

## SLIDE 1: Women Ministers in the Assemblies of God

**Intro:** Have you ever been somewhere and you thought to yourself, “Hmmm; I think I’ve been here before.” Maybe in childhood your parents took you somewhere, or maybe in your adult years you took a turn down a road to realize you’d previously been there. But upon coming to that place again, you have a sense of your bearings for indeed you have been there before. And because you have your bearings, you can find your way forward.

And so it is with our lives, even our collective life experience (as the Church); when recall the past, when we revisit it in our mind’s eye, it helps us find our way forward.

And so today, we’re going to take a look back upon the history of Assemblies of God women ministers. In order to do this right, we need to go back to the **Day of Pentecost**.

## SLIDE 2

**Acts 1: 8**, Jesus said, “You will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my **witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

**Acts 1:14**, “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the **women** and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

**Acts 2:1-4**, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on **each of them**. **All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues as **the Spirit enabled them**.”

On that glorious **Day of Pentecost**, Men and women **equally empowered with God’s Spirit** as was prophesied by the prophet Joel (2:28).

In fact, when Peter addressed the crowd of spectators who had come from many different nations for the Feast of Pentecost, **Peter referenced Joel’s OT prophecy**: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your **sons and daughters will prophecy** ... Even on my servants, both **men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will **prophecy**.”

And **what is prophecy**? The authoritative, Spirit-inspired forthtelling of God’s heart, God’s message, to the world.

And **what is His message for the world**? Joel’s prophecy tells us: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” (**Joel 2:32**).

So why do I reference Acts 2 in speaking of our own AG history? **Why do we start here?**

This was the **birthday of the NT church**; here we see **God’s design** for the Church—that **God’s Spirit** would empower *men & women* together to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission!

And this **foundational Scriptural narrative** in Acts should continue to inform our theology and practice today!

**SLIDE 3** For the sake of time, we will now fast forward to **American Pentecostal history** ... I want to look briefly at **two revivals** that were significant precursors to the formation of the Assemblies of God—particularly, I want you to note **the participation of women** in these events.

You see, when the Holy Spirit writes the script, we see the full empowerment and inclusion of God’s “sons and daughters” in His redemptive work!

**Revival 1: 1900, Charles Parham** started a Bible school in Topeka, KS. In their study of the Bible, students wrestled with what to do with **Acts 2**. So in Dec. 1900, Parham gave his students an assignment: research the Scriptures for the biblical evidence of having been baptized in the Spirit. The answer they discovered: *speaking in other tongues*.

On Dec. 31, 1900, in a watchnight prayer service, student **Agnes Ozman** asked the other students to lay hands on her and pray for her to receive this Holy Spirit baptism because she wanted to be a **missionary** to foreign nations.

She was baptized so powerfully in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in another language that it’s reported she couldn’t speak English for three days! (See: <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1901-2000/was-agnes-ozman-speaking-chinese-11630666.html>.) (Also see Edith Blumhofer’s book, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 1. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989; p. 83 [for more clarification](#).) Revival broke out on that campus that spread throughout the nation, including to **Azusa Street** in LA in 1906.

From 1900 onward, **Charles Parham trained women for ministry** and commissioned them as church planters and to serve as pastors. (“Women in the Pentecostal Movement,” article by Dr. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. [Professor of Church History at Fuller Seminary]; accessed at: <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/women-in-the-pentecostal-movement/>.)

I’ll say it again: When the Holy Spirit writes the script, we see the full empowerment and inclusion of God’s “sons and daughters” in His redemptive work!

**Revival 2: At the Azusa Street Revival (1906)**, in addition to the inclusion of women, we also see cultural diversity. (Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, page 61).

In 1906, the African-American preacher **William Seymour**, (who had been a student of Parham) brought the Pentecostal message to Los Angeles. Men and women, black & white, provided leadership to this revival. (Picture)

Pastor Seymour invited women to preach from his pulpit, and (just as Parham did), and he too sent women out as church planters and missionaries. (“Women in the Pentecostal Movement,” article by Dr. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. [Professor of Church History at Fuller Seminary]; accessed at: <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/women-in-the-pentecostal-movement/>.)

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Seymour: “It is contrary to the Scriptures that woman should not have her part in the salvation work to which God has called her. We have no right to lay a straw in her way, but to be men of holiness, purity and virtue, to hold up the standard and encourage the woman in her work, and God will honor and bless us as never before. **It is the same Holy Spirit in the woman as in the man.**” (Untitled Article, *The Apostolic Faith*, [Los Angeles, CA] 1.12 (January 1908), 2.4.2)

Many leaders from the Azusa Street revival—men and women—went on to start Pentecostal works and churches throughout the nation.

Many regard the Azusa Street revival as the **launch of the modern-day Pentecostal movement**.

One of the subsequent outcomes just a few years later was the formation of the **Assemblies of God**.

Now we'll focus more specifically upon **women ministers in the Assemblies of God**.

## SLIDE 5

**1914:** Formation of the AG (Hot Springs, AR). Approx. 300 delegates...

At this first council, among the many decisions that were made, it was decided that women could be **ordained to be missionaries and evangelists ... but not as senior pastors**.

Historians such as Drs. **Edith Blumhofer** and **Gary McGee** surmised that such a restriction bore “the unmistakable imprint of EN Bell,” the **first General Chairman** of the AG (**Southern Baptist** background). (Edith Blumhofer, PhD. *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism, Vol. 1*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989; page 206. And ... Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, page 116.)

**Gary McGee:** “The ideal of the male pastor was brought *into* Pentecostalism *from existing religious traditions*,” (Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, page 212). This wasn't the norm for us; it was an import.

But McGee also pointed out that the restriction for women to not serve as pastors **was too late**. Women had already planted numerous churches across the nation, (Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, page 116).

**Darrin Rodgers** echoes this: “... female evangelists and missionaries found they had to pastor their fledgling flocks,” (Darrin Rodgers in McGee's book, p. 213). In fact, many women served as pastors, just without denominational credentials.

**1922:** EN Bell, then “general superintendent” of the AG, writing on behalf of the Executive Presbytery to ordain women, stated that women could serve as senior pastors *if it was an emergency*—no man was available. (“Women in the Pentecostal Movement,” article by Dr. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. [Professor of Church History at Fuller Seminary]; accessed at: <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/women-in-the-pentecostal-movement/>.)

Here was the **dilemma**: Most AG world mission fields were pioneered by *women*.

“Much of the early Pentecostal growth was due [in part] to the efforts of women ministers. Through the 1930s, **one out of every five ministers** was a women and **two out of every three missionaries**,” (Darrin Rodgers, in McGee, p. 213).

These women had to pastor their congregations!

**FINALLY in 1935:** women were ordained as AG pastors without restriction (decades before most “liberal” denominations ordained women)

Scholar **Janet Evert Powers:** “Pentecostals should not forget that **over half of all women ever ordained** come from their tradition or closely related traditions,” (Janet Evert Powers, “Your Daughters Shall Prophecy,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, Dempster, Klaus, & Peterson, eds. Wipf & Stock, 2011. Page 332).

**SLIDE 6:** Here I want to take a short little detour and tell you about some amazing women who served as **church planters in the AG**—the focus of my study for my master's thesis.

**Cornelia Jones Robertson**, an *Azusa Street participant*, served as an **evangelist**, and **planted** a church in San Francisco, where she served as pastor for more than **30 years**. She also started a **mission** that served over 100K men and boys (particularly during the Great Depression).

At the *age of 15*, **Dollie Anne Drain Simms** was the youngest minister ordained at the first General Council in 1914. Over the course of her life she pioneered, and helped to pioneer, a total of **thirty-two churches!**

Starting in 1923, **Ethel Smith Musick** planted churches throughout Oklahoma, Texas, and California. In *one 18-month period alone*, she started **six new churches**. Her husband, a carpenter, helped to build five of the church buildings.

One of the most prolific church planters in Assemblies of God history, **Blanche Brittain** (1890-1952), affectionately called the “**North Dakota sodbuster**,” started over **forty churches** from which rose up several pastors, evangelists, and missionaries, including the late AG General Superintendent, G. Raymond Carlson.

**SLIDE 7: Back to our AG history:** by the **middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**, we start to see a sharp decline in the numbers of women credential holders (and a decline among persons of color).

Edith Blumhofer suggested the **professionalization** of the ministry caused this. (Edith Blumhofer, PhD. *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 1. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1989; page 371.)

Pentecostal scholar, **Lisa P. Stephenson**, elaborates that the **institutionalization** of Pentecostal revivals and movements into burgeoning organizations and denominations contributes to diminishing leadership participation of women in those organizations. (Lisa P. Stephenson, *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry: A Feminist-Pneumatological Approach*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies Series (Boston: Brill, 2012), 62.)

When organic, grassroots revivals grow into institutions, with layers of hierarchy & bureaucracy, they predictably cut out both women and ethnic minority groups from leadership roles.

#### **1942: NAE**

Another possible contributor to the decline of AG women’s participation in church planting and pastoral roles in the mid-twentieth century includes the invitation for the Assemblies of God to join the **National Association of Evangelicals** (NAE), which formed in **1942**.

**Food for thought:** Some scholars purport that:

- *our desire for the esteem of the broader evangelical world-at-large,*
- *our desire to no longer be perceived as a sect from “the other side of the tracks,”*

may have contributed toward **movement away from our classic Pentecostal distinctives** such as **speaking in tongues** and **women in ministry**, particularly in light of the NAE’s Calvinistic majority who generally interpret Paul’s passages on women in a restrictive manner. (Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, page 231).

(Some delegates at the organizational meeting of the NAE openly questioned whether the NAE umbrella should be opened wide enough to include Pentecostals.) (Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, pages 230-232).

So while membership in the NAE caused the AG to emerge as a major American denomination respected for our fast growth and our hugely successful missions program, **the AG in the 1950s and 1960s experienced a decline in (1) the rate of people coming to Christ (conversions), (2) new churches, and (3) ordinations; (4)**

the numbers of female pastors and (5) the numbers of men and women evangelists. (Gary McGee, PhD, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004, page 345).

It begs the question: *In pursuit of the esteem of the broader evangelical world, did we lose some of our Pentecostal distinction?* Did we want to sit at the “cool kids’ table” so much that we may have compromised our beliefs and praxis to do so?

**SLIDE 8:** Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Numbers of AG women ministers continued to decline through 1987. (See “Female Ministers 1977-2019,” at <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.)

But then toward the **end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**, we begin to see an *uptick*, causing us to ponder, “**What is God doing?**”

In **1991**, the General Council of the Assemblies of God passed a resolution “that explicitly stated that God’s call to the ministry was without discretion regarding gender, race, disability, or national origin.”

**1990’s: Decade of Harvest;** since 1990 we have seen a consistent rise in the percentage of AG female ministers.

**1990:** 14.9%; **2019:** 26.4%.

In some of our districts, especially in our Hispanic districts, those numbers are significantly higher! In the **Texas Gulf Hispanic district**, over **42%** of AG ministers are women! In our **Korean district**, almost **40%** of our ministers are women! (See “Ministers Marital Status/Gender Summary, 2019” at Ministers Marital Status by District\_Network and Nation, found at <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.)

Could it be that our renewed global focus upon *the harvest*, while some say the Decade of Harvest didn’t accomplish its goals (less churches opened and more churches closed than in the decade prior), was a season of **gathering harvest workers—which includes women?**

Remember: When the Holy Spirit writes the script, we see the full empowerment and inclusion of God’s “sons and daughters” in His redemptive work!

**SLIDE 9**

- **2009:** *The General Council voted its first woman to the Executive Presbytery: Dr. Beth Grant.*
- *In 2017, Dr. Melissa Alfaro also joined the EP.*
- *In 2018, Rev. Donna Barrett become the first female to join the executive leadership team as our General Secretary.*

**SLIDE 10:** In what capacities do AG women ministers serve?

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2019</b>
Chaplains	79	173
Church Staff Members	2446	3081
District Executive Presbyter	7	21
District Officials	1	3

Evangelists	190	155
World Missionaries	432	733
US Missionaries	188	223
Pastors (lead)	524	620
Sectional Presbyters	22	52
Teachers (AG colleges)	33	30

(See “AG USA Ministers Report 2019,” “Credentials, Marital and Ministry Status by Gender,” accessed at <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.)

**SLIDE 11: What is God doing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?** Could it be that we are returning to our Pentecostal ethos, history, and theology? As I referenced at the beginning of this presentation, are we recognizing that we’ve been here before? Is the Day of Pentecost coming into clear vision for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

I say “yes!” (In the last days ... God’s sons and daughters will prophecy!)

Could it be, friends, that **there is a “last days” revival coming of such a large scale**, that God is preparing the ranks of Spirit-empowered workers to bring in this large harvest? When it’s harvest season, especially when the harvest is large—it’s all hands on deck!!

And how do you, young men and young women, factor into God’s plan?

What does God want to accomplish through *you*? Step courageously into your Pentecostal calling! Don’t be timid.

All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved, but how will they know of His name, unless you go?