experience or expertise they lack and how to find it.

At a recent conference on women and ordination, one speaker noted how far the church lags behind when it comes to family-friendly hours and conditions of service. Leadership research suggests that women are more concerned than men about **work-life balance** and managing the demands of family alongside work. As suggested above, this is one key area which needs considering. The Methodist Church has found that some women don't want to be superintendents because they see the job as very demanding, and difficult to combine with responsibility to family. The same may be true for some women thinking about posts such as archdeacon.

Women may be **less intentional** in thinking about senior posts (after all, one is led to think there is no such thing as a 'career' – but then one may suddenly find that many men think there is!). Few women have **higher degrees** in theology, something which is often looked for at this level.

Many clergy, both men and women, find the Church of England **appointments system** is veiled in mystery. There are now several papers on the Patronage section of CPAS' site on how to apply for clergy posts and one aimed particularly for curates which explain the system. Click [here](#) for the link. Strategies such as mentoring, as well as changes to the way senior appointments are made, should help this to be less of a problem. Leadership courses, coaching, and help to get the right experience, should also help women who think they may be called to senior leadership.

Recent initiatives

Recent initiatives include a conference entitled '**Future Search**' held in February 2008, convened to explore what the Church will need of its leaders in the future. Of the 70 participants, 18 were women. 'Transfiguring Episcopate' was held in July 2008 prior to the Lambeth Conference, and brought together 'senior' women from every diocese, with many of the women bishops in the Anglican communion, to explore issues for women in leadership. Papers from this, together with other related articles, were published as *Apostolic Women, Apostolic Authority: Transfiguring Leadership in today's Church* – see resource list.

In November 2010, CPAS and Awesome sponsored a consultation day on **women and leadership in larger churches**, partly in response to the lack of women leading 'larger' churches (only 4 out of around 160 churches of 350+). In the evangelical world 'senior' leaders often come through this route – archdeacons and bishops have often led large churches. So the lack of women is worrying. Besides theological issues covered by the Resolutions, factors working against women include the difficulty women sometimes face in finding curacies in larger churches, obtaining associate posts which give suitable experience, and perceived discrimination in the appointments process. Addressing such issues is more difficult, but the changes to application forms (see below), the encouragement of mentoring, and the monitoring of appointments should all help. You can read a report of the consultation [here](#).

In a separate initiative, prompted by similar concerns in the wider Church and the Equality Act 2010 in relation to health and other discrimination issues, a new draft **common application form** for clergy appointments has been circulated on a trial basis (as at March 2011) by the HR manager, Clergy Terms of Service. This incorporates a number of suggestions which were raised at the November consultation day, including removing questions about age, spouse and children to a separate sheet, and including a monitoring form. It is hoped this better practice will make its

way into areas where other forms, and CVs, are used for applications. General **guidance on appointments** is due to be discussed later in 2011 and issued in due course – all progress in a positive direction, though it will take more than policies to change some attitudes towards women leaders.

Many women clergy are **married to clergy**, and sometimes face particular challenges. A new booklet is being prepared which will give practical and legal advice to those in this situation. Another area which can be confusing is entitlement to maternity pay and maternity leave, where each diocese can to some extent make its own rules. Many diocesan policies are now online.

The diocese of Liverpool has made a significant contribution to progress by producing a report, *A New DAWM 2*, which sets out key **statistics** relating to the numbers of female clergy working in different capacities across the dioceses. This report enables comparisons to be made between dioceses, and progress to be measured over time.

Progress has been made in a number of other ways. The association which brings together diocesan advisers for women's ministry (NADAWM) has become more pro-active. Some dioceses have held events to enable clergy women to think more strategically about their '**career development**', to gain new skills and to build confidence. Another outcome of the 2006 consultation is that a small **mentoring** scheme has starting for a handful of women identified as having the potential to take up senior roles in future. NADAWM and AWESOME (the network for ordained evangelical women in the Anglican Church) are also advocating mentoring to help women grow in confidence and competence.

In conclusion

It is clear that seeing women appointed to senior posts needs more than giving it time. In business, women have found they have needed to be proactive, and the picture in other churches bears this out. For example, the picture in the Episcopal Church in the USA is that there are not many women in senior posts, and while there has been progress women still face significant challenges. A handful of women have become bishops, but women have not moved into all levels of the church in the way that many expected.

The stained glass ceiling may be broken, but entering senior leadership still seems like a labyrinth, with twists and turns and many barriers on the way. Nevertheless, slowly progress is being made, and each woman appointed archdeacon is another role model, another proof that women can work at this level, another addition to gender diversity at a senior level, another change to the leadership culture, another step towards seeing men and women serving together at every level of the Church.

Resources

Averil Leimon, Francois Moscovici and Helen Goodier, *Coaching Women to Lead* (Routledge, 2011)

Martyn Percy and Christina Rees (ed), *Apostolic Women, Apostolic Authority: transfiguring leadership in today's Church* (Canterbury Press, 2010)

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