

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOGNISING PASTORS' WIVES

It is certainly a lot easier for a pastor's wife to get a credential. I've really discovered that it's not always what you know, it's who you know and it does help in that regard. (CRC woman pastor)

After examining two other reasons for the current increase of women pastors in the CRC this chapter turns to exploring a third option—that current CRC practice is the result of the formal recognition of the role of pastor's wife.

One of the most significant aspects of the recent increase in number of women pastors was the high percentage of recipients who were also pastors'¹ wives. In 1998, of the 21 women pastors, eight were wives of pastors (26%) while only three percent of male pastors were part of a clergy couple. In 2000, this figure had risen to 42% and by 2005; pastors' wives comprised 57% of all women pastors. Most significant is the fact that in 2005, almost three-quarters (72%) of active National Full Minister (ordained) women are pastors' wives and over 60 percent of active women holding Minister's credentials are pastors' wives. Comparably, in 2001, another Australian Pentecostal denomination, the AC, claimed 52% of women pastors were pastors' wives.² Statistics from the AG show, in 2003, 40.8% of all female ministers were married to other AG ministers.³ Historically, 66 of the 150 women on the roll at the founding of the AG in 1914 were pastors' wives.⁴

¹ This chapter will use both pastors' wives and *ministers' wives*.

² Lydia Tweedie, *Born in the fire ... living in the smoke? A report on women in leadership within the Apostolic Church, Australia* (Melbourne, VIC: Tabor College, 2001), 66. Of 34 women pastors, 18 were married to senior pastors.

³ Statistician.

⁴ Kenyon, 198.

These statistics indicate that any explanation for the increase in women pastors in the CRC must include an examination of the role and function of the pastor's wife. One possible explanation is the CRC was now formally recognising the pre-existent, manifest, functioning ministries of many pastors' wives that had previously gone unacknowledged. In all but one case, these CRC women received their credential after becoming a pastor's wife; thus these women were acknowledged first as pastors' wives and only later as pastors in their own right. Therefore, there is need of careful analysis to determine whether their function differed to that of other pastors' wives in the CRC in that they fulfilled the duties expected of an ordained CRC pastor in addition to the expected duties of a pastor's wife. A persistent folk belief among Pentecostals is that Pentecostal women, and particularly pastors' wives, were a 'breed apart' from their Protestant sisters in both fervour and service. Therefore, comparative analysis of CRC pastors' wives and ministers' wives from other denominations will determine if the former undertook ministry to a greater extent and level of expertise, thus qualifying them for separate ordination. As well, this chapter will seek to identify any peculiar CRC theological, historical, practical or organisational *raison d'être* that would explain why pastors' wives received credentials at a proportionally higher rate than other women in the CRC.

Writings on the role of the pastor's wife from a CRC perspective are sparse and sporadic; however, there are a sufficient number available to offer clarity. In addition, this chapter will draw upon the findings of a survey of CRC pastors' wives conducted in 2002.⁵ As the only comprehensive Australian survey specifically targeted at Pentecostal pastors' wives (that I am currently aware of), it provides invaluable information for comparison with other denominational findings and a snapshot of a

⁵Surveys were sent to 272 pastors' wives and 85 usable surveys were returned, a 31% response rate.

specific religious group. Whilst only one interview was conducted with a non-credentialed ex-pastor's wife, some of the women pastors interviewed were also pastors' wives and their comments have been included where relevant. A personal perspective can also be offered, as the author was a CRC pastor's wife for four years in the early 1980s and had opportunity to observe and interact with numerous CRC pastors' wives over a period of 27 years.

This chapter will address the topic in two sections. The first section will examine the role of the CRC pastor's wife from the inception of the movement until the present, concentrating on the period from 1990. It will seek, through the drawing of comparisons with other denominational ministers' wives, to determine if there is a marked divergence apparent that would support the argument that CRC pastors' wives have always been a 'breed apart'. Issues explored will be call, employment and education, activities and involvement, expectations, and costs and rewards. The chapter will then offer a number of theological and practical reasons that explain the practice of credentialing CRC pastors' wives.

Role of pastors' wives prior to the 1970s

It can be argued the role of the clergy wife—up to 1975 at least—had not altered since European settlement. It was assumed (perhaps because a residence and car allowance was supplied) that parish ministry was a joint enterprise and that the husband's career was also vicariously the wife's.⁶

In earliest CRC literature, women were linked with their husbands. Wives of prominent men were often described in terms of "his dear wife" and "his good wife"; the wives of Cecil and Allan Harris and Brother T. Masters, along with two babies,

⁶ Ibid., 395.

accompanied their husbands on tent campaigns, living in caravans and enduring the rigours of life on the road. The first genuine CRC pastor's wife was Belle Harris; she appears to have had a far-reaching influence, positive, and negative, not only upon other pastors' wives but also upon the way in which male pastors viewed their wives' involvement. Belle was a self-proclaimed, forceful, independent woman of passionate views and many who knew the marriage relationship commented that it appeared that Leo had to exercise strong control to 'handle' his wife. This became most apparent on the death of Leo when many within the CRC were concerned that, without his presence, Belle's powerful personality would not be curbed and this might have a detrimental effect upon the movement. It would appear that Belle Harris, while undoubtedly having some personality flaws, was a woman born into a generation where her gifts could not be expressed to their fullest degree, perhaps leading to a high level of frustration. She certainly would not have fitted the enculturated and socialised role of the demure, supportive minister's wife of her contemporaries.

Undoubtedly, the Harris' marital relationship had an influence on the way other CRC pastors viewed their wives. One of the persistent views was that strong women were a potential threat to a man's ministry and the church, and should be controlled at all costs. Likewise, it was not proper for wives to be privy to all governmental information as this might place them at a power advantage over other men in the church. In reality, many pastors from that era confessed to being not a little afraid of Belle and the strength of her personality. When asked to comment on Belle's influence on the way some CRC pastors perceived women in ministry, one pastor responded:

Whilst I respect the lady greatly she certainly has a very direct and very forthright manner which particularly in Australian men can

sometimes be seen as a bit of a challenge personally ... Certainly her singular role as the wife of the founder I think gave her a degree of authority and she never retreated from that. And her manner of speaking and presentation was always very direct and forthright.⁷

Much of Belle's role corresponds with Douglas' "very intense involvement-teamworker" subcategory profile. As with every minister's wife, she made sacrifices of time and companionship with her husband ,but they were more pronounced because of Leo's leadership role. There was always a clear understanding that the husband's ministry was of pre-eminent concern. Belle commented,

I had all sorts of romantic ideas before I was married (why I should get them, I don't know), that every Monday we'd go out for a picnic. He'd preach on Sundays and we'd have a nice little picnic and it would be delightful. That soon vanished, that idea. One day I complained that I wasn't seeing very much of him and I'll never forget it. He very quietly walked to the door at the centre of the passage in the little house we were at and he looked back at me and said, "Well, you'd better make up your mind. You'll see a lot less of me in the future." He didn't have to say anything else. He could have been saying, Well if you don't like it, you can go home to your mother.⁸

After Leo died, Belle wrote, "Today I record my gratefulness to God for allowing me to be the wife of one who was *firstly*, a servant of God and *secondly*, my husband and the father of our daughter Cherith Joy."⁹ Perhaps the most striking illustration of her dedication to her husband's work was her decision to have only one child in order to be more involved in ministry, something that she encouraged other wives to emulate. One pastor's wife commented how she and many of her fellow wives had only had two children because of this idea. Belle was to continue her influence on other CRC pastors' wives, not only through her actions as a role model but also through conferences where she would speak about the role of a pastor's wife.

⁷ Personal communication to author.

⁸ Interview.

⁹ Belle Harris, "Belle Harris shares some thoughts," *Impact*, November 1977. Emphasis mine.

Despite some amplification of the traditional role, most CRC pastors' wives differed little in role and function from their mainline denominational sisters. These dutiful wives were expected to fulfill the role of support for their husband, (and wear a hat to church as a sign of submission) and be involved in as many church activities as possible. These activities might include the Pentecostal practices of exorcism, prophecy and praying for Spirit-baptism, but she would still fit in with Douglas' "teamworker" category. The pioneer nature of the organisation likely thrust some wives into levels of activity they might not ordinarily have aspired to had they been in more traditional settings. Nonetheless, the role was fairly clearly established as primarily one of care of the home and family, with all other available time spent in pursuits linked to the husband's ministry. Belle Harris' activities included being an accomplished pianist who played at services, cleaning the church and entertaining groups of people, having 27 people live with them over a period, and joining her husband in a session of prayer for deliverance from demon possession. Likewise, Jean Foster, wife of Tom Foster, was noted for her piano playing, immaculate attire, Sunday-school work and production of musicals in the church. She was also instrumental in bringing the baptism in the Spirit to several people in her home in Frankston, and it was her initiative to invite any seekers of this experience to attend the Christmas Camp in January 1949 that was to be the beginning of a significant growth in the NRC in Melbourne. She did not begin to preach until after her husband's retirement but then was very well respected, especially on the topic of marriage.

Role of pastors' wives in the 1970s and 1980s

During the 1970s and 1980s many writers asserted that significant changes were taking place in the lives of ministers' wives and their roles in the church and broader society. Whilst earlier this was most apparent in North America, by the mid-1980s Australian clergy were feeling the impact of the immense social changes wrought by the women's movement. The escalation of the number of women in paid employment, women's greater access to higher education and the social emphasis upon justice and equality all affected clergy wives. The most far-reaching impact was that of clergy wives entering the workforce. In 1980, 57% of clergy wives in the United States worked outside of the home, with 66% claiming they worked for economic reasons to provide for housing, education and retirement.¹⁰ As paid employment took her outside the marriage and home, her own life and career took precedence over her husband's ministry as the primary concern in her life. This new detachment from the cares of the ministry restricted the ways in which the ministry could now be considered 'shared', as the wife in paid employment was more selective in the causes and interests she supported, some of which might not be church-related.

Within Australia, other sociological trends also affected the life of the minister's wife. In assessing the situation for clergy wives in the Australian Anglican church in 1980, Yvonne Dann, a bishop's wife, identified four developments. Firstly, wives were aware of the multiple options they had with regard to employment and homemaker duties and the ultimate effect this might have on their husbands and their involvement in church activities. Secondly, men were entering seminary later in life as a second

¹⁰ Charlotte Ross, *Who is the pastor's wife? A search for personal fulfilment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 79.

career and their wives felt a greater sense of shared ministry. Thirdly, the rising divorce rate had triggered a greater willingness in clergy couples to publicly acknowledge and seek professional help if their marriage was under stress. Lastly, there was a possibility that ministry would no longer be viewed as a lifetime call but, rather, a fixed term of employment in a working life that might encompass three or four distinct careers.¹¹

Despite these far-reaching changes, not all vestiges of the traditional role of the minister's wife had been swept away. Kenneth Dempsey's sociological study of ministers' wives in rural Australia¹² in which he collected data on 30 Methodist and later Uniting Church ministers' wives whose husbands had served in one of two small rural towns between 1905 and 1985, noted the strong lay expectation for traditional levels of involvement continued into the 1980s. Historically, two-thirds of these wives were heavily involved in their husbands' work while the others offered less support to their husbands but were nonetheless still partially involved in their work. By the mid-1980s, some of the wives had less of a commitment to particular traditional expectations; however, little of their behaviour appeared to have changed from that displayed by ministers' wives from previous decades; their purpose was to make the husband's ministry as effective as possible. Significantly, Dempsey was unable to establish a link between this small but perceptible shift and the feminist movement. Only one wife of the time demonstrated adherence to feminist ideals in word and action.¹³ Likewise, from her sociological research on Anglican clergy wives in England, Janet Finch reported that, contrary to common perceptions, only 20% of the

¹¹ Yvonne Dann, "The clergy wife: A stereotype crumbles," *St Mark's Review* (1980).

¹² Kenneth Dempsey, "Ministers' wives: Continuity and change in relation to their husbands' work," in *The force of the feminine* (1983); *The fate of ministers' wives: A study of subordination and incorporation*, vol. 15 (Melbourne: La Trobe University, 1985).

¹³ Dempsey, "Ministers' wives," 92.

78 ministers' wives she interviewed 1971–73 engaged in outside employment and only six percent had anything resembling a career.¹⁴ Indeed, these women believed employment must always be a lesser interest to their husband's work.¹⁵

Dempsey challenged the notion ministers' wives were gaining a greater freedom of choice concerning the type and extent of their involvement in their husband's work in the 1980s. From a 1984 survey of 87 lay leaders and 20 ministers in the Uniting Church in 70 rural congregations, he found the traditional expectation of the involvement of the minister's wife persisted. More than half of the respondents believed their primary task was to support their husband and more than two thirds held they should be more active in church life than the laity.

The few writings concerning pastors' wives that appeared in CRC publications during this period gave little indication that these extensive changes were having any pronounced effect on the role of the CRC pastor's wife. Her predominant role remained that of homemaker and support for her husband. A CRC pastor's wife exhorted the laity to pray for and extend recognition and gratitude to the one who appeared to have no identity of her own. "Has she a ministry? Ministry gifts don't include pastors' wives! She is the most overrated, yet underrated nobody in the whole church".¹⁶ A letter written to a pastor's wife by a laywoman depicted her running the house, disciplining the children, handling interruptions in the home and providing the necessary support for the smooth running of the pastor's life¹⁷.

¹⁴ Janet Finch, "Devising conventional performances: The case of clergmen's wives," *Sociological Review* 28, no. 4 (1980): 856.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 866.

¹⁶ "Who is she? (only a pastor's wife)," *Revivalist*, June 1975, 10.

¹⁷ 'Josie', "'Dear Debbie ...'" *Impact*, September 1977.

The wives of CRC pastors did not take up paid employment, a prime catalyst for change in the role of a minister's wife, with the same fervour as their North American counterparts. In the late 1980s the CRC, unsure of its stance towards women in paid employment, nonetheless remained clear that the primary role of a woman was to be that of mother, wife and homemaker. While some CRC pastors were recognising the pressures placed upon their wives, they were reluctant to suggest paid employment as a solution to these problems. Pastors' wives did enter the workforce but few entered in order to forge a career and a new identity separate from that of their husbands' ministry.

Perhaps because of the influence of the women's movement, CRC pastors' wives began to participate in what could be described as 'Christian consciousness-raising' groups. Lois Cronin, wife of a CRC senior pastor, was part of a Pentecostal steering group for the annual National Conference of Ministers' Wives and Women in Leadership begun in 1983. Instigator of the conference, Anne Morrow, designed it "specifically for women whose husbands are in the ministry" to allow sharing of needs, problems and feelings of inadequacy¹⁸. The emphasis, however, was upon equipping the woman so she might better enable her husband's ministry. The promulgation of the traditional role notwithstanding, by the mid-1980s some CRC pastors' wives had a greater consciousness of new options and desire for self-identity. Self-identity was theologically unacceptable in that it elevated selfish desires; therefore, emphasis was placed upon achieving their God-ordained identity and this was often couched in terms of "what God wants". Sometimes, this teaching was in

¹⁸ Elizabeth Inkster and Jeanene Marchand, "Women's leadership conference fulfils vision," *Australia's New Day*, November 1983, 20.

direct contrast to the instructions of other CRC pastors' wives. One pastor's wife reflected on the disparate messages pastors' wives were receiving:

They [other CRC pastors' wives] were saying that Monday was washing day and the washing should be out on the line by 10am. I mean your children have to behave because the church is looking on and if your kids aren't behaving then you know your husband's ministry is in danger and all this absurd stuff. So I'd put the notes aside and teach them how to release themselves and love themselves and *be to God what they need to be* and not who the church wanted them to be. So I had a lot of sessions like that and the girls really, really enjoyed the fact that they didn't have to be the image that church thought they were or even their husbands thought they were, or even what they thought they were. It was often self-imposed expectations and I was just releasing all that and [saying] *be whom God wants you to be*.¹⁹

Additionally, pastors' wives conferences raised the concept of the pastor's wife as part of the leadership 'team' of the local church; a team comprised of the husband and wife as well as other leaders, usually elders, and their wives.

Organisational Response

The organisational response to this developing consciousness was to offer greater recognition to pastors' wives, but there is little indication this included acknowledgment of genuine 'leadership partnership'. National conference attendance had always included pastors' wives, although it was often suggested that they might absent themselves during the business meeting.²⁰ While wives were always welcome in the South Australian State Council meetings, in Victoria until the mid-1980s State Council meetings were restricted to pastors only. The 1986 notification letter indicating the inclusion of wives in these meetings signified this was a departure from

¹⁹ Interview, emphasis mine.

²⁰ At one conference the author attended, it was noted that undoubtedly the women would rather be out shopping.

the norm and displayed the assumption that these women's primary role was motherhood.

This is a very special State Council meeting. As a recognition of the vitally important role of ministry that our wives have we are inviting the wives to again share on this day and to be encouraged and edified together. WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO BRING YOUR WIFE. It is an opportunity for someone else in your Assembly to be blessed by looking after your children, and a day for your wife to be ministered to and refreshed in God.²¹

In reality, however, the program for the day was still segregated—apart from one hour of praise, worship and sermon together, the husbands continued with the business agenda while the wives had 'fellowship', heard a sermon from a prominent senior pastor's wife, and spent time sharing together. Finch's observation that meetings where ministers' wives gathered were more often organised by the wife of the most senior minister²² is supported here indicating, perhaps, the existence of a hierarchy among pastors' wives based upon the status of their husband in ministry.

Summary

In summary, as the CRC was poised to enter a period in which pastors' wives emerged as a significant portion of the group of newly-credentialed women pastors, there was little to indicate they were a 'breed apart'. Despite a growing apprehension of the concept of the pastors' wife as part of the 'leadership team' most pastors' wives fulfilled roles little different from their mainline denominational counterparts and, in some respects, trailed behind them. Predominantly, CRC pastors' wives were homemakers who supported their husbands in all aspects of their ministry. They

²¹ Letter to pastors, (1986).

²² Janet Finch, *Married to the job* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 67. It is not possible to ascertain, for CRC wives, the veracity of her contention that these were 'primarily status-confirming rather than mutually supportive' events in which wives were ranked vicariously according to their husband's church's position in the parish hierarchy.

undertook hospitality, led women's groups, taught Sunday-school, taught in home groups and led worship, many fulfilling the 'helpmate' or 'teamworker' role. As always, there were exceptional women who were highly visible and publicly partnered with their husband in ministry. Logically, it would be this group of very involved wives who would seek organisational recognition of their role in the 1990s, as their activities most closely approximated those of an ordained pastor.

1990 to present

Quantitative data is drawn from the survey conducted in 2002 that offers a representative view of CRC pastors' wives (CRCPW). Eighty-five pastors' wives completed the survey; the average age of the respondents was 48 years, with 63% over 45 years of age, 13% under the age of 35 and only four in their twenties, corresponding to the aging population of CRC pastors. The strongly anglo-centric nature of CRC leadership was demonstrated by the result that 96% of respondents were born in Australia, Europe or North America. Thirty-nine percent were from churches that had less than 50 average attendance with 64% from churches with less than 100 in attendance. The majority were in urban churches, 46% were in situations where their husband was the lone pastor in the church, and only eight percent were located in churches with more than five credentialed pastors on staff. Sixty-nine percent were married to husbands holding a National Full Minister's credential and the average length of involvement with the CRC was 21.94 years (median = 20 years). Although there was a higher representation of respondents from the state of Victoria (49%) there were respondents from each state and territory where CRC churches are located and the states with the largest number of CRC churches were

represented²³. Thus, it can be argued that the answers given offer a genuine representation of the views of a cross-section of pastors' wives in the CRC. As 80% of the respondents' husbands were either currently or previously the senior minister of a church, the predominant views may be slightly skewed; however, this is offset by the fact that so many CRC churches have only one minister on staff.

Call

The assumption that Christians require an individualised, divine 'call' to a specific vocation or ministry is part of CRC ecclesiology. In particular, as an individual 'calling' to ministry is prerequisite for credentialing and ordination in the CRC, it should be expected that, as pastors' wives constitute the majority of women pastors, these women have received a strong individual call. In fact, many Christian women believe that marriage to a pastor is a legitimate means for a woman to fulfill a personal calling to ministry. Belle Harris' narrative exemplifies this paradigm:

I just said to the Lord, "Well, I don't know about this getting married business" Because I'm not getting married to any fellow just to be pushing a pram up the street in 12 months' time. I don't want to marry a pastor that only wants to run around just to sit down and have cups of tea and be nice to people. I want to marry someone who's red hot on fire for you. If you haven't got one of those around for me that's fine, I'll go to China as a missionary.²⁴

This understanding is widespread among CRC pastors' wives. In the survey, 88% of pastors' wives responded that they believed they had a ministry call on their life (n = 83). However, only 33% (n = 85) had considered applying for a pastor's credential, confirming that the role of pastor's wife is considered to be a legitimate form of

²³ Vic 49%, SA 27%, NSW 11%.

²⁴ Interview.

ministry in its own right. Fifty-eight percent of pastors' wives indicated they felt they were fulfilling their own ministry call through their involvement as a pastor's wife.

For those who may not have received such a personal call to ministry, their husband's call is sufficient. In a publication for CRC pastors' wives²⁵, Lois Cronin and Alison Chant utilised a "one flesh" theology (Gen. 2:23–24) and determined "*Your husband's call is your call too*. You are one flesh and God calls you to respond to the work he has opened up to both of you. However, some may feel they need their own call and we respect that"²⁶. Reception and obedience to a divine call was expected to produce a submissive spirit and mitigate the pressures and problems that a believer might face. Cronin and Chant assumed the wife had received a call to be just that—a pastor's wife—and this call was not to be questioned but obeyed and accepted as God's perfect will. "We must find God's yoke and wear it. Then our attitude should be to accept his call and not chafe under it. If we do strain against the call of God then his yoke will seem hard, harsh, sharp and pressing"²⁷.

However, the understanding of a pastor's wife feeling a call to her role is not a uniquely CRC concept, indeed it is acknowledged throughout the Evangelical world. Dempsey argued that one of the reasons the Methodist/Uniting Church ministers' wives in Barool and Smalltown gave so much of their lives to their husbands' work was they felt they had a call from God to fulltime ministry. Marriage to a minister enabled them to fulfill this call²⁸. Likewise, Sinclair, an Evangelical, noted,

It followed then, that in choosing a partner, one would be attracted to a person through whom one could experience, vicariously at least, those

²⁵ A Chant, ed., *Unsung heroines* (Kingswood: Vision, 1994).

²⁶ Alison Chant and Lois Cronin, "Hallelua! You're a pastor's wife," in *Unsung heroines*, ed. A Chant (Kingswood: Vision, 1994), 21. Emphasis mine.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Dempsey, "Ministers' wives," 97.

aspects of one's being that one could not live out conveniently in the world.²⁹

Another Evangelical, Wendy Murray Zorba, expressed her belief that as a minister's wife she too had received a call when her husband accepted a pastoral position and her connection with the "shepherd" consequently gave her a "mantle" that was "blessed".³⁰ The National Association of Evangelicals survey of ministers' wives conducted in the early 1990s showed that 80% of these wives believed they were fulfilling God's will for their lives.³¹ Thus, it would be misrepresentation to conclude that CRC pastors' wives had a stronger or more pronounced call to ministry than other Evangelical ministers' wives but, rather, that they shared a common conviction that they were fulfilling a God-ordained role that was a legitimate expression of a ministry call. In addition, within the CRC there was almost universal understanding among pastors' wives that they had received a call to ministry, and thus this could not be used as a means of differentiating those who were eligible for a credential or ordination from those who were not. If call were the sole criterion, every CRC pastor's wife would be eligible to become a pastor. Factors such as employment, education and consequent level of involvement need to be considered.

²⁹ Sinclair, 108.

³⁰ Wendy Zorba, "What pastors' wives wish their churches knew," *Christianity Today*, April 7 1997, 20, 22.

³¹ Bonnie Rice, "Married to the man and the ministry," *Leadership* 11, no. Winter (1991). According to the Spring 1992 issue of *Time Lines*, published by the North American Renewal Service Committee, "The classical Pentecostal denominations now account for 80% of the membership in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)", therefore, this survey would reflect the opinions of North American Pentecostal ministers' wives.

Employment

The entry of numbers of minister's wives into paid employment in the 1990s greatly affected the extent to which, historically, they had partaken in church activities and involvements.

Pastors' wives in the CRC had lower levels of employment than American Evangelical/Pentecostal pastors' wives. In 2002, of the 84 CRCPW respondents 41% of wives were in paid employment with just one-fifth of these women in fulltime positions. In 1991, only 26.8% of Pentecostal women were employed in para-professional, professional or managerial positions³² suggesting CRC pastors' wives are likely to be employed in non-managerial positions. Some of the CRC pastors' wives surveyed indicated paid employment was not their first preference but an economic necessity. One reflected on the advantages of being a pastor's wife, "Not a lot. Mainly disadvantages because working full-time I cannot get to conferences or times of input into [my] husband's life. I actually feel cheated as I do the work to earn the money so he can go. I miss out!"³³ Another noted, "[we live] in [capital city] so I have to work therefore no financial pressures but difficulties juggling church and home for my husband. It's working but remains an issue in terms of weariness".³⁴

The wives of CRC pastors who chose to enter paid employment faced a number of hurdles. Chief among these, as for other women, was a constant struggle with priorities. Finch argued there exists a hierarchy of priorities for the wife—first priority is the requirements of her husband's work, second the needs of her family and third, her own paid work. This hierarchy is supported through various structural and

³² Hughes, *Pentecostals*, 78, Table 11.

³³ Survey written comment.

³⁴ Survey written comment.

cultural devices including state social policies, and strong societal disapproval for women placing individual and work needs before those of their children. One of the strongest cultural mores is the ideology of marriage in which, while acting as a team, the wife still performs a secondary or ‘helpmate’ role.

One consequence for wives who do undertake paid work is that they are probably faced with demonstrating that their children do not suffer as a result, but that their husband’s work does not suffer either. The clergymen’s wives in my study certainly felt under a strong obligation to show this.³⁵

This struggle with priorities was compounded for the pastor’s wife because there was not simply a husband’s career to consider but the priority of the ministry, in which she was also intimately involved and to which she felt called. Invariably this would place pressure on the wife to give priority to ministry over career. Alison Chant demonstrated this when she noted that, while wives might work, their careers might suffer because they were unable to relocate when required due to church responsibilities. She concluded, “It takes a woman called of God to help build a new church!”³⁶ Thus, the implication the true woman of God was one who always placed ministry first.

According to Chant, whatever the decision made regarding the wife’s employment, it had to ultimately benefit the husband. “If she has that distance [between herself and her husband’s ministry through employment] it might enable her to be more of a support to *him*, enabling her to minister to *him* more effectively”³⁷. Whatever role the wife chose to fulfil, assessment was given in relation to the impact upon the husband and his ministry. Cronin and Chant asserted all pastors’ wives were firstly a helper to

³⁵ Finch, *Married*, 149.

³⁶ Alison Chant, “Helpful teaching!,” in *Unsung heroines*, ed. A Chant (Kingswood: Vision, 1994), 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16. Emphasis mine.

their husbands but they might then choose one of three other roles or even a combination of all three. Firstly, they could be a *partner* working in “public” ministry with their husband, counselling, visiting and perhaps singing. This role might lead to loss of identity or a feeling of entrapment for the wife that “will in turn effect (sic) your husband and his ministry”³⁸. Secondly, they might choose to be an *enabler*, supporting their husband from the background. However, the wife was advised to be involved in the life of the church in order to better understand the pressures her husband faced, otherwise her self-absorption “will become a further source of strain to her husband”³⁹. Lastly, after family responsibilities have diminished, they might become a *specialist* working in a different area to that of their husband. The danger here was that the partners may drift apart and the wife might no longer show the requisite “whole-hearted support” for her husband.⁴⁰

The domestic role

Fundamental to the choices a pastor’s wife would make concerning her role was the situation of her family. As with most Evangelical movements, the CRC continued to promulgate the view that women carried the primary responsibility for domestic and child-rearing tasks. Ninety-one percent of pastors’ wives (n = 81) agreed with the statement “The most important role for a married woman is that of wife and mother”, with 59% strongly agreeing. Chant and Cronin clearly delineated the primary role of the pastor’s wife lay in caring for the family and ensuring the home was a haven of rest and peace for husband and children.⁴¹ Regarding involvement in church activities, the home and family were priorities, “Your first job is to care for your family, and to

³⁸ Chant and Cronin, “Hallelua,” 27.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

do your own work at home. If you have spare time and the energy then you can do other things.”⁴² Occasionally, circumstances would require compromise and a seemingly contradictory message was sent to the reader. On the one hand, she was advised not to neglect her family in order to fill a gap in the church but, on the other hand, she was told that for the sake of the church she might be required to fill a gap even if it did not match her gifting.

A domestic life for the wife could also bring benefits to the husband and therefore the ministry. Finch noted the clergy wife could offer moral support to her husband and contribute to his ministry by meeting his need for a home life that freed him from responsibility as much as possible in order that he might better do his work.⁴³ If the husband had his church office located in the home, a wife who highly valued her husband’s work would seek to create domestic conditions most conducive to his work, thus reinforcing a strict gender-based division of tasks.⁴⁴ This was because, not only was it the cultural expectation of a good wife, but also because it would ensure the continuation of the husband’s work on which the wife was financially dependent. Additionally, even the employed wife would undertake the fulfillment of numerous tasks within the home setting, such as answering phone calls, taking messages and offering hospitality. These functions actually offered the wife no option but to be at least a back-up worker to her husband. Dempsey noted, “Involvement in the minister’s work on the part of such a wife is not a product of a conscious decision but of ad hoc reflex-like responses to requests and demands that are inevitable because she is ‘living on the job’”.⁴⁵

⁴² Chant, “Helpful teaching!,” 15.

⁴³ Finch, *Married*, 85.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

⁴⁵ Dempsey, “Ministers’ wives,” 97.

The pastor's wife as part of the ministry team

The ever-present concept of the pastor's wife as part of a 'ministry team' with her husband grew in prominence and popularity through the 1990s. Finch suggested that, as well as the provision of back-up services, the wife might also act as an unpaid assistant, an extra worker that the employer had access to but did not have to pay. Her main contribution was made working in conjunction with her husband but under his supervision. From this arose the concept of 'team': the wife viewed her husband's work as her own and therefore referred to "our church" and "our ministry" implying joint responsibility. The wife might restrict her contribution to "women's activities" but nonetheless perceived it as her "job".⁴⁶ Alison Chant wrote, "Those of us who cannot, for whatever reason, share in a public ministry, will share in our husband's reward on that great day when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ".⁴⁷

In an editorial for the online AG Women in Ministry magazine, James Bridges, the then-denominational General Treasurer, claimed:

When speaking of women in ministry, we often overlook the role of the minister's wife. Yet, next to a divine call, nothing is more crucial to a successful ministry than the minister's companion. She is in ministry and should be honored for her role. Without her, her husband would have little, if any, ministry.⁴⁸

Finch notes the curious nature of this understanding,

Outside the structure of self-employment, it makes even less sense to see the employed man and his incorporated wife as a "team", but that is precisely the model which many wives both endorse and welcome. Clergy wives present it as a very positive aspect of their own situation: wives of men newly entering the ministry commonly anticipated their

⁴⁶ Finch, *Married*, 99–103.

⁴⁷ Alison Chant, "A unique life!," in *Unsung heroines*, ed. A Chant (Kingswood: Vision, 1994), 5.

⁴⁸ James K. Bridges, *Women in ministry: An editorial* (Assemblies of God USA, 1997, accessed 31/07); available from http://womeninministry.ag.org/resources/articles/ministry/min0306_wim_bridges.cfm.

new lifestyle as “working as a partnership”, and more experienced clergy wives valued this opportunity not only for the work itself, but as an aspect of “sharing” which they saw as central to the marriage relationship.⁴⁹

There were also very practical reasons why the pastor’s wife would seek to be part of her husband’s team and involved in church activities—preventing marital infidelity.

Alison Chant wrote,

Some feel it is far better for the husband and wife to work together as a team, if that is at all possible ... However it is true that if the wife is not there to work with her husband then he must find someone else to help with the work. If that someone else is a woman then there could be a danger of getting too close to each other – with all the peril that implies. There is enough danger facing a man of God, without looking for more!⁵⁰

Crucially, Finch asserted that in such partnerships the wife could only ever be the “junior partner” and if her contribution were to be recognised it would only be through her husband.⁵¹

Summary

In summary, employment levels for CRC pastors’ wives reflected the conviction that their primary role was to support their husbands’ ministry through provision of home duties and childcare. Increasingly, regardless of the level of support these wives offered, many considered themselves, and were granted recognition by others, as part of a ministry team with their husband.

⁴⁹ Finch, *Married*, 104.

⁵⁰ Chant, “A unique life!,” 16.

⁵¹ Finch, *Married*, 106.

Education

Educationally, CRC pastors' wives differ from ministers' wives in other denominations. High levels of education among ministers' wives are evident in most North American mainline Protestant denominations: in Baker and Scott's survey of 196 Lutheran clergy wives, 35.7% had college or advanced degrees.⁵² Evangelical ministers' wives were also highly educated—in 1987, 75.5% had at least a four-year college degree compared with the national average of 17%.⁵³ In the 2002 CRCPW survey only 34% of pastors' wives (n = 85) had received any form of non-theological educational award and only 21% had received a bachelor degree or Master award. Similarly, in the area of theological awards, while 46% had completed an award, only one wife had attained the level of a bachelor degree. On the one hand, the lower levels of theological education would not be a deterrent for reception of a CRC credential as only minimal standards apply, but on the other hand, they would not be better qualified for a credential than others. Indeed, lack of formal education might restrict areas of outside employment for pastors' wives, making a ministry position more attractive.

Activities and involvement

The years 1990 to 2005 saw some changes in the number and range of activities and the level of involvement in the church on the part of pastors' wives. The practice of ordaining both husband and wife upon entry into ministry was not found in Pentecostalism until recently and even now it only occurs in a few denominations. In early Pentecostalism, to qualify as a pastor, pastors' wives were expected to

⁵² David Baker and Jean Scott, "Predictors of well-being among pastors' wives: A comparison with non-clergy wives," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 46 (1992).

⁵³ Brunette-Hill: 86.

demonstrate equal involvement in ministry with their husband. Tackett noted regarding the AG in 1922:

For a minister to qualify for reduced rail rates, he or she had to devote his or her entire time to the ministry. For a minister's wife to qualify as a minister for the same reduction, she had to preach the Gospel also, with her preaching appointments separate from those of her husband, and she had to receive separate collections.⁵⁴

Involvement of CRC pastors' wives

Although most were not in areas that would normally constitute the work of an ordained CRC pastor, CRC pastors' wives were involved in a wide range of church activities. The CRCPW survey revealed the most common areas of involvement for pastors' wives were in the traditional 'female' areas of pastoral care (66%) and women's ministry (52%). Other activities included leading communion (41%), teaching adults (36%), administration (36%), teaching children (35%), worship-leading (34%), and preaching (32%). However, preaching, an activity expected of a pastor, was an infrequent occurrence: only 17% of wives preached more than two or three times a year and none preached "most weeks". The least number of wives participated in the governmental arenas considered the rightful province of pastors—eldership (18%) and business council (16%). One wife commented she, along with the other elders' wives, attended elder meetings with her husband, and was involved in all decision-making except in matters of church discipline. The respondents noted they were involved in counselling, hospitality, ministry to seniors, ministry to mothers, leadership training (with their husbands), secretarial work, music and missions but none indicated any sole membership, or involvement, in church governmental leadership.

⁵⁴ Tackett, 201.

Whilst involved in a broad range of activities, most CRC pastors' wives were not engaged in large numbers of church activities. Sixty-seven percent of wives were involved in five or fewer activities, 27% were involved in only one or two activities, and just eight percent were involved in nine or more activities. This suggests the majority of these women are closer to "background supporters", (similar to Brunette-Hill's 1990 United Church of Christ sample), than "teamworker" (Douglas' 1960 sample) and definitely do not fit the profile of the "very intense involvement" subcategory of the latter. Despite these relatively low levels of involvement, most of these women had a self-perception they were contributing much: 52% considered themselves to be "in ministry as a partnership with my husband (essentially co-pastors)" and merely nine percent considered their input no more than that of any other church member. Only 36% agreed their role was to support their husband behind the scenes and 18% responded they had no desire to be in ministry.

Incorporation

The high percentage of CRC wives claiming to be co-pastors with their husbands, despite their low levels of involvement, suggests that many may have incorporated themselves so much into their husband's ministry they, in fact, have carved out a vicarious 'career'. The high level of involvement of these wives in full-time (20%) and part-time (12%) voluntary Christian ministry, which is presumably in their churches, and the low level of those identifying themselves simply as homemakers (13%) support this. Finch notes that, while these positions are unpaid, the orderliness, structure and development make them in every other sense a career.⁵⁵ The seven

⁵⁵ Finch, *Married*, 161.

wives from the survey who are active in nine or more areas of ministry would certainly be candidates for these ‘careers’.

Summary

In summary, some evidence suggested that, since 1990, CRC pastors’ wives were active in ministry beyond the extent expected of ministers’ wives in other denominations. They were no different to other ministers’ wives in believing they were fulfilling a call to ministry through their marriage to a minister; however, the ‘average’ CRC pastor’s wife was less likely to be employed on a full-time basis, thus giving her more time to invest in church-related activities. If employed, she assessed her career and made career decisions in the light of potential impact upon the ministry. Due to theological and CRC cultural norms, she understood her first priority was her husband’s ministry and sought to provide a home life in which his needs were met. Involved in a broad range of activities, mainly in traditionally female areas, the number of activities is little different to other mainline denominations’ ministers’ wives. In particular, few wives were involved in the regular preaching or governmental areas that constitute major duties for a CRC pastor. Thus, the CRC pastor’s wife was as likely to be a “background supporter” as any other minister’s wife and could not claim her level of involvement more closely resembled formal ministry. Despite this, many wives perceived themselves to be in partnership with their husband, in some cases using “co-pastor” as a self-identity or viewing their role as a career. Justifiably or not, many of these women would have considered they were doing the work of a minister, but without the formal denominational piece of paper. Bestowal of credentials and ordination in the CRC in recent years has not included an

expectation of full-time, paid ministry involvement, thus these women's levels of activity conceivably qualified them for the granting of this recognition.

Expectations

A pastor's wife who exceeded lay expectations, and even spousal expectations, of her role might be a candidate for recognition of her ministry in the form of a credential. Yet, historically, most pastors' wives found it difficult to meet lay expectations, let alone exceed them. Lay expectations have included the minister's wife actively being involved in the life of the church and contributing at least as much as any other member. Some congregations also expected the wife to open her home for meetings, to counsel, to accompany her husband in pastoral visitation and to speak for him when he was absent. Likewise, church leaders had the expectation that a minister's wife should be a committed Christian and as involved in church activities as any lay member⁵⁶.

Lay expectations held an enduring power over pastors' wives. In the 1980s Dempsey argued it was laity expectations, often also held by the minister husband, that ultimately had the power to make a wife conform.⁵⁷ Rebellion against lay expectations was fraught with danger and seldom successful, and the cost of rebellion was high, for it continued to have a negative affect upon the husband's career.⁵⁸ By the 1990s, the pressure of lay expectations was still present but pastors' wives, including those from the CRC, were encouraged to ignore them and instead focus on individual choice and fulfilment of 'God-expectation' and God-given 'giftings'. Rice reported that, whilst minister's wives felt greater freedom to find their own ministry

⁵⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁷ Dempsey, "Ministers' wives," 95.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 95-6.

and less outside pressure placed on them, there still existed some outside expectations of their role. However, they were also more likely to be assertive about their own needs and demand to be listened to.⁵⁹ Michael Smith insisted that, as there were no scriptural qualifications for a minister's wife and it was not an office, congregational expectations should be no more than that of any church member, free from any cultural, church or historical considerations.⁶⁰ Alison Chant stressed the need to "be true to yourself and God's will for your life" and ignore other expectations. Congregational expectations were "unreal" and a source of stress on the pastoral family, thus the wife should seek to know what *God* required and choose to please Him, her husband and children.⁶¹

Despite the liberating rhetoric, CRC lay-people still had expectations, pastors' wives were cognisant of them, and few of them were central to the role of a pastor. Chant and Cronin list the "empty spaces" the church may expect the pastor's wife to fill as "the receptionist, the tea lady, office worker, crèche worker and telephone counsellor"⁶². Liz Bailey offered a glimpse of CRC lay-peoples' expectations of pastors' wives in the 1990s. The list of what they are pressured to *be* included: spiritually victorious, available, punctual, gracious, loving, wise, efficient, capable, look like a pastor's wife; present at everything, perfect wife ... mother ... homemaker. However, the list of what they are pressured to *do* contained "preaching" which is unlikely to feature in lists for other denominations. This list also included:

⁵⁹ Rice, 68.

⁶⁰ Michael Smith, "Let your minister's wife be your minister's wife," *Christianity Today*, October 7 1995.

⁶¹ Chant, "A unique life!," 2-4.

⁶² Chant and Cronin, "Hallelua," 23.

visitation, run ladies meetings, preach, songlead, chair, secretarial work, counsel, nurse, cook, baby-sit, welcome new people, hostess and “remember all things.”⁶³

Along with lay expectations, the pastor’s wife had to contend with those expectations of her husband. Ross’ 1980 survey revealed the key expectation of 122 clergymen was that their wives would be supportive—expressed in assuming primary responsibility for the home and childcare, in giving emotional support to their husbands, and in supporting at least some of the programs of the church. As with the laity, the clergyman viewed his wife as an extension of himself. Yet, in the same survey, most lay and clergy respondents indicated the wife should be free to be herself.⁶⁴ Thus, the husband had tremendous power to release his wife.

The fact remains that women need great motivation, support, and encouragement from the most important male in their lives, their husbands, to break out of stereotype images and live their lives to the full as human beings. This is doubly true for clergy wives!⁶⁵

Ironically, however, the husband who was to be the major influence in freeing the wife from expectations would also be the one who imposed the greatest expectations. Despite this, in the CRCPW survey over 65% of the wives ranked their husbands’ expectation of them as a very low concern, suggesting most had reached an understanding with their spouse in this regard.

A double standard was apparent for the two groups of pastors’ spouses. Carroll et al determined congregations were more tolerant of inactivity on the part of the clergywoman’s spouse than the clergyman’s spouse, and they expected more activity

⁶³ Liz Bailey, “How to deal with ministry pressures,” in *Unsung heroines*, ed. A Chant (Kingswood: Vision, 1994).

⁶⁴ Ross, 38.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

from the spouse who was a wife than the spouse who was a husband.⁶⁶ Alison Chant concurred, writing in 1994:

I have observed this anomaly: if the wife is the pastor, and her husband is the one in the role of helper, then a double standard is at once apparent. Instead of expecting the husband to be useful to the church in any way, the people are pathetically grateful if he does anything at all. Praise and gratitude are the order of the day. The pastor's husband is even praised for attending a meeting, and if he brings a dish to a potluck the people are overwhelmed. He is treated like a king! If the male pastor's wife was treated this way there would always be a happy and contented spouse in the manse!⁶⁷

In conclusion, in CRC churches there was no indication that lay expectations were that a pastor's wife would fulfill functions normally only undertaken by a credentialed or ordained pastor. To the contrary, CRC pastors' wives appeared to assume the activities their congregations expect were those traditionally expected from any pastor's wife.

Costs and rewards

One possible factor propelling CRC pastors' wives to seek credentials could be discontent with their current role. While many studies have concentrated on the clergy marriage as an indicator of quality of life for husband and wife⁶⁸, the common stressors that particularly affect pastors' wives have long been identified and are usually labeled 'costs'. The four costs traditionally attributed to the role of pastor's wife are: loneliness caused by shortage of husband/father time and difficulty in

⁶⁶ Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis, 195.

⁶⁷ Chant and Cronin, "Hallelua," 25.

⁶⁸ Priscilla Blanton and Michael Morris, "The influence of work-related stressors on clergy husbands and their wives," *Family Relations* 43, no. 2 (1994); Theodore Hsieh and Edith Rugg, "Coping patterns of ministers' wives," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 2, no. 3 (1983); David Mace and Vera Mace, "Marriage enrichment for clergy couples," *Pastoral Psychology* 30, no. 3 (1982); Patricia Noller, "Clergy marriages: A study of a Uniting Church sample," *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family* 5, no. 4 (1984); Janelle Warner and John Carter, "Loneliness, marital adjustment and burnout in pastoral and lay persons," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12, no. 2 (1984).

making friends; low income; housing difficulties including substandard housing, lack of privacy and lack of ownership; and lack of personal identity as they grapple with the often unrealistic expectations placed upon them and their children.

Finch posited clergy wives were the victims of “vicarious contamination”. Because their husband was a public figure whose private persona was affected by their occupation, wives suffered from expectations of appropriate behaviour (associated with their husbands’ work and their positions as their wives), being distanced by other people and being treated as her husband would be. Not all ministers’ wives cherished being a public figure: Finch’s research revealed the majority of her respondents did not want the pressure of having to be a model family for the congregation, but two-thirds were willing to have it as a future objective.⁶⁹ One cost of being the wife of a public figure was in the area of finding friends: many ministers’ wives worried friendships with parishioners or local community members could cause jealousies and place them in the position of betraying confidentialities. For many, their identity was only ever as the “wife of the minister” and as such they were treated with a certain detachment by others. They were often also victim to the treatment their husband was receiving—if there was conflict with a church member, the wife was subject to the same hostility.⁷⁰ In order to deal with these consequences of being the wife of a minister many concealed their identity for as long as possible, or sought out companionship and friendship with those who knew them as someone else (family and old friends) or as a fellow-traveller (other ministers’ wives). Hsieh and Rugg found no discernible differences between the demographics and the responses of ministers’ wives from the Evangelical Free Church of America and those from the

⁶⁹ Finch, *Married*, 39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40–42.

International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, suggesting Pentecostal ministers' wives are little different from their Evangelical sisters in this regard.⁷¹

CRC pastors' wives

Chant identified lack of friends, unreal self-expectation and intrusion as the major stressors on CRC wives.⁷² Overall, however, the CRC pastors' wives surveyed expressed a low level of discontent with their lives. Those areas that recorded the greatest concern in the CRCPW survey were financial pressures, handling negative emotions, demands on the husband's time, resolving church conflicts, and juggling church and home responsibilities. Nonetheless, the average of scores recorded for each item were all less than 3.08 on a scale of one to six, indicating their relative insignificance for most of the wives. Those areas of least concern were frequent moves, understanding of role in the church and congregational expectations of family.

The age and family situation of the pastor's wife has a bearing on the level and severity of their concerns. Rice reported that the NAE survey of the early 1990s showed 40% of wives under 30 years of age felt they were competing with the congregation for their husband's attention, whereas only 18% of women aged over 40 had the same complaint.⁷³ Responses of CRC pastors' wives confirms this. A 45-year-old wrote, "Coming into the ministry in our middle years has an advantage—our children are older so there's not so much of them missing parental contact. Although our 12-year-old shows sign of lacking attention which needs to be addressed"⁷⁴. A 55-year-old who did not indicate any concerns commented by way of explanation, "Our

⁷¹ Hsieh and Rugg, 74.

⁷² Chant, "A unique life!," 3–7.

⁷³ Rice, 70.

⁷⁴ Survey written comment.

family have grown up and married, with families”⁷⁵. Another 55-year old-stated, “These things are not issues anymore as we have long since resolved them. Such was not always the case when we had five little children”⁷⁶. However, a 30-year-old wife lamented, “My husband works full-time in a demanding job and is then church planting in his ‘spare’ time—the juggle between work, church and family is difficult. It means that I have to take on primary responsibility for keeping the homefront going (baby and toddler) so limits my involvement elsewhere”⁷⁷.

Length of service as a pastor’s wife and size of church affect the intensity of concerns held.

There is strong evidence that the early years of ministry are the most difficult. Increasing maturity and the experience of coping with parish life may solve many of these earlier problems for most women.⁷⁸

A CRC pastor’s wife with 31 years of experience in the role wrote, “Twenty years ago my answer may have been considerably on the ‘other side’—I feel very comfortable in my ‘yoke’ at present”⁷⁹. A wife who indicated she had no concerns after 27 years commented, “After years of ministry these issues don’t become a problem. You work through them”⁸⁰. Another woman with 25 years service explained, “Some issues have taken me many years to work through. Years ago my answers would have been *very* different”⁸¹. The NAE survey showed that wives in churches with less than 100 attendees were less likely to describe their life as rewarding (56%) than those in churches of more than 500 (91%).⁸² This is most likely

⁷⁵ Survey written comment.

⁷⁶ Survey written comment.

⁷⁷ Survey written comment.

⁷⁸ Ross, 126.

⁷⁹ Survey written comment.

⁸⁰ Survey written comment.

⁸¹ Survey written comment, emphasis hers.

⁸² Ross, 70.

because the larger church will have a team of pastors and therefore a number of pastors' wives. This would 'dilute' the expectations on one wife and allow for a diversity of expressions. One CRC pastor's wife from a small church described it as having one 'staff' pastor and two 'working' pastors (presumably outside the church), thus her role was "not that of a leading pastor's wife". This woman explained why she had none of the "concerns" listed in the survey with, "As my husband is not head pastor I do not have these pressures on me or our family"⁸³.

By dint of their position, there are certain 'rewards' that the pastor's wife enjoys. Brunette-Hill noted there had been a shift away from predominantly church-centred rewards (mainly involving service to others) to non-church-centred rewards (including respect and personal fulfilment) among pastors' wives in the years between 1960 and 1990. Likewise, the CRCPW survey revealed CRC pastors' wives perceived their advantages more in terms of gaining the respect of others, working with their husbands, personally becoming fulfilled, and fulfilling the ministry call on their lives (58%) than in terms of service (27%). Interestingly, 15% of the wives recorded they felt there were *no* rewards in being a pastor's wife.

Whatever their chosen role and level of involvement, many ministers' wives have a high level of fulfilment and CRC wives are no exception. Sixty percent of the ministers' wives in the NAE survey felt fulfilled and 50% loved being clergy wives. The level of satisfaction among CRC wives was also high, as 59% indicated they were happy and satisfied with their role as a pastor's wife. Just four percent of these wives were frustrated with their level of involvement and would like to be doing more, and a mere two percent felt pressured to be in areas of ministry they would

⁸³ Survey written comment.

rather not be. In addition, only four percent were confused about their role as a pastor's wife. This high level of satisfaction may derive from the conservative nature of the denomination: Hartley and Taylor found those wives who held traditional beliefs were four times more likely to assert their self-fulfilment came through their husband and his ministry than those with less-traditional beliefs. In addition, 80% of these 'traditional' women said they would still be involved in all or almost all of their current church activities even if they were not clergy wives.⁸⁴

Why seek credentials?

With such a high level of contentment, it is not surprising that many CRC pastors' wives did not see any advantage in becoming credentialed ministers. The CRCPW survey revealed over 60% of the surveyed wives believed that reception of a credential would make negligible or no difference to their current ministry. The remaining 40% indicated perceived advantages evenly: greater opportunities for teaching and preaching, for pastoral ministry, for giving direction and leadership to the church, and greater recognition and respect (20% each) while less indicated their personal esteem and confidence would be boosted (12%). One third of the pastors' wives had considered applying for a credential but had decided not to continue with the process. The reasons these women gave for this reticence reflected the diverse understanding of the nature of ordination in the CRC. Some indicated a credential would not "change or add anything to what I do"⁸⁵, others cited family or time restraints, some considered the need for a Bible college course too onerous and for some the main reason was financial, "Why pay for something you do anyway! (i.e.

⁸⁴ Hartley and Taylor: 70–71.

⁸⁵ Survey written comment.

annual credential fee)⁸⁶. There was little indication that a credential was a necessary step in the fulfilling of a vocation but rather might add unwanted responsibilities: “I thought it might validate my ministry, but could negatively alter some people’s approach to me. Also, I didn’t want to attend all the business meetings⁸⁷”.

In summary, CRC pastors’ wives experience the same stressors as other ministers’ wives but overall express a low level of discontent with their lives, due primarily to their age, family situation and length of service in this role. While CRC pastors’ wives tend to see their rewards in non-church-centred terms, there is a high level of fulfilment and few wish to change their role. Most do not view the obtainment of a credential as a logical step in recognition of a vocational call.

Reasons for the validation of the practice of credentialing pastors’ wives

The previous sections have revealed that, generally, CRC pastors’ wives do not exhibit a greater involvement in ministry than other ministers’ wives, nor do they possess specialised educational or vocational qualifications that would make them singular candidates for reception of credentials. There is also no indication that pastors’ wives participate in the type of activities, particularly preaching and governmental roles, that would be expected of an ordained pastor. The high percentage of pastors’ wives among credentialed CRC women ministers would therefore suggest there are *other* compelling reasons why this practice is so widespread in the CRC. The following discussion suggests four motivating factors:

⁸⁶ Survey written comment.

⁸⁷ Survey written comment.

the innate authority of the pastor's wife; a hierarchal view of marriage; the practical benefits to the ministry and the organization; and a means of meeting demands for recognition.

The innate authority of the pastor's wife

The position of pastor's wife involves a delicate balance, between the assumption of authority and power inherently associated with the role, and the avoidance and spurning of any vestiges of authority or power that might be perceived as manipulation of either the husband or the church.

The authority and power of the Pentecostal pastor's wife is established via her womanhood and her marital connection. Unlike the role of fundamentalist pastors' wives, "a position with many responsibilities, but little power"⁸⁸, Blumhofer noted, "women have exercised immeasurable cultural authority in Pentecostal congregations"⁸⁹. Any woman is able to prophesy from within the congregation, others are able to preach, teach, administer the sacraments and pray publicly to the congregation, and a minority hold governmental positions over the congregation. All of these activities involve the exercise of authority and pastors' wives contribute at all levels. Nonetheless, Pentecostal women are aware of the delicacy of their position and the importance of never suggesting they are grasping after power lest they be considered ungodly, unsubmitive or power-hungry.

The greatest source of authority for the pastor's wife, however, is not her womanhood but her *marital connection*. In her study of Evangelical churches, many of which were

⁸⁸ Bendroth, 78.

⁸⁹ Blumhofer, "Women," 19.

Pentecostal, Brenda Brasher acknowledged, “The intramovement norms that condone marriage provide a pastor’s wife with nearly unassailable authority”⁹⁰. The position of wife of the senior pastor of a congregation was the highest attainable position of authority for a woman. These women were able to exercise seemingly independent power, yet ultimately this power was subsumed to the dominant patriarchal structure headed by her husband. One example within Australian Pentecostalism is Bobbie Houston, wife of Brian Houston, the former head of the AGA and leader of the largest church in Australia, Hillsong. Bobbie has been granted leadership status, as co-pastor with her husband, and has a public ministry involving speaking, preaching and writing that likely would not be available to other women within the congregation possessing the same gifts and abilities. Not only does Bobbie hold power and authority at a local church level, but also on a national stage, as she is lauded as the role model of the perfect Pentecostal pastor’s wife.

Brasher reported that some senior pastors’ wives were involved in leadership duties because of genuine interest, while others felt they had been forced to do so. The ‘forced’ stance may be a tactic to deflect any accusations of these women seeking power, or it may be a consequence of laywomen applying pressure for the pastor’s wife to fulfill a position structurally allowable for no other woman. These wives of senior pastors are involved in a wide range of church activities and Brasher notes, “The frequently maligned and often overlooked pastor’s wife in many instances is a major source of religious life in a congregation”⁹¹.

⁹⁰ Brenda Brasher, *Godly women: Fundamentalism and female power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1998), 75.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 200–201, fn 8.

Despite the authority granted by her marital connection, the pastor's wife seeking to be credentialed may face congregational suspicion of her motives. While the pastor's wife is deferred to due to her special status, she must also negotiate her authority and power to minimise its outward appearance as well as be involved in certain activities because of it. There exists a fear on the part of congregations that the minister will be unduly influenced by his wife or that he will use her to gain greater power. In the CRC, there is a lingering fear of a 'Belle Harris-type pastor's wife' exerting undue influence upon her husband and usurping the authority and power of the elders who have governmental responsibilities. Historically, it was not uncommon for elders and pastors to be forbidden to share any church-related business with their wives, lest they gossip or seek to influence decisions. Undoubtedly, this injunction was rarely upheld in practice and pastors' wives did involve themselves in decision-making.

Suspicion towards pastor's wives obtaining credentials and ordination extends beyond the local congregation to other women ministers who are not pastors' wives. Some of these women expressed a belief that the wives had an easier journey into ministry than they did.

That [credentialing of high number of pastors' wives] concerns me very greatly. I feel almost that in some respects considering some of the ladies in question [it is] a left-handed endorsement of the husband's ministry, rather than being taken solely in the call and equipping of the wife's ministry. Now, I realise that there are very many well-qualified, well-called and equipped ladies in ministry, some of whom are wives of pastors, but I personally have never been at peace just with the principle of ordaining, particularly to full credential, women who are there, I don't want to say primarily because they are pastors' wives, but somehow that just keeps popping up in my thoughts. It disturbs me that they are given, so to speak, a leg up the ladder because of that relationship. I believe that every person, male or female, needs to be chosen on the basis of the unmistakable call of God and the quality of their life as a Christian and the careful examination of the fruit of their

ministry, and I don't really see that our marital status is a factor you need to write into the equation.⁹²

In summary, the CRC denominational structure in its credentialing of pastors' wives likely acknowledged and confirmed the innate authority and power granted by the congregation to this woman because of her marital connection. However, such authority might be neither boundless nor timeless. The authority and power should not be flaunted nor used to manipulate others, but was bound and controlled primarily by the visible patriarchal marital relationship and to a lesser extent by congregational limitations. Because the authority was inextricably bound to the marital connection to another minister, difficulties might arise if the husband, in time, decided to leave the ministry and the wife decided to remain or if the marriage should dissolve.

A hierarchal view of marriage

Secondly, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Pentecostalism predominantly holds a hierarchal view of marriage. Additionally, the Pentecostal view of clergy marriage, albeit from North America, theologially identified the pastoral marriage as the key means of communication of the gospel to the world.⁹³ Writing to Pentecostal pastors Raymond Brock noted the woman was created to be a “nurturing listener and active communicator” for the man and was to be the foremost priority in the husband's life, followed by family and church. Exemplifying the relationship between Christ and the Church, the pastoral marriage was to follow the pattern set out in Eph. 5:21-33. The husband is the “head of the house” and, using this anatomical metaphor, Brock determined his decision-making would involve sensation, perception, cognition

⁹² Interview.

⁹³ See Raymond Brock, “The pastoral marriage,” in *The Pentecostal pastor: A mandate for the 21st century*, eds. T Trask, W Goodall and Z Bicket (Springfield: Gospel, 1997), 33.

and communication. Thus, ‘headship’ was viewed in terms of decision-making on behalf of the family. The wife was “to submit or respond voluntarily and spontaneously with love to these initiatives of her husband” and thus reap the rewards of “God’s divine order of relationships”⁹⁴. This theology of male “spiritual leadership” was pervasive in instructions given to Pentecostal pastors⁹⁵.

This conservative theology was identifiable in CRC pastors’ wives in a surprising manner: while 97% (n = 80) agreed that the relationship between a husband and wife should be one of mutual submission, 64% (n = 79) believed a woman should only minister when in submission and “under the covering” of her husband or another man. This curious dissonance is explored in the next chapter, but suffice to note here that this relationship of ‘mutuality’ within the home *did not* extend to the church, where ‘covering’ was needed. While a pastor’s wife might be in practice an equal partner in the home (whilst likely still agreeing to the biblical teaching of male headship), she had to be seen to be in submission within the church. Consequently, it was unlikely that pastors’ wives who became pastors were going to be able to sustain any theological rebellion against the status quo of male spiritual headship within the church

In summary, the pervasive conservative theology of the CRC and the cultural mores of the movement worked together to ensure those pastors’ wives who were credentialed were a ‘safe bet’ for the denomination. They were expected to remain in submission to their husbands and allow them to lead. Thus, when credentialing a

⁹⁴ Ibid., 38. Brock’s inclusion of a quote from Donald Joy to bolster his argument is misguided as Joy, in fact, is suggesting *kephale* is better understood as *source* or *origin*. Brock goes on to suggest, bizarrely, that the allegedly high number of Assemblies of God pastors aged 90 or over might show one of the blessings of a biblical marriage is an extended life.

⁹⁵ See Carmichael; Dobbins, 149. She refers to her husband as her “provider-protector”, p. 133.

pastor's wife, the CRC was not really ordaining a free-thinking, self-directed individual who might challenge the predominant theological paradigm but, rather, the other half of a male-directed and male-dominated couple.

Practical benefits for others

The third reason for the widespread practice of credentialing pastors' wives is the practical benefit to the husband, the congregation and the organisation. There are two aspects of these benefits: the preference for married clergy; and the incorporation of wives into their husbands' work. It is clear that Protestant churches prefer their male ministers to be married and marriage enhances their career prospects. Ninety-four percent of the 739 clergymen responding to the Carroll, Hargrove and Lummis survey in 1981 were married compared to only 55% of the 635 clergywomen respondents.⁹⁶ These figures changed little over the next decade, another survey in 1994 found 92% of the 2,116 clergymen were married and 62% of the 2,485 clergywomen were married.⁹⁷ In 2003, the AG reported 88.6% of pastors were married and a mere one percent divorced.⁹⁸ Paula Nesbit's analysis of the occupational histories of 1373 Episcopal clergy (974 male, 399 female) in the USA concluded that the career attainments of male clergy benefited positively from marriage and family whereas the marital and family situations of female clergy registered no significant positive or negative effects on their career.⁹⁹ In 1999, 98% of the surveyed CRC pastors were married (n = 158) thus the single minister would be so rare they might be considered suspect or 'incomplete'.

⁹⁶ Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis, 190.

⁹⁷ Barbara Zikmund, Adair Lummis, and Patricia Chang, *Clergy women: An uphill calling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 27.

⁹⁸ Statistician.

⁹⁹ Paula Nesbitt, "Marriage, parenthood and the ministry: Differential effects of marriage and family on male and female clergy careers," *Sociology of Religion* (1995).

The greatest benefit for the husband and employer of a credentialed pastor's wife is her inevitable incorporation into her husband's work. Finch's sociological analysis of the incorporation of wives into their husbands' work argued that, for women, marriage to a man was also marriage to his job and his job would exert influence upon the woman's life. She asserted there were two aspects of incorporation of the wife into her husband's work—first, through the structures the husband's work placed on her, and second, through the contributions she made to his work because his job elicited them. It was in the latter area that the most practical benefits were available to both the husband and the employer. The husband benefited from the wife's domestic labour, and her contributions enhanced his current career and future prospects¹⁰⁰. The benefit of a wife's unpaid 'partnership' with her husband was ultimately to the employer who was getting 'two-for-the-price-of-one'.¹⁰¹ It was also in the employer's interest to preserve family life because male workers will work hard to support their dependants, have all their physical needs met without cost to the employer, and their wives can help the employer through her activities.¹⁰²

Apart from rare cases where married couples establish, and succeed in maintaining, a very non-traditional division of labouring the home, the domestic labour of wives represents a very significant mechanism through which employers benefit from the work of people whom they do not employ, and to whom they have almost no legal obligation.¹⁰³

Practically, it was almost impossible for a CRC wife completely to avoid incorporation in her husband's work. The incorporation of women into the work of their husbands was strongest and had the least possibility of evasion when certain features were present. At least six of the nine features Finch lists were found in the lives of most CRC ministers: flexibility of working hours; the possibility of work

¹⁰⁰ Finch, *Married*, 177.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 83.

being done at home; work which is socially contaminating; work that entails frequent geographical moves; husband's job has amount of women's work that can be siphoned off; and husband's job is greatly facilitated by having someone with whom a message can be left at any time.¹⁰⁴ The question then arises: why do some women continue in their incorporation? The wife might benefit from a higher social status, she might enjoy some reflected glory or she simply might have no other viable alternatives. Finch also contended that a clergy wife might perceive such involvement as natural perhaps because she believed this was where her natural giftings and abilities lay, perhaps because she believed she was investing in her husband as part of what takes place in healthy marriages, or perhaps because it was legitimated by very public role models.

The levels of incorporation and consequent contribution to her husband's work were magnified when the wife was also a credentialed minister. Even if she was not reimbursed, as many are not, the sense of ownership and identity with the husband's role would propel the pastor's wife to even greater levels of sacrifice and involvement to ensure the success of her husband's, and now her own, ministry.

Means of granting recognition

Lastly, the granting of credentials answers the demand for recognition of the contribution of pastors' wives that emerged in the 1990s. In 1994 Jean Leak, then a pastor's wife and later an ordained pastor, approached the National Executive to ask for "acknowledgment of the ministry of Pastor's [sic] wives without them necessarily

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 131. The other three features are living in institutional settings, any kind of self-employment, and work that entails living in tied accommodation. Some CRC ministers may be in situations with these additional features.

having to apply for a Credential”¹⁰⁵. This recognition was given in the form of the gift of a rose to each wife at the National Council Meeting. The 1990s also saw the birth of the Pastors’ Wives Camps that became an important catalyst for the increase of these women into ministry, as shown in chapter seven. Some pastors’ wives signaled they were no longer willing to serve CRC churches without some recognition of their contribution, and credentials were the only official means of recognition available. The fact that one-third of CRCPW survey respondents had considered applying for a credential, that 40% saw some possible benefits from gaining a credential, and that almost half (44.6%) agreed “pastors’ wives should be encouraged to receive minister’s credentials” indicated there was a desire for recognition. There is an indication that the most desirable recognition was one that would distinguish the individual and be most credible in the eyes of CRC congregations and pastors—a credential. Only 40% of respondents were in favour of pastors’ wives receiving a special credential and only one-third wanted to have both husbands and wives automatically ordained when one entered ministry.

Summary

In summary, there are some very powerful reasons why the credentialing of pastor’s wives is such a widespread practice among the CRC. Firstly, the denomination can recognise the innate authority and power the pastor’s wife possesses, whilst still being assured that the patriarchal marriage structure and the natural suspicions of the congregation with regard to abuse of power will impose boundaries upon the exercise of her authority as a credentialed pastor. Secondly, the conservative theology of the CRC offers a reassurance that the credentialing of these women will not be exposing

¹⁰⁵ CRC National Executive, *Minutes of meeting 30 May 1994*, Item 6.14.

the movement to strident feminism or individualistic thinking but, rather, an extension of the husband's beliefs and practices. Thirdly, credentialing of pastor's wives offers practical benefits for the husbands and the CRC. The inevitable incorporation of the wife into her husband's ministry and the many practical contributions she makes is enhanced and heightened when credentialing occurs. Now the church has received two-for-one and the success of the ministry is the responsibility of not one man with the reluctant help of his wife, but the overpowering motivation of both members of the clergy couple. Lastly, credentialing pastors' wives would give the denominational recognition of their contribution that many were seeking in a form that was identifiable to all CRC adherents.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the hypothesis that the recent increase in numbers of women pastors was attributable to the role and function of pastors' wives, as statistics support the prominence of this group of women in those receiving credentials. There was little to suggest these women exhibited special characteristics that clearly entitled them to a credential or ordination. Examination of the past and present roles of CRC pastors' wives revealed they differed little from ministers' wives in mainline denominations in the extent and type of their ministry activity. In the CRC, as in each denomination, there were a small percentage of wives so extensively involved in their husband's ministry they virtually viewed their contribution as a career. However, for the majority the inevitable incorporation in their husbands' work took the form of a background support worker and their contribution was in the domestic realm, providing a supportive home base. Participation in outside employment further restricted the active church-related support a wife could offer. Pastors' wives in the

CRC had few of the characteristics expected of an ordained pastor: they preached rarely, were rarely involved in formal governmental decision-making positions; and they lacked formal theological training.

There were, however, theological, organisational and practical reasons why CRC pastors' wives were considered good candidates for credentials. Pressure for recognition was mounting, particularly through the development of the understanding of the pastor and wife constituting a ministry team. The innate authority afforded their position due to their marital connection meant they would receive acceptance from the congregation. Their marital connection additionally drew acceptance from the ranks of fellow pastors, as they were known through their husbands. Theologically, pastors' wives were excellent candidates for credentials, as they would automatically be 'covered' by their husbands, thus avoiding conflict on an entrenched belief.

Practically, a credential carried no obligation of denominational financial outlay or provision of ministry opportunities, thus the CRC would continue to get two-for-the-price-of-one". The lack of expectation of a certain level of ministry activity for those having CRC credentials, enabled these women to continue their current involvement but with the added title of Pastor.

In conclusion, denominational recognition of the pastor's wife is a *major* contributing factor to the recent increase in numbers of women pastors. Whether these women are worthy recipients of a credential is debatable. Without doubt, some, due to their very high level of involvement, are, but it would appear that many others might not be. Whereas in the past, the former group would conceivably have been content to continue their involvement without official recognition, perhaps triggered by the credentialing of other women, they no longer were content to remain so. The latter

group may have been motivated by envy of their peers, or by a desire to receive recognition for their contribution and the only means available was obtaining a credential.

Having established the recognition of pastors' wives as a major contributing factor, the next chapter will explore the contribution feminism has played in influencing both the women of the CRC and the denomination itself to increasingly grant credentials and ordination to women.