



Developing Women in Senior Leadership: A Case Study of the Australian Christian Churches in South Australia

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Abstract

The research is a case study of the Australian Christian Churches in South Australia concerning the development of women in senior leadership. A patriarchal culture can inhibit the development of women aspiring to senior leadership. The research explores ways of influencing cultural change by affirming the key themes of gifting, taking opportunities, and mentoring. The oral interviews allowed women to talk about their experiences, contributions, and recommendations. The women expressed their feelings, thoughts, and aspirations. The identified key themes offer potential pathways for positive change within the denomination.

Keywords Developing women in senior leadership · Australian Christian Churches · Pentecostalism · Patriarchal culture · Tokenism · Gifting · Opportunities · Mentoring · Female and male support

Introduction

The Australian Christian Churches in South Australia (ACC SA) has an abundance of talented, educated, and passionate women of God who are gifted and called to leadership. This paper will contribute to their leadership journey. ACC SA is part of the Australian Christian Churches (ACC), a major Australia-wide Pentecostal denomination formerly called Assemblies of God in Australia, adopting the name Australian Christian Churches in 2007 (ACC, 2023). The ACC is affiliated with the World Assemblies of God Fellowship.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the experiences, contributions, and recommendations of female leaders in senior and influential positions in the ACC SA and to provide inspiration and information to enable more female leaders to be raised into senior leadership in the future. The focus is on the current situation for female leaders, and to identify potential areas for improvement. The significance of the research is that it provides an opportunity to hear the voices of senior female leaders within the ACC SA. It encourages and empowers women to aspire to leadership at all levels. The ACC SA will benefit by discovering strategies to increase the number of quality leaders.

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This paper argues that the exploration of what is currently happening concerning female leaders, and the affirmation of the key themes of gifting, opportunities, and mentoring, will contribute to the development of women in senior leadership and to an inclusive leadership culture within the ACC.

Literature review

The literature review addresses themes relating to developing women in senior leadership, including the background to Pentecostalism in Australia, women in Pentecostal leadership, female leaders in the ACC, and women in leadership in South Australia. There is a gap in the literature regarding women in leadership within the ACC in South Australia.

Pentecostalism in Australia

Pentecostalism in Australia has its origins in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries (Chant, 1984). Elliot (2018) suggests that the Catholic Apostolic Church preceded Chant's claims. This was a formal Pentecostal church that did not appear to acknowledge female leadership, in contrast to the affirmation of female leaders in early 20th-century Pentecostalism. More than half of the Pentecostal churches in Australia were planted and led by women (Chant, 2011). Elliot says little about female leaders or ministry roles, whereas Chant strongly affirms the pioneering contribution of early Pentecostal female leaders. He gives insight into where Pentecostalism came from, its origins, Pentecostal culture, and its expressed belief in the Holy Spirit. Emerging Pentecostalism was counterculture (Webber, 2003), and women were significant leaders. As Austin and Grey observed (2017), most of the great early pioneers of Pentecostalism were women. However, as Pentecostal churches were formalized, women were often removed from leadership despite an obvious calling on their lives (Austin & Grey, 2017; Grey, 2002), in contrast to the egalitarian attitude of the earlier decades. Today there continues to be a gender imbalance in the Pentecostal church, with far more men in senior leadership than women (McMaster & Tuovinen, 2017), reflecting historical gender barriers to women in senior leadership.

Women in Christian leadership

Pentecostal female leaders often struggle to have a voice in a culture that favors men over equally qualified women due to a stereotypical mindset (Arasaratnam, 2011). Women's voices can be ignored in male-dominant church culture. This is inferred by Thompson (2008), reflecting the male-dominant culture of the wider society. In the political world, males are often deaf to the female voice (Crabb, 2021). In effect, women can be held back by a male culture. However, gifting rather than gender is the key to recognition for leadership (Langford, 2017; Stephenson, 2011). The leadership styles of women and men can differ. Men are inclined to use a rational approach in decision making, whereas women tend to use intuition as much as rationality (Clifton, 2009b). Mentoring is critical for women seeking advancement (Smith, 2020). Quality support from men is also needed (Clifton, 2009a). However, Tangenberg (2013) suggests that "matched-gender and mixed-gender mentoring can both have positive effects, although recognition of gender differences is often vital" (p. 206).

Women leaders in the Australian Christian Churches (ACC)

Today, ACC women are under-represented in senior leadership, including in South Australia. Gradual change can be observed; for example, a former general superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Australia (1977–1997), Andrew Evans, was influential in raising young women and men in leadership in South Australia, contributing to and reflecting a cultural shift (Austin, 2017). Alphacrucis University College (the ACC national training college) contributes to cultural change by validating women for all academic levels and leadership (Austin, 2013), promoting an “egalitarian message” (Clifton, 2009a, p.173). The ACC positional statement *Women in Ministry* (ACC, 2016) reflects this; however, there is an “ideal-real gap” (Catford, 2009, p. 27) between this statement and actual practices in that Australian female leaders tend to fill all leadership roles *except* senior positions (Maddox, 2013). This applies to women in the ACC SA. Senior pastors’ wives often have a vague, informal role in leadership, bringing complexity to understanding how the roles of the ordained woman and the minister’s wife coexist (Potts, 2021). Wives frequently see their role as complementary rather than egalitarian (Archer & Archer, 2019), while others see themselves as leaders. The notion of “Princess Theology” (Grey, 2006; Maddox, 2013, p. 18) promotes a glamorous approach to women as leaders. This could be a regressive approach that appears to raise women in leadership but does not break resistance to female leadership. Instead, it potentially supports “traditional worldviews about gender roles” (McMaster, 2016, p. 269).

Women in leadership in South Australia

Many South Australian women in the Public Service are completing professional programs, and traditional barriers are receding (Ibrat, 2015). The question is, What are the traditional barriers within the Public Service to which Ibrat is referring? Also, what do traditional barriers in the ACC SA look like, and are they receding? As in the Public Service, ACC SA women do not occupy senior positions in significant numbers; there is still a “glass ceiling” (Starr-Parker, 2012). For female leadership to grow, opportunities for women in high-level positions need to become available, along with opportunities to develop a professional style and ethos. Support from family and partners is also vital for career success (Ibrat, 2014). The female pastors who were interviewed by the author would agree with this. If there were more professional women on boards, as Gould et al. (2018) suggest, a trickle-down effect would increase female representation at lower levels. Research on church social media pages (Lim, 2017) may reveal attitudes toward female leaders and the support they receive from family and partners. There is a gap in the literature regarding women within the ACC SA, particularly regarding female leaders related to male church culture, leadership opportunities, women having a voice, and the mentoring of women in leadership.

Methodology

I employed three methodologies in my research. The first was oral interviews, conducted face-to-face or via Zoom, which were recorded electronically (unless the person being interviewed declined a video or sound recording). All participants were required to agree with and complete and sign a consent form. Participants were purposively selected to

ensure that they fit the purpose of the research. The criteria for selection included their reputation as senior leaders, proven leadership, and character. Participants were also considered because they were available as there is a limited number of senior female leaders in South Australia. Twelve women and two men were interviewed, most of whom were key leaders in ACC SA or had previously been in key positions of leadership and influence (see Table 1). The two men were included because of their extensive ministry experience and their many years of encouraging and mentoring women and providing opportunities for women to step into leadership. The age of the participants ranged from those in the early 30s to the early 80s. All had a reputation for exceptional leadership ability and skills. The two participants in their 80s were highly respected leaders with vast experience in academia and in leading and establishing churches, as well as involvement in founding a theological college.

The initial focus of the interviews was on the participants' experiences, current trends regarding women in senior leadership, their successes, and the challenges that remained. The use of video recordings allowed body language, expressions, sounds, and tones to contribute to the research (Cheng, 2018). For some of those being interviewed, this was their first opportunity to articulate their experiences, thoughts, and feelings in a significant way (Sarkar, 2012). This means that not only can past experiences be talked about but also, importantly, what needs to happen to bring about change. In addition, the person being interviewed could anticipate the interview and contribute to the direction of the conversation by providing unexpected data, including emotions, desires, and possibilities (Sarkar, 2012). Sometimes official history can forget or overlook the contributions of women, but these personal stories help fill in the history (Keulen & Kroeze, 2012).

My second methodology was an historical analysis of secondary sources such as books, chapters of books, journal articles, encyclopedias, and dictionaries. I also reviewed primary sources in the Australasian Pentecostal Studies Centre archives. Critical analysis of the primary and secondary literature substantiated the data gathered from the interviews to contrast and validate similar findings (Groenewald, 2004).

Finally, participant observation was used as a third methodology to gather data. As an ACC pastor, I participated in and observed ACC SA events and activities, maintaining an objective stance to observe social and cultural interactions, read body language, and take note of emotions and nonverbal communications (Berthelsen et al., 2016). Attending events as a participant provided an opportunity to observe behavior, attitudes, and culture. Participation was mainly overt in that the author's observation was only partly disclosed. The participant observation gave me further insight into the attitudes and mindsets reflected in the way leaders behave and talk about women in senior leadership as well as insight into informal gender politics (Kawulich, 2005).

Contextual overview of Pentecostalism in Australia

It is important to provide a brief contextual overview of Pentecostalism in Australia in order to understand the situation for current ACC SA female leaders. Pentecostalism had become a noticeable movement in Australia by the early twentieth century. Sarah Jane Lancaster, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Smith Wigglesworth as well as other women and men made a significant contribution to early Pentecostalism in South Australia. Meetings and rallies held in Adelaide were instrumental in establishing Pentecostal churches (Chant, 1984). In 2022, Influencers Church and Lifepoint Church both celebrated their centenaries.

Table 1 Demographics of Interview Participants

Interviewee	Age	Position	Type of Church	In-Person or Face to Face Interview
Female interviewee 1	65	Co-Campus Pastor	Regional campus church	Interviewed at her residence
Female interviewee 2	32	Co-Campus pastor	Regional campus church	Interviewed at her residence
Female interviewee 3	43	Senior pastor	Regional church	Interviewed by Zoom
Female interviewee 4	late 50s	Campus pastor	Regional Campus church	Interviewed by Zoom
Female interviewee 5	mid-60s	Retired co-senior pastor		Interviewed by Zoom
Female interviewee 6	mid-40s	Campus pastor	City Campus church	Interviewed by Zoom
Female interviewee 7	60	Senior pastor	Regional church	Interviewed by Zoom
Female interviewee 8	32	Assistant pastor	City Campus church	Interviewed by Zoom
Female interviewee 9	72	Co-senior pastor	City church	Interviewed by Zoom
Male interviewee 1	late 60s	Retired co-senior pastor		Interviewed by Zoom
Male interviewee 2	80	Retired senior pastor, academic, writer		Interviewed by Zoom

They can trace their origins back to the formation and establishment of small groups in response to evangelical meetings in 1922. By 1932, three Pentecostal churches had been established in Adelaide (Chant, 1999).

In the early years, Pentecostalism affirmed women to preach and lead (Chant, 2011). However, this gradually changed as female leadership became less acceptable (Chant, 1999). Adelaide pastor Pauline Heath was “pressured to step aside for a male leader” (Austin & Grey, 2017, p. 211). The Assemblies of God was formed nationally in 1937, including the three South Australian congregations, and grew gradually until the late 1970s when the church experienced considerable growth (Austin, 2017; Chant, 1984). Women such as Stella Evans and later Lorraine Evans served as missionaries. Lorraine became a formidable leader; later in life, after her husband Andrew retired, she became the children’s pastor of Paradise Community Church and developed a significant self-funded children’s ministry (conversation with Andrew Evans, July 2004). In 2007 the Assemblies of God was renamed the Australian Christian Churches (ACC). Since that time, the ACC has grown, with several huge churches leading worldwide ministries.

The ACC positional statement titled *Women in Ministry* was adopted in 2016, endorsing women “at all levels of leadership and ministry” (ACC, 2016). While this is the ideal, women in senior leadership are underrepresented in South Australia and there is an “ideal-real” gap (Catford, 2009). The ACC SA has approximately 60 churches, some with multiple campuses. At present, four women are serving as senior pastors and two women as campus pastors. Eight women hold the Ordained Minister’s Credential (OMC) and share the senior role with their husbands. The two female campus pastors hold an OMC. A total of twenty-five women hold an OMC. Twenty-eight women hold a Provisional Minister’s Credential (PMC). Women in South Australia fill leadership roles in almost every area of the church except the senior role. Currently, there is only one woman represented on the State Executive. Some of those interviewed appreciated the positional statement but felt that it was difficult to access and that, despite the intention to endorse women at all levels of leadership and ministry, there is still an underrepresentation of women in senior leadership.

Results: Key themes

I conducted a thematic analysis to draw out key themes from the research interviews. Initially, I codified 14 meaningful patterns, allowing four key themes to be identified. The four key themes are patriarchal culture, gifting, taking opportunities, and mentoring.

Patriarchal culture

Negative and positive experiences All those interviewed agreed that there is a strong male culture in the ACC SA and that while it has “got better, there is still room for improvement” (female interviewee 1, age 65). A senior male pastor said that a gifted female senior pastor was a “great girl, but eventually, a man needs to take over” (observed male, age late 50s). Male leaders are sometimes threatened by the emergence of quality female leaders and may use such language (Smarr et al., 2018). The two men interviewed recognized the negative effects of patriarchal culture. Even though they affirmed women in leadership, they are yet to embrace “an egalitarian Pentecostal understanding of humanity and society,

thus affirming the beauty and dignity of female and male without affirming the hierarchical perspectives maintained by patriarchy or matriarchy” (Archer & Archer, 2019, p. 70).

Tokenism Some participants felt that there was a degree of tokenism when a woman was added to a discussion panel to represent women. One woman said, “I felt my credentialling was a token gesture” (female interviewee 1, age 65) because of the way she was treated during a domineering credentialling interview conducted by two men. Having only one or two “token” women may constrain their level of influence, whereas a greater female leadership presence would reduce gender inequality (Stainback et al., 2016). Both male and female participants commented that, at conferences, women’s contributions were treated more like an elective rather than as part of the main program. For example, at a state conference “[T]here was a session for women at the same time as a session for senior pastors. The very people who should be listening to women were not there. What does this say to women? Conference sessions that are focused on women in leadership and ministry need to be part of the main program.” (male interviewee 1, age 68).

Women ignored and pastor couples Some women sharing the senior leadership with their husbands often felt they were ignored; the woman is seen as part of a couple rather than as a pastor in a co-equal relationship exercising her ministry. In one instance, a regional leader would sometimes make pastoral contact with the pastor husband but never with the pastor wife, and if the husband was unavailable, he still would not talk to the wife, even though she was co-pastor with her husband. “I sometimes get treated like a minister’s wife, not as the pastor” (female interviewee 2, age 32). Both wife and husband who were co-pastors felt they had no structured support (Potts, 2020). Some women felt forgotten and disconnected from the ACC. A female senior pastor who pioneered her church said, “Sometimes I am not given respect and authority even in my own church. Some seem to expect me to act as a pastor’s wife” (female interviewee 3, age 43). This was expressed even though most members of her church had high respect for her as the senior pastor.

Ego versus a relational approach Male pastors are often ego and success, whereas women are more pastoral, relational, and empowering in their leadership styles (Clifton, 2009b). Having more female senior leaders in the ACC SA would bring these qualities into the church culture, effecting change. One participant said, “The church would be softer, more Christ-like” (male interviewee 1, age 68).

Navigating the culture While the denominational culture can be an obstacle, “[I]t can be navigated by listening, watching, and observing” (Female interviewee 4, age 61). Sometimes assertive women are considered aggressive or “pushy, [and] people don’t like pushy women” (female interviewee 5, age 69). This can have a discouraging effect on strong, assertive female leaders. Another woman said, regarding conflict, “I don’t want to be seen as the angry woman” (female interviewee 3, age 43). Some of the women had had negative experiences, which most had put behind them and had grown as leaders. “I learned to have the right conversations, to handle myself well, and to rely on God when fighting battles. The person I am now has been shaped by fighting these battles, facing issues head on” (female interviewee 6, age 46). Forgiveness was important in order to move on. “Don’t get bitter, get over being offended and be quick to forgive” (female interviewee 6, age 46). Another female senior pastor said, “Keep a sweet spirit” (female interviewee 7, age 63).

Women under the age of 25 Several participants said that gender in leadership is not an issue for those under the age of 25. For most in this age group, having both female and male pastors was normal. The attitudes of young teenagers tend to be influenced by their peers. The church has an opportunity to shape the attitudes of youth towards women in leadership, making a positive contribution to cultural change (Francis et al., 2016).

Campus churches, connection, and disconnection Several women belonging to campus churches have had positive experiences there, and while they know of the patriarchal culture, as one reported, “[I]n my world, it does not affect me” (female interviewees 1 and 8, ages 65 and 32). Their campus church experience was positive and empowering as they had been given significant opportunities in leadership; however, while they felt connected to their campus, half of them felt disconnected from the ACC.

Positive modelling An experienced senior female leader observed that often “a woman of good standing” (female interviewee 5, age 69), recognized for her leadership in her local church, can be elevated beyond her local church for her ability and positive relationships but will need male support to achieve this. If women are to have a “voice,” it has to be at a senior level with strong support from men (Catford, 2009). A female senior pastor said, “Positive modeling of women in leadership would be helpful. People would be able to see that women in senior leadership works” (female interviewee 1, age 65). This would provide a way to talk about the issue, as well as for the “people in power” to acknowledge female leadership and gifting (female interviewee 1, age 65). Affirming women in this way has the potential to positively influence and shift the patriarchal culture.

Gifting

Gifts determine the role Those interviewed said that gifting from the Holy Spirit had to be recognized by the individual and the church if there were to be change. Roles and ministries are determined by the gifting and calling of the Holy Spirit, rather than by gender (Langford, 2017). Affirmation of women’s gifting submits to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, who decides which gifts a person should have (1 Corinthians 12:11). Such affirmation has the potential to challenge the patriarchal culture.

A male participant with decades of ministry behind him noted that “in the past often women went to the mission field as there was no significant place for women to exercise their gifts” (male interviewee 2, age 80). If their gifts had been acknowledged, used, and supported by males, then male thinking about women and leadership would have changed more quickly than it has. This pastor said he had always promoted the approach of choosing “the best people for the job” (male interviewee 2, age 80).

The Holy Spirit In response to a male critic, Lancaster (1926) wrote in *The Good News* newspaper (a Pentecostal publication), “[T]he Holy Spirit makes the bodies of women his temple as well as those of men; He speaks and acts through either sex at his own sweet will” (p. 11, as cited in Chant, 2011, p. 424).¹ Stephenson (2011) suggests that some would

¹ Parts of *The Good News* newspaper have been damaged by fire leaving the Lancaster text incomplete. The complete text had been recorded by Chant previously to the fire (Lancaster, 1926, p. 11; Chant, 2011, p. 424).

acknowledge that women are given authority to preach and prophesy by the Holy Spirit, but not to rule in the church. (Stephenson, 2011). The key question to be asked today can be succinctly stated: Is a man's authority greater than that of the Holy Spirit? The answer will challenge existing beliefs, potentially influencing change.

Responsibility and support for gifts A female senior pastor said, "The responsibility for my gifts rests upon my shoulders and if I see something that's needed in the church, I use my gifts" (female interviewee 5, age 69). Her pastor husband tended to stand back, ensuring this could happen. During the interviews, I found that flourishing pastor couples gave space for each other to develop in different areas, bringing different perspectives to their ministry, so that their combined gifting powerfully expanded their ministry. Several women said that male leaders who championed them in their gifting contributed to their successes in ministry and leadership. Female leaders expressed a need to be supported by male leaders in their giftings and for male leaders to intentionally contribute to their development as leaders.

Taking opportunities

Responsibility for taking opportunities No participant liked the idea of specific opportunities being offered only to women or agreed with affirmative action in favor of women. "Women need to take responsibility for being a woman" (female interviewee 5, age 69), acknowledging their gifting and taking opportunities as they arise, to recognize what is potentially a God-given opportunity.

The participants overwhelmingly agreed that women need to be available and to say "yes to God" when opportunities are presented. A female pastor said, "I clearly heard God say to me 'proximity,' in that I am in proximity to what God is doing. I need to stay close to God and what He is doing and take opportunities as they arise" (female interviewee 4, age 61). All of the women interviewed recognized that in pursuing and taking opportunities, they have grown and developed in their leadership and positively affected the way their congregation thinks.

Resistance as an opportunity Some of the women who had experienced resistance from men towards their leadership saw this as an opportunity for change and persisted in ministry with those men; some of the men learned and changed their attitude, others heard from God, and some now even brag about their pastor and how amazing she is. One young man "loves to tell people in other churches that he has an awesome lady pastor and seeing the looks on their faces" (female interviewee 4, age late 61). "Seeing opposition as an opportunity and persisting can have a positive transforming effect on church culture" (female interviewee 6, age 46).

Credentialing and nomination processes Some of the female participants said that there had to be better and fairer ways for women to access and take opportunities. Pathways in the credentialing process, with positive mentoring for women seeking credentialing, need to be explored. Executive nomination processes could be reviewed in a way that creates pathways and affirms women as potential Executive members, attracting women who are innovative thinkers who could move the church forward (Starr-Parker, 2012). Once women are represented more in governance and the Executive, they would in turn advocate for

other women (Gould et al., 2018), making a positive contribution to raising female leaders at all levels.

Male and female support All of the women indicated that strong male support and encouragement empowered female leaders to identify and seize opportunities (Clifton, 2009a). Those with pastor husbands valued their support and their making space for them to develop and take opportunities. Others whose husbands were not in leadership said the same; their husbands did all they could to ensure that they pursued their potential and did not miss opportunities. Ibrat (2014) commented that successful women in high-level leadership have found their family's and partner's support to be important to their success. Some of the women interviewed had experienced support from senior women regarding opportunities (female interviewees 5 and 8, ages 69 and 32), but not all had been able to access mentoring from senior women in spite of their desire for such support (female interviewees 2 and 3, ages 32 and 43).

Church planting Several female participants had planted churches or had been involved in a church planting exercise. All had a deep concern for the "lost." They suggested that planting churches would create opportunities to reach "lost" people (i.e., those who had not yet "found" Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour). More people can be won for Christ in the first few years of a church plant than in an established church. This could provide female leaders with opportunities to use and develop giftings and to grow in credibility (Malphurs, 2011). Malphurs suggests that the credibility of church planters grows quickly. There was a deep sense among the interviewees that if opportunities were not available then they could be made; new churches could offer opportunities for leadership. These women in a sense were recapturing the spirit of pioneering Pentecostal women (Austin & Grey, 2017).

Pursuing opportunities Sometimes a qualified, talented, and gifted woman seeking a leadership opportunity will be overlooked in favor of a less-qualified man (Arasaratnam, 2011). However, women can make a difference and rise above the patriarchal culture (Kgatle, 2019). Women then need to take opportunities, to "work hard, to take responsibility for who they are as a women leader, to be a trailblazer" (female interviewee 6, age 46) and take opportunities to be part of a breakthrough in male culture. Empowered women who take opportunities are highly visible and cannot be ignored.

Mentoring

Male mentors All participants agreed that mentoring female leaders is necessary and makes a positive contribution to the development of female leaders (Bickmore-Brand & Madden, 2009). Several of the younger women said that their experience with male mentors had always been encouraging, opening up their world to possibilities and opportunities. The mentoring relationship helps to identify gifts and calling. Having a male mentor can be empowering (Clifton, 2009a). Mentors can pass on wisdom, knowledge, and experiences and have a belief in their protégé's potential (Tangenberg, 2013). For some, the male mentor is a senior leader or pastor who has valuable networks from which they can draw opportunities for learning and growth. Male mentors tend to speak positively and openly about those they mentor, promoting the development of female leaders and influencing culture.

Female mentors Senior female leaders as mentors can provide valuable specific mentoring as to what it means to be a female leader (Tangenberg, 2013). Some female pastors said that they did not have access to a senior female leader for mentoring and that while they have had high-value mentoring from men, “I still have a need for a woman mentor” (female interviewee 2, age 32). Christel (2009) observed that “women with female mentors experienced a different kind of relationship. There was more emotional support, more role modeling, and less power inherent in the role” (p. 53) Those women who felt the need for a senior female mentor were at the same time mentoring a considerable number of young women as well as young men.

Mentoring models One approach to mentoring is for a senior leader to observe a potential female leader for some time and then invite that young woman to join a discipleship (mentoring) group for growth. Women need to be seen “as being faithful, available, and teachable” (female interviewee 9, age 72), and then they will also receive personal mentoring. Another approach is that a female pastor is available to be a mentor, but the potential mentee has to take the initiative, be a servant, be available, and “chase your mentor with pen and pad in hand” (female interviewee 6, age 46). Becoming a mentor has worked well for several female mentors. They are teaching a younger generation to be mentors and helping raise and develop a new generation of female leaders, contributing to changing the patriarchal culture. Without leaders who have a passion for mentoring other leaders, female leadership will continue to struggle to grow.

A lifetime of culture-changing activity Mentoring seems to be a lifelong activity. Appropriate mentoring of young female leaders can help to raise and develop female leaders, but it also can contribute to producing an egalitarian culture that determines leadership by the gifting and calling of the Holy Spirit, rather than by gender.

Conclusion

This article argues that exploring and affirming what is currently happening with female leaders in relation to the key areas of gifting, opportunities, and mentoring will contribute to the development of women in senior leadership. The research shows that although the patriarchal culture in the ACC SA is improving in favor of a positive gender balance, more improvement is needed. When their gifting is identified and encouraged by others, women feel affirmed, confident, and empowered in their leadership. None of the interviewees suggested that women should be given opportunities simply because they are women. Rather, opportunities are to be offered and taken because of gifting and calling. As one interviewee said, “You choose the best person for the job.” (Male interviewee 2, age 80). Participants were aware of their giftings and calling and sought opportunities by staying close to God, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and seizing opportunities with boldness and confidence. The female participants agreed on the importance of mentoring both females and males. Mentoring powerfully affirmed the participants and has the potential to affirm women developing in senior leadership. The themes of gifting, taking opportunities, and mentoring offer potential pathways for positive change, raising the visibility and “voices” of female senior leaders.

Appendix

Interview schedule questions

1. What is happening now in the ACC SA regarding women in senior leadership?
2. What would senior female leaders say about their experiences, contributions and recommendations as female leaders?
What successes have there been?
What challenges are still there?
3. What are men in senior leadership saying about women in senior leadership?
4. The ACC positional statement on women in ministry endorses women in all levels of leadership. However, there appears to be an “ideal-real gap.”
What needs to change? What can be improved?
5. If a cultural change is needed, what steps and processes would help to facilitate cultural change?
6. In what ways can more women be raised to positions of senior leadership?
7. What would the ACC SA look like with more women in senior leadership?

Probing questions

Probing questions can be used to clarify and expand answers. Such questions can arise spontaneously in responding to what has been said. Examples of potential questions follow:

- Would you clarify that comment or point, please?
- Tell me more about what you just said.
- Can you provide more detail?
- How did that make you feel?

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