

## **Life-nurturing gender leadership in the context of Africa**

Gender and Leadership Consultation

9-11 July Lusaka, Zambia

Women's Christian Fellowship (WCF) in the United Church of Zambia (UCZ)

### **Communique**

#### **We affirmed that women pastors face hierarchy and a patriarchal church:**

- 1) Ministry is still a male-dominated space. Owing to this, women face perceptions of discrimination and rejection.
- 2) The image of a woman is highly sexualised. Women are seen more as sexual beings evaluated in beauty, family status and age.
- 3) The patriarchal perspective tends to women's role in housekeeping.
- 4) Social orientations limit women's access to opportunities. Women have not been accepted naturally in leadership.
- 5) Success in women's ministry is seen as exceptional; it's not normal.

#### **We discerned the historical context of African women in church ministry:**

- Pre-colonial Roles of Women: Spiritual leaders and healers, Cultural Custodians, and Community influencers.
- Impact of Colonialism: Introduction of patriarchal norms, exclusion from formal ministry roles, and education and empowerment: Patriarchal framework introduced by missionaries and their influence in church constitution and theological curriculum.
- Historical struggles and progress: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century movements, post-independence Era, landmark ordinations, ongoing challenges and advocacy

#### **We affirmed a life-nurturing leadership in the context of Africa:**

*Divine Assignment:* The uniqueness of women's ministry is not necessarily located in gender but on God's assignment - there are specific missions God entrusts to women. In the Bible, Deborah, Esther and Mary were picked for a specific, unique mission. Consider birthing – it's unique - the Messiah had to come through a woman. Mary's role underscores the idea that God's divine assignments often involve unique and significant missions that only the chosen individual can fulfil, irrespective of gender.

*Women's dimension of Life:* There is no life without womanhood – no one can express the women's dimension of ministry apart from a woman. Women's lived experiences and their

in-flesh encounters give a peculiar perspective of ministry that their male counterparts cannot duplicate.

*Promoting Gender Justice:* women ordination is not just about having women in the ministry; it's about recognising that by including them in ministry and as equals in church leadership, we create a powerful force for social and economic justice worldwide.

*Holistic Ministry:* enriching decision-making processes and fostering a more inclusive church culture. Additionally, women often bring relational and empathetic approaches to leadership, which is essential for pastoral care and community building. Women also, in most cases, take up ministry with a holistic mindset that has spiritual, social and communal aspects of life.

### **How can Churches in Africa react to patriarchal-based church leadership:**

*Reclaiming the Church's Understanding in a Reformed Context:* To reclaim the understanding of being a Reformed church by acknowledging gaps between current practices and desired inclusivity. Church should embrace change led by the Holy Spirit and work to overcome resistance to women's leadership, which can come from power struggles.

*Constitutional Review and Policies for Women:* To review the Constitution and create gender policies with specific positions for women in the church. These policies would promote transformation and reformation, ensuring women have key leadership roles. The discussion stressed that women's involvement in leadership would be limited without intentional strategies.

*Shift from Posting System:* The church's calling system for placement seems problematic. Churches should adopt a posting system to streamline the placement process and ensure better representation of women in leadership roles.

*Promoting Leadership through Contextual Bible Study (CBS):* CBS skills, organising workshops, training trainers, and developing manuals are proposed as tools for developing leadership in local contexts.

*Document and celebrate women's contributions:* Documenting is necessary that women's leadership challenges patriarchal church structures and promotes gender justice. Sharing their stories honors their contributions, inspires future leaders, and reshapes the church's understanding of women's roles.

*Develop leadership training programs:* To effectively combat patriarchal church leadership, it is crucial to develop comprehensive leadership training programs tailored specifically for women. Key components of these programs are the establishment of mentorship opportunities and fostering supportive networks.

*Action plan for participants:*

- Promoting Contextual Bible Study (CBS) challenges contentious texts historically used to oppress women and empowers women's agency in God's image.
- Churches in Africa that do not ordain women invite women leaders from the African context to encourage them at their General Assembly.
- Include ordinary church women in the discussion on women's ordination because they are also part of the resistance to women's leadership.
- Online gatherings are regularly held with participants to follow up on breaking barriers related to this issue.