

# Reaching Toward Wholeness II

## Highlights of The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Survey

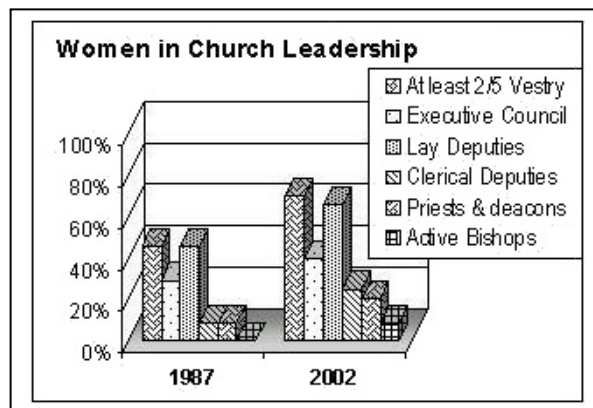
### The Participation of Women in the Episcopal Church

Presented to the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention, Minneapolis 2003  
 Committee on the Status of Women  
 Executive Council, The Episcopal Church USA

#### The Good News

The 21<sup>st</sup> century survey clearly indicates that progress has been made in the past fifteen years.

- The number of women in leadership positions in the church has steadily increased.
- Women are serving God and the church in positions not open to them in the past, *e.g.* bishops.



#### Reaching Toward Wholeness II

This survey updates the first *Reaching Toward Wholeness*, the 1987 action research study prepared for the 1988 General Convention by The Committee for the Full Participation of Women in the Church, predecessor to the Executive Council's Committee on the Status of Women.

Many of the questions used in the earlier survey were repeated, in order to gauge the extent and types of changes that have taken place in the intervening fifteen years.

Eighteen dioceses from around the country (see list on back) participated, providing factual data and distributing questionnaires to randomly-chosen parishioners and to diocesan leaders. Members of Executive Council, chairs of General Convention commissions, and Church Center professional staff also completed questionnaires.

Responses were collated and analyzed by Dr. Adair Lummis, of Hartford Seminary, who also directed the 1987 survey. Following discussion by the Committee, the full report was edited for distribution by the Rev. Virginia Brown Nolan. These highlights were prepared by Dr. Pamela W. Darling, who edited the first survey.

At the time of the first survey, there had been a decade of regular ordinations of women to the priesthood. Today that has stretched to a quarter century. A generation has grown up taking ordained women for granted. The first survey found that exposure to ordained women tends to increase openness to the ministry and leadership of all women, so it is not surprising to see significant increases in women's presence in all leadership categories.

Lest we become complacent, however, statistical analysis supports anecdotal evidence showing that most ordained women are called to serve small, generally poor congregations, while rectors of large multi-staffed parishes are overwhelming male. In addition, as is the case in several professions, women's compensation tends to be significantly lower than that of men in comparable positions.

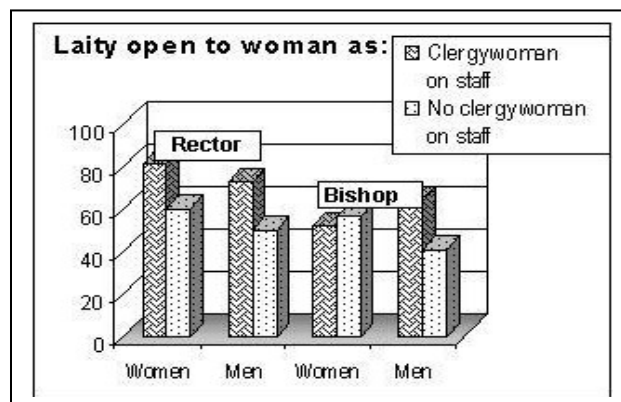
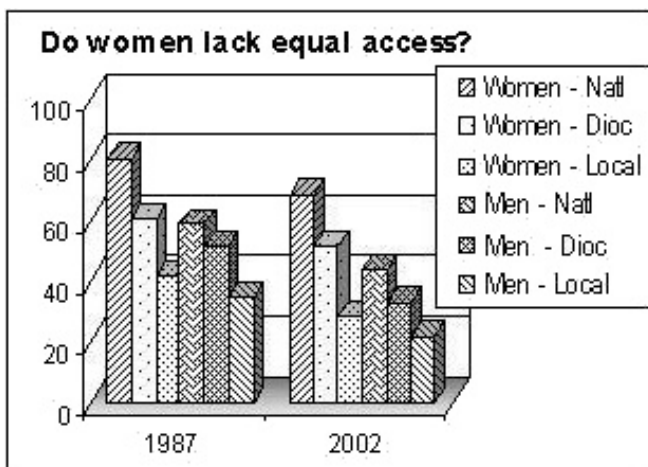
#### The Not-so-Good News

- We still have a stained glass ceiling.
- The larger the congregation, the less willing people are to have a woman as their rector.
- Despite lack of evidence, people continue to fear that women in leadership will somehow drive men away.

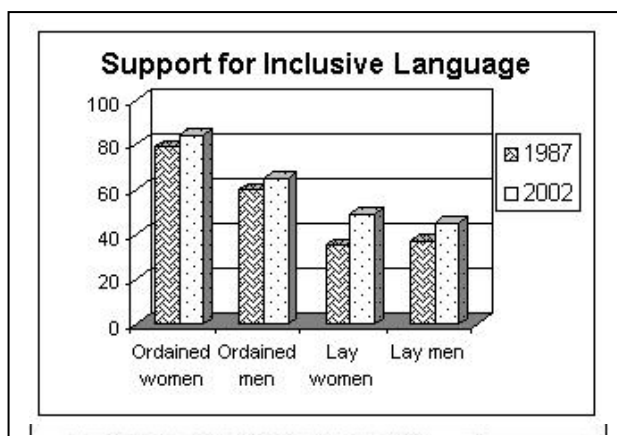
## Significant Findings

The full report, "Reaching Toward Wholeness II," presents more detail about points highlighted here, and other elements in the survey. The statistical data will continue to be available through Dr. Adair Lummis at the Hartford Seminary.

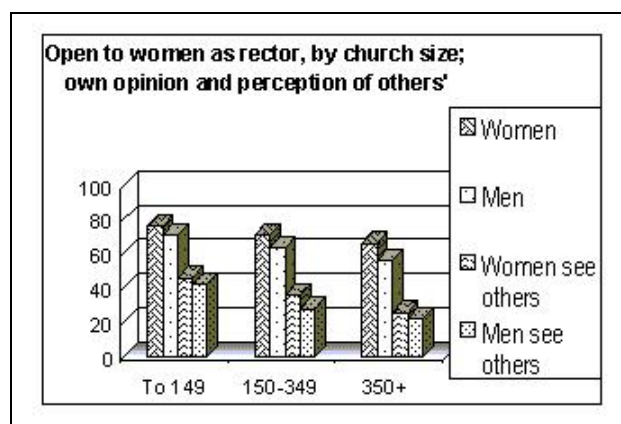
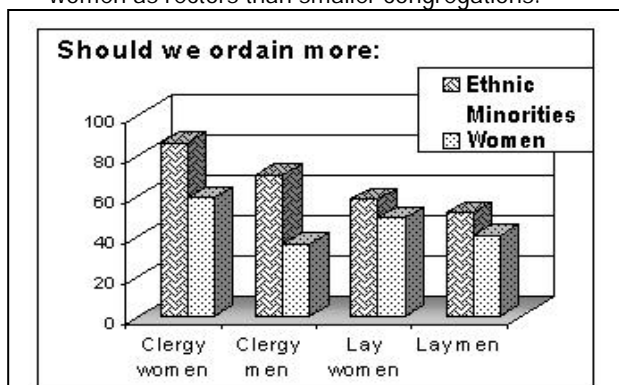
- In 2022, as compared with 1987, fewer people at all levels of the church are aware of barriers to women's full participation in the church. Are there actually fewer barriers, or has sensitivity to this issue declined?



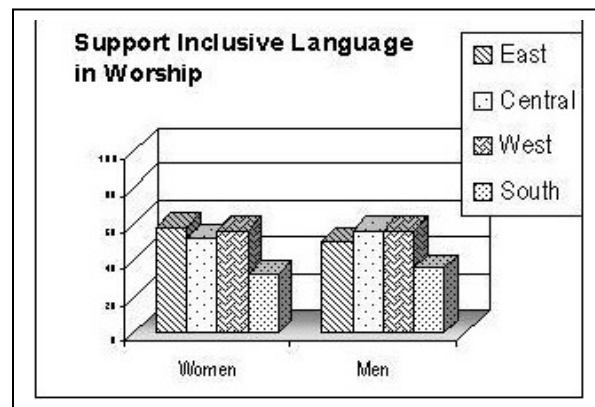
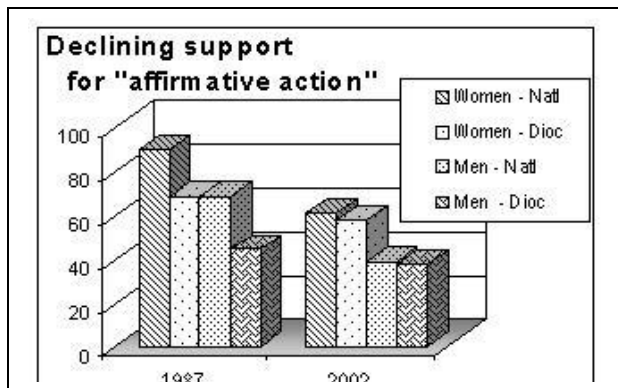
- Support for using inclusive language in worship when referring to humans has increased somewhat since 1987, but fewer people are comfortable with inclusive language referring to God.



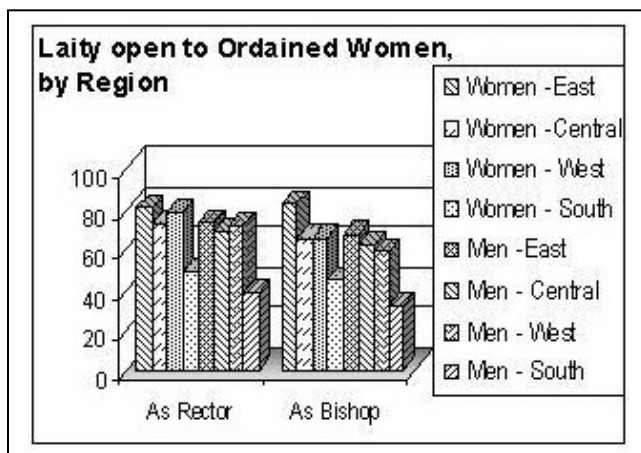
- Lay persons who regularly see an ordained woman in the pulpit and at the altar are significantly more likely to approve of women in all congregational leadership positions, including rector, than those who see only men in these pastoral roles.
- Most people believe themselves to be more open to women in church leadership positions than they perceive others in their congregation to be. Is this an accurate assumption, an excuse not to press for parity, or evidence that leaders are more open to change?
- People in larger congregations tend to be somewhat less open to ordained women than those in smaller congregations.
- Some priorities are seen as compatible with the goal of equal status for women, and others as conflicting. In 2002, ordaining ethnic minorities was a higher priority than ordaining women.
- Larger congregations tend to be somewhat less open to women as rectors than smaller congregations.



There is strong support, particularly among national leaders, for continuing national church attention to education for women's concerns and ministries, but support for "affirmative action" to place women in professional church positions is declining.



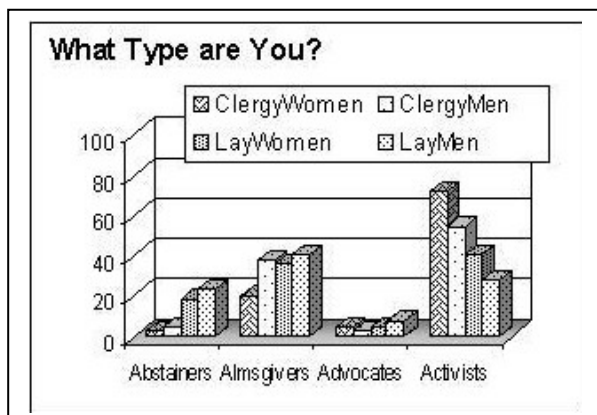
have fewer opportunities to serve in church leadership positions than women in other areas. Diocesan leaders from the Northeast are more likely to endorse women's ministry as church leaders than those from the South. They are also more likely to support the use of inclusive language in worship.



- Changing attitudes about the appropriate place of minorities and women may take a broader educational effort than the survey findings suggest people are willing to undertake.
- Regional differences mean women in some areas have fewer opportunities to serve in church leadership positions than women in other areas. Diocesan leaders from the Northeast are more likely to endorse women's ministry as church leaders than those from the South. They are also more likely to support the use of inclusive language in worship.
- Congregational characteristics are not randomly distributed among regions. The Northeast has more women rectors and a larger proportion of women on vestry than the other three regions combined. The South has the fewest women on the vestry, and the lowest support for inclusive language. The other regions, Northcentral and West, occupy the middle range of responses.
- The regional location of diocesan respondents is not a major influence on the kind of missions they endorse, but the South stands out as less supportive of issues such as welfare reform, medical care, ecology, the place of gays and lesbians in the church, and opportunities for ordained and lay professional women.

## Outreach Typology

The survey asked about outreach and advocacy ministries within and outside one's congregation. Responses suggest four distinct types of Episcopalians, distinguished by their involvement in various outreach activities:



**Abstainers** are not involved in outreach or advocacy.

**Almsgivers** are involved in outreach activities but avoid social advocacy and lobbying efforts.

**Advocates** focus on changing systems through advocacy and financial donations.

**Activists** are involved in both advocacy and outreach.

Awareness of these types can improve planning for education and outreach programs.

## Concluding reflections

Despite lack of evidence, people continue to fear that women in leadership will somehow drive men away. For centuries, worry about gender imbalance in the church has increased in every period of significant change. One historian noted that "turn-of-the-century [*i.e.* 1900] church leaders' sudden preoccupation with gender imbalance in the pews did not result from a change in demographics" but rather "ignoring the fact that churches had been two-thirds female for over two hundred years...[male church leaders] constructed a 'crisis,' pointing to the excess of women as a new and dangerous threat." (*Taves, cited by Gail Bederman in Women and Twentieth Century Protestantism, p.307; University of Chicago Press, 2002*)

The fear may persist because changing the gender balance among the clergy de-stabilizes power structures within a congregation. Women tend to exercise leadership differently than men, who benefit from the authority automatically ascribed to them by the culture. Theoretically, the absence of a male leader could be experienced as absence of leadership altogether, which might lead some to abandon the congregation. In fact, neither men nor women perceive a significant difference in church membership trends between churches with ordained women on staff and those without.

Regional differences are perhaps the most striking finding of the survey, documenting more conservative attitudes in the South, which make change in the Church much slower there than elsewhere.

PARTICIPATING DIOCESES	
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>South</b>
Bethlehem	Central Gulf Coast
Maine	South Carolina
Massachusetts	Virginia
New York	Western Louisiana
Washington (DC)	<b>West</b>
<b>Northcentral</b>	California
Indianapolis	Los Angeles
Iowa	South Dakota
Kentucky	Texas
Southern Ohio	Wyoming

Church-going remains a much more prominent part of Southern culture than in other regions, leading to larger congregations which tend to be more conservative than smaller ones regardless of region. Some will argue that this provides a necessary "brake," preventing the Church from changing more rapidly than its structures can handle.

This first survey of the 21<sup>st</sup> century documents progress in incorporating women into all aspects of the Episcopal Church's life. This is more prominent in some regions than in others, but the overall pattern is unmistakable. How will these findings compare with the situation 15 or 20 years from now? Continued monitoring is one way of ensuring that the church continues to "reach toward wholeness."

*The complete report can be found at [www.episcopalchurch.org/women/surveyreport.ht](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/women/surveyreport.ht)*

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