

# Women's Leadership Role in the Apostolic Faith Mission Church of South Africa

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## SHORT BIO

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## ABSTRACT

Women's advancement into executive leadership in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) church in South Africa (SA) has not been able to keep pace with women's movement into the workforce. As part of a resolution passed at the AFM of SA's National Leadership Forum (NLF) meeting, a task team was appointed in March 2020 to determine what prevents women from being elected to leadership positions in the church. This team consisted of three women ordained as pastors in the church. A questionnaire was distributed by the team to women in the AFM assemblies in nine provinces of SA asking why women were not advancing in leadership in the church and what could be done to change the phenomenon. A sample of 89 participants responded to both closed and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings illustrated that a change in perceptions and bias toward women in leadership is needed. Women require support from church leadership, training, mentorship, and intentional changes to policy and practice. Finally, women require representation on all levels of leadership in the church.

## KEYWORDS

Women leadership; Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa; Negofeminism; African feminism; Pentecostal church

## Introduction

Despite some women's significant advances into higher ranks of church leadership across the globe, research overwhelmingly confirms the continued existence of the glass ceiling in church leadership for women. Recent progress has been made in certain denominations such as the Church of England, which has turned to 'unconscious bias training', to appoint more female bishops over the next decade. Moreover, the Catholic Church appointed the first woman to the Synod of Bishops in 2021. Still, women's transformation in church leadership has been painfully slow.

Across various sectors of society, women are finding ways to break through the glass ceiling. Massive strides have been made both internationally and in South Africa (SA), affording women the opportunity to rise to leadership positions. The fact that the church is lagging in this respect is prompting women to feel disenfranchised and underrepresented. As McKnight<sup>1</sup> puts it, "It seems a sad commentary on the church and on its understanding of the Holy Spirit that official leadership and ministry are allowed to come from only one half of the community of faith". This leads to Landman's<sup>2</sup> question: "What is women's space in the church, and what can or should it be?". In Africa, trailblazers such as Bishop Purity Malinga of the Methodist Church of southern Africa and the late Professor Plaatjies Van Huffel from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa have demonstrated women's leadership potential in the church. Historically, the Pentecostal church has been more open to female participation and leadership. Miller<sup>3</sup> states that the Pentecostal belief was that experiences of the Spirit were "empowering and legitimating",<sup>4</sup> and, importantly, that these experiences were open to all, leading to high levels of female participation in Pentecostal churches. Nel<sup>4</sup> claims that,

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<sup>1</sup> Scott McKnight, "Biblical Scholars and Women in Ministry" *Jesus Creed*, Jan 11, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/february/biblical-criticism-and-women-in-ministry.html>

<sup>2</sup> Christina Landman, "Safe spaces for women in the church: The case of Dullstroom-Emnotweni." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (2013): 171-185

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Miller, "Women in Australian Pentecostalism: Leadership, Submission, and Feminism in Hillsong Church." *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 29, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Marius Nel, "Structural Violence against Women in the Pentecostal Movement: Proposals for a South African Deconstruction Strategy." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 45, no. 2 (2019): 1-14.

in early Pentecostalism, race and gender did not count in terms of ministry because the deciding factor was the gifts of the Spirit. Women featured strongly in the democratic worship service, and they were also recognised as evangelists or preachers and efficient in praying for the sick or possessed.

This was also the case in the early Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) church.

The AFM of SA was established in 1908 as an evangelical Pentecostal church. However, women's role in church leadership positions changed when the AFM church amended its hermeneutical perspective, leading to the demise of its inclusive ethos. Unfortunately, this earlier departure has not yet fully recovered and the growth of women's participation in both ministry and church leadership has been painfully slow. Weber offers an explanation for the diminishing rates of female leadership in Pentecostal churches in the theory of "routinisation of charisma".<sup>5</sup> This theory holds that in the early development of religious institutions, the labor of all members is needed and women, therefore, have a broader scope for leadership, especially if authority is situated in the personal "charisma" of the individual. However, as organizations grow and develop, they become more formalized and structured. Consequently, "priestly" figures are favored over "prophetic" ones that, in the case of these churches, are overwhelmingly men. These more formalized and rigid structures subject women to a "theology of submission"<sup>3</sup> based on biblical scripture that requires women to submit to the authority of men and men to submit to the authority of the church. The gender disparity in the AFM church leadership was less apparent in the earlier years of the church due to positions being less prominent and formal. However, as structures within the church became formalized, the gender disparity consequently became more evident.

Kgatlé<sup>6</sup> highlights the lack of female leadership at various levels of the AFM of SA, citing that this issue seems to be present at the local assembly, regional, and national office bearers levels. He states that misrepresentation of leadership in the AFM of SA is evident, whereby most of the 300 ordained female pastors in the church are in supporting roles of assistant pastors or

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<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, *The sociology of religion*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Mookgo S. Kgatlé "Gender dimensions in Pentecostal leadership: The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa as a case study." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019): 1-7.

branch pastors, with many women taking up secular jobs to support their ministry as they are not being called by assemblies as presiding pastors. Many ordained female pastors support their husbands in the role of pastors' wives. Indeed, female pastors are often limited to youth and women's ministries, leading Sunday school, or taking administrative roles in the church.

Nevertheless, strides had been made on a regional level with the appointment of Dr. Ina Smit in 2021 as the first democratically elected regional chair of the Central Gauteng Region and the second woman in the history of the AFM to serve on the National Leadership Forum (NLF). On an international level, Pastor Thandanani Savhasa was elected as the AFM International Youth president in 2022. Despite these encouraging recent developments, however, the overall lack of women in church leadership is still a pertinent crisis.

## **Background to the study**

Today, more than 300 women are recognized by the AFM as ordained pastors (in a church with a total of 1498 pastors).<sup>7</sup> In practice, however, only 38 women serve in assemblies and only serve as presiding pastors in exceptional cases. The reason for these women not serving in presiding positions includes a reluctance from the church assemblies to call on women to be presiding pastors, relegating them instead to children, youth, and women's ministry or administrative duties. Indeed, the perception of assembly members is that women should not be in presiding positions. This situation emphasizes the perpetuation of historical, cultural, and hermeneutical reasons for women's non-acceptance in leadership roles.

Initially, women were allowed to lead assemblies, but after various discussions, it was decided that they were not to serve the sacraments. In 1971, questions were again asked about the theological basis of women in ministry. A committee was appointed to investigate the matter. The executive council then decided to acknowledge women's callings, but required training specifically designed for them. Six years later, in 1977, a regulation was approved that women would serve and be recognized in the

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<sup>7</sup> "Pastoral Letter: Second Quarter 2018." AFM of SA, accessed September 13, 2022. <http://afm.ags.org/category/publications>

ministry in the same manner as part-time pastors. Various discussions led to a decision in the later part of 1980 that defined the requirements for women to be in ministry. Sister Eldad Bosch and Kotie Beukes were two of the first women allowed to enter the ministry as part of the new regulations. Additionally, Sister L. Schoombie was approved to be a full-time worker and lecturer at Central Bible College and operated under the supervision of the Missions Department. The church was informed that these women were available for ministry.<sup>8</sup>

The AFM of SA has been ordaining women as pastors since 1991. However, for the past 29 years, female pastors have faced challenges that are not common to their male counterparts. In March 2020, as part of a resolution passed at the AFM of SA's NLF, a task team was appointed to determine what prevents women from being elected to leadership positions in the church. This team consisted of three women ordained as pastors in the church. The mandate originated from concerns communicated to the church's leadership during a meeting in May 2012 with female pastors who mentioned a lack of equity with their male counterparts in terms of salaries, serving of the Lord's Communion, and administering Water Baptism, undertaken through a Call system illustrating the assembly's governing body's reluctance to call on women as presiding pastors. Theological issues were also raised such as the exposition of scripture like 1 Tim 2:12-15, and constitutional challenges where female pastors felt discriminated against when it comes to their employment agreement (e.g., maternity leave).

The task team endeavored to better understand women's experiences in the church by distributing a questionnaire to women in all congregations of the AFM of SA. This questionnaire recorded participants' biographical information and asked pertaining to women's experiences of leadership in the AFM. Participants were also asked what they thought needed to change, whether they believed women had equal opportunities, and why they thought there was a lack of female representation on a regional and national level.

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<sup>8</sup> Isak Burger, and Marius Nel. *The fire falls in Africa: a history of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa: a centennial edition 1908-2008*. (Vereeniging: Christian Art Publishers, 2008).

## Theoretical framework

This study was approached through the lens of African feminist theory. African feminist thought challenges and rejects prevailing narratives that homogenize and oversimplify the experiences of African women, men, and children, in favor of an approach that is attentive to the nuances of specific contexts, cultures, and peoples. African feminist theory places a strong emphasis on the power and agency of African women who draw on their cultural and experiential backgrounds to develop knowledge that is contextually relevant and can contribute to the development of strong relationships, foster personal and community healing, and engender positive change within larger socio-cultural contexts.<sup>9</sup> African feminist theory emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the intersection of patriarchy, colonialism, and racism in African societies. As scholars such as Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí<sup>10</sup> and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi<sup>11</sup> have argued, the category of "woman" in African societies is not a static or universally applicable concept but is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, political, and economic forces. African feminist theory seeks to challenge essentialist and Eurocentric assumptions about gender and sexuality and foreground the experiences and perspectives of African women. As a result of the presence of diverse viewpoints within the realm of African feminism, several scholars advocate for the use of the plural form 'African feminisms' when referring to the theory.<sup>12</sup>

Arndt contends that African feminism seeks to challenge and dismantle the current structure of female subjugation to enhance the status of women.

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<sup>9</sup> Bagele Chilisa and Gabo Ntseane, "Resisting dominant discourses: Implications of indigenous, African feminist theory and methods for gender and education research." *Gender and Education* 22, no. 6 (2010): 617-632.

<sup>10</sup> Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's African Womanism." In *The womanist reader* (Routledge, 2006). 21 - 36

<sup>12</sup> Annie Fatsireni Chiponda. "An analysis of the portrayal of women in junior secondary school history textbooks in Malawi." PhD diss., University of KwaZulu Natal, 2014); Susan Arndt. "Perspectives on African feminism: defining and classifying African-feminist literatures." *Agenda* 17, no. 54 (2002): 31-44.; Mary Kolawole, "The Dynamism of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures." *The Dynamism of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press Inc, 2002): 31.

Given the diverse social conditions prevalent in Africa, African feminists recognize multiple forms of oppressive power beyond patriarchy, including racism, ethnicity, colonialism, neo-colonialism, religion, apartheid, class, culture, and tradition, which Arndt identifies as "oppressive mechanisms." Consequently, African feminism also seeks to address gender oppression in the context of these other oppressive mechanisms.<sup>13</sup> African feminism further ensures that the local and context-specific informs gender analysis and feminist practice in Africa in "order to avoid making facile generalisations".<sup>14</sup>

## Methodology and research framework

This study utilized a mixed method approach to draw on both qualitative and quantitative data. An embedded mixed methods design was used in this study. This design aims to understand experimental results by incorporating individuals' perspectives.<sup>15</sup> Data was collected via questionnaires that included both closed and open-ended questions. This online questionnaire was distributed throughout the AFM of SA assemblies across all nine provinces of the country. The following groups were approached: youth leadership, elders, deacons, assembly governing bodies, welfare ministry committees, outreach/evangelism committees, and pastors. Eighty-nine women responded to the questionnaire (n=89). The questionnaire was anonymous and included 15 questions aimed at understanding women's leadership in the AFM of SA.

## Participants

At the time of data collection, all participants were members of the AFM of SA church. Participants' biographical information is presented in Table 1:

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Arndt, "Perspective on African feminism: defining and classifying African-feminist literatures." *Agenda* 17, no. 54 (2002): 31-44

<sup>14</sup> Annie Fatsireni Chiponda. "An analysis of the portrayal of women in junior secondary school history textbooks in Malawi." PhD diss., University of KwaZulu Natal, (2014);

<sup>15</sup> John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (California: SAGE publications, 2016)

Characteristic	Frequency	(%)	Characteristic	Frequency	(%)
Gender*			<b>Age</b>		
Female	89	100	16 – 20 years	4	0
Province			21 – 30 years	33	3
Eastern Cape	0	0	31 – 40 years	12	1
Free State	5	0.6	41 – 50 years	16	1
Gauteng	38	43	51 – 65 years	23	2
KwaZulu-Natal	4	0.5			
Limpopo	4	0.5			
Mpumalanga	2	0.2			
North West	1	5			
Northern Cape	0	0			
Western Cape	36	40			

## Findings

The quantitative data was generated from 14 close-ended questions that were included in the questionnaire. As indicated in Table 1, all participants in this study were women members of the AFM of SA. Women between the ages of 21 and 30 years were most represented and women between the ages of 16 and 20 years were least represented. The majority of respondents were from Gauteng and the Western Cape province. The most represented leadership involvement of participants were found in youth leadership, assemblies governing bodies, sister's fellowship communities, and from pastors.

When asked how women would describe their journey to leadership in the AFM church in their various assemblies, 41% of women reported that they found it challenging and that they constantly had to prove they could lead. In contrast, 31% of women reported that they experienced no direct opposition, however, no support was provided, and 34% of women indicated that they felt supported in taking on leadership positions in their church. Moreover, 32% of the respondents indicated that they led social, political and other organizations outside the church. In the same vein, 85% of respondents indicated that they found it easier to be influential outside of the AFM church as a woman, and 43% felt that they did not have equal opportunities to lead within the church. Of the 58% of respondents that felt they had equal opportunities to lead in their church, the vast majority were involved in Youth Ministry, were in the 21 to 30 years age group, and already had a woman pastor in their church.

65% of respondents did not know that there were 300 ordained women pastors in the church. 62% of respondents indicated that they believed their current local assembly would call a woman pastor. Furthermore, 17% indicated that they are already led by a woman pastor, and 22% of



respondents said that they did not believe their assemblies would call a woman pastor. Indeed, 60% of respondents, most of whom were in the age groups above 20 to 30 years, agreed that gender equality in the church has not come far enough. 90% of participants disagreed with the statement that "men are better leaders in the church than women."

The qualitative data seems to suggest that younger women and those involved in youth ministry in the church experience less gender bias and are more optimistic about the role of women in leadership in the church. Of those who indicated they were already led by a woman pastor, all were between the ages of 16 and 30 years. Of those that indicated opposition in leadership to women in their churches, the majority were over 30 years of age and were already pastors, assistant pastors, presiding pastors, and deacons. The data also suggests that the status of women in leadership positions in the higher echelons of the AFM church is not well known, especially among the youth.

Three dominant themes emerged from the qualitative data in this study: (1) Women in the church had divergent experiences of leadership inside and outside the church; (2) Women recognized the need for a change of biases and perceptions in the church; and (3) Women offered recommendations for changes.

### ***Divergence in women's experiences of leadership inside and outside the church***

One of the main themes that emerged from participants' responses was that the leadership modeled in their churches was disconnected from what they experienced in other areas of their lives. Women seemed to experience greater opportunities for leadership in their places of employment and communities than in their church, leaving them feeling disenfranchised.

These views are illustrated in the extracts below gathered from the raw data. Participants seemed to have significant leadership experience outside the church context:

*"Outside of church, I chair committees"* (Participant 62)

*"Sometimes the community acknowledgment is better than [that of] the church people"* (Participant 23)

*"I am in a leadership position at work" (Participant 71)*

*"Outside the church, people trust women and young people to lead" (Participant 30)*

*"I have been in senior management positions of listed and non-listed companies" (Participant 2)*

Some participants mentioned how they were treated in terms of leadership differed outside the church:

*"I have never been treated differently outside of church because I am a woman. It has always been on merit and hard work" (Participant 27)*

On their influence in church communities, participants reported:

*"Women need to work harder inside the church to prove themselves" (Participant 11)*

*"The church views women based on their gender and not their capabilities" (Participant 3)*

*"You have to work harder to prove your capabilities in leadership [in the church]. Every decision you make is scrutinized – unlike male counterparts" (Participant 66)*

*"I need male pastors' approval to do things" (Participant 21)*

Participants also shared feeling more recognized outside the church:

*"I am heard outside the church" (Participant 4)*

*"Outside people are more willing to listen" (Participant 52)*

*"I feel more accepted and can work more freely in my community" (Participant 19)*

*"I get honoured and respected easier outside the church"*  
(Participant 33)

***Women recognized a need for perceptions and biases to be challenged in the church***

Participants seemed to experience bias as a significant barrier to women's progress in church leadership:

*"You can lead in every avenue you can think of only to find that people [in the church] still prefer men"* (Participant 14)

*"Educate our churches to accept women as leaders"* (Participant 5)

*"There are no barriers other than the mindsets of the people in churches"* (Participant 54)

*"There is still a strong patriarchal system that needs to adapt to women leadership"* (Participant 3)

Some participants reported feeling left out based on perceptions justified through scripture:

*"The business sector had a strong focus on skill and competence, and in cases where gender bias exists, you can at least convince people through determination and using your skills...in the end, the business sector seeks to profit, so if you can contribute to that everyone wins; the church, however, seems (sic) to have decided that women cannot enter certain roles and they draw this conclusion from Scripture"* (Participant 69)

Other participants blamed bias for the lack of women in church leadership:

*"Women do not believe that they can lead, so...members of the church don't have that much faith in a woman"* (Participant 6)

*"I think we still believe that men lead better than women"* (Participant 8)

*“So, the perception...that comes across, women can do the work and participate but not really take the lead” (Participant 52)*

*“How can you expect women to rise as leaders when they are not taken seriously in the church? There they are mainly seen as only good for women’s ministry” (Participant 71)*

### ***Women offered recommendations for changes***

Participants provided their opinions on what change is needed to alter the status quo of female leadership in the church. High on the list was the need for greater opportunities for women:

*“Acknowledge the [women] pastors and use them in our conferences [rather than] have outside of ... AFM church speakers” (Participant 11)*

*“Participate in preaching in the church at large” (Participant 37)*

*“As a leader who took over from a male pastor, I need assistance and guidance from other female leaders/pastors” (Participant 67)*

Women also sought support from existing leadership within the church:

*“Support from leadership” (Participant 46)*

*“More support from members of the governing body” (Participant 6)*

*“This should start at provincial level right up to national” (Participant 14)*

*“Effective communication from the national office” (Participant 20)*

*“Constant and unconditional support from the church, especially the leaders. Without judgement and negative assumptions, instigations or preconceived notions...and the restrictions that come with that” (Participant 52)*

A need for training, as a form of empowerment, was also evident:

*"More leadership training is required at regional and national level"*  
(Participant 35)

*"Updates of systems and policies"* (Participant 29)

*"Opportunities and funding for further education"* (Participant 18)

*"Opportunities for growth disappear while we are waiting for approval"* (Participant 81)

## Discussion

Women's advancement into executive leadership in the AFM church in SA has been unable to keep pace with women's movement into the workforce. Women are keenly aware of the discrepancy between the opportunities for leadership they are afforded in their communities and places of employment compared to those they are afforded in the church. *The lack of female representation is leaving many women in the church to feel unrecognized and disenfranchised. Factors that influence this exclusion seem to be scripture-related, hermeneutics, and cultural perspectives.* Jacobs<sup>16</sup> states these barriers are a matter of "gender, patriarchy, and power". Glanz<sup>17</sup> also highlights the issue of gender stereotypes in leadership in the evangelical context. Expectations for women's leadership behavior in church settings are often determined by unconscious bias and stereotypical beliefs on gender roles. Moreover, the existence of gender role stereotypes among male leaders can be detrimental to leadership form and function and can also lead to a lack of cooperation in congregations, confusion, and a loss of credibility for female leaders.<sup>18</sup> In cases where women do function in leadership positions, the pressure to conform to the church's executive leadership culture is enormous: "Executive women in strongly male-normed

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<sup>16</sup> Pumeza Cordelia Nonie Jacobs, "Practical theological study of the marginalisation of women in religious leadership in the Pentecostal tradition in South Africa." (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2022)

<sup>17</sup> Judy L. Glanz "Exploration of Christian women's vocational ministry leadership and identity formation in evangelical churches on the west coast." *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 2 (2020): 325-346.

<sup>18</sup> Leanne M. Dzubinski, "Taking on power: Women leaders in evangelical mission organizations." *Missiology* 44, no. 3 (2016): 281-295.

executive leadership contexts must exercise strong gendered self-constraint to break through the glass ceiling".<sup>19</sup>

*Participants in this study considered bias from church members a major obstacle in women's leadership progress in the church.* Davis<sup>20</sup> similarly notes that the traditional family values highlighting the patriarchal model for both home and church have been the most significant hurdle for women who believe they were called to preach. An exploration on men's unexamined gendered identity issues is required to address bias in the church regarding female leadership and to eliminate the objectification of women that diminishes their leadership potential and results in a vulnerability that their male counterparts do not experience. Glanz<sup>10</sup> suggests that a culture of respect and honor for 'femaleness' can be nurtured with time and through the modelling of mature men and women. Chitando<sup>21</sup> notes that it is important to acknowledge the effect of gender socialization in the church in southern Africa and that, in many instances, it is women religious leaders themselves who hesitate to stand up boldly, with other women in the congregation refusing to support and empower them to do so. The AFM church, like many churches in Africa, has failed to embrace women in leadership due to its attachment to the patriarchy.

*Women's space in the church needs renegotiation.* Research by Barna<sup>22</sup> suggests that women feel undervalued and underutilized at church. The participants in this study were asked what needs to happen for things to change to promote women's leadership in the church. The responses indicated that they mainly sought more opportunities, referring to speaking engagements, opportunities to preach, and training for women in the field. *Participants felt that support from leadership structures in the church would go a long way to change the tide for women in leadership. This support includes women's intentional appointment to committees and giving women*

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<sup>19</sup> Leanne Dzubinski, Amy Diehl, and Michelle Taylor. "Women's ways of leading: The environmental effect." *Gender in Management: An International Journal* (2019).

<sup>20</sup> Nicole L. Davis, "Women in ministry: How conflicts between god's purpose and church doctrine impact the efficacy of female church leaders." (PhD diss., Nova Southeastern University, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Ezra Chitando "Introduction" in *The Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa*. Vol. 22, ed. Joachim Kügler, Rosinah Gabaitse, and Johanna Stiebert (Bamberg:University of Bamberg Press, 2019). 13 - 24

<sup>22</sup> George Barna, *Revolution* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 2012)

*seats at the table*. Landman talks about “negotiating space . . . in the open and in the heart of the church itself”.<sup>23</sup> She asks poignant questions about women’s space in the church:

Is women’s space in the church a safe space, and will it only be safe if it remains secret? Is it a space where women uphold the church but have to keep it under cover? When and how can the church become an openly safe space for women where they do not have to behave in a covert way?

Landman’s answer to the question of “creating space” is rooted in the designation “nego-feminism”, which Nnaemeka<sup>24</sup> defines as “‘Africa’s way’ of theorising and practising negotiations between men and women from a perspective of ‘non-egoism’”. Nego-feminism can be seen as a feminist theory that implicitly acknowledges women’s capabilities in dealing with the patriarchy.<sup>25</sup> In approaching the issue of women’s space in the church from the nego-feminist perspective, knowing when to disrupt the patriarchy becomes important, along with the concept of “give and take”, which is related to the principles of compromise and balance.<sup>26</sup>

Pillay<sup>27</sup> notes the remaining resistance towards a feminist consciousness in the church context and advocates for the possibility of being both a Christian and a feminist. The author claims that common ground between Christianity and feminism can be found in both affirming the human dignity and equality of every individual. As far as the way forward is concerned in advocating for women’s leadership in the AFM church, it is imperative that the church intentionally levels the playing field between men and women. Conversations about women’s leadership are required at all levels of leadership in the church. Bias and patriarchal tendencies should be

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<sup>23</sup> Christina Landman, “Safe spaces for women in the church: The case of Dullstroom-Emnotweni.” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (2013): 171-185

<sup>24</sup> Obioma Nnaemeka. “Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa’s way.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 2 (2004): 357-385.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin Justice Mapangisana, “Examining women’s agency with respect to the appropriation of runyoka in Johane Masowe Zambuko Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe.” (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu Natal, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Annie Fatsireni Chiponda. “An analysis of the portrayal of women in junior secondary school history textbooks in Malawi.” PhD diss., University of KwaZulu Natal, 2014);

<sup>27</sup> Miranda Pillay. “The Anglican Church and Feminism: Challenging the ‘Patriarchy of our faith’.” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Southern Africa*, 19 no. 2 (2014): 53-71.

addressed in conversations where both men and women participate in the space of negotiating within the nego-feminist perspective, united in their role as people of faith. The church should further engage in processes that empower women for leadership positions, by facilitating workshops and mentoring programs. Although courageous conversations about the changes needed for women in the church are an integral part of the process of transformation (considering the slow pace of change in the church), intentional implementation of policies and practices is necessary. Female pastors should be afforded more opportunities in presiding positions and women should be represented at all levels of church leadership.

## **Conclusion**

Thirty-one years after female pastors were first ordained in the AFM of SA, the status of female leadership in the church seems to suggest that women are still somewhat situated in the “de facto second-class citizenship positions”.<sup>28</sup> The call for transformation in women's roles in leadership in the AFM church of SA has never been more urgent. Based on responses from women in the AFM church across the country, a change in perceptions and bias of women in leadership is needed. Women require support from leadership, training, mentorship, and intentional changes to policies and practices. Finally, women require representation on all levels of leadership in the church. The cause of women's increased leadership in the church should not just be considered as having a feminist agenda but as a human rights concern. As Johnson and Rakoczy<sup>29</sup> point out, “whatever enables women's full humanity to flourish is redemptive and of God” and whatever damages women's full humanity is “non-redemptive and contrary to God's intent”.

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<sup>28</sup> Justice RKO Kyei, Elizabeth NMK Yalley, and Emmanuel KE Antwi. "Negotiating Gendered Leadership Positions within African Initiated Christian Churches in Amsterdam." *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 27, no. 2 (2021): 22-44.

<sup>29</sup> I.W. Van Wyk, "Johnson, Elizabeth, CJS with Rakoczy, Susan IHM 1997-Who do you say that I am? Introducing contemporary Christology." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 55, no. 4 (1999): 1155.



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