CHAPTER 14

Living a Theology of Co-Gender Ministry

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**Introduction**

The presence of females holding ministry credentials and leadership positions has flourished significantly in recent decades. Between 1951 and 1978, female clergy increased by 178 percent, compared to a 62 percent increase among male clergy; a portion of those women served in Pentecostal groups.¹ According to research by the Barna Group, the number of female senior pastors in Protestant churches² in America doubled between 1999 and 2009.³ The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) statistics reflect a similar trend.⁴

With this increase of female credential holders, issues related to the praxis of healthy co-gender ministry continue to present new challenges for both genders, since men have traditionally held the primary leadership roles in the church. However, the balance of male and female ministers is shifting, as an increase in knowledge and awareness pertaining to gender equality is perpetuated. For instance, John Stackhouse, in his article, “How to Produce an Egalitarian Man,” narrates the story of his shift from patriarchy to egalitarianism, leading to his unapologetic support of authentically living out a theology of co-gender ministry. He describes not only male scholars and role models, but also a plethora of female scholars and personal examples, including his wife, and his mother, who prompted compelling arguments for this biblical view of gender. Stackhouse points out that “they seemed the equal of men in every way pertinent to leadership in church and society, and also to partnership at

² See also, pages 20–21, and 71 for statistics indicating that Pentecostal churches lag behind other denominations with respect to female senior pastors.
home."\(^5\) He stresses that women participating equally in ministry leadership roles alongside men “makes more sense of church history and of our contemporary experience in a culture that, for once, is actually trying to treat men and women equally."\(^6\)

Although progress has been made, the challenge of how best to work as equal partners and demonstrate mutual respect continues, seeking a working relationship where women do not experience a loss of their identity or fear subordination.\(^7\) The notion that a congregation could thrive under the leadership of shared female and male partnerships remains a new concept for many in the church. Cultural and religious roadblocks, as well as a myriad of other complexities, exist as both genders pioneer this new territory, even though early Pentecostalism offered many leadership rights and privileges to women. This chapter investigates these concerns by examining the praxis of co-gender ministry, focusing on three central matters: (1) developing a theology of co-gender ministry according to Jesus and the apostle Paul, (2) living a theology of co-gender ministry, and (3) understanding and maximizing female leadership expression.

**Developing a Theology of Co-Gender Ministry According to Jesus and the Apostle Paul**

**Jesus’s Ministry to and with Women**

A proper theology of men and women in ministry must first and foremost begin with the person of Jesus, whom Pentecostals consider to be God incarnate and, therefore, the ideal model for Christian behavior. Throughout the Gospels, the authors include Jesus’s ministry to and with women, particularly in Luke who writes of twenty-four occasions when Jesus meets a woman, talks about a woman, or mentions a woman in a parable—all are spoken of in an instructive and positive way.\(^8\) Several key elements regarding how Jesus ministered to and with women remain pertinent to how men and women minister

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6 Ibid.
