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African American Women in Informal Leadership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church

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**AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN INFORMAL LEADERSHIP IN THE
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

A Dissertation

by

Tava Renee' Herring, M.Ed., B.S.

**Presented to the School of Graduate Studies of the
University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The University of the Incarnate Word

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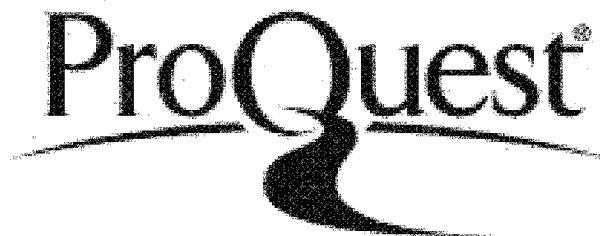


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By

Tava Renee Herring

Dedication

A dissertation is not completed in a bubble or without assistance and encouragement from individuals who are truly committed—either to you, to your dream, or to education.

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the head of my life and without whom-I am nothing.

To my mother, Audrey W. Herring and my father, Wyman H. Herring, Jr. who have always protected, supported and cared for me and my every dream and who made me the woman I am today.

To my younger brother, Wyman H. Herring, III who was a pain when we were children, my champion as we grew older, and my friend no matter where life takes us.

To my nieces, Daryn Marie and Lisa Renee who I hope will be inspired to go into the world and do great things—I love you both dearly.

To my dear friends, Sabrena Hurst, Arnechia Harris, and Natasha Wright for always encouraging and supporting me throughout this journey.

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To Marie Thurston, who took the time to assist me in this endeavor, and who offered advice and support, thank you very much.

To Sarah Williams, who gave great advice and offered thought provoking questioning. Thank you for all your work on my behalf.

To the wonderful participants in this study who were gracious and inviting. You have shared your life with me and I am honored by your trust.

To my church family who have been there the whole time as inspiration and encouragement. You lifted me when I was low, and you were happy for me when I did well. Finally, a special thank you to those Missionary women who first inspired my research: You showed me as a young Y.P.D.er how service is rendered.

Thank you all for being my village.

Abstract

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN INFORMAL LEADERSHIP IN THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of Church Mothers as they perceived themselves as informal leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. While it is generally acknowledged that there are gender and minority differences in leadership, there has been little exploration in how these differences affect the overall landscape of leadership and leadership theory in the African American community. Criteria for participant selection for the study were informed by Pielstick's characteristics of informal leadership: shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and character. The study was conducted from the Womanist perspective as a way of understanding the unique lens of African American women in informal leadership roles. Using a basic qualitative inquiry format, the researcher used interviews to allow the participants to tell their stories, beginning when they were young and progressing into their informal leadership role in the church. Through the sharing of the lived experiences of the nine Church Mothers, the researcher gained insight into how these women view their contribution to their church and communities. The inquiry produced three reoccurring themes: service; compassion; and mentorship. Service refers to the selfless giving of time, talent and financial support to the organization/community; compassion is the non-judgmental support of others, and mentorship includes formal education and informal education which can include mentorships, apprenticeships or simple observation. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge by increasing awareness of African American women as informal leaders within the church community.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Context of the Study

Leadership has long been a focus of interest and study all over the world. Through essays, parables, and epics, authors and poets have advised people on the ways of an effective leader (Ayman, 1993). According to Nahavandi (2006), a leader is a person who “influences individuals and groups within an organization, helps them in the establishment of goals and guides them toward achievement of those goals, thereby allowing them to be more effective” (p. 6). Leaders influence individuals to action, holds the authority and delegates responsibilities in any group or organization. When discussing leadership and what it is, there is no end to the amount of responses you will find.

According to Keohane (2005),

The scope of leadership differs from that of most other human activities. The issues that leaders must address have broad implications, and a large number of human beings are affected. Leadership involves an organizational context that gives this particular person the authority to make those decisions and assemble those resources. No one else has the same opportunities or obligations. (p. 707)

Leadership Research and Theories

To provide insight into the topic of leadership in general one must review leadership research and theories. There have been 65 different classifications of leadership “developed to define the dimensions of leadership” (Northouse, 2004, p. 2). Defining leadership as a process means that it is not a trait or characteristic that resides in the leader but an event that occurs between the leader and his or her follower. For many years experts have studied the concept of leadership and what it means to be a successful leader. There are many various examples of leadership theories and approaches that have

evolved over time. According to Haines (2004) and Chemer (2000) common theories include Carlye's trait theory or "great man theory". Carlye proposed that successful leaders had personality traits and character that distinguished them from less effective group members. "Traits that were stereotypically associated with leadership were dominance, assertiveness, intelligence, physical stature, and social sensitivity" (Chemer, 2000, p. 28). These traits were historically connected with those that are typically male. Fiedler and Vroom's contingency theory includes leadership style, as well as traits and situations. What they found was that both traits and styles did influence the outcome of a situation and the followers' ability to achieve the desired results (as cited in Chemer, 2000).

Another theory is Hollanders transactional theory (1973) which states that leaders and followers influence each other. Hollanders research found that a "...leader must be seen as competent in task relevant abilities and as honest, trustworthy, and loyal to the group norms and values" (as cited in Chemer, 2000, p. 38). Path-goal theory states that the leaders "main purpose is to motivate subordinates by helping them to see how their task-related performance could help them achieve their own personal goals: (as cited in Chemer, 2000, p. 30). More recently, there have been alternative theories like Goleman's emotional intelligence, that builds on concepts of learned abilities and circumstances that make the leaders of today successful. While all of these theories have been studied extensively in the research, many, if not all of them, inform the research community about leadership as relates to men and Caucasians and how they exercise leadership as the only way to do so. These theories do not take into account women or minorities and it

neglects those individuals in an organization that may not hold a formal title but are still able to contribute greatly in a leadership role.

Research on informal leadership is not often found in the literature but is important in the life of an organization. Leadership, as described previously is a behavior and not a position (Wheatley, 1999). These behaviors can be adapted to fit the needs of the group—a behavior that informal leaders tend to possess (Bass, 1990). Informal leaders are those individuals who have influence over a group without holding a formal position of leadership within the group (Pielstick, 2000). Informal leaders are thought to hold influence over a group and because they are a part of the social systems of an organization they hold a key role in developing a groups self efficacy as well as providing group direction (Pescosolido, 2001). Informal leaders are seen as influential in spite of their position within an organization. There is little research on informal leaders that highlights their importance in the life of an organization.

The Black Church

African American Christianity is considered to be uniquely tied to the history of American slavery (Campbell, 1998). The Black church as it is thought of today has sprung from a mixture of West African Cosmology and Western Christianity that reaches back to the late 17th century. “With the constant influx of Black Africans through the slave trade, the traditions and religions of Africa were constantly renewed and revitalized in the Americas” (Townes, 1995, p. 19). Slaves began developing a spirituality that “affirmed their personhood and self-worth” (Townes, 1995, p. 29). While slave owners were participating in worship services, the slaves participated in their own, using both the religion of the slave owner and the religious practices of their African home.

The journey to understanding the African American culture begins with a look at the black protestant church as defined by Lincoln and Mamiya (2003), as the “independent, historic, and totally black controlled denominations, which were founded after the Free African Society of 1787 and which constituted the core of black Christians”(p. 1). The seven denominations within the Black church are the African Methodist Episcopal Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated; the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated; the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and the Church of God in Christ. “Because religious and social spheres mutually influence one another to a greater extent in the African American community than in American society as a whole, the influence of denominational culture on social attitudes among African Americans is particularly strong.” (Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, & Woodberry, 2000, p. 294). For African Americans, the link between social, economic, and political concerns rest in the Black church/community. It is because of that link that any exploration into African American culture can begin within the church community.

The Christian conversion of slaves began in the northern United States with much controversy. Some felt that giving religious instruction to slaves would make them begin to think of themselves as equal to slave owners which would lead to unrest. Others believed that slaves would be unable to understand the scriptures. There were many that believed that by converting slaves they would be saving souls that were otherwise “lost” (Pinn, 2006; Raboteau, 1978). Some saw religious teachings as a way to make slaves better understand the divine plan and their place in it. “Put simply, obedience to God

required obedience to human authority” (Pinn, 2006, p. 145). These conversions began with the Puritans who required reading and time for reflection. Slaves were not taught to read and had very little (if any) free time which made the Puritan way of faith very difficult. In the Southern United States slaves were offered religious instruction in the Anglican faith believing that the religious conversion of slaves would “encourage slaves to accept the existing social order as part of God’s ultimate plan for human community” (Pinn, 2006, p. 165). Slaves were taught through memorization as it was forbidden to teach slaves to read. The first widespread conversion of Africans was during the Great Awakening of the 1730s. Baptist and Methodist evangelists began traveling and preaching in various churches converting Africans by the tens of thousands. The success of these evangelists was attributed to their ability to address the demands of the south and their concern for individual salvation which was available through a relationship with God (Pinn, 2006). The ways in which Baptist and Methodist worship resembled the rituals of Africa and the evangelist fiery sermons reminded Africans of the practice of spirit possession in many African based religious rites. During this period, slaves began to preach the gospel which was unheard of before this time.

As time moved forward, the Black church became “one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003, p. 7). The Black church gave birth to new institutions-schools, banks, housing, and a community. According to Lincoln and Mamiya (2003), “much of black culture is heavily indebted to the black religious tradition...” (p. 8). The twentieth century saw the birth of many African American secular organizations. Most of these organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League

were founded by, and with the assistance of, Black church leaders and membership. The development of these secular organizations grew out of the need to deal with the issues plaguing the black community. According to Lincoln and Mamiya (2003), the “experience of oppression is more likely to find immediate resonance with the incarnational view of the suffering, humiliation, death and eventual triumph of Jesus...” (p. 4). Throughout the history of the Black church the idea of Jesus as personal savior was one that differed from the idea or concept of an impersonal God. The idea of freedom became a central theme in black Christian belief and has maintained throughout the history of the Black church (Costen, 1993). “During slavery it meant release from bondage; after the emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place” (p. 4).

African American Women in Church Leadership

Moving into the twentieth century, freedom takes on more political, social, and economic overtones and centers more on justice. If you were called into discipleship with God, then you are called to be free- to belong to God (Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003). The composition of the Black church is characterized by a predominately female congregation and a largely male leadership. This structure has been prevalent throughout Black church history. “Despite the fact that the major programs of the Black church in politics, economics . . . depend heavily upon women for their promotion and success”, there is often times a distinct lack of women in key leadership roles (Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003, p. 275). Women serve in many roles within the church as missionaries, ushers, choir members, stewardesses, Sunday school teachers and musicians, but are often times left out of the higher church authority. The origins of women in the ministry of the Black

church go back to the beginning of the church. While Christianity teaches submission on the part of women and minorities, most African religious traditions show women playing a major role (Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003). It is this duality that may have encouraged women in the early church to begin evangelizing and preaching despite the negative connotations in the church.

One example in the African Methodist Episcopal Church is Jarena Lee (1783-185?) who was converted to Christianity at the age of 21 and felt that she had been called to preach. In 1811, Lee expressed this to the founder and minister of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Richard Allen, who told Lee that while he was not opposed to women holding prayer meetings or exhorting after ministers preached their sermons, but that the discipline and doctrine of the church strictly prohibited women being licensed to preach. Although she was discouraged from preaching, Lee was patient but persistent in her desire to preach the gospel, seeking other avenues to do so (Andrews, 1986; Lincoln & Mamiya, 2003). There are many similar stories throughout the history of the Black church and as we move through the twenty-first century, we see the number of women as pastors and bishops in the Black church are climbing higher than they have ever been in the history of the church.

Church leadership positions for African American women have been on the rise, but on some level, the African American female leader has always been a driving force in the African American church/community even when those women were not allowed to hold formal leadership positions. Some of these women assumed roles as church mothers—those women who set the moral and spiritual tone of the entire church congregation. According to Pinn (2002), church mother is “a title bestowed upon older,

wise, and spiritually strong women who have distinguished themselves through service in numerous capacities” (p. 118). Spirituality, religion, and support of the church in promoting leadership pursuits and success, emerged as key leadership factors for African American women in several separate studies (Gostnell, 1996; Webb, 2000). Informal leaders, according to Pielstick (2000), are those individuals who have influence over a group without holding a formal position of leadership within the group. With more formal leadership opportunities for women in the public and private sector has the unique informal leadership position of church mother become obsolete or is she the key to African American female leadership theory?

Statement of the Problem

There is a sharp rise in the number of African American women attending college and moving into leadership positions in the secular world. This trend has also been seen in the Black church with an increase in women Pastors, Bishops, and major leaders within the church. While it is generally acknowledged that there are gender and minority differences in leadership, there has been little exploration in how these differences affect the overall landscape of leadership and leadership theory. There is also a lack of research in the area of informal leadership. Informal leaders do not have a formal position of leadership but influence groups as a leader using what Pielstick (2000, p. 2) calls, “authentic leading” as opposed to the “power-wielding” style often used by formal leaders. According to Pielstick, the characteristics of informal leaders include shared vision, communication, relationships, community, and character (p. 2). While most organizational behavior texts mention informal leadership as an important concept, there is little in the literature beyond a few references to informal leadership in small groups

(Pielstick, 2000). Now that women are moving into more formal leadership positions there is a need to study the more informal roles of church leadership that have sustained it for the last few centuries.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of church mothers as they perceived themselves as informal leaders in the Black Protestant Church, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Through the sharing of the lived experiences of nine Church Mothers, the researcher gained insight into how these women view their contribution to their church and communities.

Research Questions

Research Questions that guided this study included;

1. How do did these African American women as informal leaders perceive their role as church mothers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church?
2. How does the church mother as informal leader in the study add to the church community?

Theoretical Framework

The study will be conducted from the Womanist perspective as a way of understanding the unique lens of African American women in informal leadership roles.

According to Phillips (2006),

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black woman's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension. (p. xx)

Womanism speaks to the African American woman's way of knowing. By using this theoretical lens to approach, the research can assist in seeing a phenomenon through the lens of the African American woman. A womanist is concerned with oppression in all its forms. The womanist is concerned with the African American woman, the African American man, and humanity. Womanism is anti-oppressionist, vernacular, non-ideological, communitarian and spiritual (Phillips, 2006).

Womanism manifests five overarching characteristics; it is *antioppressionist*, meaning that it seeks to combat oppression in all its forms.

The term antioppressionist conveys that womanism is identified with liberationist projects of all sorts and that womanism supports the liberation of all humankind from all forms of oppression. Indeed, womanism seeks to enable people to transcend the relations of domination and oppression altogether. (Phillips, 2006, p. xxiv)

Secondly, womanism is *vernacular* which points to its everyday quality. It is a perspective for the "everyday" person. According to Phillips (2006),

The soul of womanism is grassroots, identified with the masses of humanity. Use of the term 'masses of humanity' does not in this case suggest a polarity between 'the masses' and 'the elites'; rather, it highlights the unifying reality that all people have "everyday" lives and that elite status is something that cloaks this reality more than supplants it. (P. xxiv)

Womanism embraces the diversity found from person to person and sees this diversity as favorable in terms of positive social change. Every person is encouraged to begin "where they are. As a womanist, there is no need to be "perfect"; personhood is enough to qualify" (Phillips, 2006, p. xxv). The third characteristic of womanism is that it is *non-ideological*. Womanism is not about creating lines of demarcation; rather, it is about building structures of inclusiveness and positive interrelationship from anywhere in its

network. Ideology is rigid; it relies on internal logical consistency and some degree of central control that seeks the resolution of difference by means of homogenization (Phillips, 2006, p. xxv).

This makes womanism less about rules and boundaries and more about relationships and how these relationships facilitate discussion of differences. “Womanists rely on dialogue to establish and negotiate relationships; such relationships can accommodate disagreement, conflict, and anger simultaneously with agreement, affinity, and love” (Phillips, 2006, p. xxv). Womanism is also *Communitarian*; womanism views commonweal as the goal of social change. Commonweal is the state of collective well-being; it is the optimization of well-being for all members of a community.

For womanist, community is conceptualized as a series of successively overlapping tiers, beginning with Black woman or women of color (the level of the self or identity), followed by the Black community and other communities of color (the level of “tribe” or “kin”), followed by all oppressed people (the level of similarly situated others), and ultimately encompassing all humanity-the universal level. (Phillips, 2006, p. xxv)

Womanism seeks to define community as not only those in the black community but to everyone. Included in this conception of community is what TalibaSikudhaniOlugbala (a student of Layli Phillips) has called “livingkind” (all living things-from humans to animals, to plants, to microorganisms) as well as the “inanimate” components of Earth, the universe(s) beyond Earth, the spiritual world(s) and transcendental realm(s) encompassing the universe(s), and, ultimately, all of creation (Phillips 2006, p. xxvi). Finally, the fifth and maybe most controversial characteristic of Womanism is that it is *spiritualized*. Spiritualized refers to the fact that womanism openly acknowledges a spiritual/transcendental realm with which all human life as well as the material world are

all linked. For womanist, this realm is actual and palpable, and the relationship between it and humans is neither abstract nor insignificant. The spiritualized nature of Womanism distinguishes it from other critical, theoretical, or ideological perspectives (Phillips, 2006, p. xxvi).

Definition of Terms

Additional terms used in this study will be;

1. **Cultural Identification**-The women in this study will be referred to as African American. Within the literature, there are other designations (Black, Colored, and Negro) and when these other designations are used in quoted material, they will be retained.
2. **Church community**- the fellowship created by individuals who share a faith perspective and gather regularly for worship and support.

Personal Connection to the Study

I was sitting in the Richmond, VA airport, reading about Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), leader of the anti-lynching movement and crusader for women's rights. There was a quote where Wells describes herself as trying to "exorcise the demon of unrest and dissatisfaction" (Wells as cited in Bell-Scott, 1998). I suddenly realized that I felt the same way. It was a startling revelation that left me exhilarated and terrified and tremendously sad all at once. I'm thinking, "What now? What do I do with this epiphany?" I have always thought of myself as a person without pain, or struggle—a charmed life. I was never a slave or had to sit at a lunch counter. I grew up in a middle class home with both parents, which was rare in my neighborhood. I have always done well in school and was rarely any trouble to anyone. I went to college without thinking

about how tuition would be paid (my mother and father worried about that for me). So where is my unrest and dissatisfaction coming from? What does this mean for my life? Am I living up to my potential? Am I honoring the work of my ancestors? Then I think about the women at my church.

Growing up in the African Methodist Episcopal Church is a singular experience. I never thought about it growing up, but in recent years, I have found myself in reflection. I began attending my church at the age of 11. I was a shy child who often hid behind my parents and rarely ventured out of their presence. It is at this church where I learned about God, public speaking, manners, protocol, etc. This is where I learned confidence (or at least how to make others think I was). This is where I came out of my shell and became an adult. None of this would have been possible without a strong supportive mother and strong supportive “church mothers” guiding me every step of the way. When I look at the senior women of my church (often called “Mothers”), I see leaders-women who have struggled to make their place in the world and now have knowledge and wisdom to give to the rest of us. “Mothers” struggled and came through as leaders of the church and the community. These women showed me how to be a woman. They balanced gentility and strength like it was nothing. They were both submissive and formidable all at the same time. They didn’t have formal leadership positions, but the influence they had was undeniable. As I begin to witness the growing number of female Pastors and Bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the passing away of the church mothers, I began to wonder what we might be losing in this shift. I began looking at the make-up of our church leadership and started to think about the changes in the past 50 years. Where women were relegated to the background of leadership they are now Pastors and Bishops.

They now head the highest boards in the church. In the age where women are taking on the more formal role of leader, and now that we are living in a world where there is more opportunity for the African American female than ever before, what is to become of the church mother?

Overview of the Methodology

The study will use a basic interpretative qualitative design (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon of African American women as informal leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal church. An appropriate way to go about exploring a topic is to use a qualitative method of research. Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning that the individual has constructed. It is interested in how those individuals make sense of their environment. In this study, the experience of the women will be explored in their own words how each of them experienced and because the researcher will be collecting this data, the research becomes the instrument. The researcher is “responsive to the context; he or she can adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered” (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 7). The researcher will interview nine African American women who are identified by their peers as informal church leaders and church mother. Qualitative research involves fieldwork. The researcher is expected to go where the participants are in order to “observe behavior in its natural setting (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Qualitative research is inductive in nature so it can help to fill in the gaps of current theory that fails to adequately explain a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). This whole process will lead the researcher to findings that are complete with rich descriptions of the phenomenon from

the participant's unique point of view. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will employ a basic qualitative method which will be described in the methodology section.

Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the body of knowledge by increasing awareness of African American women as informal leaders within the church community. Church mothers have not been found in the literature therefore the study will add an additional perspective on these women as informal leaders. This study helped to reveal some of the characteristics of African American women informal leaders in a religious setting. This study also contributed to the literature on womanism within this specific context. This research also gives a voice to a segment of the church community that has to date gone unheard.

Limitations of the Study

In this study, the use of personal interviews and the data that came from it, hinged upon the reliability of the memories of the women interviewed over a short period of time. The researcher's bias as a member of the community of study was taken into consideration. The researcher bracketed her knowledge and preconceived ideas to limit personal bias. A delimitation of the study was that the researcher interviewed a limited number of women in a small region of the country in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

To explore the phenomenon of church mothers, it is important to understand not only the culture of the women involved, but the church and its structure and culture. In this literature review, the researcher will (a) give a historic overview of women in the black protestant church and then focus specifically on the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, (b) explore the womanist epistemology (Walker, 1979) –its origins, contributors, and detractors to better understand the point of view for the study, and finally (c) investigate informal leadership theory to gain insight into the informal leadership role of the Church Mother.

Women in the Black Protestant Church

According to Hygh (2008) empowerment and leadership for the African American woman in slavery was often found in the form of Holy Spirit churches of East Africa (p. 12). However, as time went on, abolitionists began to point out the contradiction between slavery and America's moral character as put forth in the constitution. African Americans began to establish separate churches to create their own communities, escape white control, and worship in their own culturally distinct ways (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). They had already created a unique and empowering form of Christianity that creolized African spiritual traditions, which is a Christian tradition developed more fully during the late 19th century (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Within the Black churches, African Americans built strong community organizations and held positions of spiritual and political leadership.

In addition, African American churches have long been the centers of communities, serving as schools in the early years after the Civil War, taking up social welfare functions, such as providing for the indigent, and going on to establish schools and orphanages (Billingsly, 1999). There early churches offered leadership opportunities for increased social status and for a sense of community (Evans, 1995). African American women performed as leaders in ways that affected people from all walks of life.

For the African American woman, the church has been a social organization that developed a community of sisterhood where older women served as mentors and role models for younger women. Professionally, more African American women than White women have sought ministry training, ordination, and leadership roles in their church. The history of these women in the church context showed their call to function in the areas of ministry, preaching, and social change embraced a unique phenomenon that was inspired by the strong oral tradition of the black culture. (Hygh, 2008, p. 13)

In the 19th century, African American women established schools, orphanages, settlement houses, and literary and moral improvement societies. The areas of greatest concern addressed by these movements were prostitution, alcohol consumption, and other practices detrimental to the family (Meux, 2002). Community organizer and activist Sal Alinsky (as cited in Meux, 2002) found leaders indigenous to a community had a unique understanding of the culture of the groups they represented, had the confidence of the people to voice their viewpoint, influence small spheres of people, needed training to develop more inclusive skills, knew how to use emotions of the people to bring common understanding and saw the individual as a part of a larger system or total social situation (Meux, 2002).

The church was also the institution that allowed the birth of various and diverse social and political movements and that developed both men and women in social change leadership from its earliest history to contemporary times (Fraizer, 1963; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Malone, 1994; Paris, 1995; Wilmore, 1996). The community gatherings of the church allowed the people to reform styles of traditional leadership that were based on African behavioral patterns and responsive to the particular social conditions of the times (Bennett, 1975; Mintz & Price, 1976). African American women, along with their men, found an opportunity to ascend as leaders for the betterment of their people through this institution. The church was a training ground where women who were the most powerless in society due to their ethnic economic or social status exercised leadership skills (Meux, 2002). Even within the church women held no formal leadership positions but were able to develop leadership skills informally. Women learned from their church to recognize and develop skills for coping with and resisting acts of racism and sexism (Delany & Rogers, 2004). It is these differences that make African American women's leadership separate from most leadership theories. The African American women's link with the church is the key to her leadership style. Contemporary African American churchwomen were recognized as leaders in most lay ministries and they exerted powerful influences on African American church communities (Collier-Thomas, 1998; Collins, 1990; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

All of the mainline African American church denominations are characterized by a predominantly female membership and largely male leadership. While most of the major programs within the church depend on women for their success, it is still the men

that are exalted as the community leaders. Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) summed up the experience of the African American woman in the church this way:

Women serve in a myriad roles in Black churches as evangelist, missionaries, stewardesses, deaconesses, lay readers, writers on religious subjects, Sunday School teachers, musicians, choir members and directors, ushers, nurses, custodians, caterers and hostesses for church dinners, secretaries, clerks, counselors, recreation leaders, and directors of vacation Bible schools. Women are also the designated “mothers of the church” as honorific title usually reserved for the wife of the founder or for the oldest and most respected members. In some Black churches pastors usually consult with the church mother before making an important decision because she can exercise countervailing power among some key church members. The phenomenon of the “church mother” has no parallel in white churches; it is derived from the kinship network found within Black churches and Black communities. (p. 275)

The role of the church mother was a major part of the and in some respects still is today, but is this a phenomenon that is fading? This is the question that comes to mind in a world that is changing and African American women are found in increasingly higher positions in the church and in the world at large. Where does the church mother fit into this equation?

History and Structure of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church grew out of the Free African Society (FAS) which Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others established in Philadelphia in 1787 (Woodson, 1921; Campbell, 1995). When officials at St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church pulled blacks off their knees at the altar so that white congregants could pray, Allen, Jones and others walked out of church in protest. These men and women made plans to transform their mutual aid society into an African congregation under the Methodist church (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). After the establishment of this new congregation, the Methodist church refused to assign a minister

to the “African church”. This slight from the Methodist church prompted most of the congregation to vote to affiliate with the Protestant Episcopal Church, but Allen led a small group who resolved to remain Methodists (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Allen (1883) stated,

no religious sect or denomination would suit the capacity of the coloured people as well as the Methodist; for the plain and simple gospel suits best for any people, for the unlearned can understand, and the learned are sure to understand; and the reason that the Methodist is so successful in the awakening and conversion of the coloured people, the plain doctrine and having a good discipline. (p.16)

Allen owned an old blacksmith shop that was converted for worship. In 1794, Bethel church was dedicated by Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury with Allen as pastor (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). To establish Bethel’s independence from interfering white Methodists, Allen, a former Delaware slave, successfully sued in the Pennsylvania courts in 1807 and 1815 for the right of his congregation to exist as an independent institution. Because black Methodists in other middle Atlantic communities encountered racism and desired religious autonomy, Allen called them to meet in Philadelphia in 1816 to form a new Wesleyan denomination, the A.M.E. Church with Richard Allen elected Bishop (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Education in the A.M.E. Church. From the beginning, the A.M.E. church was concerned with providing social services to the community and had an equally strong interest in education. “The church leaders were not educated people, but they had a clear perception of what education would mean to the interest of the church and to the advancement of African people then held in abject slavery” (Lincoln, 1990, p. 53). A.M.E. leaders began opening common schools, night schools, and Sunday Bible reading schools. These early efforts were not always successful due to the lack of properly trained

teachers and the pervasive poverty in the community as well as the practice of “binding black children out as apprentices” (Campbell, 1998, p. 38). The effort toward educating Pastors and congregants was spearheaded by several early Bishops of the church. Bishop Daniel Payne set educational goals for church and insisted on a trained clergy and encouraged Pastors to start school in their communities (Lincoln, 1996). Payne was instrumental in the founding of Wilberforce University in 1856, America’s first black university (Campbell, 1998). The AME church established more than 20 academic institutions. Over time, some were closed and others merged. Currently Wilberforce University and Payne Theological Seminary (established in 1894) in Wilberforce, Ohio; Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia (established in 1881); Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina (established in 1870); Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas (established 1881); Shorter Junior College in North Little Rock, Arkansas (established in 1886) and Edward Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida (established in 1901) are the most well-known A.M.E. schools in the connection. They are carrying on the educational torch sparked by Bishop Payne and others. In the wake of all of these educational reforms also came magazines, books, and historical organizations. “The A.M.E. Review founded in 1881 is the oldest journal in the world owned and published by black people” (Lincoln 1990, p. 52).

Bishop Payne was also instrumental in standardizing the musical tone of the church. He began replacing “spiritual songs” which were often spontaneous in their creation with more a more orthodox hymnody (Campbell, 1998). At the time, congregations sung hymns in a call and response style referred to as “lining out”. A deacon or assistant would “call” out the line to be sung while the congregation responded

with singing in a fugue-type style. This style of singing is an example of the mixing of African Cosmology and Christianity. According to Payne, this style of singing was “ideally suited for the lowly and illiterate” (Campbell, 1998, p. 41). He began to insist that choirs begin singing proper hymns and in 1818, Richard Allen and Daniel Coker published an official church hymnal with over 300 hymns, 250 of which were from the standard Methodist hymnal (Campbell, 1998). These changes affected some congregants, especially the women who were often in opposition with Bishop Payne, and many of the changes became a mainstay of the A.M.E. church.

A.M.E. Women’s Organizations. African Methodist women, like most African American women of this era, made up the majority of congregations. Campbell (1998) described what the church meant to the women.

In the nineteenth century, as in the twentieth, black women bore a distinct burden of oppression and exhibited a special affinity for enthusiastic, evangelical Christianity. Often isolated in white people’s back yards and kitchens, black women found solace in the warmth and communalism of A.M.E. love feasts and revivals; assailed by poverty and sexual depredation, they found in African Methodism’s ideals of dignity and self-possession a basis for organizing and revaluing themselves. (p. 43)

The earliest lay organizations for women in the A.M.E. church were the “Daughters of the Conference” and the “Mothers’ Associations” and were born out of the very first A.M.E. conference where Sarah Allen, Bishop Allen’s wife, and other women decided to mend the clothes of the ministers attending the meeting. The “Daughters of the Conference” gained “Episcopal sanction” in 1827 and spread throughout the church connection (Campbell, 1998). This organization “operated within the prevailing assumptions about women’s nature and role...they provided hospitality at church conferences, raised money for needy ministers, visited the sick and dispensed motherly

counsel. The “Mothers’ Association” was concerned with “instilling the virtues of purity and chastity in the race’s young women” (Campbell 1998, p. 44).

The Church as a Connection. The African Methodist Episcopal Church is a connectional organization. The geographical spread of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church prior to the Civil War was mainly restricted to the Northeast and Midwest. Major congregations were established in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, Chicago, Detroit, and other major cities. Numerous northern communities also gained a substantial A.M.E. presence. Remarkably, the slave states of Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, and, for a few years, South Carolina, became additional locations for A.M.E. congregations. The denomination reached the Pacific Coast in the early 1850s with churches in Mother Bethel Church Stockton, Sacramento, San Francisco, and other places in California. Moreover, Bishop Morris Brown established the Canada Annual Conference. In the 1990s, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church included over 2,000,000 members, 8,000 ministers, and 7,000 congregations in more than 30 nations in North and South America, Africa, and Europe. Twenty bishops and 12 general officers comprised the leadership of the denomination (Yrigoyen & Warrick 2005, p. 8).

The A.M.E. church motto is “God Our Father, Christ Our Savior, and Man Our Brother”. The doctrine and polity of the church was modeled after the Methodist Episcopal Church and is laid out in *The Book of Discipline (2008)* which is revised every four years at the General Conference—a meeting of all A.M.E. church in the world. The mission and purpose of the church stated that,

Each local church of the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall be engaged in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society out

of which the A.M.E. Church evolved, that is, to seek out and save the lost and serve the needy through a continuing program of: (1) preaching the gospel, (2) feeding the hungry, (3) clothing the naked, (4) housing the homeless, (5) cheering the fallen, (6) providing jobs for the jobless, (7) administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, asylums and mental institutions, senior citizens' home, caring for the sick, the shut-in, the mentally and socially disturbed, and (8) encouraging thrift and economic advancement. (Doctrine and Discipline, 2008, p. 13)

Church Structure. The Bishops are the Chief Officers of the Connectional Organization. They are elected for life by a majority vote of the General Conference which meets every four years. Bishops are bound by the laws of the church to retire following their 75th birthday. Presiding Elders are the assistants, whom the Bishops appoint to supervise the preachers in a Presiding Elder's District. A Presiding Elder District is one portion of an Annual Conference, which in turn is one part of the Episcopal District over which a Bishop presides. In the Presiding Elder District, the appointed Presiding Elder meets with the local churches that comprise the District, at least once every three months for a Quarterly Conference. The Presiding Elder also presides over a District Conference and a Sunday School Convention in his or her District. At the end of an Annual Conference year, the Presiding Elder reports to the Bishop at the Annual Conference and makes recommendations for pastoral appointments. Pastors receive a yearly appointment to a charge (church), on the recommendation of the Presiding Elder and with the approval and final appointment of the Bishop. The pastor is in full charge of the Church and is an ex-official member of all boards, organizations, and clubs of that Church (Yrigoyen & Warrick 2005, p. 8).

The local church consists of a range of auxiliaries and boards that help to accommodate the objectives of the A.M.E. church. These include the steward board, who

is responsible for the spiritual side of the church as well as the finances, and the Trustee board who is primarily responsible for the property of the church. The stewardess board is responsible for preparing the rituals of Holy Communion and baptism and see to the upkeep of the altar dressings. There is a class leader system that divides the congregation into classes and it is the class leader's job to keep track of the members in their class and report them to the Official board. The official board is a meeting composed of the above boards of the church where the business of the local church is discussed. Once every three months, there is a quarterly conference that is presided over by the Presiding Elder. The Presiding Elder is a minister who has been given charge of a district (a geographic area of many churches). At this meeting, all boards and auxiliaries are expected to report their progress. Going up a level, yearly the Presiding has a District conference where ministers present their work of the year. At the next level, the Annual conference, the Presiding Elders and local Pastors present to the Bishop their work for the year, this is also the meeting where the Pastors, who are itinerant, are assigned to churches for the next conference year. Each local church is a part of the larger connection. The supreme legislative body is the General Conference. The General conference meets every four years and is composed the bishops, general officers, head of colleges and seminaries, armed forces chaplains, and ministerial and lay delegates from all the Annual conferences. The General conducts church business, to include, electing general officer, establishing the budget, receiving reports from the various agencies, determining organizational structure and regulations and electing new bishops (Campbell, 1998). The remaining structure of the church governance is found in figure 1.

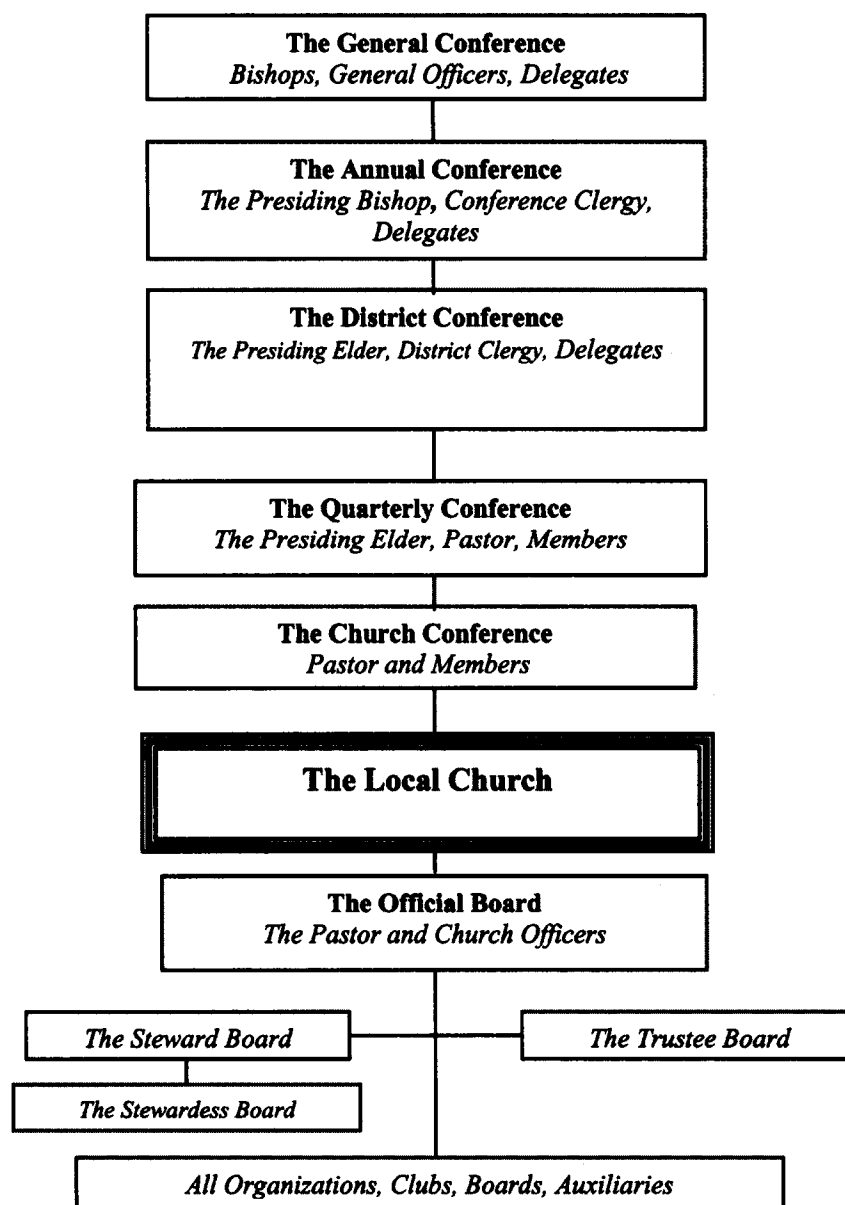


Figure 1. Structure of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Trailblazers of the A.M.E. Church

From colonial times, women were exercising leadership within their church/religious communities. Women like Mary Baker Eddy of the National Christian Scientist Association, founded in 1886 and Sally Parsons, Mary Savage, and Clarissa Danforth in the Freewill Baptist tradition of the 1790s, were pioneers in religious movements formed

by, and lead by women. Women also served at Missionaries and Professional Lay Leaders throughout the 17th and 18th centuries (McKenzie, 1996). African American women were also leading in their churches. "Women, from the earliest times, always constituted a major portion of the congregations. And they emerged to develop effective and efficient parachurch [sic] organizations, such as missionary societies and women's mite societies that were significant in the development and maintenance of the local church" (McKenzie, 1996, p. 30). In the growing African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) denomination, many women began to come forward to preach. Jarena Lee, considered to be one of the first women preachers of the A.M.E. church, answered her call to the ministry in 1820 (Andrews, 1986). She preached from her home because she was not allowed to be formally ordained or preach from the pulpit. Word of her ministry spread throughout the United States and she began preaching all over the country as well as in Canada (Collier-Thomas, 1997). Zilpha Elaw was a contemporary of Jarena Lee and served as an evangelist and missionary. "Elaw distinguished herself as a missionary. She traveled extensively and like Lee, demonstrated exceptional courage. She traveled to slave states in the late 1820's risking arrest, kidnapping, or sale into bondage" (McKenzie, 1996, p. 34). Rebecca Cox Jackson, the sister of one of Bethel A.M.E. church's founders and trustee, answered her call to ministry in 1830 as an already mature woman. She began having "covenant meetings" and "Her penchant for dreams and visions and her advocacy of various forms of bodily mortification...quickly brought her into conflict with A.M.E. church leaders" and she eventually entered a community of Shakers (Campbell, 1998, p. 48). Amanda Berry Smith also served as a preacher without being formally ordained. Smith, who was born a slave in 1837 in Maryland, was literate

and attended private school in the summers of her childhood. After her parents purchased the families freedom, “she married a local deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church, who abandoned her. Her second husband died and she supported herself as a washerwoman” (McKenzie, 1996, p. 33). Smith acknowledged her call to preach after the Civil War in the holiness movement. Her calling lead her all over the United States and Britain preaching in Holiness camp meetings-all without ordination. “Members of the Plymouth brethren opposed her, publishing opposition stories about her and trying to draw her into public debate. Smith politely refused, continuing her preaching mission” (p. 34). These women were the trailblazers of African American leadership in the church.

Womanism

Womanism should not be confused with Feminism. While there are several similarities, there are also some differences that lead one to see the need for a womanist way of knowing. Feminism argues that “gender is the central factor in shaping consciousness, skills, and institutions and for looking at the distribution of power and privilege” (Lather, 1994, p. 242), and that in some cases, women are superior to men. Feminism excludes the African American experience because the experience of the African American has been historically overlooked in terms of developing theory. According to Collins (1990),

This historical suppression of Black Women’s ideas has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory. Theories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group, on closer examination, appear greatly limited by the white, middle-class origins of their proponents. (p. 5)

The womanist perspective however, “used a framework of a traditional African worldview of the inseparable spirit and soul, and of human wholeness presumed through

connection with others in the community” (Meux, 2002, p. 6). Phillips also took on the debate between the differences in feminism and womanism when she said,

Unlike feminism, and despite its name, womanism does not emphasize or privilege gender or sexism; rather, it elevates all sites and forms of oppression whether they are based on social-address categories like gender, race, or class, to a level of equal concern and action. (p. 437)

Womanism’s link to gender is the fact that the historically produced race/class/gender matrix that is Black womanhood serves as the origin point for a speaking position that freely and autonomously addresses any topic or problem. “Because Black women experience sexism, and womanism is concerned with sexism, feminism is confluent with the expression of womanism, but feminism and womanism cannot be conflated, nor can it be said that womanism is a version of feminism” (Phillips, 2006, p. xxi). The researcher will place the experiences of the women interviewed in the context of womanism. Within that context the researcher will use the characteristics of womanism (antioppressionist, vernacular, non-ideological, communitarian, and spiritualized) to filter the information in a meaningful and structured way.

Womanism is a term that comes from ‘womanist’ first used by Alice Walker in a 1979 short story “Coming Apart” found in Laura Lederer’s anthology *Take Back the Night* (1982). In this story about a Black husband and wife arguing over the effect of the husband’s consumption of pornography on their marriage, there is a line where Walker wrote, “The wife has never considered herself a feminist-though she is of course, a “womanist”. A womanist is a feminist, only more common” (Walker, 1980, p. 100). “Womanist”, as defined by Alice Walker (1983), is derived from the term “womanish” which is considered the opposite of “girlish”, “i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious” (p. xi). The expression of “acting womanish” referred to girls whose behavior was

“outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful” (Phillips, 2006, p. xi). Because the definition of “womanist” offered by Walker was poetic in nature, it became, on the one hand, immediately attractive to and resonant for many people who were searching for an alternative to “feminist” as an identity or praxis and on the other hand, theoretically slippery and frustrating to scholars and activists accustomed to working within a decidedly feminist frame (Phillips, 2006, p. xix).

Walker (1983) also defined womanism as “the consciousness that incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations” (p. 298). Womanism is concerned with oppression and those who are considered oppressors in society. In this line of thought, women are able to advocate for themselves as well as their communities and their nation. So while feminist thought focuses on gender, and nationalism on race, womanism focuses on both. It is a concept that not only deals with the struggle of black women, but the black community and the power structure that subjugates both (Collins, 1990). Walker is considered one of many African American women who embraced the idea of womanism even before this concept had a name. Two other women, Chikwenya Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems along with Walker are thought to be major contributors to the womanist idea.

Nigerian Chikwenya Ogunyemi writes in her 1985 article, *Womanism: the Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English*, “African and Afro-American writers share similar aesthetic attitudes in spite of factors that separate them” (p. 64). Ogunyemi also states that she came to the term independently from Walker and was surprised to see that their ideas had some overlap. She then began to highlight where her perspective departs from Walker, first by coining her perspective, “black womanism”

and then begins to introduce "elements of Black separatism that seem to imply both the impossibility of reconciliation between white feminists and black womanists and the permanence of a black- white racial divide based on the intractability of racism" (Maparyan, 2012, p. 24). Ogunyemi also linked womanism with spirituality which was not a major part of Walker's womanism. In the late 1990s Ogunyemi began to call her perspective African womanism to distinguish it from Walker's womanism on two grounds: (1) "the African obsession to have children", and (2) "incompatible attitudes toward lesbianism" (Maparyan, 2012, p. 24). It is Ogunyemi's belief that gender issues can only be dealt with in the context of issues relevant to African women.

Clenora Hudson-Weems derived her Africana womanism worldview, not from feminism, but from a nationalist Africana studies (Maparyan, 2012). The term *Africana* in Africana womanism refers to those in the African Diaspora. Africana womanism seeks to establish "an alternative identity and politics for Africana women who want to challenge patriarchy and sexism within Africana culture" instead of through feminist identity and politics. (Maparyan, 2012, p. 26). Hudson-Weems states that womanism can be traced back to Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a woman?" speech at the 1852 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio (Maparyan, 2012). In that famous speech, Hudson – Weems stated,

Sojourner was not embracing the Women's Rights movement; instead, she was attacking that element of the Women's Rights agenda that excluded her. Instead of establishing feminist alignment, she was engaging in self-actualization, forcing White women in particular to recognize her and all Africana women as women and as a definite and legitimate part of society in general. (p. 186)

Hudson-Weems emphasized that Truth had to establish herself as black first amongst the hostile crowd, before she could even discuss her womanhood. In that context, she was

acting as “the copartner of her male counterpart in the struggle for her people” (Hudson-Weems, 2000, p. 207). Hudson-Weems is an advocate of Africana women creating their own name based on their own ways of knowing and being in their own cultural context. These three women gave us the beginnings of what we call womanism, and each contributes to the African American women’s lens.

Womanism therefore is, according to Meux (2002),

a recognition of the African American woman’s personal strength, and emotional flexibility, that valued tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter, commitment to survival, and respect for the wholeness of all people, both male and female as key elements to this concept. (p. 5)

Womanism embraced African American culture and the power of the African American woman. According to Carlton-LaNey (2006), many African American women, both historical and contemporary, who shied away from the feminist way, may well embrace womanism as “God’s will” and as a better way to identify their commitment to the community. This worldview gives African American women a way to define and empower themselves. This concept encapsulated the complete experiences of the African American woman as reflected in her church going, theology, leadership activities, and methods of empowerment (Kirk-Duggan, 1997). According to Phillips (2006) in the introduction to her Womanist Anthology, *The Womanist Reader*,

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black woman’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension. (p. xx)

Through this social change perspective in which the everyday knowledge is key to how people relate to the world. It gives this knowledge validation and a place in the world.

Womanist Leadership Style. A womanist leadership style response for African American female clergy was developed by McKenzie (1996) from the profile of 164 clergy women who were surveyed and interviewed. This study took into account “the historical, contemporary, and biblical role models, plus the compilation of shared experiences with clergywomen in workshops, seminars, and retreats over the past fifteen years (McKenzie, 1996, p. 94). The Womanist Leadership Response framework uses womanism as well as Keating’s four basic leadership styles (1978). The first style is “high relationship, low task” where the leader places more emphasis on relationship than the work itself. The second style is “high task and high relationship” where the leader is more concerned with getting the work done than the people involved in that work. The third leadership style, “high task, high relationship”, involves a leader that is nurturing but also has well defined goals. The final style is “low task, low relationship” where the leader is low in both work and relationship. From these four styles, McKenzie (1996) developed 10 leadership styles of the womanist leader. Of those 10 styles, four are in line with Keating: “Sister Girlfriend” who is high relationship, low task; “The Queen” who is high task, low relationship; “Wise Woman” who is low relationship, low task; and the final style, “Mama”, high in both relationship and task, is the who is described as, “just what every church needs” (McKenzie, 1996, p. 97). In the description of this leader are the characteristics of being organized, delegating tasks, going beyond the call of duty and raising “her congregation the way she would her own children” (McKenzie, 1996, p. 97).

These formal leaders possess some of the same characteristics that may also be found in the informal leader or the church mother.

Informal Leadership

While informal leadership is often cited as an important factor in Organizational behavior, it is not readily found in the literature. According to Druskat & Pescosolido (1999, p. 78)

there is relatively little research to date on the role of the informal group leader, the characteristics of an effective informal leader, and the behaviors and mechanisms used by informal leaders to affect change within a group. Informal leaders are those persons not in positions of leadership, but recognized as leaders nevertheless, and are mainly characterized as not having any real authority at their disposal. For this reason, they are considered “authentic leaders” rather than “power-wielding”.

They hold no legitimate authority or power. Instead, they acquire authority from group members who give them control because they believe these individuals provide value to the group (p. 5). Wheatley (1992) addressed informal leadership in organizations through systems theory, noting that informal systems leaders noticed patterns of relationships between systems members, understood boundaries within organizations, and addressed the need for a full system of communication to avoid partial information processing.

According to Avolio and Gardner (2005) authentic leadership involves

those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspectives, knowledge and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character. (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 321)

During a study of formal vs. informal leaders, Pielstick (2000) surveyed 500 subjects asking them to complete “The Leader Profile”, twice; once thinking of a formal leader

and again thinking of an informal leader. The results found that informal leaders had more “authentic leading” tendencies than those of formal leaders. There are six major themes of “authentic leading” as described by Pielstick: shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and character (p. 2). These characteristics will help to guide the researcher in defining authentic leadership for the purposes of this study.

Shared vision. Vision is a distinguishing characteristic of leadership in general. The concept of shared leadership comes from the thought that both the leader and the one being led share one purpose. “The leader does not impose, but may initiate, the vision” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 2). There is usually a shared value system between the leader and the led that is ingrained in the organizational culture. The study found that while both formal and informal leaders have shared visions, the informal leader is more likely to have a vision that is based on the needs, values, and beliefs that leader shares with group.

Communication. Communication within an organization deals with sharing the vision and providing direction. When the vision is communicated properly there is excitement generated and the followers are motivated and then catch on to the vision. Communication is a two way dialog that “facilitates the process of elevating the moral purpose of the shared vision...” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 3). Informal leaders were found to be more inclusive and open to sharing and receiving, accepting criticism, and showing appreciation than formal leaders.

Relationships. This theme “reflects the interactive, mutual and shared nature of authentic leadership” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 4), and lead to a culture that is mutual, collaborative and collegial. Informal leaders tend to be close with followers and fully engage others through collaboration.

Community. Community represents the shared values and beliefs of an organization. Community involves building relationships and internalizing commitment to a shared vision. Informal leaders treat everyone with dignity and respect, are humble and fair, and are altruistic. They are servant leaders who place service above self (Pielstick, 2000, p. 3).

Guidance. “Authentic leaders build trust through their actions” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 4). The actions taken by the leader guide the followers in the way they should go and also builds trust between leader and follower. Informal leaders exhibit true guidance by setting the example and guiding by mentoring, coaching, and teaching.

Character. The most referenced characteristic for authentic leaders was self-confidence. Authentic leaders must be “centered, intuitive, and motivated by a higher purpose” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 4). Informal leaders are “more likely to be humble, fair and altruistic” than informal leaders. Informal leaders are also moral and principle centered (Pielstick, 2000, p. 4).

Summary

In this literature review, the role of women in the Protestant and more specifically, the African Methodist Episcopal church, were reviewed and revealed the long struggle of women in the church to gain formal positions within the church structure. During this time, women forged ahead into informal leadership positions with the church community. This informal leadership took on several forms but had a universal set of characteristics given to that of informal leaders in the literature. The womanist epistemology helps to illuminate some of the theoretical ground work behind

the African American woman's world view and how that may influence her leadership style.

Chapter III Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study explored the phenomena of informal leadership among African American women in the 10th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The informal leaders targeted in this study consisted of the “mothers of the church”. The basic qualitative interpretative inquiry seeks to explore the lived experience of “church mothers” and their experience as leaders through a womanist perspective. Qualitative research seeks to explore, discover, understand, or describe phenomena (Creswell, 2009, p. 436). According to Flick (1998), qualitative research deals with the “perspectives of the participants and their diversity” (p. 5). It is the unique experiences of the individual and the analysis of those experiences. The qualitative research design has several generally agreed upon characteristics (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting where there is “face to face interaction over a period of time” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). The researcher collected data in the participant’s natural environment, their homes, not in a lab or artificial setting. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument within the study. The researcher collected the data personally and made observations. The researcher did not depend on other instruments or questionnaires created by others. Another characteristic is the use of multiple sources of data to include interviews, observations, and documents. The research used only the interviews and observation made during church services. The researcher then used the data for analysis and interpretation which led into another characteristic which is the use of inductive data analysis. The qualitative researcher also seeks to find participant meanings for all data

gathered. The focus for the researcher was the participants meaning of the problem or issue that is being explored. This characteristic stems from the assumption in qualitative research that “knowledge is not objective truth but is produced intersubjectively; the researcher learns from participants to understand the meaning of their lives” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 5). The design of qualitative research is emergent, meaning that it can change or shift as the researcher starts collecting data. “The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). Qualitative researchers may use a lens to view a study such as culture, gender, race, or class differences.

Basic Interpretative Qualitative Method

Basic interpretive qualitative method seeks to understand the description or meaning of a phenomenon for those involved. This method asks, “How people interpret their experiences; how they construct their worlds; and what meaning they give to these experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38). Using this method allowed the researcher to explore the perceptions of women who are perceived as informal leaders in their church community, and understand how they make sense of their experiences. While most forms of qualitative research seek to understand how people make sense of their lives and their world, basic interpretive qualitative method says that this is the *primary* goal. Other forms of qualitative inquiry (i.e., phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnology, etc), have an additional purpose (i.e., building theory). This method will also allow for more in-depth interviewing and identifying recurring patterns presented as categories, factors, and themes in order to get an idea of how the participant understands the phenomenon. The findings will highlight the participants understanding of the phenomenon of the Church

Mother and the final representation is meant to describe/explain the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

Setting and Participants

To begin the process of recruiting participants for the study, the researcher sent a letter (Appendix A) to the Presiding Elders (2) of the geographic area in which the study was conducted. The letter included a brief explanation of the study as well as the measures that would be taken to protect the confidentiality of the participant. The letter also stated that the churches of the participants would not be identified. The participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 1990), by inquiring among the members of 19 African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) churches in the Southwest United States of the Women's Missionary Society (W.M.S.). The W.M.S. of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is an organization that seeks to uphold the mission of the church, to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, and cheer the fallen. The W.M.S. serves as a supervisory body over the Young People's Division (youth 2 to 26 years of age) of the church. This society is one of the longest standing organizations in the church. The researcher contacted the Conference President of the W.M.S. and asked about the best way to get this information from the women. The president suggested submitting an email requesting the information and suggested the researcher write out the verbiage for the email and that she would send it (see Appendix B). The group was asked to identify, in writing (Appendix B), two women (from their church), they believe fit the criteria given in the email about informal leaders and the church mother. The criteria for identifying these women was filtered through the themes of informal leadership given by Pielstick (2000), shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and

character. The 12 suggested women formed the pool of potential participants. The researcher made the selection of participants based on availability as well as final endorsement of the Pastor of the church. This endorsement was sought using a similar letter presented to the Presiding Elders (Appendix C) and followed up with a phone call or a visit to the pastor in order secure consent.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher formally requested approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of the Incarnate Word to conduct this research study prior to communicating with the participants. Prospective participants were given a detailed letter and consent form (Appendix D) explaining the study and the aim of the study. The letter included pertinent information about the researcher, contact information for the Advisor of the study, and assurance that the study would retain their anonymity. Participants in this study were advised that their participation in this study was strictly voluntary and involved no risk to them. The guidelines protecting human subjects guided the process of this study and the researcher adhered to the guidelines for the protection of subjects and information obtained from all participants. The participants acknowledged their understanding and acceptance of terms by signing and returning the consent form provided prior to their participating in the study. The participants' anonymity was respected and protected. Prior to engaging in participation of the study, all potential participants were provided the opportunity to understand the purpose of the study and to ask questions. Each participant was asked to voluntarily sign an informed consent, mentioned above, prior to participating.

Data Collection

Each participant was asked to provide demographic information (Appendix E) prior to each interview. Using a semi-structured (Merriam, 1998) interview format, the researcher took notes during and immediately following the interview. Semi structured interviews give the researcher the flexibility to use structured questions to glean specific information, but also use open ended questions (Figure 2). The researcher interviewed nine church mothers within the Southwest United States. The interviews were conducted in each of the homes of the church mother. The women were very accommodating and hospitable. They each offered refreshments to the researcher as well as a comfortable quiet place to sit. One of the participants took the researcher to lunch and another sent the researcher off with a large jar of homemade sweet pickles. The women had many questions for the researcher in an effort to make a connection and expressed their excitement about the researcher's educational pursuits and their role in that process. When the interviews concluded, each of the participants extended an invitation back to their homes at a later date.

The researcher also attended a worship service with three of the participants in order to observe the church mother in her community. Observation is the systematic description of events and behaviors in a social setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher took field notes (Appendix F) during the observations in order to record events surrounding the participant. During the services, the research was able to witness the women and how others related to them. Each of the women observed sat close to the front in pews the researcher found out were considered their regular seating. Each member seemed to make it a point to greet these ladies before, during, and after the

service. In one of the observations, the pastor made it a point to greet one of the women and another made reference to the church mother as a pillar of the church, and asked that the church follow her legacy. The researcher was able to learn about the phenomenon as the participant interacts with the outside world. The observations gave the researcher an opportunity to see the participants in her natural environment.

Interview Protocol

According to Ritchie & Lewis (2003), there are some key features to an in-depth interview. First, the in-depth interview is a combination of structure and flexibility. “The researcher will have some sense of the themes they wish to explore. . . (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 141). The structure of the topics was used as a guide for the interview but remained flexible enough to explore the topic in a way that was more natural to the individual being interviewed. The researcher began by asking the opening question but as the interview progressed, the questions were modified or supplemented as needed. Secondly, the interview was interactive in nature. The researcher asked questions that encouraged “the interviewee to talk freely when answering the question and that answer will influence the next question” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 141). Thirdly, the researcher used prompts and other techniques to “achieve depth of answer in terms of penetration, exploration, and explanation” (p. 141). Sometimes a participants’ first response was only the beginning of what could be a great wealth of information. It became the researchers’ job to probe further to get the deeper experience. Fourthly, in-depth interviews tend to generate new knowledge or thoughts. By going beyond the surface, the participant went “down avenues of that they have not explored” (p. 141). The combination of these key

features lead to a final feature that says this type of interview was conducted face to face in order to get the type of experience needed.

In order to explore the phenomenon of church mothers in the African Methodist Episcopal church the life experiences of each participant was explored first. Once the participant began, to relate the experiences of their lives (especially as it related to the church) they were asked to dig deeper and deeper into that experience until we reached the heart of what their experience had been. Figure 2 illustrates the semi structured interview questions as layers of a whole experience.

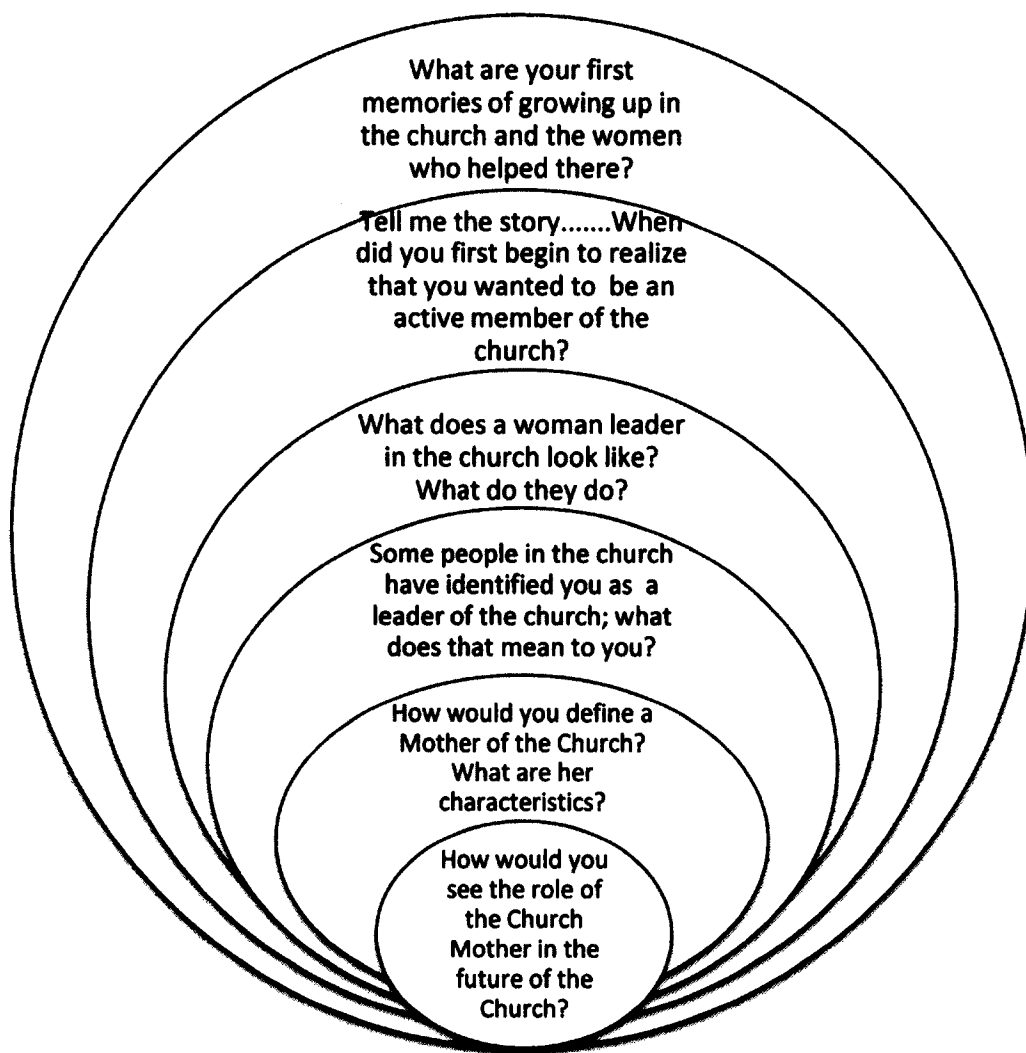


Figure 2. Data collection Protocol.

Data Analysis

Data analysis seeks to “bring meaning, structure, and order to data” (Anfara, 2002, p. 31). Data for this study was collected during audio taped interviews. These interviews were transcribed and then analyzed. In this particular study, the approach was from a Womanist perspective and that also guided *the analytic lens* through which the data were examined (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003, p. 17). The researcher analyzed the data using the characteristics of womanism as expressed by Phillips (2006). Those characteristics include: *anti-oppressionist*, meaning that the womanist seeks to combat oppression in all its forms; womanism is *vernacular* which means it is a perspective for the ‘everyday’ person; *non-ideological*, it is less about rules and boundaries and more about relationships and how these relationships facilitate discussion of differences; *Communitarian*, collective wellbeing for social change; *spiritualized* which refers to the fact that womanism openly acknowledges a spiritual/transcendental realm with which all human life as well as the material world are all linked. Using the womanist lens as a point of reference, the researcher read through each transcript to gain a general understanding of the information. The researcher reviewed the characteristics before and after reading through the transcripts over several weeks. Initially the researcher attempted to glean examples of each characteristic directly from the text with little success. The researcher then began to use the women’s stories as the unit of analysis discovering common subordinate themes throughout the interviews. From these subordinate themes, the researcher began to find themes common to all the information obtained during the interviews resulting in the three themes presented in the findings (Merriam, 1998).

Role of the Researcher

During data collection, the researcher acts as the instrument and it is important that the researcher is not only aware of the role they play, but understand the topic area enough to be effective. The *theoretical positioning* of the researcher refers to the researcher's "motives, presuppositions, and personal history that leads him or her toward, and subsequently shapes a particular inquiry" (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003, p. 9).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The researcher used information from the interviews, participant observation, and the literature to validate findings in a process known as triangulation. According to Creswell (2009), triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection. This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible (p. 252). The researcher used the review of the literature, the interview transcripts, and the researchers own field notes in order to facilitate this process. These notes were vital in assisting the researcher discover the common themes in the data and also helped to limit the researcher's bias.

The researcher also kept a journal of her reactions, feelings and previously held misconceptions during the entire research process. This journal was a tool for the researcher to maintain objectivity and give the researcher a way to explore thoughts in a free space where those thoughts will remain and be referred to throughout the process of analysis.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of church mothers as they perceive themselves as informal leaders in the Black Protestant Church, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Through the sharing of the lived experiences of nine Church Mothers the researcher gained insight into how these women view their contribution to their church and communities.

The research questions that have guided this study were;

1. How do these African American women as informal leaders perceive their role as church mothers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church?
2. How does the church mother as informal leader in the study add to the church community?

Utilizing the basic interpretative qualitative method allowed the research to explore how each participant makes sense of their environment. Each of the participants was interviewed for an hour in their homes. Each of these ladies has served in their churches over 20 years, with half of them serving in the same church for 30 years or more. All of these women have been married, four are still married, and five are widows. All of these women were also in “nurturing” vocations (i.e. nurse, teacher, etc). The table 1 gives a breakdown of the participant’s demographic data.

Participants

Table 1 displays participants’ demographic information. The women were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Name	Age	Church Membership	Marital Status	Children	Vocation
Mary	74	Over 30 years	Married	8	Educator
Georgia	74	Over 30 years	Widowed	1	Nurse
Margaret	90	Over 30 years	Widowed	0	Caregiver/Domestic
Audrey	71	10-20 years	Married	4	Hospitality
Rosalind	92	Over 30 years	Widowed	5	Nurse
Stephanie	96	Over 30 years	Widowed	2	Educator
Antoinette	76	Over 30 years	Married	4	Educator
Geraldine	74	Over 30 years	Married	1	Educator
Barbara	98	Over 30 years	Widowed	3	Nurse

Mary. Mary was raised in the Eastern United States with her mother and father. She is an only child. Her first memories of church are centered on summer visits to her grandmother who was living in the south. Among the members of her grandmother's church were a particular group of women who were, "kind...and loving" to her growing up.

My memory goes back to very good experiences in the church in Georgia. It was the summer that I was nine, visiting my grandmother again, she would have us to sit on the mourner's bench upfront. They were having revival and there was something that was within me was saying, "You want to be like Christ too, you need to go and give your life to Christ." So without anybody telling me I made my step. (personal communication, November 2011)

After her conversion into the church that summer, she went home and decided that she would attend church with her father, who was African Methodist, instead of her mother who was Baptist and attended another church. This would be the beginning of a life filled with choices that would be made by Mary. As she grew up, she continued to grow and work in the church until she went off to college, married, and had children. Mary worked at the same church that she attended for many years. The end of her first marriage led

Mary to Europe to work as a teacher for the Department of Defense. She and her four children moved to Germany, where she lived for 23 years. During that time, her experience with the church was very different.

I was on a military base—I was there for 23 years and they didn't have an AME church. It was Protestant, Catholic, or Mormon Church. So I became a member of the Protestant church and for 23 years I was a member of the Protestant Chapel no matter where I lived. I became active and taught Sunday school, sang in the choir, whatever they needed me to do. The Protestant women of the Chapel were much like our missionary society and so I was very active with that. So all my tenure, 23 years, was with the Protestant Chapel. And it was a mixture. Each space or place had a chaplain that brought their own experience with them. They were either Baptist or Methodist or evangelical or whenever—Church of God in Christ, so we got a little flavor from the varied and different Protestant denominations there. They brought in their experiences with them. So you begin to appreciate and you realize it doesn't matter—we are all just Christians. (personal communication, November 2011)

Mary continued to work in the church and has carried that to her current church where she and her husband, both retired persons with grown children, still find time to work with the youth. When asked about the qualities that people look for in the female church leader she said, “A person that’s...a people person and is able to be a good listener”. When asked what she thought people saw in her that made her a good leader she responded, “I guess what people see in me as a leader is from my life experience – that I have just been around so many different people and have traveled and I think maybe I just have an openness of people” (personal communication, November 2011). Mary would like the leaders of the future to remember the choices that they make because those choices affect others. She stressed the importance of remembering that there is always looking up to you to find their way. What troubles her about the modern church is the lack of commitment by followers:

People used to think very seriously about coming to church on Sunday. There was a commitment. People got ready on Saturday to go to church on Sunday. They didn't even have a car to get there and I remember even in the country where my grandmother lived they didn't have a car, and we walked. They didn't even have a paved street—it was a dirt road. But we got up and walked to Sunday school in groups. You would catch up with another group because we were all going to church. That commitment is lost and people have everything now. Things are so different you can push a button and GPS can tell you exactly where to go but the churches are empty. (personal communication, November 2011)

When asked about her reasons for working in the church for so long, Mary expressed a deep thankfulness and gratefulness to God. She explained that she had been through “mighty trying things” in her life and it is a miracle that she is alive today. Mary believes that what she does for the Lord is what she is meant to do. She believes that,

... every individual that God has given life he has given a purpose in this life. Every person that's living is important—every person. Every person can learn. Every person learns in different patterns and they learn in different ways. They can learn that God has something for them that is positive not negative—something to make this world better. (personal communication, November 2011)

Georgia. Georgia grew up in a small town in the South. She has vivid memories of walking to church with her three siblings for Sunday school each morning, then going on to church. After church, she would follow her mother home where they would eat and then return to church again for an evening service.

My mother was an usher, so we had to go [to church] three times a day. We went to Wesley Chapel and three times a day we went back home. So, I will that remember for the rest of my life-walking back and forth. (personal communication, November 2011)

The women who ushered in her childhood church became a source of inspiration to Georgia—especially her mother.

I used to say, “Well mama can we just miss one Sunday? Do we have to be there every Sunday?” And she started telling us, “God has been so good

to me to raise you children up. You're in a home [that she was able to purchase herself]", she said, "You all are healthy. I'm going to serve and you are going to serve". So I guess by the time I was 16 years of age I knew that I was going to have to be a servant. (personal communication, November 2011)

Georgia felt that she really began to grow in the church after she was married and she and her husband moved out of their home state. In those times, she found solace in her church family. She credits the church with keeping her protected and loved. Georgia has advised her own children to seek the church in this way.

Seek your family (the church) out and they will come to you just like we do... So seek them out—find them, go there and fellowship and then when you come back home you come back home to the same family. (personal communication, November 2011)

When asked about female leadership in the church, Georgia feels that church mothers have an empathic ability to sense when something is wrong with someone in the church, much like a biological mother. She believes they see the need and then fill that need without having to be asked. She also believes that the church mother should not judge the actions of others but model appropriate ones.

What we have to do is show them Jesus' love, and loving them and not making any excuses about why we can't do for them. By saying, "You should be doing this, and you should be doing that." We live the life that we're supposed to be living in front of them and then being there when they need us is all that's needed. (personal communication, November 2011)

Georgia's commitment to the church comes from a feeling of thankfulness and purpose.

Georgia fought a battle with cancer six years ago and was healed by the Lord. She asked the Lord to heal her so that she could testify of His goodness to her. Her whole life is about faith.

God has been so good. I testify every Sunday. I don't let a Sunday go by that I don't stand up and testify. I promised Him [God] that if he would

heal me and take care of me that I would testify each and every day that I have breath in my body. (personal communication, November 2011)

Georgia hopes that the church does not forget the church mother. She feels the church mother is need for guidance and support for the young people of the church. She says that the church mother is almost a literal translation of a mother in the home.

That's the backbone of the church—the mother. Just like we huddle around the children in the home, we do the same thing in the church. "Come on darling what is it that you need?" "How are you feeling?" "Give me a hug." "Everything is going to be all right, don't worry about a thing." And I think when the children and young adults come to the church where the family is, and they receive something to take back with them to make them stronger for the next week. They come to Bible study and prayer study, and lay organization where we do all the training. It just makes all of us strong. (personal communication, November 2011)

Georgia feels a strong sense of calling to work in the church and help others in need. She believes that what she does is not work, but her obligation as a Christian.

Your head maybe hurting, but you have to go anyway because you are a servant. I'm a servant and a servant serves. (personal communication, November 2011)

Margaret. Margaret's first memories of the church are vivid and alive. Memories of being baptized with her sisters and brother in a small church in the country, take her to a time of much love and laughter. She recalls a memory from when she was 5 or 6 years old.

...I can remember the people singing and clapping and they had a thing on the wall that burned oil-kerosene oil [for light], and the little shade would go, "clap, clap, clap, clap, clap." I was more interested in that clapping than in the singing. It was a small, small church. There was a stove that burned coal and wood. That is what kept us warm. That clapping sound always kept time with the music. And there was a lady who played the pump organ—up and down, up and down is how her feet would go. It was interesting to me... (personal communication, January 2012)

She recalls being in church for most of her youth and young adulthood, saying that her

mother expected them to be in church. It was not a choice for them, “it was a part of growing up.” Margaret met and married her husband of 30 years and settled in a new city where she immediately found a new church. While in this church, where Margaret stayed for over 30 years, she worked with the youth and even had a Girl Scout troop. She says of her long work in the church,

I think that when I hear I was doing something [good] it makes me feel good. . . I thought what I was doing was what I was supposed to be doing.
(personal communication, January 2012)

When Margaret was asked what she thought were the most striking characteristics of a female leader in the church said that the individual should mirror what you would see in your own mother. She is someone you can idolize and depend on. When talking about the future church and the work needing to be done, it was clear that Margaret was focused on her passion—the youth.

I would say to the future church—work with our youth. Start working with the youth when they are little and let them grow up knowing what the church is all about, not just worshiping. Why are we called African Methodist? Let the young folk know. That’s part of it. (personal communication, January 2012)

At 90 years old, Margaret is still an active member in her new church of 2 years. She is a deaconess, a position that she has wanted since she was 20 years old. She feels good about the appointment, but wishes it was more involved in the modern day church.

They [deaconesses] don’t do anything. They should do something. I have tried my hardest to think of what we could do. We have a nice uniform, and we worship. I get to sit in the front which is good. If I’m not in the front, my pastor always looks for me. I think that there could be something for us to do. (personal communication, January 2012)

Audrey. Audrey has lived in several states in the Southwest United State in her childhood. She grew up in the Baptist church. Her first memories in the church were of

being baptized in a pool in the church. She was the secretary of the Sunday school at the age of 11. A move in her early teens placed her family in a community that had only one church—a Catholic church.

I did not attend the Catholic Church but a minister came out from Santa Fe for those of us who were not catholic—which were five people (laughs). He [the minister] would come out every Sunday and give his little sermon and keep going. We were the only black families so actually I grew up from [the age of] 12 on to 16 not being around black people. I actually did not go to church that often. (personal communication, January 2012)

Audrey married at the age of 16 and moved with her husband quite frequently. It was not until after she had begun having children that the idea of going to church regularly came into her spirit. The family lived in a home positioned behind the landlord's home and that family invited her family to their church. She, however, did not go to church herself but sent her two children instead.

The woman and her sister would take my two girls to church but I still didn't go. "Don't send your kids, go with them"—I could tell people that now. They took them the Sunday school and everything. So my girls were raised in church even though mom was not there. (personal communication, January 2012)

Time passed and the family moved again. Audrey had two more children and the youngest was hit by a car and seriously injured. The local pastor and his wife began to help the family and suggested they begin coming to church on a regular basis.

...he told me that I needed to start coming to church and I went to church there for about 15 years. I was in the choir, the church secretary and I was in the ladies home mission and I was secretary of the mission. I was also director of the young people. (personal communication, January 2012)

Once Audrey and her family moved to her current city of residence and began going to her current church she began to see the real value of a church family. When asked about female leadership in the church, Audrey had very definite ideas of how this leader should

behave.

...First, she's humble; she's ready to help out with anything that is going on in the church. I feel like she should follow her pastor. What he says should go but she should also have her own feelings about things. (personal communication, January 2012)

Audrey also believes that a female leader in the church is one who knows her strengths and weaknesses. She mentions how she helps some young people on her own terms.

We have five Junior Stewardesses and were trying to teach them how to be holy. I don't do it through the Scriptures but I do it through life. I can sit down with them and tell them about the Bible and what they need to know. But I cannot call the verses and I feel like you shouldn't have to be like that. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ and the Trinity, you can go from there. (personal communication, January 2012)

When asked about being a church mother, Audrey seemed to take a moment to reflect on the question before coming to an answer. She then began to discuss her motivation behind her church work.

That makes me feel good that people think I'm a leader and a mother. Because I tried to do what should be done so that someone can say--"oh I want to do that, I want to be like her". I really don't try to be anything but a child of God, that's all I try to be. (personal communication, January 2012)

Audrey spoke more about female leadership in the church and the future of the church mother. She also revealed a secret desire of hers to be in ministry.

I think that mothers and other female leaders in the church can exist together. I grew up in a time where people said no women can be Pastor. If I could, I would push to be a preacher. I've seen so much change in my 71 years and I think that it's good that women have gotten their place in the church. So I think that being a woman preacher is fine. I would not mind serving under a woman pastor. (personal communication, January 2012)

When asked about the future of the church, Audrey expresses concern for the men of the church. She sees an even greater shortage of male congregants at her church and other churches in the conference and wonders what this may mean for the future of the church.

I hope for the future that the church can get more young black men in the church. Because if they don't start now there's only going to be the women preachers and women. I sometimes sit there and look at the congregation and I see all these beautiful women and children and only a few men. And I think the future of the church is dependent on the fathers and men. The women can do so much, they can do what a man does, but still they need them to help carry along. I think the church can and will go far as long as we can get the men on board. (personal communication, January 2012)

Rosalind. Rosalind has been a member of the church for over 30 years and doesn't ever regret making that decision. She tells the story of how she began her Christian walk at the age of 10.

...the pastor was having revival and my mother told us, "You better not go in there." That night I went—I had no control and I wasn't even 10 years old! Then I remember praying. . . I was 11 years old I knew how to get on my knees and pray. I have been successful with it ever since. I love it. I have so much to give, and no one can take away my joy. So I pray wherever I go. (personal communication, January 2012)

She married early and moved with her husband to another church and became friends with the young pastor and his wife. They raised their five children in the church. Rosalind begins to speak on how much that early interaction in her young adulthood affected her.

...me with the five babies, they really mothered me there. Mrs. C was a mother to my children. They [the church] just all took on a mother role to the kids. We were just a family church, everybody was connected to everybody. That's what has kept me there all these years and I wouldn't change it for anything in the world. (personal communication, January 2012)

During her long membership in her current church, Rosalind has enjoyed a long career of service. She has been a Stewardess; she sung in the choir, was a member of the missionary society, and taught Sunday school. She is currently serving as a deaconess-a

position she was unsure she deserved.

After I became a stewardess, my pastor and presiding elder were at Bethel church and said you should be a Deaconess. And I told them that I don't think I'm that good but if God wants me to be a Deaconess, I will be a Deaconess. Usually, that is taken care of at the Annual Conference but at our 136th anniversary, our Bishop was the guest speaker at our church. All the ministers of the city were there and my pastor and my Bishop ordained me a Deaconess right there. (personal communication, January 2012)

When Rosalind was asked about her service in the church and her primary motivation for doing that work, it did not take long for her to respond. She has always felt a great joy in working with and for the people of the church and she feels her calling is to do just that.

As a mother, I am doing what God would have me to do. I'm trying to do everything that I know how, I love everybody, and I love everybody. I want to be there for everybody if I can... I thank God for just allowing me to be here in order for me to do his will. (personal communication, January 2012)

Rosalind believes that the church mother is essential to the functioning of the church. She believes the essential function of the church is to love the people of the world. To her, love is an important characteristic of a church mother.

A church mother is someone with lots of love and never negative. She is someone that loves everybody and tries to understand and not find fault. I don't like negativity at all. Even when someone is not in good shape or good, there is a need there, so rather than to criticize find out how we can help. Doesn't that make sense? That's what love is all about. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone felt that way? (personal communication, January 2012)

Rosalind has concerns for the future generations and their exposure to things through television and the internet. She says that, "I think the world got a little fast and mothers are not as patient with what's going on as we used to be." She also feels that children do not read as much as they should and calls for more self-control. Rosalind thinks that overall the church needs to return to being a family.

I think that we should embrace each other more and realized that we are family. There is not a minister or Bishop that has not been in my home at Thanksgiving or Christmas because it's family. It means a lot to me. All these church members, (shows a picture) all of these people have passed away. We were such a family, we made sure that the pastor, and everyone was taken care of. (personal communication, January 2012)

Stephanie. Stephanie was born in a small rural town the last of five children. She was a member of her local A.M.E. church until the family moved into the city. Most of her early childhood memories are filled with stories on her first church.

"The preachers would come to different homes to eat dinner every Sunday. They wanted to come because we made good food for them." Stephanie stated that the family always went to church no matter what the circumstance. If the church was too far, they found a closer one, if there was one that was more accommodating to the family then they went to that church. By the time Stephanie was high school age an A.M.E. church opened close to her home and that is where the family settled. Stephanie was attending the local community college to be become a nurse. She then received a scholarship to attend a college in the Northeastern United States.

My papa was not keen on me going all the way to North Carolina, but Ms. B was instrumental in getting me there. Papa didn't want me to go but she told him that she would take care of me on the way up there. Papa didn't want me to go. (personal communication, February 2012)

Stephanie went to the school with the help of several individuals helping her get from train to train safely depositing her at school. For a young woman of African American heritage over 70 years ago, this was quite a journey. In order to take care of herself and not burden her family, Stephanie began working in the dining hall. She remembers the work she did in that hall.

So we used dumbwaiters to carry the food from the kitchen in the basement up to the second floor where the faculty was eating. I was in

charge of the dumbwaiter. I would pull the rope and the food would go up and then I would go up and pass out the food making sure that each faculty member got the appropriate plates. It was very hard work. The food was heavy. But a dumbwaiter was big time at a Negro school. So we were a big-time school. (personal communication, February 2012)

While at school, Stephanie became ill and her parents persuaded her to come home. Once the doctor decided that she should stay home and rest, Stephanie began to live her life there and was married. She had two children. She and her children attended church at an AME church in the city (where she has been a member for over 50 year) and began working. Her husband was United Methodist and attended another church. She has fond memories of working in the church.

Rev. L was the pastor. I was a missionary there—the whole time. We cleaned took care of things for the church and for the pastor. We did it all. We did whatever needed to be done. (personal communication, February 2012)

Along with being a missionary, Stephanie also taught Sunday school, served as a stewardess, and a trustee (she is currently trustee emeritus). She has fond memories of working with the youth and serving as delegate to the Annual conference and other important meetings of the church. When Stephanie was asked to describe a church mother, she said, “Church mothers are usually old. Sometimes I think that’s the only reason I am the mother.” Stephanie hopes for a return to old fashioned values in the church.

The children would sit in the front, never in the back. That way everyone could see them. There was an understanding between the mothers that anyone could correct your child. Everyone was free to help everybody and if someone told you they had to get on your child they would be in trouble. Now, you can’t do that. (personal communication, February 2012)

Antoinette. Antoinette grew up in the Southwest United States in the Baptist church. Her first memories were that of being converted during a revival as a young girl.

What I remember is anytime we had revival, she [mother] always said that we needed to give our lives to the Lord. We would sit on the mourner's bench (front pew) and all of the older people would pray with you. This is so that you could give your life to the Lord. They were praying and they weren't tired of praying. They were going to pray until we became converted. (personal communication, February 2012)

Growing up in the church was a good experience for Antoinette. She can remember going to Sunday school with her grandmother as a "requirement". Antoinette talked about going to church the entire day on Sunday as something that happened every Sunday no matter what.

We would have four services at our church: we went to Sunday school and then we went to 11 o'clock service or worship and then about five o'clock or six o'clock or something close to that you came back to Endeavor league and then at the end was at seven o'clock worship service. (personal communication, February 2012)

Antoinette credits her participation in Endeavor league (a youth program) at her church for making her a good public speaker since they were required to present to the other youth at every meeting. She also discussed learning respect for the ladies who were in her church.

We were anxious to go because we had no other recreation. . . We sang in the choir, we were Junior ushers, we went to Sunday school and of course it was given that any of those adults whether they were elderly or just middle-aged—we were required that you show them respect. (personal communication, February 2012)

Church membership and service became a part of Antoinette's upbringing and she became dedicated to church life at a young age. Once she was married and on her own, she made it clear to her husband that her church life was very important to her.

The one thing I said to him [my husband] when we got married was that I will never stop is going to church. (personal communication, February 2012)

Antoinette became an active member of her church, participating in many of the programs and organizations of the church wherever she is needed. When asked about female leaders in the church, Antoinette began to discuss working with women as a woman leader.

...Because you have people with so many different personalities and if you're working with women, you need to know how to be approachable. You involve people—a woman working in her church needs to be able to involve people. Involving them mean also that you let them know that you will give them support. (personal communication, February 2012)

Antoinette also feels that a female leader should be aware of how they conduct themselves with men.

Even though women make up most of the congregation and they are the ones that do the work to keep to church moving, they [women church leaders] still have to stay in a certain place. You have got to make sure that you always remember that the Pastor is the Pastor. (personal communication, February 2012)

One of the final pieces of advice she gives to women leaders is the make sure that you model Christian behavior as much as possible because others will be watching.

Antoinette also expressed the need to be able to see a model of what right behavior looks like. Antoinette was then asked to describe a typical church mother.

Mothers may not be the oldest person in the church but people believe that you have a level of wisdom. . . You are a person they can call on if they have a problem and you will be able to do two things: pray with them about it and talk to them about it. . . Then that mother is also one that has the ability to not fuss with people when you're trying to explain things to them. Instead you try to understand. (personal communication, February 2012)

When asked about her own leadership and what it feels like to be identified as a church mother she responded with a smile and said,

It makes me feel good. Anytime someone can complement me, it makes me feel great. It also makes me grateful to the Lord for working through me and in me. The Lord wants us to succeed in whatever we are doing. But whatever we accomplish we have to be grateful to the Lord, because he's working with us and through us to make it happen. (personal communication, February 2012)

Antoinette had some advice for the future church and especially the mothers of the future church. She wants the future church to address the casual nature of church. She claims that young people are not being taught the sanctity of church and worship.

Geraldine. Geraldine grew up in a farm community in the Southwestern United States the fourth of five children. She grew up in a small home with her mother, father, and siblings behind the “big house” which was owned by her grandmother. She was raised in church. A true teacher at heart, her first memories are of Sunday school and the requirement by her grandmother that she must attend.

I can remember we went to Sunday school. My mother, my grandmother, everybody—we all went to Sunday school. I don't know if I really, really liked Sunday school or not because, I used to say that if I ever get grown I was not going to Sunday school anymore because we were always going whether you wanted to go or not. (personal communication, February 2012)

While going to church was something required of the family it didn't stop Geraldine from having rich and rewarding experiences with church going during her youth. She talked of having chores at home on the farm, and then going to church as a treat. She was the secretary of the Sunday school, participated in the youth choir, and anything that was deemed necessary in the youth department of the church. Tragedy struck the family with the untimely death of Geraldine's father and shortly thereafter her mother.

We had tragedy in our family as well. I lost both my parents in high school. So I kind of had a hard time going to school. I had to work my way through school because my dad was killed when I was 15 and my mother who was sickly all along. From the time I was 5 years old we all lived with my grandmother. My grandmother lived in the big house and we lived in the little house. My grandmother had trouble taking care of both my mother and grandfather, so we all moved to the big house. My mother died a year or so later. (personal communication, February 2012)

Education became important in Geraldine's life and she made sure that she excelled in school to honor the memory of her father.

I was good in school. I loved school. I went to school sick. I hated missing school. My dad always told me that I was going to be his teacher. Teachers would give me their old stuff and I would play school. I know my dad would be proud of me—I know he would be proud of me. (personal communication, February 2012)

Geraldine continued in school and attended college. She went on to earn a Master's degree in Education. She traveled for a short while with her husband (who was in the military) and was recruited to work at a school where she worked for the next 37 years as a teacher and an administrator. During this busy time, church and church work was never far from her mind.

I've always enjoyed going to church—that was the thing to do. People can say when they were saved and stuff but for me I didn't know anything else. I never was one that really liked to go out and party and stuff like that, so church has been an active part of my life since I was three years old. Sleep late? No, you get up and go to church. And we would have to walk quite a distance but it was just something that you just did – church and church activities. Church has been a real strong influence in my life and what I became. (personal communication, February 2012)

When asked about her definition of a church mother, Geraldine did not hesitate to answer. She started with the statement “a good Christian woman” and then began to elaborate.

The church mother is woman who is held in high esteem by most, if not all, of the members of the church. She carries herself with pride and

dignity. She is integrity. She is one who in my opinion epitomizes the church. I'd say she is involved in about 90% of the activities of the church. She has the ear of the pastor and she is a member of all or many auxiliaries in the church. She's the missionary; she's a Sunday school teacher or a trustee Stewart or stewardess. I think everybody likes her, she's easy to get along with and a very good role model for young women and older women as well. (personal communication, February 2012)

Geraldine was very reluctant to accept the fact that others in her church congregation felt that she was a church mother. Once she got over her initial shock, she began to talk about how this honorific made her feel.

It gives you some sense of pride—I really don't want to use that word because I'm not really proud. But I'm really a regular person—I like don't like to boast. I don't put on airs. I don't go out and broadcast what I do- I don't like that. I do what I do in a quiet manner. (personal communication, February 2012)

When asked what her primary motivation is for working in the church, Rosalind was quick in her response: “What I do, I do for Almighty God”. She refers to her work at the church as her “hobby”.

I like to do (for people) it's almost like a hobby—I like to help. I've done that so much that when someone does something for me I don't know how to take it. I don't know how to appreciate it. You do things for other people but you don't know how to accept that help for yourself. (personal communication, February 2012)

Geraldine wants to be seen as someone who has always been helpful to those in need and feels like all she has done she has done in the name of the Lord.

I would like my legacy to be that I did my part for the church. I want God to say to me. “Well done my good and faithful servant”. I want that to be my legacy. I want people to say that not only did I help people in the church but then I helped kids. Whenever I can be on the scholarship committee, I'm on it because I believe in helping people, because I know how important it is to get an education. (personal communication, February 2012)

Barbara. Barbara grew up in a small, rural community in a home shared by her parents and grandparents. She was always going to church as far back as she can remember. As a matter of fact, the local church was across the street from her home.

We lived in a small community and my grandmother was very religious. She believed in going to church and we were out in the country. We lived right across the street from the church—My grandmother and my parents too. People would come and stop to get water on the way to church. Some people after church would come and eat. This was all you had to do in this small community was to go to church on Sunday. (personal communication, February 2012)

Barbara and her parents moved from their small town when she was nine years old and began to attending the church where she is currently a member. She can remember attending Sunday school and participating in a number of church activities. As she grew older, Barbara began to see she had a particular interest in young children.

I began to admire little children in the church at this time. I always thought that we had the prettiest little girls in the world, and the pretty little boys in their high-top shoes. And I thought when I have a child I would have him wear high-top shoes—I thought they were so cute. (personal communication, February 2012)

Barbara reminisced on all of the good times she had growing up in the church and how she continued to work and sing in the choir, but as she became an adult, she found her passion for working at the doors of the church. She describes below how she became an usher and the importance of her work at the time.

I started ushering at 18 [years old]—I always ushered. I ushered all the time because there were not many ushers—three of us. When we got four (ushers), we were really happy and then we got five, and then we got more. I knew that we were moving on up when we moved into our next church. Then I was the head of the junior usher board ... then we had a young adult usher board and we had several of the children in the church

on that board. They had suits alike, the boys did, and the girls had matching dresses. (personal communication, February 2012)

Once her current church moved to its current address, Barbara began to look to her next duty in the church, becoming a Stewardess. She explains the move as being her next step as she grew older gracefully.

On the Sunday that I didn't usher I could see the difference in the young ushers and the older ones. So I decided that I would not continue to be an usher when I couldn't walk straight. So I thought about becoming a stewardess. I could remember my grandmother and remember how much she loved it and she didn't have to do much walking. So I joined the stewardess board, but I kept ushering until I got older and wasn't walking tall and straight. And that is why chose to be a stewardess. (personal communication, February, 2012)

Barbara describes female leaders in the church as, "honest and must understand people." She goes on to say that she did not feel like she was much of a leader because a leader is "always ready" and she feels she can only act if she is told exactly what is needed to do and then given the time to do it. When asked about church mothers specifically, her answer was similar to that of a female leader.

I think it should be someone of good character and someone who carries herself in a certain way. That you would respect her enough to even ask her a question or ask her to do anything. So if you are that type of person I don't think you would even accept being the mother of the church if you didn't think that you can help someone else who is younger than you or maybe even the same age. . . They have a personality that you can talk to them and you can be with them. (personal communication, February 2012)

Themes

Each interview lasted a minimum of 45 minutes, with the longest interview lasting two hours. The participants were interviewed in their homes. The researcher began all the interviews asking the women to recall their first memories of church and the women they remember and ended by asking the women about their feelings concerning

the future of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and church mothers. Following each interview, the audio tapes of the interview sessions were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher was able to be a participant observer, during church services for three participants. Those notes were attached to their interviews for review. After reading the interviews several times, the researcher began to make notes of the recurring ideas and language that was used. There were several reoccurring concepts that ran through the events presented by the nine women: joyful service, heritage, gratitude, community, and Christian duty. Through analysis of the participants' interview transcripts and notes, three overarching themes emerged: (a) service, (b) compassion, and (c) mentorship. The concepts used during the analysis of each episode can be found throughout the themes and give us a glimpse of what these women perceive their role as informal leader in the church community.

Service. The church mothers interviewed for this study talked about having a calling that leads them to service to God. Service refers to the selfless giving of time, talent, and financial support to an organization/community. Seven of the nine women directly referred to the work they perform in the church as a calling. The participants believed that each person is called by God to do a specific task in this world. According to Mary, "I feel that every individual that God has given life he has given a purpose in this life. Every person that's living is important – every person"(personal communication, November 2011). Geraldine stated the same belief and warned of the dangers of being held back from your calling when she stated, "And if that person says they have been called in is not for me to question their calling" (personal communication, February 2012). According to these women, individuals are called to a task made just for them and

in that task; they are equipped with what they need to complete that task. They also explain “calling” as acting out God’s will in their lives. They believe doing church work and helping their church community is part of what they are meant to do for God. There are no boundaries in terms of what the women are willing to do in order to fulfill their duty. These tasks are done without expectation of a reward or acknowledgement.

Compassion. Compassion is the non-judgmental support of others regardless of race, creed, color, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation. The church mothers who were interviewed for the study repeatedly mentioned the need for church mothers to embrace those in the community; even the ones they did not know. Many said that a mother has to be approachable. When asked, two of the mothers gave their idea of how a church mother should conduct herself. According to Antoinette a mother should,

Talk to people in a way that comforts them and let them know . . . the Lord is going to work it out. . . They know you've had experiences in your long life and the Lord has worked it out. Never fuss with them, but yet give them advice. Sometimes people can be fussy [laugh]. (personal communication, February 2012)

Mary stated that a good leader must, “have certain compassion because you have people coming from various different backgrounds and you can’t feel that you are above them, but be open and accepting of them” (personal communication, November 2011).

The concept of connectedness was introduced and explored as one of the vehicles through which compassion is given to others. Some other components of compassion included caring, concern, and correction. The participants were able to communicate through their stories, the feeling of genuine caring and concerns for those in their church community; especially young people and how it is out of that caring and concern that the church mother corrects behavior and soothes troubled hearts. The women acknowledged

that individuals come from varied backgrounds and situations, but love was the common denominator in any situation.

Mentorship. Mentorship includes formal education (i.e., the school system) and informal education which can include mentorships, apprenticeships, or simple observation. When interviewing the women the research found that the subject of formal education came up frequently, even though there were no questions on the subject. The researcher's education and the women's own educational pursuits were a high priority for the participants. As noted in the review of the literature, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church was a part of the advancement of education in the late 19th century and even today has importance in the women's lives. The findings also provided examples of mentoring or "setting an example" for others. The women went into detail concerning the need for a church mother to be an example for all. Another interesting aspect of this informal learning was the influence that their biological mothers and other women in the church had on them. All of the women interviewed stated at some point there was a mentoring or modeling component to each of their experiences. Using the interviews, the researcher found that the behavior and attitude of the church mother was often modeled in childhood. They often cited their mothers as their first mentors on how they should conduct themselves in the church. Eight of the nine women grew up in church with a mother and a grandmother who were devout church goers, and all could identify a specific woman in the church whom they could model their lives after. Antoinette expressed this when talking about how she knew she would become a working member of her church as a young woman.

... I guess we emulated her because she was a willing worker. She was actively involved and we saw what her life was like and I think that is

when you really know that is something you need to do. (personal communication, February 2012)

This aspect of mentorship was strongly indicated in the interview by the women as some of the most important indicator of their future service to the church.

The church mothers in this study told their stories as a means of relating their perceptions concerning their informal leadership in the church. They each expressed a purpose driven work ethic and each took pride in the job they did for God. After talking with these women it was clear that while each had differences in up bring, the common denominators found in their stories were service, compassion, and mentorship. Each of these themes are intertwined and serve to give others the concepts that make church mothers as informal leaders function in the church community.

Chapter V: Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of church mothers as they perceived themselves as informal leaders in the Black Protestant Church, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. Through the sharing of the lived experiences of nine church mothers, the researcher hoped to gain insight into how these women viewed their contribution to their church and communities. The following Research Questions guided this study;

1. How did these African American women as informal leaders perceive their role as church mothers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church?
2. How does the church mother as informal leader add to the church community?

This chapter presents the answers to those questions with: (a) a summary of the findings of the study; (b) a discussion of salient points that emerged from the themes, and; (c) recommendations for further research.

Summary of the study

Using a basic qualitative inquiry format, the research focused on the lived experience of the church mothers. The researcher asked questions to illicit a response that would allow participants to tell a story that would begin when they were young and progress into their leadership role in the church. After analyzing these stories from the participants who were acknowledged as church mothers in their respective church communities, the inquiry produced three reoccurring themes: (a) service, (b) compassion, and (c) mentorship.

Service. When asked when and why they chose to serve in the church, each woman, in their own way, expressed that their service in the church was not something

they chose to do, but something *they were chosen* to do. The idea of service is one that is not foreign to the black women's current of historical experience and is explained by Thurston (2011) as having a

. . . connotation that is mentioned in the history of women in general and especially for Blacks, for initially the major work in America for African Americans was as servants. It implies help, aid, and assistance, which are the reasons for which Blacks were brought to America. Gender also plays an important role here, for in the American culture, the division of labor has in the past been split along the line of male and female, with females handling the domestic sphere, which involved being a caregiver and providing nurture for others, In the church, one is expected to behave as a servant, putting the needs of others before one's own. (p. 164)

Service for the purposes of this study refers to the selfless giving of self, time, talent, and financial support to an organization/community. There is no job too menial for a person who feels they have been called to serve. They each expressed that their service to others was a calling from God and they would be obedient to that call. Of the nine women, seven directly expressed the idea of being called into service or expressing a feeling of being exactly where the Lord wanted them. Rosalind expressed it by saying,

As a mother, I am doing what God would have me to do. I'm trying to do everything that I know how, I love everybody, and I love everybody. I want to be there for everybody if I can. I thank God for just allowing me to be me in order for me to do his will. (personal communication, January 2012)

Each of the women expressed some satisfaction in learning that the things they did naturally, were acknowledged by others even though that was not the intent. Most of the time each woman was doing what felt right for them to do. During the interviews, the women discovered that it meant a great deal to others in their church community.

Margaret explained it this way, "I worked with the youth, I worked with the girl scouts in

the church, and we had a Girl Scout troop in the church. I think that when I hear I was doing something [important], it makes me feel good.” (personal communication, January 2012) While the women expressed the feelings of joy and pride when hearing about their work in the church being important to others, they also had a strong sense of humility about their true position in the church community. Geraldine weighs in on that this way:

What I do I do for Almighty God. That is the foremost reason that I do anything. I guess I was just reared that way. I feel good when I'm worshipping or when I'm doing something...I like to help. (personal communication, February 2012)

The women worked for God and completed that job even at the costs of relationships.

Antoinette made sure that her husband knew how deeply her church work was to her very early on in the relationship.

I wanted to work in the church . . . and that's why I said to my husband that if we give married you can stop me from doing anything else but you will not stop me from going to the church. (personal communication, February 2012)

Each of the women expressed the feeling that they were not working in the church purely on their own motivation, but out of gratefulness to God and because the task of working in the church is, what God has called them to do. In one study about the lives of nontraditional African American women who have re-entered academia, Thurston talks of this same gratitude that “was expressed not only verbally, but also in their willingness and desire to reach back and help someone else achieve” (Thurston, 2002, p. 126). Each felt that the work they did as church mothers was their direct assignment and corresponded to their spiritual responsibility to the kingdom of God. Within the concept of service was the women's unstoppable will to do what the Holy Spirit led them to do.

In review of the literature, the womanist lens was described as being both “Spiritualized” (Philips, 2006), which referred to the fact that womanism openly acknowledges a spiritual/transcendental realm with which all human life as well as the material world are all linked; and “non-ideological” which means it is not about creating lines of demarcation. These two concepts fit into the whole concept of service because that service is not predicated on being a part of a particular religion or group. Each of the women felt a calling which comes from God, not a denomination.

Compassion. Each of these women expressed willingness to help others who are “downtrodden” or “who needs someone”. There was a frequent expression of compassion for those less fortunate that was evident throughout each interview. “Compassion” for the purposes of this study refers to the non-judgmental support of others regardless of race, creed, color, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation. Church mothers connect with all people and tended to be non-judgmental in their treatment of those who were having a hard time or behaving in a way inconsistent with their beliefs. The level of connectedness goes beyond the superficial. In a study examining the social construction of compassion among activist and volunteers, Blackstone (2009) stated,

. . . individuals seeking self-fulfillment often do so within a community of others and through communal ties and interactions. It is through these interactions, in which individuals pursue self-fulfillment at the same time they connect with others, that we can observe. . . participants constructing compassion. (p.88)

Each of the women conducted themselves with a “what would Jesus do” kind of attitude when it came to serving others. The hallmarks of compassion include caring, concern, and correction. Six of the women interviewed made reference to compassion being a big part of being a church mother. Georgia told a story about three young ladies

in the church, who lost their mother and how the church and the church mother surrounded them during their time of loss and transition,

Now, we're not going to try to tell them, "don't do this or don't do that", but what we have to do is show them Jesus' love, and by loving them and not making no excuses about why we can't do this or that for them.
(personal communication, November 2011)

The compassion the ladies feel does not stop with those who are in despair, but to anyone who needs understanding. Another side to the compassion displayed by these women takes the form of standing in the shoes of the other person before judging them. This compassion extends to everyone, even the pastor. Barbara explained it this way,

There were changes; each pastor has their own thing and I just know that everybody has their own agenda and they're going to do their own thing—which is fair, because my ideas are different than the next person, and my house looks different from your house and that's because it's your taste, not mine. That's the way I feel and it never bothered me—the music changes, we used to sing nothing but hymns and now we sing gospel and you just change with the changes. (personal communication, February 2012)

Rosalind brings compassion back around to being a simple act of love and kindness by stating it in this way,

Even when someone is not in good shape or good, there is a need there, so rather than to criticize find out how we can help. Doesn't that make sense? That's what love is all about. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone felt that way?
(personal communication, January 2012)

The women interviewed expressed a deep love for all of God's children. They each explained the role of the church in the lives of others is to help and not criticize. They each expressed the need for more love and less judgment of others. Many of the women told stories of compassion and even made references to Jesus as being a model for that compassion.

Using the womanist lens to look into compassion, you find that the concepts of communitarian and antioppressionism are both present. According to Phillips (2006), antioppressionism means enabling people to “transcend the relations of domination and oppression altogether” (p. xxiv). The compassion these women show is an attempt for them to free people of those things that burden them. Womanism is also Communitarian which seeks to define community as not only those in the black community but to everyone. The church mothers in this story expressed a willingness to help all of God’s children. Relationships and community are two characteristics mentioned in informal leaders. Relationships refer to the ability of the informal leader to engage others in collaboration. Many of the church mothers interviewed stressed the importance of being able to incorporate all members of the community in the work being done. These women also extend themselves to all they meet and make connections with those individual.

Mentorship. Mentorship can be divided into two categories: formal and informal education. Formal education includes the use of curriculum “taken from a pre-established knowledge” disseminated by a teacher, trainer, or mentor who holds authority (Bekerman, 2006, p. 204). In contrast, informal education and learning refers to a teacher or mentor instructing a willing participant without making reference to an organized body of knowledge. Informal education takes advantage of more incidental and spontaneous situations which can include learning a skill or community development activities (Bekerman, 2006).

During the course of interviewing the participants of this study, a reoccurring subject of conversation would arise—the subject of education. The women made it a point to discuss their educational accomplishments and the joy at being able to assist the

researcher in further educational pursuits. The literature review documents what an important issue education was and continues to be for the A.M.E. church. When questioned about their church leadership, the women often found a way to bring the conversation back around to the importance of education. While formal education was important to them, each of the women offered much evidence on the value they place on informal learning.

The women were asked to identify the mother of the church in which they grew up. They described these church mothers as women that each would want to emulate in their own lives. Each of the participants also described their own biological mothers as examples that informed them on how a church woman should act and what she should do. The relationship between African American mothers and daughters is one of the first and strongest mentor relationships. "As a result of an emphasis on responsibility and achievement many African American girls grow up with the confidence that when times get hard they are not going to fall apart" (Peterson, 1992, p. 69). As these daughters grow into women, they pass these lessons on to other young people. Mentorship comes in several forms; there is apprenticeship, where an individual learns directly from another person; modeling, where you watch the expert and emulate their behavior; and participant witness which includes "learning" while "doing". In a study by Bova (2000), the researcher explained the importance of mentoring in the black woman's experience as supporting how individuals learn and socially construct the nature of learning, by observing and emulating the mentor and learning for the experiences of the mentor as well as their own. Mentoring supports much of what is currently known about how individuals learn, including the socially constructed nature of learning and the importance

of experimental, situated learning experiences. The protégé can learn the skills of leadership by observing and emulating the mentor and has the opportunity to learn from not only his/her own experiences” (p. 7). As the interviews progressed, each of the women felt that they should be an example and by that example and through gentle guidance, they could be of help to others in the church community.

Several of the women stated that church attendance was not a choice for them growing up. The example Georgia gives is reminiscent of the women’s stories.

I used to say, “Well mama can we just miss one Sunday? Do we have to be there every Sunday?” And she started telling us, “God has been so good to me to raise you children up. You’re in a home [that she was able to purchase herself]”, she said, “You all are healthy. I’m going to serve and you are going to serve”. So I guess by the time I was 16 years of age I knew that I was going to have to be a servant. (personal communication, November 2011)

Each of the women mentioned being an example for younger women in the church as a duty of their service. They believed that an important part of being an effective leader is to be an example to others. Mary mentioned the importance of being an example to future generations.

I would tell the leaders of the future to be careful because the choice that you make can effect more than just yourself. There is somebody younger than you that are looking up –there may be somebody 30 years old that somebody 10 or 15 [years old] is looking to them as a model. So remember when you’re making choices and decisions it doesn’t just affect you it affects others and someone is always looking up to you. Even somebody ten years old has someone five years old looking up to them. In our religious way of thinking, we have to remember that our choices are important because someone is watching us no matter what. (personal communication, November 2011)

Each woman mentioned the mentoring factor as important for leadership and important for church mothers especially. When the researcher asked Audrey about how she felt

about people seeing her as a leader in the church, her answer pointed to wanting to be a model for others.

That makes me feel good that people think I'm a leader and a mother. Because I tried to do what should be done so that someone can say--"oh I want to do that, I want to be like her". I really don't try to be anything but a child of God, that's all I try to be. (personal communication, January 2012)

The role of mentoring/modeling was summed up best by Georgia when she was asked about her advice to future church mothers.

We live the life that we're supposed to be living in front of them and then being there when they need us is all that's needed. (personal communication, November 2011)

Each woman in the study gave examples of women whom they wanted to emulate in some way. They modeled these women as closely as possible because they saw something in them that made them special. Often times this woman was a mother or grandmother. The women also expressed a need for more role models in the church and that it was not enough to tell someone how to behave or what to do, but all agreed it was better to show them by their everyday lives and how they chose to live them.

Modeling and the womanist characteristic of being vernacular line up in terms of what happens when these women describe the women who influenced them. Vernacular refers to an "everyday quality" that seeks to encourage the everyday person to begin "where they are". Each of the women expressed the idea of meeting people where they are and taking them where God wants them to be. According to Phillips (2006), "As a womanist, there is no need to be perfect; personhood is enough to qualify" (p. xxv).

The characteristic of guidance in informal leadership is described as setting the example and guiding by mentoring, coaching, and teaching. Each of the women

interviewed exhibited character that leads others to trust and follow these women. These characteristic are displayed not only in the church mothers interviewed, but in the women that influenced them as young women. Mary discussed her education in terms of her service and her career and at the same time demonstrated the way these women honor both formal and informal education through mentoring in their daily lives.

I also had a chance to work on my doctorate and there was even more growth than in the Masters program. I went to the University of Georgia to work on my doctorate where my grandparents had lived and worked as a janitor- where my uncles were not allowed to come in because of segregation. So I went back there and finished all the coursework and came out with a 3.9 grade point average. I didn't pursue the test and didn't finish the dissertation. I felt in my line of work that the coursework was all that I needed. I feel good about it. The courses that I took strengthened me in administration to make me a better administrator. So just to see that growth pattern and all the things that God put me through in my career aided me to become a productive administrator. The end product is that I became a trainer of teachers. (personal communication, November 2011)

Mentoring, as discussed in this study was a topic of conversation in all of the interviewed. The women each expressed the importance of teaching and learning in all of its forms, whether they be formal or informal in nature.

In analyzing further the data from the study, there were three additional themes that were unique to these mothers of the A.M.E. church and provide ground for further discussion. Those ideas were Spirituality and Religiosity; Informal leadership and Womanist leadership exhibited by these women.

Spirituality and Religiosity

In a study about African American Women's definitions of Spirituality and Religiosity, 53% of the women defined spirituality as a "belief in the existence of a divine sacred and /or powerful force that is external to the individual" and referenced a relationship with this force, (Mattis, 2000, p. 109). Although the women interviewed for

this study were not asked about spirituality, each was able to articulate their belief in a spiritual factor that weighed heavily in the way they conducted their lives and how they served in the community. Spirit, for these women, helped to explain both positive and negative experiences as an opportunity for growth and learning your purpose in life. Each of the women was willing to do any job, no matter how menial or unpleasant because that duty was a part of the building of the kingdom of God given especially to them. This sentiment is reflected in the study by many of the women. Stephanie, after listing all of the activities and initiatives she was a part of said, “We did it all. We did whatever needed to be done” (personal communication, February 2012). Church mothers serve the community because of the feeling of interconnectedness they feel with all people. They credited this feeling to the spiritual connection we all have that make us family.

According to Mattis (2000),

Spirituality is defined as the intimate relationship between God, the individual, and others. Spirituality also denotes a journey of self-reflection, self-criticism, and self awareness that culminated in a greater understanding of the relationship between self, God, and the larger community. (p. 118)

Religiosity refers to religious doctrine that is in concert with the values of the members of a religious group. Another facet to religion for some is that “religion was considered a conditional entity. It was conditional in that there were rules and restrictions placed on behaviors, feelings, and attitudes” (Lewis, Hankin, Reynolds, & Ogedegbe, 2007). These conditions can create divisions between those that fall within those conditions and those who do not. There is an appropriate way to behave and conduct one’s life and religion instructs you in those ways.

According to Lincoln & Mamiya (2003), “religion or the religious dimension consists of the encounter of human beings with the *sacred* or *divine*” (p. 2). To relate spirituality and religiosity for women we must understand that “religion and church life provide an *entrée* into the experience of spirituality” (Mattis, 2000, p. 118). Religion not only facilitates closeness to God, but also affords the congregant a community tie that can involve social networking and the gaining of status. Religiosity is an observable practice and therefore comes with certain expectations when it comes to behavior and ways of thinking. Religion is “the heart of culture” (Lincoln & Mamiya 2003, p. 7). All of the women were ardent proponents of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and its teachings and felt that upholding its traditions and history was necessary for the future of the church. Margret discussed her concern about teaching the youth of the church about being African Methodist. She stated,

They don’t teach them about how we became A.M.E.’s. Why we are AME’s and why we are called what we are called...There should be more of that. Why we are called A.M.E.s and how we became A.M.E.’s.
(personal communication, January 2012)

Each of the women seemed as zealous about the church as they did about their spiritual duty. In a study on African American spirituality it was found that participants felt that an individual can practice spirituality without having a connection to a religious belief and that “one needed to ultimately understand the belief in God on your own” (Lewis, et al., 2007, p. 20). This helps to establish the idea of spirituality being a more universal concept and religion being aligned more with a value system that aids in the practice of those things that are spiritual. The church mothers in this study demonstrated an awareness of the rules of the church which could be seen as religiosity. They were also able to put themselves in the place of the other and not judge that place, which could be

described as spirituality. The church mother's in the study exercised the ability to know an individual is not following the rules, but love them any way by showing compassion. They demonstrated an ability to travel a continuum where they were non-judgmental in their attitudes toward others, but still used challenges that an individual may face and use those challenges as teaching moments through their mentorship. One of the keys to being an effective church mother is balancing religiosity and spirituality as seen in the graphic below. In a study about the intersection between spirituality, relationships, and health in African American women conducted by Banks & Parks (2004), the women stated that trusting God and being obedient to Him was important, even when it was contradictory to church traditions or customs. This way of balancing the spiritual and the religious is where the church mothers in this study seem to excel.

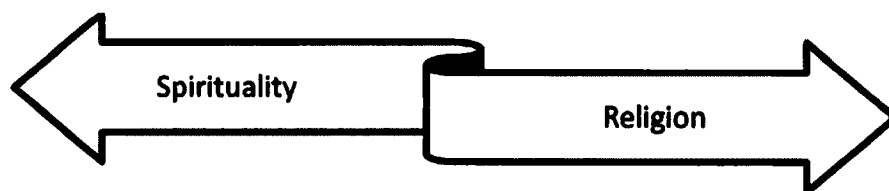


Figure 3. Spirituality, Religiosity, and the Church Mother.

Several of the concepts found in spirituality are also found in the theoretical framework presented in the beginning of the study. Two characteristics of womanism that coincide with spirituality are being *spiritualized*, and the characteristic of being *nonideological*. As noted in the literature review (Phillips, 2006) *spiritualized* “refers to the fact that womanism openly acknowledges a spiritual/transcendental realm with which human life, livingkind, and the material worlds are all intertwined” (p. xxvi). According to Phillips (2006), the spiritual nature of womanism distinguishes it from other critical, theoretical, or ideological perspectives. The characteristic of being *nonideological* is not about “creating lines of demarcation, but building structures of inclusiveness and positive

interrelationship from anywhere in its network” (Phillips 2006, p. xxv). The church mothers who participated in the study voiced these characteristics through their story telling. The church mothers indicated in their interviews that the work and care they took with others was somehow a part of a greater work in the lives of those individuals. “Black women historically have used religion/spirituality, the church, and the Bible as transgressive and transformative spaces”(Mattis, 2002, p. 309).

Informal leadership

The women in the study were displaying informal leadership without expressing it as such in their interviews. According to Pielstick (2000) as stated in the literature review, shared vision is a distinguishing characteristic of informal leadership and leadership in general. The concept of shared vision comes from the thought that both the leader and the one being led share one purpose. “The leader does not impose, but may initiate, the vision” (p. 2). The study found that while both formal and informal leaders have shared visions, the informal leader is more likely to have a vision that is based on the needs, values, and beliefs that leader shares with the group. In terms of the church, the pastor will have a global vision for the church as a whole that will include the shared values of the group as a whole. The difference for the church mothers in the study was that the visions they had were more geared toward the individual. The church mother in the study had a vision for each member of her church community. Some were more detailed than others but each woman was concerned for the future of her church community and did what they could to support it.

Communication is second theme of informal leadership. Communication within an organization deals with sharing vision and providing direction. When vision is

communicated properly there is excitement generated and the followers are motivated and then catch on to the vision. Communication is a two way dialog that “facilitates the process of elevating the moral purpose of the shared vision...” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 3). Informal leaders were found to be more inclusive and open to sharing and receiving, accepting criticism and showing appreciation than formal leaders. The church mothers in the study were very active with their congregation and were able to get things done, by clearly communicating expectations and seeing that those expectations were met. These women also were excellent at building relationships and community. The idea of *relationship* in informal leadership “reflects the interactive, mutual and shared nature of authentic leadership” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 4), and leads to a culture that is mutual, collaborative, and collegial. Informal leaders tend to be close with followers and fully engage others through collaboration. This aspect of the church mother’s function in the church was apparent in all the interviews. These women are an integral part of the culture of the church. Community involves building relationships and internalizing commitment to a shared vision. Informal leaders treat everyone with dignity and respect, are humble and fair, and are altruistic. They are servant leaders who place service above self (Pielstick, 2000, p. 3). This theme falls directly in line with the compassion theme that resulted from the study, because “Authentic leaders build trust through their actions” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 4). The actions taken by the leader guide the followers in the way they should go and also builds trust between leader and follower. Informal leaders exhibit true guidance by setting the example and guiding by mentoring, coaching, and teaching.

The church mothers’ informal leadership was vital to the church in the way the women nurtured and mentored the members, especially the other women in the

congregation. Mentorship was integral in the way these women dealt with others. They each felt that it was important for church mothers to be an example for others and show others the way to go. Within the concept of mentorship is also the social change leadership construct, found in womanism, called “mothering”. According to Maparyna (2012), mothering

attributes include nurturance that is both physical and emotional, educational leadership that shapes both consciousness and morality, dynamically equitable resource distribution, creative conflict resolution, and modeling a dynamic relationship between self-care and self-sacrifice that balances the interests and needs of the individual and the collective.
(p. 62)

The attributes of nurturing, education, morality, and equality were reoccurring when discussing the findings from the participants in this study in regards to their leadership. These informal leaders exhibited all of the characteristics that are associated with the authentic leader. Informal leaders are important to the life of an organization like the church because “informal leaders have a strong amount of influence over group perceptions” (Pescosolido, 2001, p. 75). These women demonstrated their influence, each of them mentioning how they often chose not to speak on certain matters as not to impact the church. In a study that explored the role of informal leaders in an organization from the informal leaders’ perspective, the participants noted that informal leaders get things done “through influence rather than authority or direct threats” (Smart, 2005, p.70). The study went on to say that this influence was evident throughout the organizational structure. The participants of the Smart (2005) study also felt that speaking up “in an honest, constructive manner, non-complaining and in a positive way” (p. 71) was another way that they are able to not only influence others but also made the approachable by

others. Another supporting characteristic, “approachability” was cited by these participants as the foundation of their influence. Their approachability was established by going the extra mile with their duties which established a rapport with others and facilitated open, safe, casual conversations (Smart, 2005, p. 72). Another aspect of their approachability is the fact that informal leaders are open minded, first seeking to understand instead of judging. Informal leaders are people of high integrity, displayed by “walking the talk” and also modeling a positive attitude and energy. One of the final characteristics each of the informal leaders pointed to as important was a sense of humility (p. 79). In the literature review Pielstick (2000) states authentic leaders must be “centered, intuitive, and motivated by a higher purpose” (p. 4). Informal leaders are “more likely to be humble, fair and altruistic” than formal leaders. Informal leaders are also moral and principle centered. These were the words most of them used to describe the women that they felt were the mothers of their own childhood churches. The church mothers in the study demonstrated most of these qualities as reference in their stories. They lived a life that was temperate. The church mothers were always on duty and responsible for all.

Another important aspect of informal leadership is the notion of empowerment. In African American women’s leadership, empowerment, rather than the gain of personal power for the individual was a key component. To present a notion that leadership would focus its efforts on designing a means whereby the leader passed elements of power to others so they can in turn build up others to be sources of power confronted one of the most sacred norms of traditional leadership (Meux, 2002). Empowerment and mentorship are linked in that one leads to the other. According to McKenzie (1996),

Empowering is a major component of female leadership. Women tend to empower others to feel confident to act on their own authority. The person empowered feels that the leader respects his or her judgment. If a person makes a mistake, many leaders who happen to be women use that opportunity to teach rather than to humiliate or berate a colleague. (p. 74)

The women in the study were very clear that they were interested in helping others so that they could help themselves. The women wanted to be able to pass on the torch of leadership to their church community.

So how do the informal leaders in this study add to the church community? Using these characteristics we can get a glimpse of the leadership exhibited by the church mothers in the study. These women hold influence because of their approachability and the trust they engender in others. They are important in the church because they can use that influence to bring resolve conflict, move a ministry forward, and mentor a new generation of followers and workers in the church community in a way the alludes a Pastor or formal leader.

Womanist Leadership

When thinking about womanist leadership, one has to go back to some of the womanist concepts in the literature review and link them to leadership. Phillips (2006) refers to methods of social transformation when describing the womanist way of being. "The methods of social transformation cohere around the activities of harmonizing and coordinating, balancing and healing. These methods work in and through relationship..." (p. xxvi). The womanist, like the church mother becomes a bridge. There are overlapping methods that are associated with these activities include but are not limited to "...spiritual activities, hospitality, mutual aid, self-help, and "mothering" (p. xxvi). According to Phillips (2006), methods of social transformation "recognize the power of the spiritual

realm and the need to maintain harmony in relationships with humans, the environment and the spiritual realm” (p. xxix). The women in the study often discussed their concerns about the church and how they wished they would be addressed. One of these church mothers discussed the need for more young black men in the church, while another discussed the need for more instruction on the A.M.E. Church to promote the values that they are to hold dear. Another discussed her distress at the mandatory retirement age of ministers (75 years of age), because they still have vitality and that they should be “kept in the church. . . not sent out to pasture like a cow” (personal communication, January 2012). These church mothers expressed a need to have harmony in the church and the relationships of the individuals who are a part of that community. Their concerns were intergenerational, interracial, and reached across gender.

Hospitality is the method of taking care of guest, “those who, by one degree of difference or separation, are not members of one’s house or intimate circle, but are welcomed into one’s house and treated in ways that respect their essential worth and integrity” (Phillips, 2006, p. xxviii). The method of hospitality is not only an intersection of spirituality and religiosity, but is linked to the theme of compassion found in the study. One of the women from the study, Stephanie, talked about how as a young woman she witnessed how the people of the community would open their homes to travelers who, because of the times, were unable to stay in a hotel or otherwise find lodging. She spoke of opening her home to black pastors and other black dignitaries and how she would cook for the ministers to come to your home to eat on Sunday evenings. Stephanie stated that those were the times when African-Americans, “helped one another” (personal communication, February 2012).

Both methods of mutual aid and self-help are attached to the mentorship theme found in the study. These methods “rely on the principle of...wisdom gained from life experience, self-education, and democratic knowledge sharing” (Phillips, 2006, p. xxix). Examples of this method can be found in Harriett Tubman and the Underground Railroad that lead many slaves to freedom in the north or someone like Rosa Parks who became a bold symbol during the early civil rights movement. The women in the study discussed the need for these types of social movements for today’s young people. Geraldine states it plainly when she said, “we are losing our young people” (personal communication, February 2012). According to Phillips (2006),

Mutual aid and self-help demonstrate two important things: first that an underestimated genius for problem solving circulates among institutionally dispossessed populations and, second, that such marginalized populations will not be forced to succumb beneath institutional neglect, whether benign or malign (p. xxix).

These problem solving skills are another way that the church mothers in the study demonstrate self-help. The women spoke of the work to be done at the church as one of those areas where problem solving skills were needed. Barbara spoke of the church needing money and the different fundraisers that arose from the women in the church that are still used to this day. She also spoke of common necessities saying, “. . . we needed curtains, so I made some” (personal communication, February 2012).

The final method of motherhood has its roots in African culture and is not directly associated with biology, just as the church mother is not necessarily a biological mother. In this context,” motherhood is a set of behaviors based on caretaking, management, nurturance, education, spiritual mediation, and dispute resolution” (Phillips 2006, p. xxix). Because anyone, male or female, young or old can have these qualities everyone

has an opportunity to participate in the goals of womanism as a communal way of being. When asked to describe who a church mother was to the community, the women in the study used words like “love”, “approachable”, “knowledgeable”, “people person”, “integrity”, but mostly the women seemed to all agree that the role of mother was the caretaker of the church. All the attributes listed above were used in some form during the interviews to describe the women that are called church mothers.

McKenzie (1996) described the objective of women’s leadership was “change, not control”. She goes on to say that “women leaders, generally speaking, act as role models; value creativity; facilitate; teach archetypes; establish mutual contracts for specific results; reach out; are growth-oriented, visionary, master motivators; have infinite time for people; are flexible, holistic and personal” (p. 70). While the profile in the book attempts to uncover the African American female as formal leader, it is insufficient in describing the church mother or informal leader who is selected by an organic process. These church mothers engendered qualities that caused others to see them as a leader, even when they did not consider themselves leaders. Some even denied being the church mother. According to King & Ferguson (2011), who conducted research about how African American women perceived their accomplishments as incongruent to leadership and being a leader lies in the misconception that female leaders are masculine or harsh or the puppet of a male who is actually in power. In addition, the cultural projections of the “Black matriarch” relegate females to matters of home and domesticity and not in matters that might seem to usurp black male power (p. 5). Finally, King and Ferguson (2011) stated,

As a matter of home training and tutelage in humility, black women modestly accept thanks and praise and shrink at acknowledgement of our

leadership accomplishments. Moreover our communal upbringing teaches us that everyone's contribution is necessary to the success of a venture . . .
(p. 6)

This mindset fits in the womanist way of knowing because the church mother wants to take care of the 'other' (all who are oppressed), and is communal in nature. The womanist leader has care and concern for her community. The church mothers in the study displayed these characteristics in their dealing with their church and community. Their professions, as mostly caretakers and teachers, point to a quality of care and concern that each woman was able to articulate in their stories.

Conclusion

The women in this study might have been stereotyped as victims of sexism and racism, relegated to the back of the church community, and given the least important positions. These women might also be characterized as passive, and cowed into the positions they hold and the kind of women who "know their place". Upon reflection, the researcher discovered that she also held some of these biased views. The church mothers who participated in the study displayed courage that had an impact on their lives and the lives of all they touch in the church community. They overcame obstacles and continued to move forward when they were told to do otherwise, which was similar to the early A.M.E. women profiled in the literature review. Whether it was attending college in another state against their parent's wishes or participating in church despite what their husbands demanded, each of these women demonstrated a courageous spirit that brought them to the status of church mother. These women talked and people listened, including

the Pastor. These women could be found speaking up in the official board meeting about an issue, not inciting, but speaking their minds nonetheless.

Along with this courage comes a reflective quality that points to emotional discipline, which allows these women to be direct without being incendiary in nature. These church mothers did not say whatever came to their minds. They had an emotional maturity that allowed them to make their point without becoming overly emotional or hysterical. They had passion without acting out. They had the ability to disagree without being disagreeable. Each believed that change is not facilitated with loudness, or aggression. They did what you are supposed to do and gave the rest to God, which is a sign of their faith. Antoinette described an example of how this discipline worked.

When it comes to that faith bit, just believe—certainly when it's in the interest of the church. There may be one or two people murmuring (complaining), you just make sure you stay on the positive side of things. If you don't like what somebody has asked you to do, let's say it's the pastor, if you don't believe it--that's okay, but don't try to undermine somebody else and allow them to have an excuse for not doing it. In other words, don't block them from doing it because you don't want to do it (personal communication, February 2012).

The church mothers in this study identified their role in the church as a part of God's plan in their lives. The women demonstrated the ability to be approachable to the people in their church community and act as teachers, role models, and mentors to them. According to Smith (2004), education through role modeling was essential to the African American community. This quality goes back to slavery where “for slave and free person alike, literacy was a statement of one's humaneness” (p. 213).

They displayed an ability and wiliness to work hard and be accessible. The research points to the same qualities in the informal or authentic leader, who uses their natural leadership abilities instead of power or position to influence others. These women

serve because they were called to do so. The duties of church mothers, as told by the women, were not a consolation prize, but a mission that was given by God to help people where they were. These women have a strong spiritual center and were disciplined in their everyday live. These women touch areas of the church that a pastor, presiding elder, or bishop may not be able to access. They were a part of our lives, they listened and advised, they guide us, they touch our hearts and the uplift our spirits. These church mothers inspired empowered people and gave them confidence and engendered trust in the people they come in contact with on life's journey. They feel a connectedness to those who are a part of their church community. The church mothers who shared their stories for this study are confident that the church communities will need church mothers to guide them in the way they should go.

Recommendations for further Research

This study was an attempt to uncover the characteristics of the church mother as informal leader in the African Methodist Episcopal church. As stated at the beginning of this study, the phenomenon of the church mother is one found in the entire black protestant church. The following are recommendations for further study of this topic.

1. Duplication of this study in other black protestant religious contexts would be beneficial in adding to the exploration of the church mother and informal leadership of women.
2. The characteristics found to be present in church mothers are qualities that are irrespective of gender. Therefore a study that included male informal leaders would help to extend knowledge in informal leadership in the African American community as a whole.

3. While conducting this research, the church mothers were identified by the Women's³ Missionary Society of the church. Research into how these women perceive the church mother as leaders in the church in order to gain further insight.
4. This particular study could be extended to other congregants or a study that features the formal church leader's perceptions of the informal church leaders.
5. A reoccurring theme throughout the study was education. A possible area of study might include the role of education in the both the formal and informal leadership of the black protestant church. This research would help to highlight the attitudes and perceptions of formal and informal education in the African American community.

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Appendix A

Tava R. Herring-Copeland
PO Box 10920
San Antonio TX 78210
Home: 210-663-9994
Tavarenee75@yahoo.com

Dear Presiding Elder;

I am a doctoral candidate attending the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas in Organizational Leadership in Education program. As you know the A.M.E. church has a long history of ministry to those who are in distress, and fulfilling the mission to feed the hungry, cloth the naked and cheer the fallen. For my dissertation research, I am proposing a qualitative research study focusing on the experiences of African American women in informal leadership positions in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

As I begin to witness the growing number of female Pastors and Bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the passing away of the church mothers, I began to wonder what we might be losing in this shift. In the age where women are taking on the more formal role of leader, and now that we are living in a world where there is more opportunity for the African American female than ever before, what is to become of the church mother?

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in leadership, specifically leadership of African American females in the context of their role in the African American church community. This study will further explore the area of informal leadership and help to ensure that the lens used to explore includes the African American female.

To carry out this study, I will use traditional qualitative methods including structured observations at church functions, participant observations and individual interviews. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and will pose no potential risk or harm. The participants will be chosen based on information obtained by members of the conference Women's Missionary Society and church pastors. Participation will be limited to one individual interview that will be audio and possibly videotaped. The interviews will be no more than one hour in length, and I anticipate interviewing 9 women in their homes. The questions are designed to allow the women to tell their own story of being a leader in the church.

All information collected will be held in strict confidence. As transcription is completed, the interviewee will assigned a pseudonym and then the recording and transcription be secured to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Anonymity is assured and churches will not be identified. Should this study be published, neither the

participants nor their churches will be identifiable. Individual data will be aggregated with all the data collected for this study.

I am seeking your blessing to carry out this study among the female informal leaders within the church. This study will add to the rich history of the church and contribute to the knowledge of not only our church, but our leadership within the community. Your signature indicates that (1) you have been made aware of this research study, that (2) you have read and understand the information given, (3) that you have assented to this studying being conducted within your district.

Please complete the enclosed authorization form and return it to me immediately. I look forward to hearing from you.

You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee for further information:

Dr. Dorothy Ettling
University of the Incarnate Word
4301 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209
Telephone: 210-829-2764

AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE ——— DISTRICT

My signature below indicates that (1) I have been made aware of proposed research study, that (2) I have read and understand the information given and, (3) that I have assented to this studying being conducted within the San Antonio District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Presiding Elder

Date

Tava R. Herring-Copeland

Date

Appendix B

Based on our conversation today, would you please suggest 1-2 women in your church that, in your opinion, fit the criteria for the informal leader (church mother) in your congregation. Please print their names below. Please remember that pseudonyms for the participants and their church will be used for this study and NOT the real names.

1. _____

2. _____

Name of your Church

Thank you for your participation. Please return these to me at the end of our discussion.

Appendix C

Tava R. Herring-Copeland
PO Box 10920
San Antonio TX 78210
Home: 210-663-9994
Tavarenee75@yahoo.com

Dear Pastor;

I am a doctoral candidate attending the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas in Organizational Leadership in Education program. As you know the A.M.E. church has a long history of ministry to those who are in distress, and fulfilling the mission to feed the hungry, cloth the naked and cheer the fallen. For my dissertation research, I am proposing a qualitative research study focusing on the experiences of African American women in informal leadership positions in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

As I begin to witness the growing number of female Pastors and Bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the passing away of the church mothers, I began to wonder what we might be losing in this shift. In the age where women are taking on the more formal role of leader, and now that we are living in a world where there is more opportunity for the African American female than ever before, what is to become of the church mother?

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in leadership, specifically leadership of African American females in the context of their role in the African American church community. This study will further explore the area of informal leadership and help to ensure that the lens used to explore includes the African American female.

To carry out this study, I will use traditional qualitative methods including structured observations at church functions, participant observations and individual interviews. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and will pose no potential risk or harm.

The participants will be chosen based on information obtained by members of the conference Women's Missionary Society and church pastors. Participation will be limited to one individual interview that will be audio and possibly videotaped. The interviews will be no more than one hour in length and I anticipate interviewing nine women in their homes. The questions are designed to allow the women to tell their own story of being a leader in the church.

All information collected will be held in strict confidence. As transcription is completed, the interviewee will assigned a pseudonym and then the recording and transcription be secured to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Anonymity is assured and churches will not be identified. Should this study be published, neither the

participants nor their churches will be identifiable. Individual data will be aggregated with all the data collected for this study.

I am seeking your blessing to carry out this study among the female informal leaders within the church. This study will add to the rich history of the church and contribute to the knowledge of not only our church, but our leadership within the community. Your signature indicates that (1) you have been made aware of this research study, that (2) you have read and understand the information given, (3) that you have assented to this studying being conducted within your district.

Please complete the enclosed authorization form and return it to me immediately. I look forward to hearing from you.

You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee for further information:

Dr. Dorothy Ettling
University of the Incarnate Word
4301 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209
Telephone: 210-829-2764

AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN _____AME CHURCH

My signature below indicates that (1) I have been made aware of proposed research study, that (2) I have read and understand the information given and, (3) that I have assented to this studying being conducted within my church.

Pastor

Date

Tava R. Herring-Copeland

Date

Appendix D Consent Form

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a doctoral student in Organizational Leadership in Education attending the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. I will be conducting a qualitative research study of the lived experiences of African American women in Informal Leadership positions in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Your name was suggested to me as a possible participant. Women have been an integral part of the African Methodist Episcopal Church since its inception. Even when there were no formal positions for women, they were leaders in any number of informal capacities.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and will pose no potential risk or harm to you. Participation requires one individual interviewing session that will be audio and possibly videotaped. All material collected will be held in strict confidence. As transcription is completed, the material will assigned a pseudonym and then will be placed in a secure place to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants. Information will not be identifiable.

It is your right to discontinue the study at any time should you feel that you do not wish to be video or audio taped. The interview will be ceased immediately. Completion and return of the signed consent form indicates consent to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate in the study, it will not have an effect on professional organization membership or future affiliations with this program or with this university.

Should this study or a section of this study be published, you will not be identifiable nor will it be traceable to you. Your data will be integrated with the total data collected for this study. When this consent form indicating that you wish to be a part of the research has been returned to me, further instructions indicating a mutually agreed meeting site will be forwarded to you.

Your signature indicates that you have consented to take part in this research study and that you have read and understand the information given. Please complete the enclosed registration and return it to me immediately. I look forward to hearing from you.

Tava R. Herring

PO Box 10920, San Antonio TX 78210

Home: 210-663-9994

Tavarenee75@yahoo.com

You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee for further information:

Dr. Dorothy Ettling

University of the Incarnate Word

4301 Broadway, San Antonio, TX 78209

Telephone: 210-829-2764

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix E**Participant Demographic Information**

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

1. How long have you been an active church member?
 - a. 1-10 years ____
 - b. 10-20 years ____
 - c. 20-30 years ____
 - d. Over 30 years ____
2. How long have you been an active member of your current church?
 - a. 1-10 years ____
 - b. 10-20 years ____
 - c. 20-30 years ____
 - d. Over 30 years ____
3. Have you attended the same church for most/all of your life?
 - a. YES ____
 - b. NO ____
4. What is your current age group?
 - a. Under 40 ____
 - b. 40-60 ____
 - c. 61-80 ____
 - d. Over 80 ____
5. What is (was) your occupation?
 - -----
6. Are you currently working?
 - a. YES ____
 - b. NO ____
7. Do you have children?
 - a. YES ____ How many? ____
 - b. NO ____
8. Are you:
 - a. Married ____
 - b. Single ____
 - c. Divorced ____
 - d. Widowed ____

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please return this form along with your signed consent form immediately.

Appendix F**Observation Notes**

Location: _____

Date/ Time: _____

Purpose: _____

1. Physical setting/Activities

2. Formal interactions (with participant).

3. Informal interactions and unplanned activities.

4. Nonverbal communication.