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**THE PASTOR'S SPOUSE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF A SPOUSE IN
PASTORAL MINISTRY**

By

JIM STARK

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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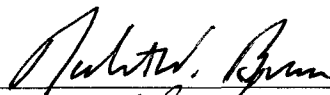
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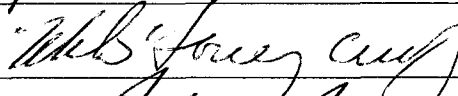
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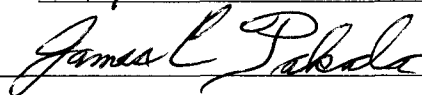
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ABSTRACT

Due to the challenges of ministry, many ministry couples are facing stress in their marriage and family. Many pastors leave their place of ministry before they reach their most productive years. Much of the effort to develop ways to sustain effective ministry focuses on the pastor. This study has focused on the spouse of the pastor. The particular focus of this study has been on the phenomenon of the expectations surrounding the wife of the pastor usually known as the role of “pastor’s wife.”

This present study took advantage of an opportunity to access the data from the Pastors Summit which was a qualitative research study funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. The focus of this study was to research how to sustain excellence in pastoral ministry into the twenty-first century. The data from the Pastors Summit was combined with questionnaires sent out by the author. The goal of this study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.”

Through this present study it was learned that much can be learned about the phenomenon of the role of “pastor’s wife” through the study of systems theory. Those who find themselves in the role of “pastor’s wife” can also benefit from resources relating to family of origin, emotional intelligence, as well as how to identify safe people and develop healthy relationships. Knowing the relationship between marriage and ministry was also discovered to be very important for ministry couples. Finally, it was noted that there are three main models for describing how the person in the role of “pastor’s wife” functions. These models were found to be useful as guidelines for the person in the role of “pastor’s wife.”

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pastor's wives. I am also thankful for the patience and encouragement of our children, Paul, Jonathan, and Jessica who had to endure a "distracted" Dad over much of this period.

Chapter One: Introduction

Ministry, with its many challenges, can often take a toll on the relationships of couples engaged in that service. Diane Langberg, a licensed psychologist and regular columnist for *Partnership Magazine*, observes, “More men are leaving the ministry due to discouragement and more ministry couples are divorcing than ever before.”¹

H. B. London and Neil Wiseman, who have decades of experience pastoring churches, counseling ministers and training those who will serve churches, report, “Those in ministry are equally likely to have their marriages end in divorce as general church members. . . . The clergy has the second highest divorce rate among all professions.”² Their survey of pastors revealed that 40 percent said they had considered leaving their pastorates in the previous three months.³ London and Wiseman note, “[T]hough most of them will never leave the ministry, it does reflect an agonizing dissatisfaction that’s largely unrecognized by those outside the profession.”⁴ The cost of this dissatisfaction is borne not only by ministry couples but by the church as a whole say London and Wiseman, who observe, “The typical pastor has his greatest impact at a church in years 5 through 14 of his pastorate; unfortunately, the average pastor lasts only five years at a

¹ Diane Langberg, *Counsel for Pastors Wives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 14.

² H. B. London, Jr., Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, rev. ed. *Pastors at Risk*. 1993 (Ventura, CA: Regal Books from Gospel Light, 2003), 86.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

church.” The result is the loss of laborers from the ministry before they reach their most productive years.⁵

One pastor, who is now in his second decade of service, recently commented on how important his spouse is to his ministry:

I know now more than ever that I cannot answer this calling without my wife. There is only one person in my life who will always be there for me in ministry and that is my wife. I realize I’ve undervalued my wife in ministry, even while thinking that I wasn’t doing that.⁶

Purpose of the Study

This project examined the experience of the spouse of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife,” and followed the approach modeled by London and Wiseman:

Although more and more women are entering the ministry, it is still the rule for more men than women to be called by churches, and for their wives to find themselves playing a supportive role. While that more-common situation is usually assumed in this book, the authors cordially invite female ministers to reverse the assumed gender perspective as they read.⁷

While having much in common with other wives, pastors’ wives play a different role. This is pointed out by Wallace Denton in his widely recognized study:

...[T]he role of the minister’s wife is markedly different from the role of other business and professional men’s wives. (What lawyer’s wife is expected to be versed in law, or physician’s wife in medicine, as the minister’s wife is expected to know religion and theology?)⁸

As one pastor’s wife put it, “I would not only be married to a minister, but I would also be wed to his job.”⁹ This is unique to the role of the pastor’s wife.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶ Bob Burns Dr., *Report to the Partners of the Pastors Summit* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, Center for Ministry Leadership, 2007), Covenant Theological Seminary, Orlando Meeting Dec. 12-13, 2007, 28.

⁸ Wallace Denton, *The Role of the Minister's Wife* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 11-12.

⁹ Edith A. Rees, “Once Married...Twice Wed,” *Christianity Today*, June 5, 1964, 13.

Another of the challenges facing those who are married to pastors is struggling with the title, “pastor’s wife,” which often doubles as an unofficial job description, well-defined only in the minds of the local congregants. The holder learns this when someone points out her shortcomings with regard to a list of expectations she was never given. One wife said,

Right now, if you were to ask me [how] I am doing I would have to tell you I am tired, frustrated, and don’t understand either who I am as a person, or just what my role is as a pastor’s wife.¹⁰

This struggle to understand what local congregants expect and also maintain a sense of identity is not easy. One woman notes:

The expectation level of the people was so different from that which I had been conditioned to accept, I soon found myself having to redirect my thinking. Believe me, that took time, energy, and lots of prayer!¹¹

Leonard I. Sweet, former professor of Church History and president of United Theological Seminary who now serves as professor of evangelism at Drew University, writes about the historical development of the “pastor’s wife” role. The domestic duties typical of marriage coupled with the opportunities and demands of ministry presented challenging situations that led many gifted women to make significant contributions to their families, churches, and society as a whole.

Long before feminists began speaking out against the imprisonment of wives in kitchens of dependency and for women’s right to manage financial affairs, assume business responsibilities, make important decisions, and converse intelligently with their partners, minister’s wives had learned to embody these values and virtues.¹²

¹⁰ Ruth White, *What Every Pastor's Wife Should Know* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1986), 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹² Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 77-78.

London and Wiseman point out the often essential role these women play in the pastoral ministry:

Without these women's spunk and tenacity, many pastors would quit before next Sunday. Without many of them working in the secular marketplace as breadwinners, pastors' families could not survive financially – so they would have to leave the ministry. And without their kingdom involvement, many congregations would lose their most dynamic spark plug for getting a lot of good done in the name of Christ.¹³

The strategic position of the pastor's wife is a unique one with its own challenges and blessings and needs to be better understood.

Problem and Purpose Statement

Ministry couples are under great pressure today. As noted above, the average pastor lasts only five years at a church yet “[t]he typical pastor has his greatest impact at a church in years 5 through 14 of his pastorate...”¹⁴ This resulting loss of fruitful ministry is costly to the church as a whole as well as to ministry couples. The wife of a pastor occupies a strategic position. She must not only meet the challenges of marriage and family dynamics, she must also contend with the often unspoken expectations of the local congregation and community. Pastors' wives must be continually aware of the potential positive or negative impact of their choices on their own and their husbands' ministries. They must both meet the challenges and make the most of the opportunities that come from being the “pastor's wife.” In light of this, a better understanding of the experiences of women serving in this role is needed.

This project has taken advantage of a unique opportunity to access data generated by the Pastors Summit. The Pastors Summit was a qualitative case-study

¹³ London, H.B. Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books/SP Publications, 1995), 11.

¹⁴ London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 36.

project at Covenant Theological Seminary funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. that investigated factors contributing to sustaining pastoral excellence in the twenty-first century. This research revealed five themes with a high correlation to sustaining pastoral excellence. One of these themes focused on the role of Marriage and Family as integral in sustaining pastors.¹⁵ Under this theme, one of the identified focal points was: “Understanding the strategic role their wife plays in their life and ministry.”¹⁶ With this strategic role in mind, the purpose of the present study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor serving in the role of “pastor’s wife.”

Proposed Research Questions

In order to study the experiences of those in the strategic role of “pastor’s wife”, the following research questions were used to frame the study:

1. What is the relationship of the wife of the pastor to pastoral ministry?
2. What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?
3. What unique challenges does the wife of the pastor face?

Significance of the Study

An examination of the literature on this topic indicates a lack of current information. There was a flurry of activity related to the “pastor’s wife” at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. There was another round of interest in the middle of the twentieth century, as well as a number of books and studies in the 1980s and 1990s. London and Wiseman wrote their *Married to a Pastor’s Wife* in 1995, but their study did not fully reflect the perspective of anyone from a Reformed theological commitment. The Pastors Summit participants were predominantly from the

¹⁵ Burns, *Report to Partners of the Pastors Summit*, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), though there were some pastors of reformed conviction from other denominations. Each Pastors Summit cohort met three times a year for two years. Wives were included for one meeting a year during the first group of participant cohorts. The identification of their importance led the Summit leadership to include spouses in the second group of cohorts (depending on the spouses' availability). While the focus of the Pastors Summit was not specifically on the experience of the wives of pastors in the role of "pastor's wife," preliminary review of the data yielded valuable insights.

The present study had the potential of producing a composite view of the current state of the pastor's wife's experience, and is set in the context of reformed churches. It has the potential of resulting in several valuable benefits for the Church.

With a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities pastors' wives face, seminaries can be better equipped to prepare seminary couples for pastoral ministry. This preparation, in conjunction with follow-up, has the potential of enabling more seminary graduates to sustain productive ministry beyond the crucial first five years. This may result in more "workers in the harvest field." And, these workers have the potential to be more effective as they continue ministry into their most productive years in the same church setting. Wallace Denton notes the valuable contribution a seminary experience can make in the life of a future pastor's wife:

...the experience of seminary training and the fellowship with other minister's wives appeared to have been a rich training ground for the future pastor's wife.¹⁷

This study may also enable women to see the freedom in diversity God allows for them to fully develop and use their unique spiritual gifts and personality mix. This can

¹⁷ Denton, *The Role of the Minister's Wife*, 59.

result in less stress for these women as they are able to minister within their strengths and gifts rather than straining to minister outside of their gift and personality mix.

With a better understanding of the current state of the pastor's wife's experience in the role of "pastor's wife," many wives may be encouraged to see the valuable contributions God can make through them to advance the work of the Kingdom. This encouragement may help them to persevere in their calling in such a way that they not only survive but thrive.

A better understanding may also lead many pastors to more deeply and profoundly "cherish" their wives, indeed, receiving favor from the Lord. These pastors may come to see the valuable contributions their wives make beyond the domestic experience. And as congregations see pastors cherish their wives, it may lead them to cherish the pastors' wives as well, setting aside stereotyped role expectations and giving them the freedom to be who they are in Christ as they fulfill their calling.

Definition of Terms

Big Picture perspective: Seeing things from God's perspective as it relates to His "harvest field."

"Pastor's wife": The role of the woman married to the pastor, often stereo-typed by the expectations and prejudices of congregations and communities.

Pastoral Ministry: The work of an individual serving in a local church as senior or staff minister.

Pastors Summit: A qualitative case study at Covenant Theological Seminary funded by a Lilly Endowment, Inc. grant that investigated the issue of understanding factors contributing to sustaining pastoral excellence in the twenty-first century.

PCA: The Presbyterian Church in America

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.” There have been a limited number of books and studies published that seek to explore this experience. In this chapter, representative material of the existing literature will be reviewed, beginning with the biblical material.

Biblical Review

A concordance study of the Bible will yield no direct term for “pastor’s wife.” However, the Bible contains examples of women in a wide variety of roles. The Old Testament describes a broad spectrum of women’s activities. God established the institution of marriage between Adam and Eve.¹⁸ Women such as Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel are mentioned as the wives of the patriarchs. They primarily fulfilled the typical role of the wife as was the custom of their day. We encounter women of faith such as Tamar¹⁹ and Zipporah.²⁰ Deborah, a prophetess and wife, led Israel for a season during the time of the Judges.²¹ Ruth demonstrated faithfulness to Naomi, her mother-in-law, was later wed to Boaz and was the great-grandmother of David.²² Hannah’s prayer for a son was answered by the birth of Samuel, who became a priest and leader of Israel.²³ Esther became the wife of King Xerxes, the ruler of Persia.²⁴ The book bearing her name

¹⁸ Genesis 2

¹⁹ Genesis 39

²⁰ Exodus 4

²¹ Judges 4-5

²² Ruth 1:16; 4:13f.

²³ 1 Samuel 2

²⁴ Esther 2:17-18

records her providential opportunity to have a significant impact on the history of her people. God's work through her courage and wisdom is evident in spite of the lack of mention of his name in the book. These and many other women are mentioned in the Old Testament, but none fulfilled a role recognized today as a "pastor's wife."

Perhaps the closest the Old Testament comes to the general concept of "pastor's wife" is the wife of the priest. But little is known of her role other than that of wife. The following describes the qualifications for the wife of the high priest as presented to the prophet Moses by the LORD:

The woman he marries must be a virgin. He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, so he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy.²⁵

In addition, the marriage requirements for other priests were: "They must not marry widows or divorced women; they may marry only virgins of Israelite descent or widows of priests."²⁶ These requirements seemed to focus on the fulfillment of priestly purity laws, and did not denounce the character of widows or divorced women.

The poetic description of the "wife of noble character"²⁷ in Proverbs 31 is a celebration of excellent wives in general. The writer of Proverbs holds the institution of marriage in high esteem as is seen in such proverbs as, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD."²⁸ But, this writer makes no distinction between wives in general and what we are calling "pastors' wives."

²⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be from the NIV. International Bible Society, *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984) Leviticus 21:13-15.

²⁶ Ezekiel 44:22

²⁷ Proverbs 31:10-31

²⁸ Prov. 18:22

The New Testament writers also recognized marriage among the leaders of the Church. The Apostle Peter was known to be married. This is clearly seen in both the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke, which mention Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law.²⁹

The Apostle Paul comments on this right to marry, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?"³⁰ While Paul appears to have been single,³¹ he affirmed the right for church leaders to marry. His preference for the single life was in recognition of several factors. First, his personal singleness was seen as a gift from God to be used in the service of the Lord. Second, Paul's encouraging others to refrain from marriage took into account "this present crisis."³² And, third, he was aware that:

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world – how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.³³

While Paul saw it as preferable to remain single so as to be undivided in one's devotion to the Lord, he also realized that different individuals had different gifts and not all are able to receive this perspective.³⁴ The passage above was not a command to refrain from marriage. It simply recognized the reality that marriage calls for sacrifice and attention.

²⁹ Matthew 8:14; Luke 8:38-39.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 9:5

³¹ 1 Cor. 7:7

³² 1 Cor. 7:26

³³ 1 Cor. 7:32-35

³⁴ 1 Cor. 7:7

Paul is the one who wrote that a husband should love his wife as Christ loved the Church.³⁵ He commanded Timothy and Titus to appoint “overseers/elders” in each town who were to be the husband of one wife.³⁶ These men were to be the leaders of the local churches. They were to be held in honor, “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”³⁷ However, while there is no list of qualifications specifically for the wives of the overseers/elders, there is a list of qualifications for the wives of deacons which can also apply to the elder’s wife: “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.”³⁸ London and Wiseman have observed that Priscilla³⁹ was the first “pastor’s wife” as she was married to a man, Aquila, who started in secular vocation and later became a pastor.⁴⁰ This seems to be the situation at the close of the period of history covered by the New Testament.

Historical Review

This leads to a brief historical review, which will be followed by a survey of selected studies relating to the “pastor’s wife.”

Sweet points out:

The minister’s wife is not the child of the Reformation. She is the child of the early church, when married men were regularly ordained. Not until the fourth century did Pope Siricius (384-398) ban sex for both married and unmarried clergy, thereby paving the way for the twelfth-century requirement of universal clerical celibacy....[When Martin Luther married in 1525] he was neither a traitor to tradition nor a foe of the future. He had but wended his way back to a more ancient, more apostolic past – a past, however, that had been suppressed and forgotten by the people of his day. That is why news of this marriage was a great scandal. Surely the fruit of this union, some said, must be the Antichrist.⁴¹

³⁵ Ephesians 5:25

³⁶ 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1.

³⁷ 1 Tim 5:17

³⁸ 1 Tim 3:11

³⁹ Acts 18.

⁴⁰ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 25.

⁴¹ Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, 12.

This reintroduction of married clergy was significant in church history.

One of the practical difficulties of the Reformation was the displacement and unemployment of priests and nuns who accepted Luther's teaching and left the Roman church...Luther's marriage validated his reform convictions as much as it met his personal needs for affection, intimacy, and the fathering of a family.⁴²

Some point out that the development of the "Protestant parsonage" had greater impact on society and the honor given to women in the role of wife.⁴³ With the coming of the Reformation, the "pastor's wife" was surrounded by controversy during a volatile period of transition. For example, efforts were made to oppose the married clergy in order to enforce celibacy of the clergy and resist the spread of reformed doctrine. In 1539, the Act of Six Articles was passed with severe penalties for those who broke their vows of celibacy. However, it appears that these were not aggressively enforced. A decade later in 1549 under Edward VI, the Act of Convocation recognized marriage of the clergy. A brief four years later in 1553, Mary became queen. She had a strong desire to return Catholicism to England. Shortly after she gained the throne, Mary repealed the Act and sparked a brutal persecution. "Mary's short reign of five years witnessed so many beheadings and burnings that she earned herself the title 'Bloody Mary.'"⁴⁴ Following her death, clergy marriage was once again recognized during the reign of Elizabeth I. However, it was not until 1604 under James I that married clergy received state recognition.⁴⁵ Records indicate that the status of the "pastor's wife" (in England) developed into a somewhat calm and uniform existence following its turbulent first one hundred years of existence.⁴⁶ The story moves from Europe to America.

⁴² London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 19.

⁴³ Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, 12.

⁴⁴ Denton, *The Role of the Minister's Wife*, 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

Knowledge of the minister's wife in frontier America is limited. What brief glimpses we have of her are usually found in biographies or autobiographies ... The pattern of husband-wife relationships set forth in the Bible seems to have been perpetuated [as like that found in Prov. 31].⁴⁷

So, the role of pastor's wife became an established part of the church and society. With these brief surveys of the development of the role of the pastor's wife as seen in the Bible and in history, this study will now turn to the development of an understanding of the role itself. This will be done through looking at three models for defining the role of pastor's wife, followed by a brief survey of various related studies.

Three Models of the Role of the Pastor's Wife

Three authors will be considered as exemplifying three different approaches to developing a system of identifying various roles that pastors' wives tend to play. Leonard I. Sweet develops models for the role of the pastor's wife from his historical research. Donna Sinclair uses a personal pilgrimage approach or "stages of development" to describe possible roles for pastors' wives. And, finally, William Douglas develops roles from his research that are commonly used to describe the role of a pastor's wife.

Leonard Sweet develops four models to portray the role of the pastor's wife:

Four models illustrate the images and roles available to minister's wives from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries: the Companion, a ministering angel who held up her husband's hands in his sacred calling; the Sacrificer, who clasped her hands in pious resignation, asked little from her husband, financially or emotionally, and "hindered him not in his work" by staying out of his way and raising the family on her own; the Assistant, who became her husband's right-arm, sharing many pastoral responsibilities and functioning as an extension of his ministry; and the Partner, who ministered with both her own hands, developed a ministry alongside her husband, and often served as the pastor's pastor. The models also embody the four major types of spirituality available to women and promoted in the Sunday school libraries of the nineteenth century. I have selected certain women to exemplify the possibilities, the perils, and some of the peculiarities of these four models of women in ministry: Katherine Luther and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 24

Sarah Edwards (Companion), Peggy Dow (Sacrificer), Lydia Finney (Assistant), and Elizabeth Atkinson Finney (Partner).⁴⁸

While there does seem to be some historical development of these models, Sweet points out that this trend is not inviolable:

...the movement through the chapters of this book from one model to another, a passage through time that should not be interpreted as suggesting any kind of cultural “paradigm shift” in styles of ministry. Wives of ministers kept inventing new roles as they resisted or modified forms of subordination and adjusted to changing historical realities. They did not always throw the old roles away. There can always be found in any period of American history a coexistence and intermingling of many models, although at times one model seems to predominate. Indeed, none of these models are obsolete even today.⁴⁹

While not welded to history, Sweet presents his four models for the role of the pastor’s wife in the framework of historical development.

Donna Sinclair takes another approach. She refers to “stages” related to “the adult’s life cycle.”⁵⁰ She is not trying to establish any “should” or “ought” but simply relates her own experience of transition as she felt herself moving between stages and roles.⁵¹ In fact, she emphasizes the idea of making conscious choices in relation to the various roles:

I have outlined several possible attitudes a minister’s wife is able to take about her position. She can actively help her husband in his career as a helpmeet...or she can choose to remain in the background, quietly keeping things calm on the home front so that he is free to exercise his ministry as fully as possible...an enablerShe can declare herself free from either role and make her own way, as liberated as possible...from the preconceptions of the people she encounters. Or she may want to pursue her own career activity in the secular world (or as an employee of the church, ordained or otherwise).⁵²

⁴⁸Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, 3-4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ Donna Sinclair, *The Pastor's Wife Today*, Creative Leadership Series, ed. Lyle E. Shaller (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1981), 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

It seems Sinclair approaches the roles of the pastor's wife as transitory and situational rather than fixed and inviolable.

The third approach comes from William Douglas, who was involved in the Lilly research project "The Minister's Wife" (MW) in 1959. As a result of his study, he identified:

...[T]he five patterns that most often occur among American MWs: the Teamworker (Martha), the Purpose-Motivated Background Supporter (Mary), the Useful Work-Motivated Background Supporter (Dorcas), the Detached-on-Principle (Jane), and the Detached-in-Rebellion (Kate).⁵³

Please note that the women mentioned in the preceding quote are respondents who represent each of the five patterns. The "teamworker" sees herself as a minister and a "yokefellow" with her husband.⁵⁴ "Of the approximately 5,000 respondents to the MW-5 questionnaire, about 20 percent described themselves as 'very involved, as a *teamworker* sharing in his ministry.'"⁵⁵ Of the respondents, 60 percent describe themselves as "very involved, but in a *background supportive way*."⁵⁶ The purpose-motivated background supporter is described:

...[A]s motivated by "belief in the purposes of the Church," as considering themselves to be "a Christian, with the same responsibilities as any other church member," as finding their major joy in "learning more about the Christian faith," and as judging their "first responsibility to be a good wife and mother."⁵⁷

Not all background supporters are purpose-motivated; some report their motivation as "desire to contribute through useful work."⁵⁸ What often characterizes this pattern is an emphasis on "a sense of helpfulness" but regretfully having a "feeling that

⁵³ William Douglas, *Minister's Wives* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), 32.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

I'm not qualified to be the kind of minister's wife I'd like to be."⁵⁹ These individuals tend to "feel inadequate for their responsibilities, and shy and timid in social situations."⁶⁰ Slightly less than 20 percent of the approximately 5000 respondents reported they "were no more involved than if he [their pastor husband] were in another vocation." These are referred to as the "detached."⁶¹ The detached are divided into two sub-categories. The first group seems motivated by their commitment to the Church and their understanding of the laity and clergy roles. The second group, feeling the conflict between their desire to be close to their husband and the expectations of the congregation, rebels against the external demands.⁶²

Thus, Douglas has three main categories of roles for pastors' wives from his research: "teamworker", "background supporter", and "detached", with each of the latter two subdivided into two categories for the total of five role models. These models resulted from his research of responses from nearly 5,000 minister wives. These different models, along with those of Sweet and Sinclair, give a framework from which to explore the current state of the women in the role of "pastor's wife." The use of these models will be influenced by the results from surveying a review of other selected related studies.

Review of Other Selected Studies

In addition to models of categorizing or identifying the various roles of the pastor's wife, there are other studies that supplement and enhance the understanding of the dynamics surrounding the challenges and opportunities women face in the role of pastor's wife.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁶¹ Ibid., 46.

⁶² Ibid.

Books Focusing on Pastors' Wives

Diane Langberg's book, *Counsel for Pastors' Wives* "offers sympathetic and realistic answers to fourteen often-asked questions from pastors' wives."⁶³ Langberg observes:

Over my past ten years of counseling ministry couples, the majority of problems presented to me have usually fallen into one of two large categories: marriage/family difficulties or burnout. Struggles in those areas must be expected due to the type of work involved in ministry and because of its intensity. These struggles do not need to be debilitating, however, nor must they inevitably result in the failure of either marriage or ministry. *Whether or not problems get out of hand is in large measure dictated by the attitudes and expectations with which one approaches ministry.* [emphasis mine]⁶⁴

Langberg then addresses marriage/family difficulties:

...Many times couples feel as if marriage is in conflict with ministry. The attitude seems to be: "If I really give to my marriage what all these books and counselors say I should, my ministry will suffer. Marriage is important, but my ministry is for God, and he deserves 100 percent." This type of thinking translates into the resolve that "I will respond to anyone who calls at any time. If I have promised my wife that I will stay home, she will just have to understand that God's work comes first."⁶⁵

Langberg recognizes most couples are not so blunt about their position; however, such a perspective can creep in subtly:

The reason for this error is a misunderstanding of how marriage and ministry fit together. Many couples believe and live as if marriage and ministry do not fit together. They view these two areas as being in irresolvable conflict and feel that one must be subordinate. Frequently, this translates into a severe neglect of the family, because "serving the Lord" is more important. Those having this attitude define service to God as "those spiritual things that take place outside the home."⁶⁶

As Langberg observes other couples, she sees another perspective:

⁶³ Langberg, *Counsel for Pastors' Wives*, back cover.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 15.

Other couples believe that marriage and ministry ought somehow to fit together, so they run back and forth between the two. The fit is never comfortable or easy, but they enjoy some success from their juggling efforts.⁶⁷

Langberg continues with an evaluation:

The first approach, a neglect of the home, is clear disobedience to God's standards for those who oversee his church. Paul tells us that "[an overseer] must manage his own family well." (1 Tim. 3:4). Obviously, a pastor cannot manage his home if he is never present. The second approach will not work when both areas make major demands at the same time. Those who try to take on both equally are prime candidates for burnout.⁶⁸

Langberg offers another approach:

There is a better way. I have seen it work for people who made a commitment to it from the beginning, as well as for those who first chose one of the above approaches and then struggled hard to change horses in midstream. This third option regarding marriage and ministry is that we view our marriage as part of our ministry. Just as we view our Bible studies, our singing in the choir, our teaching, or our counseling as a part of our ministry, so we must see our marriage as a viable part of our service to God.

One of the most important assets in an effective ministry is a healthy and strong marriage. Many people in ministry are failing God because of problems in their homes that have been generated by their neglect.

One of the traps that many ministry couples have fallen into is that of separating spiritual things from earthly or mundane things. God makes no such distinction in our lives. We are to honor him and give glory to him in *everything* we do. [emphasis hers].⁶⁹

Langberg later reflects upon a young minister who had done great damage to his marriage and family:

He said to me, "How I wish I had understood that loving my wife and nurturing my children were also ministries!" How we must grieve God when we neglect the very relationship that is to illustrate Christ's relationship to his bride. What is a greater affront is that we do it "in his name."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

Langberg recognizes that the second problem, burnout, is often related to difficulties in marriage:

A good marital relationship provides a haven for couples in the midst of the pressures and struggles of ministry. A marriage that has been honored and lovingly nurtured provides wonderful support during difficult times.⁷¹

Langberg identifies two aspects to “the kind of attitude that will help us not only to avoid burnout, but also to serve with joy.”⁷²

The first is found in 1 Kings 10:9. The queen of Sheba came to see for herself whether Solomon was all he was cracked up to be. After spending time with Solomon, she responded by acknowledging the source of Solomon’s authority: “Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness.” God put Solomon on the throne to be king for *him*, to fulfill *his* purposes in other’s lives.

Burnout often occurs when we forget that we live under authority – that we are subject to God and are accountable to him. Knowledge of this principle gives confidence. Our confidence should not rest solely in abilities, successes, intelligence, or schooling. Our confidence is to be rooted in God who rules and who has chosen us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and gifted us, and then placed us according to *his* purposes. [emphasis hers]⁷³

Langberg points out the importance of placing our confidence correctly:

Pressure is inevitable in ministry. There are difficulties and disappointments. There are the overwhelming needs of others, questions for which we have no answers. And there are failures as well—both in our families and among our church leaders. If we do not find the confidence that comes from knowing that it is *God* who has placed us where we are, we will be crushed by the demands and responsibilities of leadership. We will buckle under the pressure. If, however, we recognize that our confidence lies in the fact that God has placed us where he has, for the purpose of conforming us to his Son, then we can respond by walking in obedience to him on all fronts. The result is that we can serve as examples to the flock.[emphasis hers]⁷⁴

Langberg addresses another attitude shift to avoid burnout:

⁷¹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁷² Ibid., 18.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 19.

The second aspect of an attitude that will help prevent burnout is the knowledge that, not only has *God* placed us, but it is *God* whom we serve. Keeping this key point *in mind* will prevent us from becoming exasperated with those to whom we minister. [emphasis hers]⁷⁵

Langberg later expounds on this:

One of the most difficult things about ministering to others is dealing with the response you will get (or fail to get) from them. You will stand by a parishioner when everyone else is against him or her, and at the budget meeting this very person will stand up and say, “The pastor gets too much money.” You will counsel many hours with someone, and there will be no change. Disapproval, criticism, and rejection are very difficult in any circumstance, but when they follow loving, careful service, the pain can be overwhelming.⁷⁶

Langberg shares an insight from Dr. Oswald Chambers in his *My Utmost for His Highest*:

If we are devoted to the cause of humanity, we shall soon be crushed and brokenhearted, for we shall often meet with more ingratitude from men than we would from a dog; but if our motive is love to God, no ingratitude can hinder us from service to our fellowman.⁷⁷

In a later chapter (Why Do Women in the Church Keep Their Distance From Me?), Langberg addresses the dynamic of the role of “pastor’s wife” by saying, “...many women in the congregation see you as a role and not as a person.”⁷⁸ She later elaborates:

Though pastors also deal with role-related struggles, their wives usually have more difficulty in this area. Part of the reason for this difficulty is the ambiguity of your position. Your husband has a job description that both he and the church have decided he can fill satisfactorily. You must also fill a job description, but one that is unstated by the church and unclear to you. You are left guessing and are accepted according to your ability to figure out the church’s expectations and succeed in meeting them.⁷⁹

Langberg later offers this advice to the inquiring pastor’s wife:

...It may be beneficial for you to choose two or three women who are considered leaders by the others (your husband’s input here would be helpful). Tell them you have a concern for the church and particularly for the women of the church. Ask

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68-69.

them, based on their own experience with other pastors' wives, how they feel you might best be able to serve the women in the congregation. Obviously, your service would be unique, as it would be based on your gifts and personality, but perhaps these women would be in a position to offer some suggestions and to make more clear to you the needs and expectations you are facing.⁸⁰

Langberg adds that this "task is best accomplished by walking among these women as a servant."⁸¹ With these and other other beneficial comments, Langberg has written a helpful book as she addresses various issues faced by pastors' wives. Langberg's helpful approach was recognized by the Pastors Summit, and she was included as one of the speakers at some of the cohort meetings.

Shari Thomas has written a study which is closely related to the focus of this project.⁸² As she began her chapter two on the precedents in literature, Thomas remarked:

For the sake of brevity and clarity I have chosen to summarize the major research done in the field of clergy spouses. However, a review of the literature turns up little substantive material. The scarcity of these findings further underscores the contention that the needs of the clergy spouse have gone largely unreported.⁸³

Thomas summarizes her findings as follows:

There are six prevalent themes suggested by the precedent literature which include: the lack of a sufficient clergy spouse support system, the importance of a healthy marriage and family life, boundary ambiguity between family and work, isolation and loneliness, the spouses' commitment/sense of call to ministry, and the possibility of emotional and spiritual abuse in clergy marriages.⁸⁴

The following comments will highlight some of the key findings shared by Thomas that are related to this project. Under the area of support systems Thomas said:

A study conducted by Baker in 1989, finds that the major factor which restricts clergy spouses from experiencing the support they need is that their primary

⁸⁰ Ibid., 69.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Shari Thomas, *A Study of PCA Church Planter Spouse Stress and Satisfaction Levels* (Atlanta, GA: Shari Thomas and Mission to North America, 2005).

⁸³ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

support system comes from their husbands – men who tend to be absent from the home evenings and weekends. The study also indicates that wives do not talk about their husband since this could jeopardize his career. In a later study by Baker and Scott (1992), the lack of a sufficient social support system was a significant stressor for the wife. However, this factor was reduced for the women who were employed. Those who had high loneliness and high depression scores did not work outside the home.⁸⁵

Under the topic “Marriage” Thomas shared:

The lack of a support system not only increases loneliness and isolation for the wife, it puts added pressure on the marriage. If a clergy couple is relying primarily on each other for support, the marriage may function well most of the time, yet a narrow support system will become a problem when either one is not able to fulfill that role (McMinn et.al, 2004, 21). Added to this, the demands of ministerial work and the boundary intrusions clergy families experience often allow little time to develop the intimacy needed and thus inhibit close marriage relationships (Warner and Carter 1984).

A notable conclusion from a study done by Orstrander, Henry, and Fournier (1994) showed that ministers’ families who experience high stress levels related to church work will be in need of increased support systems beyond those normally available in their church, family, or networks. The interrelated aspect of the lack of a support system for the wife, and the increased importance this places on the relationship with the husband, adds further pressure to the marriage.⁸⁶

Thomas points out the important connection of family to ministry:

Families are also impacted by the unique level of stress found in the ministry. Cameron Lee (1988) noted that those who are concerned for the well being of the minister have recognized that the family is of intrinsic interest. The quality of his or her ministry cannot be separated from the family. Family problems complicate the ministry just as ministry difficulties can affect the family adversely. However, this interaction is not only true in the negative sense, it has positive ramifications as well.⁸⁷

As Thomas continues, she points out that family stress falls primarily upon the wife:

The stress with which clergy children struggle also implies an added stress on the wife. In traditional settings she may often be the primary caregiver of the family. Often this will be out of necessity as the husband becomes heavily committed and involved with his work (Warner and Carter 1984). The wife thus finds herself not

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

only carrying the majority of care for the family, but also carrying the additional emotional weight of children who are under stress. Thus, it is no surprise that clergy spouse scores on the emotional exhaustion scale were high. (Warner and Carter 1984)⁸⁸

Thomas also reported the following under the area of boundary ambiguity:

Ambiguity is endemic to ministry. For the spouse this ambiguity takes on three major forms which I term role ambiguity, emotional ambiguity, and physical ambiguity. Lee (1988) presents the ministers' family as an "ecological system." He insists that the family must be studied as a whole, which would include the individual members, as well as their patterns and the quality of relationships between them. Further, the ecological systems approach does not end with the family system. "The assumption is that the family is embedded within a larger network of systems" (Lee 1988, 251). These systems also must be studied to understand the family itself. One notable result of his study was a unique characteristic he labeled "boundary ambiguity." He found that the clarity of system boundaries is crucial to the healthy functioning of the whole system (or in this case, family).⁸⁹

Thomas further shares the following to show the unique challenges to ministry families:

It was noted in studies of families of POW's that there was an isolated variable of "boundary ambiguity" as a factor in family stress. In other words, the unknown prevented the family from obtaining closure and reorganizing itself. Therefore, not knowing who is "in" and who is "out" of the system creates stress for the family. In ecological terms, the boundary of the family is usually clearly delineated. The father and mother have their respective places of work, the children their school, and so on. One member of the family does not participate in the others' system. The father may visit the child's school but he does not attend with his child. This creates clear boundaries within each system. In the clergy family, however, the system is not clear. All members of the family participate either directly or indirectly in the church. There is some role expectation of the congregation which must be fulfilled by the minister, his spouse, and even his children. Hence, we see role ambiguity. Lee quotes Denton:

To marry the minister of a church is a decision to marry more than a man. It is a decision to become part of a role with a long tradition....(The minister's wife) can extricate herself from this role only at a risk to herself and her husband's ministry. Lee 1988, 256

This boundary ambiguity seeps into all aspects of the clergy family. And if it seeps into the clergy family, then it must be magnified in the church planter family. Living in a church-owned parsonage raises the issue of physical ambiguity. To whom does the home belong? Can there be privacy for the family?

⁸⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

Again, these are issues of ambiguity which add stress to clergy families. In the current study, church planters often use their home for office as well as worship space while the church is getting started.⁹⁰

Role ambiguity is very much germane to this project and Thomas shares this:

For the clergy spouse, role ambiguity has been recognized as a source of stress. As stated earlier, other professions do not demand the same level of involvement that the Christian ministry demands of the minister's spouse and family. The lack of clear expectations for the spouse, combined with a lack of friendship and community support (Zoba 1997), causes extremely high levels of stress.

In the area of role ambiguity, the wife often struggles with her own internal expectations, ("How much service is enough? Should I do more or less?"), those of her husband, ("Can't you be my secretary/children's church director?" "I need you to lead this until we get staff.") and the congregation ("Why doesn't the pastor do this?" "Why don't they have us for dinner?" "Don't they care?"). This lack of clearly defined boundaries for her and her family causes much of the stress she experiences. Is it any wonder that wives report high levels of emotional exhaustion? Their scores on the emotional exhaustion scale were considered high (Warner and Carter 1984).⁹¹

Under physical ambiguity, Thomas later shares the following:

The home is often used in clergy ministry and especially in the early stages of church planting. It is common for home to be an office, a nursery, a Sunday school room, a worship center, and a boarding house. The statements that came from the interviews were: "When can I say, STOP?" "I don't feel like I have any private space." "I even have to hide my bras when doing laundry as our home is a constant flow of people." "Do my kids always have to share their toys with all the children who are in our home?"⁹²

Thomas shares the following under the topic of Commitment/"Call" to ministry:

Commitment and call to ministry is also a key factor when looking at clergy spouses. The reason many wives will take on the extra familial responsibility and work load is because of their own sense of call to the ministry. Out of a list of advantages that wives mentioned of being married to a minister were the opportunities for service, for growth, and for living out ones' ideals. Although others did not see this as an advantage (Baker 1989), it would seem that the wives

⁹⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁹¹ Ibid., 12.

⁹² Ibid., 26.

who view their partnership with their husbands as their own personal commitment to ministry fare better than those that do not.⁹³

The final area addressed by Thomas under the precedents in literature review is that of Spiritual Mistreatment. Under this topic Thomas shares the following:

Finally the literature mentions an area that is particularly disturbing, that of mistreatment. Kroeger and Beck, in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible* (1996), argue that much of the problem of abuse within the church and home lies with the misuse and misunderstanding of the Bible's teaching on headship and submission. Although focusing primarily on sexual abuse, this book does raise the topic of spiritual mistreatment. "There is a notable gap in the evangelical church in what it promises women and what women actually experience in hierarchical marriage. Evangelical women surveyed reported loss of identity, loss of vision for one's own ministry, loss of potential for growth and development of talents and an all-consuming responsibility for others (spouse and children)" (Kroeger and Beck 1996, 102).

The current study does not set out to determine if this is happening in church planter marriages; however, the question is raised as to what constitutes abuse. "Many people don't exactly know what to think about society's broadened concept of abuse. But if abuse actually means emotional or spiritual mistreatment, then it may be epidemic in many clergy marriages. Any pastor can abuse his marriage by giving so much of himself to the church that he hasn't any energy left for the most important people in his life. He flies under the motive of giving first priority to the church, but it causes him to neglect and harm his family" (London and Wiseman 1993, 139).⁹⁴

As a result of her study, Thomas identified the "person and work of the husband" as the primary key to the sense of satisfaction of the church-planting spouse. She said:

The impact of the husband's person and work is so influential in the life of the spouse and family that this becomes the most important category for the sense of satisfaction in church planting for the spouse. This category includes three items: the husband as the wife's primary support, his relation to the family, and the effects of his work on the spouse.⁹⁵

In reporting the "Effects of the Ministry on Her" [the church-planting spouse] Thomas shares:

⁹³ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 19.

As wives help their husbands cope, they often take on more responsibility at home and at church to help lessen the pressure on him. Over a prolonged period, this affects the wife. “The biggest disappointment I have faced is how much energy my husband puts into the plant and [how little] energy he has left over for much else...It was fine to put those things on hold for a while, but not for the long haul.” In order to get a perspective of the type of lives these women lead, 59% reported heavy involvement in the church, as well as family, community, and personal commitments... Another reported, “When the church is struggling, the less my husband does for and with the family and the more he wants me to focus on helping him with the ministry.” This sense of overwork, coupled with the emotional burden of church planting, was common among wives.⁹⁶

In summarizing the impact of the husband’s participation, Thomas states:

The key is the husband’s participation. This cannot be stated enough. This raises questions of the husband’s understanding of the impact this dynamic has on his spouse, family, and eventually on himself. The debate is ongoing as to how much time he must spend to successfully plant a church and how much time he must spend to maintain a healthy family life. The research suggests that by understanding how family life and ministry mutually reinforce each other, for better or worse, the church planter can have the long-range salutary effect of increasing his effectiveness, both in the church and in his family (Lee 1988).⁹⁷

In her recommendations, Thomas includes suggestions that will support the marriage of the church-planting couples out of the recognition of how important the health of the marriage is to the ministry and the challenges the ministry add to the marriage. These recommendations include more intentional training for both the husband and the wife in the church-planting process. It encourages church-planting coaches to encourage the ministry couple to attend “a marriage enhancer designed for couples in ministry after the couple has begun planting.”⁹⁸ Thomas is also recommending a formal spousal-support system which will lessen the weight on the marriage.⁹⁹ While these recommendations are specifically for church-planting couples, the principles are also

⁹⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

applicable to ministry couples in the pastorate. In describing the structured support system, Thomas says,

Previous research combined with the findings of this study suggest [*sic*] that a support system for the spouse would be highly beneficial. However, combined with child rearing, the physical exhaustion of planting, and other employment, it will be difficult to add this to an already full schedule. If this is “required” it may not be viewed as “support.” Yet if it is not “required,” she may never find the time to do it. Due to the extreme pressures that church planting demands of her, I believe it will be in her best interest, upon being accepted into church planting at the time of assessment, to *highly* recommend that she contract a mentor for a period of three years... The mentoring system is designed to connect her with other [church planting spouses], to provide training in heart issues as well as the primary and secondary factors identified in this study, and to provide care. [emphasis hers]¹⁰⁰

In her study of church-planting couples, Thomas has also provided some most helpful insights into the experience of the wives of pastors. Shari Thomas was invited as one of the speakers who presented material to Pastors Summit cohorts.

London and Wiseman in *Married to a Pastor's Wife* have written a book that looks at various aspects of how the pastor's wife influences and contributes to the ministry of her pastor husband. In the introduction, London and Wiseman state:

Those who live in ministry marriages know how much a pastor depends on his spouse to prop him up, to validate his ministry, and to challenge the mistaken assumptions he often makes about himself and others.¹⁰¹

The real need for a helpmeet in ministry marriage is realized when one considers:

No matter how grand or noble or lofty an ordination ceremony may be, induction into ministry simply does not free a pastor from his weaknesses, temptations, or flaws.¹⁰²

One of the temptations ministry couples face is to look at their ministry context as the source of their frustrations and disappointments. This attitude can lead to longingly

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰¹ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 12.

¹⁰² Ibid., 43.

looking at other ministry situations “where the grass is greener.” However, London and Wiseman remind their readers, “Your new place will be like all the other places because you take yourselves with you.”¹⁰³ Ministry couples may even be tempted to give in to despair that anything significant can be accomplished in their present ministry location. But the authors remind their readers:

But for proactive Christian workers who view themselves as being in partnership with the Living Christ nothing is ever as hopeless as it seems at first. They know something that has eternal significance can be done in every place.¹⁰⁴

Therefore ministry couples need to seek contentment. Another temptation of ministry couples is to ignore or take their marriage for granted. The authors explain:

Far too many ministry couples have settled into a monotonous mediocrity in their marriages – no surprises, no meaningful conversations, no increased fulfillment, no exhilarating excitement, and no intentional efforts to make it better.¹⁰⁵

London and Wiseman go on to suggest that the ministry couple read a book on marriage together every year.¹⁰⁶ This will keep the need to invest in their marriage in mind while the couple is in the midst of the distractions of ministry.

London and Wiseman devote an entire chapter of their book to the discussion of the impact of expectations. They note, “Unrealistic or unmet expectations often lead to disappointments or outright hostility for a pastor or his spouse.”¹⁰⁷ It is later pointed out:

In a 1993 survey, 53 percent of ministers’ wives believed unrealistic expectations to be the biggest problem they face in the ministry they share with their pastor/husbands.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 151.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 134.

Congregational expectations are the bricks and mortar of the role of “pastor’s wife.” They are rarely logically thought through and voted on by the congregation as a whole. They are usually part of the tradition of the church. And, “some expectations are phantom notions perpetuated across decades without any test of validity or rationality.”¹⁰⁹

There are a variety of sources that feed congregational expectations. One source is “group memories” such as, “We’d love it if your wife would lead our children’s ministry like Mrs. Pastor Smith did years ago.”¹¹⁰ Another source is “false assumptions.” An example of this might be a request by a congregation for the pastor’s wife to teach the largest adult class. Such requests simply are a product of the congregation’s assumption that “a minister’s vocational commitments determine his wife’s involvements in congregational life.”¹¹¹ A helpful suggestion given by London and Wiseman for addressing unrealistic requests of the pastor’s wife is to ask a decision group (some individuals who are leaders of and know the congregation well), “Does everyone agree?” This will often reveal the request came from an individual or minority and may be negotiated without offending the majority of the congregation or placing undue strain on the pastor’s wife.¹¹² “Desperate congregational needs” can also be a source of congregational expectations:

We hope your wife has musical ability. It would be so nice to hear the organ again. The organ has not been played since Mary Alice moved to Dallas three years ago.¹¹³

The authors go on to recognize that while a congregation may need a church musician or a women’s group leader, the request may merely represent a hope of the congregation

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 140-141.

¹¹³ Ibid., 141.

rather than a demand.¹¹⁴ “Limited perspective by laypersons “may be expressed in congregational expectations. The congregation may say, “We hope you take part in community events as a way to attract new people.” This may be a way to communicate the congregation’s desire for better visibility in the community through the new pastor and his family or a desire to be proud of the minister’s community conduct that would reflect well on the congregation. Or, it may simply express the congregation’s desire that the new minister and his family are friendly and will be warmly embraced by the community.¹¹⁵ Congregational expectations may even come from “outspoken malcontents.” These may be received from a “helpful” individual making a comment like: “My dear, I know you’re new here, so you didn’t know that there are times you’ll find casual dress to be, well, *too* casual.” [emphasis theirs].¹¹⁶ London and Wiseman remind their readers:

Grumblers need to be loved, even though they create problems in the church. They should be accepted but not taken seriously when they vent opinions and promote distortions.¹¹⁷

This is not an exhaustive list of sources for congregational expectations. This list does give an idea of the variety of sources as well as some strategies for addressing them in a helpful manner. London and Wiseman include a comment expressing a woman’s personal frustration about all the discussion about expectations as well as a balanced response:

One woman of God from the Midwest recently suggested in a pastors/wives’ meeting, “I think it’s time to give the word ‘expectations’ a needed rest. We are drowning in rhetoric about this issue and don’t have energy for anything else.”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 142.

Though she may be right about too much discussion and not enough action, to suspend the talk does not eliminate the mounting pressure that easily accelerates into explosive proportions.¹¹⁸

London and Wiseman have enhanced their book with salutes by selected pastors for their wives. The authors also encourage pastors and their wives to read the book. In fact, the authors make the suggestion that each use a different color of highlighter and even provide space in the book for husband and wife to write notes to each other for later discussion.¹¹⁹

Books Focusing on Marriage/Relationships

Gary Thomas teaches at Western Seminary and has written several books as well as numerous articles focusing on spiritual formation. In this book *Sacred Marriage*, Thomas asks the question: What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?¹²⁰ This book does not specifically address the role of the pastor's wife. But, in light of the contributions of London and Wiseman in *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, it helps flesh out the understanding of the marriage relationship context in which the pastor's wife is making many of her valuable contributions to the pastoral ministry through support of the pastor as well as direct involvement. It helps provide a healthy balance for the perspective found in much of Christian history "that has unofficially ...considered married believers to be 'second-class Christians' who compromised their integrity..."¹²¹ This can provide a most helpful perspective to the married couple in pastoral ministry.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁰ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

¹²¹ Ibid., 20.

In addition to Gary Thomas' book, there are other books relating to marriage that provide general reference for this topic.¹²² These books do not deal specifically with pastors and their wives but do address the area of marriage in a manner that will be valuable to the ministry couple.

William Doherty's *Take Back Your Marriage* looks at three themes as they relate to establishing healthy marriages: powerful commitment, rituals of intentional marriage, and connections to community.¹²³ This book is written from a more research-based position rather than from a biblically based focus. Doherty shares a memorable line from the play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson. The healer in the play describes himself as a "Binder of What Clings. You got to find out if they cling first." And then he offers these words, which become a refrain: "You can't bind what don't cling."¹²⁴ Doherty then presents the book as a way for couples to cling. Dr. Dan Zink, associate professor of counseling at Covenant Theological Seminary, makes the following comment, "I think the connections issues are crucial for all marriages, but especially for ministry folks who have so much competing for their time and focus."¹²⁵ Doherty said of the book:

I wrote this book because I believe the core social and personal challenge of our time is how to make loving, permanent marriage work for ourselves and our children.¹²⁶

Doherty speaks of the importance of commitment, especially in our consumer culture. Doherty points out various benefits that research has shown to be related to

¹²² Zink, Dan. e-mail, March 5, 2008. Dr. Daniel Zink is a professor in practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He specializes in pastoral counseling.

¹²³ Doherty, William J. *Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World That Pulls Us Apart*. (paperback ed. New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 9.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁵ Zink, e-mail.

¹²⁶ Doherty, *Take Back Your Marriage*, 7.

marriage, such as the tendency of married people to live longer, have more money, fewer bad habits like smoking and excessive drinking, and be happier and healthier physically and psychologically.¹²⁷ He goes on to point out that the research:

...makes it clear that marriage confers important benefits on individuals, benefits that increase over the years, and not just that healthier people are the ones who get married in the first place. These benefits occur for both men and women, contrary to the popular misconception that marriage benefits men but not women.¹²⁸

In light of these compelling benefits of sustained marriage commitment, the research also shows, "...these same benefits do not show up in cohabitating couples, except for cohabitating couples who are engaged to be married."¹²⁹ Doherty points out, "In a me-first world, marriage is a we-first contradiction."¹³⁰ He identifies two types of commitment in marriage. The first he calls "commitment-as-long-as", meaning commitment to remain together as long as things are working out for each individual.¹³¹ This is reflected in the increasingly popular change of the wedding vows to remain married "as long as we both shall *love*." The other kind of commitment is dubbed "commitment-no-matter-what", meaning commitment that "combines elements of traditional religious and moral commitments with newer elements that recognize that marriage must be an intentional process of shared maintenance and renewal."¹³²

This kind of commitment is consistent with the traditional wording of the wedding vows that commit to marriage "as long as we both shall *live*." However, he argues it is not commitment alone that results in healthy marriages, stating, "Commitment

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹³¹ Ibid., 21.

¹³² Ibid.

without intentionality leads to stable but stale marriage. Intentionality without commitment leads to lively marriage that cannot endure bad weather.”¹³³

Doherty notes that courtship is intentional:

We fall in love through rituals of connection and intimacy – courtship rituals like romantic dinners, long talks, riding bicycles or going skiing, going for walks, exchanging gifts, talking every night on the telephone.¹³⁴

After the wedding, couples often decline in the amount of such rituals and become less intentional about their relationships. Doherty defines an intentional marriage as one in which the partners are conscious, deliberate, and make plans about maintaining and building their commitment and connection over the years.¹³⁵ In fact, he says intentional marriage is “about everyday attention and long-range planning.”¹³⁶ However, Doherty goes on to share:

One of the paradoxes of married life, after the first couple of honeymoon years, is that we generally stop asking each other and telling about important personal matters such as these [elements of self-disclosure]. It’s as if we stand too close together to really see each other as fully separate people. We assume we understand and then lose our curiosity about the mystery of the other person.¹³⁷

Commitment and rituals are important to the health of a good marriage. But Doherty paraphrases the poet John Donne and says, “...no marriage is an island, apart from the shore.”¹³⁸ Some cultures, communities, and families are better at this than others. But most couples are isolated. In fact, Doherty says, “After the wedding, our marriages tend to be invisible in our faith communities, unless we get a divorce.”¹³⁹ And on a more personal level, he points out, “For the most part, we know our friends’

¹³³ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 146.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 159.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 22.

birthdays better than their wedding anniversaries, and we celebrate the birthdays more.”¹⁴⁰ The kind of support Doherty is encouraging is not always going to be the feel-good variety, sometimes it will be a stubborn refusal to give up on a friend’s marriage.¹⁴¹ It is more common to have input into our parenting than direct input into the health of our marriage relationship.¹⁴²

Marriages used to be more community-based with community interaction with the couple. In the Hispanic culture of New Mexico, there is a cultural equivalent of godparents in which a couple shepherds a young couple in the rites of passage as well as later relationship of marriage.¹⁴³ Doherty offers some suggestions for couples in North America to begin to develop a supportive community for their marriages. He suggests being more open with trusted individuals by speaking of your marriage (starting generally and getting more specific and intimate as trust is built).¹⁴⁴ Doherty encourages couples to ask other couples how they are doing, ask about the experience of passing through various stages of marriage, and ask mature, successful couples for secrets of longevity.¹⁴⁵ Doherty suggests that if a couple is close to another, they should suggest the four of them meet to check in on how each marriage is doing.¹⁴⁶ Doherty also suggests attending marriage-education events. He points out that other couples at such events are interested in marriage and may offer the potential for developing supportive relationships.¹⁴⁷ Doherty shares several ideas about what the supportive communities can do for married

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 159-160.

¹⁴² Ibid., 160.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 165.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 167-168.

couples: they can provide mentors, crisis help, support for public rituals to encourage marriage health and function in the role of a traditional support group.¹⁴⁸

Another recommended book on marriage in general is *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John Gottman.¹⁴⁹ Gottman, who is Jewish,¹⁵⁰ includes some biblical perspective, but primarily writes from the perspective of his years of clinical research. In fact, Gottman claims he can:

...predict whether a couple will stay happily together or lose their way. I can make this prediction after listening to the couple interact in our Love Lab for as little as five minutes! My accuracy rate in these predictions averages 91 percent over three separate studies. In other words, in 91 percent of the cases where I have predicted that a couple's marriage would eventually fail or succeed, time has proven me right. These predictions are not based on my intuition or preconceived notions of what marriage "should" be, but on the data I've accumulated over years of study.¹⁵¹

Gottman says of happily married couples:

...in their day-to-day lives, they have hit upon a dynamic that keeps their negative thoughts and feelings about each other (which all couples have) from overwhelming their positive ones.¹⁵²⁻

Gottman continues,

The more emotionally intelligent a couple – the better able they are to understand, honor, and respect each other and their marriage – the more likely they will indeed live happily ever after.¹⁵³

Gottman uses the term "emotional intelligence" to mean a person is in touch with his or her emotions as well as being able to understand and get along with others.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 168-170.

¹⁴⁹ Gottman Ph.D., John and Nan Silver. *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 265.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵² Ibid., 3.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

In light of his research data, Gottman observes, “Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that communication – and more specifically, learning to resolve your conflicts is the royal road to romance and an enduring, happy marriage.”¹⁵⁵

Marriage counseling, with its focus on communication, almost universally adopts one form or another of a technique called “active listening.”¹⁵⁶ The therapist usually encourages the couple to divide into roles of speaker and listener. The speaker then voices his or her complaints in the form of “I” statements that are not to attack or accuse the listener directly. The listener then reflects back what he or she has heard. The listener is to reflect the content of the speech as well as validate the emotions conveyed. This is to communicate respect and empathy. “I hear you” is a common active-listening buzz word.¹⁵⁷ What is not as well known as this methodology itself is that its origins come from Carl Rogers and are adapted from techniques developed for use by psychoanalysts in individual psychotherapy¹⁵⁸ Gottman says, “The problem is that it doesn’t work.”¹⁵⁹ He notes that a spouse trying to practice this methodology is not a therapist listening to a patient whine about a third party. The problem is that the person the listening spouse hears being trashed behind all those “I” statements is the listening spouse.¹⁶⁰ It is quite difficult for the average person to respond graciously. Gottman goes on to say, “Active listening asks couples to perform Olympic-level emotional gymnastics when their relationship can barely walk.”¹⁶¹ He adds:

After studying some 650 couples and tracking the fate of their marriages for up to fourteen years, we now understand that this approach to counseling doesn’t work,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

not just because it's nearly impossible for most couples to do well, but more importantly because *successful conflict resolution isn't what makes marriages succeed*. One of the most startling findings of our research is that most couples who have maintained happy marriages rarely do anything that even partly resembles active listening when they're upset.[emphasis his]¹⁶²

Gottman has discovered through his research of hundreds of couples the simple truth that happy marriages are based on deep friendship.¹⁶³ He goes on to say:

By this I mean a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other's company. These couples tend to know each other intimately – they are well versed in each other's likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes, and dreams. They have an abiding regard for each other and express this fondness not just in the big ways but in little ways day in and day out.¹⁶⁴

Gottman talks about “positive sentiment override.” “This means that their positive thoughts about each other and their marriage are so pervasive that they tend to supersede their negative feelings.”¹⁶⁵ He notes:

It takes a much more significant conflict for them to lose their equilibrium as a couple than it would otherwise. Their positivity causes them to feel optimistic about each other and their marriage, to assume positive things about their lives together, and to give each other the benefit of the doubt.¹⁶⁶

Gottman shares seven principles that make marriage work. He mentions that couples use “repair attempt” to diffuse tension between them. Repair attempt “refers to any statement or action – silly or otherwise – that prevents negativity from escalating out of control.”¹⁶⁷ Gottman then states, “Most marital arguments cannot be resolved.”¹⁶⁸ He continues:

Couples spend year after year trying to change each other's mind – but it can't be done. This is because most of their disagreements are rooted in fundamental

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 23.

differences of lifestyle, personality, or values. By fighting over these differences, all they succeed in doing is wasting their time and harming their marriage.¹⁶⁹

Gottman does not suggest that a couple accept that there is nothing they can do about conflict. He suggests an attitude similar that of the serenity prayer: “Lord, grant me grace to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can change, and the wisdom to know the difference.” He suggests couples approach the irreconcilable differences the way they would bad back or trick knee.

Gottman’s seven principles are: “Enhance your love maps; Nurture Your Fondness and Admiration; Turn Toward Each Other Instead of Away; Let Your Partner Influence You; Solve Your Solvable Problems; Overcome Gridlock; and Create Shared Meaning.” The following are a few of the key points in these seven principles. “Love map” is Gottman’s “term for that part of your brain where you store all the relevant information about your partner’s life.”¹⁷⁰ With the healthy foundation of a rich love map, couples are able to face radical changes in their marriage, such as the birth of a child, empty nest, etc., because they are in the habit of staying in touch with each other’s world and thinking.

The fondness and admiration system means that the couple retains some fundamental sense that the other is worthy of being respected and even liked.¹⁷¹ Gottman says, “If a couple still has a functioning fondness and admiration system, their marriage is salvageable.”¹⁷² This is true even if the marriage has some serious other problems.

Gottman shares the importance of letting spouses letting one another influence them, especially for men:

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 63.

In our long-term study of 130 newlywed couples, now in its eighth year, we have found that, even in the first few months of marriage, men who allow their wives to influence them have happier marriages and are less likely to divorce than men who resist their wives' influence. Statistically speaking, when a man is not willing to share power with his partner, there is an 81 percent chance that his marriage will self-destruct.¹⁷³

Gottman talks about the two kinds of marital conflict: solvable and unsolvable or perpetual. The unsolvable problems are rooted in each spouse's fundamental differences of lifestyle, personality, or values. Since they are by nature unsolvable, the couple must adapt to their presence in the marriage relationship...to agree to disagree. The couple should make every effort to solve the solvable problems. In overcoming gridlock, the goal is not to solve the problem but rather to move from gridlock to dialogue [working on the problem].¹⁷⁴ Under creating shared meanings, Gottman says:

The more you can agree about the fundamentals in life, the richer, more meaningful, and in a sense easier your marriages is likely to be. You certainly can't force yourselves to have the same deeply held views. But some coming together on these issues is likely to occur naturally if you are open to each other's perspectives. *A crucial goal of any marriage, therefore, is to create an atmosphere that encourages each person to talk honestly about his or her convictions.* The more you speak candidly and respectfully with each other, the more likely there is to be a blending of your sense of meaning. [emphasis his]¹⁷⁵

Gottman concludes his book with an encouragement to apply his seven principles. He offers couples a valuable approach with helpful suggestions for improving their marriage.

Gottman also authored another recommended book, *The Relationship Cure*, which deals with relationships in general. This book may be applied in the contexts of marriage, family, and even church. In this book, Gottman looks at what he calls the "bid,"

¹⁷³ Ibid., 100.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 217.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 245.

which is “the fundamental unit of emotional communication.”¹⁷⁶ He goes on to define the bid and response:

A bid can be a question, a gesture, a look, a touch – any single expression that says, “I want to feel connected to you.” A response to a bid is just that – a positive or negative answer to somebody’s request for emotional connection.¹⁷⁷

In healthy marriages, husbands and wives disregard their spouse’s bids less than 20 percent of the time. While in marriages headed for divorce, husbands disregard their wives bids for connection 82 percent of the time and wives act preoccupied with other activities when their husbands bid for their attention 50 percent of the time.¹⁷⁸ Gottman points out that such failure is rarely malicious or mean-spirited. He says more often people are simply unaware or insensitive to other’s bids for our attention.¹⁷⁹ The result is loneliness:

They feel lonely despite their proximity to many significant people in their lives – lovers, spouses, friends, children, parents, siblings, and coworkers. Often they seem surprised and greatly disappointed at the deterioration of their relationships.¹⁸⁰

Gottman observes, “Complex, fulfilling relationships don’t suddenly appear in our lives fully formed. Rather they develop one encounter at a time.”¹⁸¹ He continues:

If you could carefully observe and analyze those encounters – as my research colleagues and I have done – you would see how each one is made up of smaller exchanges. There’s a bid and a response to that bid. Like cells of the body or bricks of a house, such exchanges are the primary components of emotional communication. Each exchange contains emotional information that can strengthen or weaken connection between people.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸² Ibid., 6-7.

Positive responses to a bid usually lead to continued interaction, but a negative response typically shuts down emotional communication. Individuals will stop making bids.¹⁸³ As Gottman continues, he spends some time looking at these “turning points: the choices we make in responding to bids” and identifies three categories of possible response. The first is “turning toward,” which means to react in a positive way to another’s bids for emotional connection.¹⁸⁴ The second category is “turning against.” People who turn against other’s bids for connection may be described as belligerent or argumentative. “Turning against” often involves sarcasm or ridicule.¹⁸⁵ Gottman observes:

Interestingly, the married couples in our study who habitually displayed this behavior did not divorce as quickly as couples whose main habit of interaction was for one partner to turn away. But eventually the majority of them did split up.¹⁸⁶

The third category of response to bids is “turning away.” This pattern of relating generally involves ignoring another’s bid, or acting preoccupied.¹⁸⁷ Individuals who encounter unrequited turning to their bids rarely re-bid and simply fade away from conversations. In marriages, this usually signals impending divorce.¹⁸⁸ Gottman observes that when people don’t have the ability to bid effectively or to respond to other’s bids such failures can prevent the development of emotional connections or even cause the deterioration of existing connections.¹⁸⁹

Gottman introduces five steps to strengthen relationships. Some key concepts will be noted. The first is look at one’s own bids for connection. Gottman observes:

¹⁸³ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

By choosing to turn toward, turn away, or turn against each other's bids for connection – no matter how ordinary or small – they established a foundation that could determine the future success or failure of their relationships.¹⁹⁰

Gottman advises the readers, "If you want to build a deeper emotional connection with somebody, turn toward that person as often as you can."¹⁹¹ Turning away from an emotional bid for connection often occurs in preoccupied, disregarding or interrupting responses. This raises the question, "Are they being intentionally disregarding, or are they simply being mindless?" People generally do not respond by turning away out of mean-spiritedness but rather from operating on "automatic pilot."¹⁹² Gottman's research has shown that habitually turning away can eventually destroy relationships.¹⁹³

Gottman says we need to examine our emotional heritage. Gottman has included in his research on relationships an investigation into past emotional experiences. He asked individuals questions about their past, such as, "How did your parents let you know that you were loved?"¹⁹⁴ He continues:

By "emotional heritage," I mean the way we were treated in the past, and the way such treatment made us feel. It includes the way people close to us acted when they were angry, sad, happy, or fearful – what they said, what they didn't say.¹⁹⁵

Gottman shows how important emotional experience is. He says scientists are finding:

... yesterday's feelings influence our ability to make and keep emotional connections today. If we want to have relationships that are more meaningful in the future, it helps to have some insight about the past.¹⁹⁶

Gottman points out that a family's philosophy of emotions is also important. He refers to the collective beliefs and feelings about feelings as one's philosophy of emotion.¹⁹⁷ This

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹² Ibid., 45.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 136.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 138.

flows out of the specific culture of one's family of origin. Gottman also points out that our emotional heritage includes the response to surviving painful events and relationships that often contain elements of loss, betrayal, abuse, or trauma. These experiences leave us with "emotional vulnerabilities."¹⁹⁸ Being able to be present in one's current relationships will enable the person to focus on them in order to improve their quality.

Gottman encourages people to sharpen their emotional communication skills. People use forms of emotional communication when they express, read, and turn toward one another's feelings. These forms include a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues including but not limited to: facial expressions, movement, gesture, touch, tone of voice, descriptive words, and metaphors.¹⁹⁹ Learning basic listening skills that foster better emotional communication is helpful in two ways:

...first, to become more aware of the way you may use these channels to express your own feelings, and, second, to become more aware of the way those around you use them, so you can recognize and respond to other's emotions through the bidding process.²⁰⁰

Psychologists say one's feelings "leak" through. That is, no matter how much most people try to conceal their emotions, their true feelings usually become evident.²⁰¹ In fact, studies have shown,

...most people trust nonverbal cues more than they trust one another's words...they relied only 7 percent on the spoken word. But they relied 38 percent on elements such as tone of voice and pace of speech. And they relied 55 percent on facial expressions and other body language.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 145.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 160.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 169.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 171.

²⁰² Ibid.

Gottman points out the importance of shared meaning. Shared meaning is the common ground individuals share even if they have significant areas of disagreement. The greater the shared meaning between individuals, the more stability can exist in their relationship. Gottman shares three ways we can achieve shared meaning:

One way is to recognize that conflict often stems from people's idealism. If we can uncover the ideals hidden within another's position in a conflict, we can often find common meaning. Another way to achieve shared meaning is to talk about our dreams and aspirations, fostering one another's support for these quests. And, finally, we can achieve shared meaning through the use of rituals – that is, regularly engaging in meaningful activities that draw people together emotionally.²⁰³

With regard to idealism, many people in our culture believe that having a conflict with another person (such as in a marriage) indicates something fundamentally wrong with the relationship.²⁰⁴ However, in Gottman's studies, 69 percent of all marital conflicts never go away. These irresolvable conflicts seem to stem from the individuals being idealists who choose to take different stands based on different understandings of what things mean.²⁰⁵ Talking about the uncovered ideal is fruitful ground to gain better understanding of one another, which can build emotional connection. In regard to the future, Gottman suggests his readers become dream detectors. He says his research shows that people form much more positive emotional connections when they encourage one another's dreams and aspirations.²⁰⁶ He later comments, "Digging into each other's hidden agendas or hidden dreams offers a tremendous potential for intimacy and emotional connection."²⁰⁷ And, Gottman points out, "The trick to uncovering that potential is to stop trying to resolve the conflict. Instead, talk about the meaning your position holds for

²⁰³ Ibid., 207.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 207-208.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 209.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

you.”²⁰⁸ Then, in addition to talking about your ideals and dreams, shared meaning can be increased through sharing rituals. Gottman clarifies:

Rituals have symbolic meaning. Brushing your teeth in the morning is a routine, kissing your kids good-bye as you leave is a ritual. The difference is, the kiss carries the meaning, while tooth-brushing does not. The kiss says, “I love you, and I’ll think about you, even when we’re apart.”²⁰⁹

Gottman includes in this book an extensive chapter (77 pages) devoted to taking the five principles he has shared and applying them in different contexts. This book, *The Relationship Cure*, could be a useful tool for the pastor’s wife as she considers the relationships in her life.

Another book on relationships, *Safe People*,²¹⁰ was highly recommended by Diane Langberg to the participants of the Pastors Summit as one of the most important books on relationships for people today. This book explores the topic of how to find safe relationships while avoiding those that are unsafe. The book addresses such challenges as how to pick better friends, how to avoid friends who let you down, how to avoid attracting irresponsible people, and helps the reader investigate why they are drawn to the wrong people. The book is divided into three sections. The first section looks at unsafe people. The second asks the reader to assess whether or not she attracts unsafe people. The third then looks at safe people.

The authors describe safe people:

Safe people are individuals who draw us closer to being the people God intended us to be. Though not perfect, they are “good enough” in their own character that

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 221.

²¹⁰ Cloud, Dr. Henry and Dr. John Townsend. *Safe People: How to Find Relationships That Are Good for You and Avoid Those That Aren't*. Grand Rapids, MI 49530: Zondervan, 1995.

the net effect of their presence in our lives is positive. They are accepting, honest, and present, and they help us bear good fruit in our lives.²¹¹

In their work as therapists, the authors have seen people working out their God-designed need for others in unhealthy ways. When they reach out to others and are hurt or disappointed, it often encourages them to “retreat into their shell” and deny their need for others. This book is designed to enable the reader to look inside as well as outside of themselves in order to more accurately evaluate relationships.

Unsafe people come in three broad categories: the abandoners, the critics, and the irresponsibles.²¹² Cloud and Townsend shared eleven character traits of unsafe people. The authors point out that there are positive traits that are opposite of these eleven and found in safe people. An example of one of the traits of unsafe people is that they only apologize instead of changing their behavior. The authors say, “The truth is...sorry is as sorry does.”²¹³ They later share an example of the opposite behavior in a man who never repeated hurtful behavior once he became aware of it. “When he says he is sorry, he means it, and he changes.”²¹⁴

Cloud and Townsend also share nine interpersonal traits of unsafe people. They explain:

While personal traits describe “who we are,” interpersonal traits describe “how we connect.” These interpersonal traits are about how people operate in relationships, how they move close or pull away, and how they build up or destroy.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Ibid., 11.

²¹² Ibid., 21.

²¹³ Ibid., 33.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

One interpersonal trait of unsafe people is that they avoid closeness instead of connecting.²¹⁶ The authors said, “You need to question long-term relationships in which you do not get to know the other person.”²¹⁷ The authors suggest that you ask yourself, “Does this relationship breed more togetherness or more isolation within me? If you feel alone in the relationship, that’s not a good sign.” They continue to encourage the reader to look at themselves first to see whether there is some block inside the reader due to his or her own fears.²¹⁸ The authors said,

There are many reasons that we pick unsafe people. And it’s good for us to look at those reasons, for they are all essentially issues of the spiritual life that the Bible commands us to look at anyway. Look at the list again: inability to judge character, isolation, false hope, unfaced badness, merger wishes, fear of confrontation, romanticizing, rescuing, familiarity, victim roles, guilt, perfectionism, repetition, and denial. These are all issues that the Bible deals with very directly and tells us to face as part of our sanctification process.²¹⁹

The authors spend some time in the book looking at false solutions we attempt in order to “fix” our relationship problems. They look at seven “doings.” They said, “These ‘doings’ are activities and attitudes that seem to promise hope for safe relationships. Yet in reality, they cause conflicts, hurt, and isolation.”²²⁰ The authors point out that “many people stay in dysfunctional arenas because they are afraid of relationship.”²²¹ The authors look at reasons that people isolate themselves from others. One example is perfectionism. If the perfection is expected in others then the person will not be able to find a perfect person. If the perfection is in his or her own self, the person will fear relationships because their faults may be discovered and the illusion of perfection will be dashed.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 108.

²²⁰ Ibid., 111-112.

²²¹ Ibid., 117.

The authors look at safe people in the third section of the book. A safe relationship does three things: draws us closer to God; draws us closer to others; and helps us to become the real person God created us to be.²²² God created us to be in community. The authors point out that relating to others is a spiritual activity.²²³ The authors spend time showing where to find safe people as well as on how to become a safe person, and discuss how to decide whether to repair or replace a relationship. The authors take relationships very seriously and do not encourage ending them prematurely.

Safe People could be useful to “pastors’ wives” who struggle with relationships. This book could be a tool to facilitate better personal health as well as the ability to choose individuals with whom she could develop safe relationships.

Books Written By Pastors’ Wives

There is a helpful group of books written by pastors’ wives from a personal perspective. Nancy Pannell has been a minister’s wife for thirty-five years and is a popular speaker at family and marriage enrichment seminars and a contributor to numerous magazines, including *Home Life* and *Church Training*. In her book, *Being a Minister’s Wife and Being Yourself*, Pannell addresses raising children in a ministry setting, husband-and-wife interactions, as well as dealing with members of the congregation and other staff couples. In her final chapter, she makes the following observation:

There are many happy by-products of being “in ministry,” but the best part, the most joyful part, is *loving people and being loved in return*. Admittedly, one doesn’t have to be in “the ministry” to know the joy of loving and being loved.

²²² Ibid., 143.

²²³ Ibid., 147.

But, we in full-time ministry have the opportunity, perhaps, to come in contact in a more intimate way with more people. [emphasis hers]²²⁴

The book contains discussion and study questions for personal or group use, and could be a useful resource for pastors' wives.

Other books falling into the personal-experience category are those by Lorna Dobson,²²⁵ Gail MacDonald,²²⁶ Ruth Hollinger Senter²²⁷ and Ruth Truman.²²⁸ Lorna Dobson is the wife of a pastor who has had varying ministries. They have been in ministry for over thirty years. She wrote her book, *I'm More than a Pastor's Wife*, in 1995, then due to personal growth and the interest of others, revised the book in 2003. Dobson addresses the validity of focusing on "pastors' wives:"

The issues pastors' wives and their families face are often the same as people in the congregation face, with some added pressures. Many people in our congregation live more difficult lives than we do; however, our commonalities related to our husbands' calling and occupation give us reasons to address issues unique to our lives.²²⁹

Dobson also speaks to those who would "kick against the goad" of the role of "pastor's wife:"

All people, including pastors' wives, want to be liked for who they are, not for a label, and not for their use in advancing another's cause. However, for a pastor's wife to deny that she is identified with her husband's work or to try to "fix" everyone's thinking to her liking is a waste of energy. We all would do well to take ourselves less seriously and to ease our demands for recognition. It is far better to look for the humorous side of people's reactions toward your identity

²²⁴ Nancy Pannell, *Being a Minister's Wife and Being Yourself* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 151.

²²⁵ Lorna Dobson, *I'm More than the Pastor's Wife*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

²²⁶ MacDonald, Gail. *High Call, High Privilege*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998).

²²⁷ Senter, Ruth Hollinger, *So You're the Pastor's Wife* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1979).

²²⁸ Ruth Truman, *Underground Manual For Minister's Wives and Other Bewildered Women* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974; repr., Lincoln, NE: Authors Choice Press an imprint of iUniverse.com Inc, 2001).

²²⁹ Dobson, *I'm More than the Pastor's Wife*, 13.

and to realize that you may have the wrong perception of what others think you should be.²³⁰

Along with other issues, Dobson speaks to the issue of friendships:

Balancing friendliness with friendships is an area with which wives of ministers must deal. Some are hurt or betrayed by church members they thought to be friends. Nearly half of the women I surveyed say they feel a frustration in changing or developing friendships because of their husband's occupation.²³¹

Dobson later says:

Whenever I hear that couples preparing for ministry are taught not to be too involved with special friends, my gut feeling is that this is illogical. If the Bible says to "love one another deeply" (1 Peter 1:22), then one must acknowledge that surface relationships do not love deeply, nor do they hold the loved one accountable. It is not enough to tell churchgoers to practice this principle and not live it out in our own lives!²³²

Dobson suggests that seminary is a good time to establish friendships.²³³ However, for those who did not develop friendships in seminary, she suggests starting a support group and gives some valuable suggestions for doing so. Dobson adds action points at the end of each chapter to encourage her suggestions to be put into practice. The book also has an appendix listing resources.

Gail MacDonald has been a minister's wife for thirty-eight years (at the time the book was published). As one reads her book, *High Call, High Privilege*, it becomes obvious that she is a woman who has faced incredible challenges, hurts, and opportunities and yet the focus of the book is taken from a talk she heard a missionary give in which he said, "Untended fires soon die and become just a pile of ashes."²³⁴ She takes this imagery and uses it as a metaphor for tending one's personal, intimate relationship with Jesus.

²³⁰ Ibid., 39.

²³¹ Ibid., 45-46.

²³² Ibid., 46.

²³³ Ibid., 47.

²³⁴ MacDonald, *High Call, High Privilege*, 2.

This is a theme that runs throughout the book. She mentions in the introduction that it is important to keep both treasure (the gospel) and the earthen vessels (us) in view when presenting such a tale as her life has been.²³⁵ She is faithful to do just that. She chronicles her life and the major themes she has learned from her experiences in the ministry. At their first church in a small rural town in Kansas while her husband was in seminary, in addition to learning about God's provision they learned that "presence is far more important than words"²³⁶ in times of grief. MacDonald talks about the difference between hospitality and entertainment: "Hospitality is a safe place; entertainment is a show place..."²³⁷ MacDonald also speaks to an issue associated with expectations when she says,

True guilt occurs when we've broken God's laws. False guilt erupts when we or others set up unattainable or superficial expectations of ourselves that even our Lord would not have attempted. Frankly, that's exactly what I was doing. I had the growing inner sense of being trapped. I was, in Henri Nouwen's words, becoming "a prisoner of people's expectations rather than being liberated by the Divine promises."²³⁸

Among other helpful topics she addresses, MacDonald gives some good insights into the area of friendship. She begins the chapter with a quote by Kahler: "Those are our best friends in whose presence we are able to be our best selves."²³⁹ MacDonald notes that as a pastor's wife entering into friendships, she felt like she always had to be *Mrs. Strength*:

But when you are seen *only* as *Mrs. Strength*, who out there imagines that they have anything to give back to you? Therein may lie the core of the reason why ministry wives have so often felt a stifling loneliness. Friendships are based on

²³⁵ Ibid., xi.

²³⁶ Ibid., 25.

²³⁷ Ibid., 36.

²³⁸ Ibid., 40.

²³⁹ Ibid., 149.

some sense of reciprocity. If I am all *give* and no *take*, then how can there be friendship? [emphasis hers]²⁴⁰

MacDonald points out that nurturing personalities can become controlling individuals and looks at what Jacob's wife, Rebecca, did in her family. She then relates it to friendship:

When I insist on being the *giver* in every relationship, I run the risk of becoming a controlling person. I now see the possibility of this as a rather serious shortcoming. I look back and see that there were times when I could have fallen into that trap.²⁴¹

However, once a woman realizes her need for friendship and the reciprocity it provides, she must be committed to paying the price in order to get it:

The fact is that friendships take time...prime time. They are not developed in the backwater of time left over from other things when we are exhausted, distracted, and disinterested. You've got to desire a friendship so badly that you're willing to set aside other things to develop it and maintain it. In earlier days, Gordon and I did not see the need for this.²⁴²

When thinking about seeking out friendships, MacDonald suggests that a person ask the following questions:

...First, ask yourself, *Am I prepared to be the kind of person a friendship requires? Do I want to have a friend more than be one?* A greeting card I once received put it this way: *You have the quality I like the most in a person. Inside: You like me.* As Lila Troutman, the wife of Dawson Troutman, founder of the Navigators, once underscored, "Never enter a life except to build." If this is our mind-set, others will delight in our friendship.

Secondly, ask, *Do I have the time to pursue common interests which engender deep friendships?* C.S. Lewis once said, "Lovers are normally face-to-face absorbed in each other, friends side-by-side, absorbed in some common interest."...A third question you need to ask yourself is the deepest and hardest to answer: *Am I prepared to take human weakness into account – mine and hers, when pursuing a friend?* [emphasis hers]²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 151.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 152.

²⁴² Ibid., 153.

²⁴³ Ibid., 156-157.

Having shared all the challenges and adversity she has faced, MacDonald still ends the book, "...ministry and being a ministry wife really is a high call and a high privilege."²⁴⁴ MacDonald's book keeps both the treasure and the jars of clay in view to the glory of God.

Ruth Hollinger Senter is a pastor's wife who is also a writer. She has written a number of books including a few focusing on pastors' wives. Her book, *So You're the Pastor's Wife* (it was later revised as *The Guilt-Free Book for Pastors' Wives*), speaks to several topics relevant to this study. About the "hats" she wears or, in other words, the roles she plays in life she says:

Although life calls for many changes of hats, the person under the hat is far more important than the hat itself. It is when I change as a person, depending on which hat I'm wearing, that I've lost sight of who I really am. It's when I make the hat my whole person that the true me gets covered up.

My role as a pastor's wife is not all there is of me. It is a very important hat that I wear, but it is not the only one. The same is true of my roles as a mother, daughter, sister, friend, teacher, writer. They are my functions in life. They are the parts God's script has assigned me. But they are not my identity. My external functions are not the internal me. My personality, my temperament, my attitudes, my feelings are the real me. Who I am is what God has given me. *My roles are what I choose to do with those gifts.*[emphasis mine]²⁴⁵

Senter continues to explain the relationship of roles and identity:

Perhaps it is time to remove our role hats and take a good look at the person under the hat. Perhaps it is time we allow what we are to determine how we function rather than allowing how we function to determine what we are. *The solution is not to forget roles, but to be the person God designed us to be. Only then will we know what to do with the functions that life calls us to fill.*[emphasis mine]²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 199.

²⁴⁵ Senter, *So You're the Pastor's Wife*, 22-23.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

As Senter shares about one of the most effective pastors' wives she knows, she says,
 "She knew what to do with her roles in life because she knew what to do with herself."²⁴⁷

Senter later addresses what often is the motivation for "playing the role" of
 "pastor's wife:"

Another reason we may work hard to keep up the fairy-tale myth of "all's well on the Christian front" is that we fear rejection. We are not sure how people will feel about us if they know we get angry and yell at our kids sometimes. We're not sure how they will respond to our saying, "I'm sorry. I was wrong about that." Or, "I shouldn't have done that." And so we tiptoe on eggshells and get sore feet, because walking on eggshells is not very comfortable. And if we're not comfortable with ourselves, there is a good chance others are not comfortable with us either.²⁴⁸

Senter speaks of the cost of fear and the benefits of taking risks:

When we live under fear of rejection, the safest place for us is in a shell. The trouble with a shell is that it keeps us from people. If we want to touch people, we have to get out of our shell and take some risks. People will not always understand. Sometimes they will criticize or jump to wrong conclusions. But in the process of our own growth, we may unearth a response in others which may have been buried deep within their own facade.²⁴⁹

Senter also speaks to the issue of loneliness and wrestles with the possible
 connection between her being busy and being lonely. She said:

As I thought about Joy's comment on my busyness, I came to the conclusion that one of the reasons I was lonely might be that I was so busy. There was always business to take care of, services to attend, projects to support, lessons to teach. I rushed by with my "hi, how are you" and smiled at people long-distance as I entered and exited from church.²⁵⁰

Later Senter continues:

Another conclusion I've come to about loneliness is that movement does not make it go away – neither does physical proximity. Loneliness is not cured by simply being with a person.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 84.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

Senter concludes “when activity becomes a substitute for intimacy, we’re lonely.”²⁵² She also looks at another possible cause, saying:

Another reason for loneliness is my predisposition to serve people. Call it genes, environmental conditioning, biblical mandate, or pastor’s-wife-itis, but it can make me a very willing giver and a very unwilling receiver. When I cannot allow another to give to me, I’ve got a one-sided relationship, and one-sided relationships can be lonely relationships.²⁵³

It is not that there are no individuals willing to listen to her or be supportive of her; it is just “more often than not, I haven’t given myself permission to use them.”²⁵⁴ Senter continues by sharing:

It took me a long time to realize that I needed a friend with whom there could be mutual load-bearing. Slowly, I began to associate my comforter-complex with loneliness. I realized that life cannot be a steady diet of being a friend to others. I needed the nourishment of allowing someone to be a friend to me.²⁵⁵

Senter exposes a myth:

There is a myth about the pastor’s wife that contributed to my lonely times during the first years of marriage. I never read it in a book or heard a seminar that was built around it, and no pastor’s wife ever spelled it out for me in terms of advice. But somewhere along the line I picked up the idea that a pastor’s wife had to be a friend to all and close companion to none. Somewhere I got the picture that the church was full of people who were just waiting for the chance to be friends with the pastor’s wife. In order to be fair to everyone and not have anyone get jealous over the fact that they were not my friend too, I would have to be friends to everyone.²⁵⁶

This myth does not take into account that it is impossible to “be friends with everyone.”

In fact, to attempt to do so is immediately to relegate all your “friendships” to superficial acquaintances rather than “nourishing relationships.”

²⁵² Ibid., 85.

²⁵³ Ibid., 86.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 87.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 87-88.

Senter became aware of another misunderstanding on her part. As a newly married person in this situation, she did not feel the loneliness immediately due to the excitement of the new marital relationship with her husband. Then, as she began to feel the loneliness and need for friendship, it seemed to somehow condemn her marriage relationship with her husband. But, Senter came to see:

Needing close friends did not detract from the value of Mark's friendship or mean that he was failing me. It just meant that I needed different kinds of friendship and that God could touch my life through many different relationships.²⁵⁷

Senter addresses another challenge to pastors' wives as she recalls an interview they once had at a church considering whether or not to call her husband to work on staff. They asked her, "Do you consider ministry *his* job or *our* job?"[emphasis hers].²⁵⁸ After some discussion of the topic, she said:

His job or our job? Each person must answer this for herself. But as far as I'm concerned, it's both. It is his job in terms of details, hours invested, amount of expertise, and physical participation. But it is our job in terms of feeling with, being interested in, asking about, listening to, observing, and supporting. To me that is the meaning of being "one flesh."²⁵⁹

This discussion along with the other issues Senter discussed make valuable contributions to this study.

Ruth Truman is a retired pastor's wife and university administrator. She earned a master's degree in counseling as well as a PhD in education while raising four children and being the wife of a minister. She has also authored several other books. In, *Underground Manual For Minister's Wives and Other Bewildered*, she speaks candidly about her experience as a pastor's wife and gives advice and suggestions freely. She writes:

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 89.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 93.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 99.

You just don't spend a life with people well until you've checked out your inner resources. Knowing yourself is the key to knowing others. It unlocks a lifetime of happiness for you, regardless of what vocation your husband is employed in because it lets you be you, secure in the knowledge that you are answering responsibly to yourself and God for your actions and words and nothing further is required. That way, if somebody else doesn't like what you're doing, you know it's his hang-up, not yours!²⁶⁰

Truman writes very openly about life in the manse and even includes an entire chapter on sex. In it she says,

Why a whole chapter devoted to sex? Is it really that important? Well, not any more important than the other chapters, perhaps, but a mite more difficult to work into the schedule and a shade more apt to be slighted by two people who lead fantastically busy lives and may take a perfunctory attitude toward the subject of procreation. All kinds of taboos still exist about this ancient human relationship, especially within the church walls. Many of us, self included, believe that sex belongs within marriage, an attitude that is almost heretical in some segments of our society. Further, ministers tend to look for wives who come from church homes with strong moral teachings. The problem is that sometimes those same homes forget to teach that sex is not only an expected but joyful part of marriage, to be entered into eagerly and with great love. If a couple comes into the ministry with hang-ups about sex already established, their private life is in for harder times than that of people in other professions because the pressures are almost all emotional. This tends to suck out the life that might be present; and along with the life the minister must constantly be giving away, a parsonage marriage has a much greater chance of drying up.²⁶¹

Truman also speaks to the challenges of raising children in the manse (PK's or "preacher's kids") and even of facing teen rebellion. The book is a bit dated (originally published in 1974 then reprinted in 2001) but still has some helpful material.

Books On Systems Theory

Another area of consideration is not specifically about the role of pastor's wife. It looks at relational dynamics. Commonly referred to as "systems theory," it is based on Bowen family systems theory. Roberta M. Gilbert, a clinical psychiatrist who expanded her work from individuals and families in the clinical setting to teaching psychotherapists

²⁶⁰ Truman, *Underground Manual for Minister's Wives*, 24.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 48.

and organizational leadership, especially the clergy, describes Bowen's way of seeing and thinking about the human phenomenon:

A superior life course, according to this theory, is based on thinking rather than feelings, which come and go. The human's best thinking, according to this theory, is based on fact, not feeling, though feelings are given a great deal of attention. The theory is based on the family as the emotional unit, not the individual, though the individual is most important to the theory. Further, it is based on observation rather than on what people think, feel or say about themselves and others.²⁶²

Gilbert further describes the theory as:

Bowen theory is formally made up of eight remarkably cohesive concepts that deal with the human family and also with the individual... To my way of thinking; seven of the eight concepts derive in a logical progression from that most foundational concept, *the family as the emotional unit*. [emphasis hers]²⁶³

Gilbert then supplies:

The eight concepts of Bowen theory, in the logical progression that builds on the family as the emotional unit are: Nuclear Family Emotional System, The Differentiation of Self Scale, Triangles, Cutoff, Family Projection Process, Multigenerational Transmission Process, Sibling Position, and Societal Emotional Process.²⁶⁴

Gilbert says, "Theoretically, all that is necessary to create an emotional system is *spending time together* [emphasis hers]."²⁶⁵ Spending time together is something which is natural to the congregation and ministry couple in pastoral ministry. Thus, a systems approach can yield valuable insights to the woman in the role of pastor's wife enabling her to better understand herself in light of her family of origin. It can also yield valuable insights into the relational dynamics existing in the congregation as well as how the relational dynamics between the congregation and the ministry couple affect her, her

²⁶² Roberta M. Gilbert M.D, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Falls Church & Basye, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 1-2.

²⁶³ Ibid., 3.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

marriage and her family. This approach can also help the woman in the role of pastor's wife to better understand herself as an individual as well as her part within existing relational systems. To put it in words used previously, this approach can help the woman to distinguish between herself as an individual and herself as the occupant of a role (i.e.: "pastor's wife") within a system.

There are several other books which should be mentioned to obtain a reasonable grasp of this systems approach within the church context. Peter L. Steinke, an internationally respected congregational systems consultant, has written several books on the topic. Two of his books, *Healthy Congregations*²⁶⁶ and *How Your Church Family Works*,²⁶⁷ seem most relevant. In them, Steinke discusses the key concepts of individuals in community. He defines a key concept for individuals, self-differentiation, as "being separate together" or "being connected selves."²⁶⁸ Another key concept related to systems is anxiety. Steinke notes:

All relationship systems become anxious. Put people together and inevitable anxiety will arise. Anxiety can be infectious. We can give it to others or catch it from them. What precisely triggers anxiety is unique to each system. common activators are significant changes or losses. They upset the stable patterns and balance of the system.²⁶⁹

Steinke describes the way anxiety can affect a system:

It has motivational power. *Anxiety provokes change. It prods and pushes us toward innovation or transformation. If, however, it reaches a certain intensity, it prevents the very change it provokes. What is stimulus becomes restraint. We "lose our head" or "cool," as we say, essentially our awareness and composure; we are too reactive to be responsive.*²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations A Systems Approach*, 2nd ed. (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006).

²⁶⁷ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006).

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

Steinke points out the system theory's view of problems:

No problem can be seen in isolation. The problem is in the whole, not the part. The system is the locus of the problem. The problem is in the interaction between the parts. The same is true for solutions and corrections.²⁷¹

Later, Steinke points out the danger of rigidity in the face of problems:

In India monkeys are captured using hollowed-out coconut shells chained to a stake. An aperture is carved out, just wide enough for a monkey's hand to go through but too narrow for a fist filled with rice to exit. The monkey is trapped by its own rigidity. As Pirsig notes, the monkey cannot understand that "freedom without rice is more valuable than capture with it."...Rigidity, therefore could be hazardous to an organization's health. When a congregation is trapped by its own resistance to change, the congregation resembles the monkey. The congregation cannot understand that openness to change is more valuable than fear of it.²⁷²

Steinke's books can provide an accessible introduction to systems theory.

How Your Church Family Works is a shorter and more accessible version of *Generation to Generation* written by Edwin H. Friedman.²⁷³ Friedman is a rabbi and family therapist who studied with Bowen and then, using his own unique perspective and insights, wrote his best-selling book. This book has given many who read it insights into the relational dynamics of their own congregations. In it he says:

It is the thesis of this book that all clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of faith, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in any one of them can produce symptoms in the others, and increased understanding of any one creates more effective functioning in all three.²⁷⁴

As Friedman considers the ramifications of systems theory for counseling, he says,

²⁷¹ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 4.

²⁷² Ibid., 73-74.

²⁷³ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, The Guilford Family Therapy Series, ed. Alan S. Gurman (New York: The Guilford Press a division of Guilford Publications Inc, 1985).

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 1.

With an organic systems model, the criterion of whom to counsel is no longer who has the symptom, but *who has the greatest capacity to bring change to the system*. [emphasis his]²⁷⁵

A key concept in the systems model is homeostasis:

As stated, family-systems thinking locates a family's problem in the nature of the system rather than in the nature of its parts. A key to that relocation is the concept of homeostasis: the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence... Family theory assumes that no matter what the various members' quirks or idiosyncrasies, if the system exists and has a name, it had to have achieved some kind of balance in order to permit the continuity necessary for maintaining its identity.²⁷⁶

As Friedman considers family theory and work systems he says,

...Of all work systems, however, the one that functions most like a family is the church or synagogue. This is true in part because it is so difficult for clergy to distinguish home life from professional life (whether or not there is a parsonage and whether or not the spouse is deeply invested), and partly because the intensity with which some lay people become invested in their religious institutions makes the church or synagogue a prime arena for the displacement of important, unresolved family issues. Interlocking emotional triangles between personal family issues and congregational family issues are the natural consequence of such displacement...

The model being developed here is more analogous to electricity. The deepest effects that work systems and family systems have on one another come from the fact that they both run on the same current, if not the identical energy source. The influence is internal rather than external. They are plugged into one another and *their respective states of homeostasis join in a new overall balance*. [emphasis his].²⁷⁷

Friedman's understanding of systems theory and its relationship to the church has profound implications for leadership within the church. Changes to the current state of a local church must be sought in changes in influential individuals within the system rather than in problem individuals.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 198.

Ronald W. Richardson, a former director of a counseling center as well as pastoral counselor and author of many books on family systems theory, has written *Creating a Healthier Church*.²⁷⁸ Richardson offers his own perspective on relational dynamics within the church and addresses leadership responses which can promote greater church health. He speaks of the impact of systems:

In the systems model, there is recognition of the connections between people. It says that people can only be understood fully within the context of their relationships. No one lives or acts in isolation, and we are all affected by each other's behavior.²⁷⁹

Richardson recognizes that systems work to maintain a balance. What unbalances a system is anxiety. He says this regarding anxiety:

Anxiety is a very uncomfortable feeling. It is more uncomfortable than fear, which is a reaction to the known. Knowing what we are afraid of gives us some sense of control. The control we usually have in fearful situations is to stay away or avoid the situation. If we are afraid of snakes, heights, closed places, angry people, or whatever, we can avoid the feared thing by keeping our distance. This ability to distance provides us with at least some sense of control for ourselves.

Anxiety is less tangible and more amorphous than fear. For this reason, we feel a lack of control. For example, when people have suffered from vague physical symptoms that doctors cannot diagnose, they feel anxious. But once the cause of the symptoms is determined, their anxiety often decreases. Even if a serious disease is diagnosed, they often feel some relief because it is a specific problem that they can work on. Their anxiety was a result of being out of control and not knowing what was going on.²⁸⁰

Within the systems, we generally think of relationships between two people. However, Richardson points out that it is more likely than not for the relationships to include three people. He speaks of triangles:

²⁷⁸ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series, ed. Howard W. Stone (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 25.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 43.

We normally think of a relationship as involving two people. But once you begin to understand the nature of emotional systems, you recognize that it is just about impossible to regard relationships as involving only two people. Any two-person relationship exists within a network of other relationships. It is difficult for any two people to maintain a one-to-one relationship for any period of time. The more differentiated they are, the longer two people can maintain a one-to-one relationship with just each other, even in conflict, without distancing or bringing in a third party. But as anxiety increases, a one-to-one relationship is harder to maintain.²⁸¹

Richardson later says,

Generally, triangles serve two purposes: (1) absorbing anxiety, and (2) covering over basic differences and conflicts in an emotional system. They keep the issues and the responsibilities fuzzy and confusing. This helps to keep anxiety at tolerable levels, as the anxiety is shifted around from one relationship to another through triangling.

Each triangle has three corners. Typically two corners are close and one is in the outside or more distant position...In relatively calm times, the two closer people will just make minor adjustments in the distance between them. They are comfortable enough in their closeness, and there is little anxiety to take outside of the relationship. When anxiety increases as more significant differences are exposed between them, either of the people in the closer twosome might become uncomfortable. The person who becomes the most uncomfortable first will make a move toward a third person.²⁸²

Richardson explains how the triangle functions:

Triangles come about when people cannot work toward this one-to-one closeness and they don't know what to do with their anxiety. People have the illusion that they are getting along with each other when they are in agreement about the third point of the triangle, whether it is a child, the church, the pastor, the church school curriculum, God, and so forth. This helps them to avoid their real differences with each other.²⁸³

Richardson's challenge to leaders is to become aware of the dynamics of system.

Leaders need to become aware of triangles. They need to be the calm influence upon the system that can lead it in a healthy direction. Ultimately, he says, "The message of this

²⁸¹ Ibid., 115.

²⁸² Ibid., 116.

²⁸³ Ibid., 128.

book is that you become a leader by becoming more fully yourself, and by managing yourself (not others), within the context of your congregation.²⁸⁴

Finally, *The Leader's Journey*²⁸⁵ offers valuable insights into the effects of systems and the family of origin on an individual. In regard to systems the authors say,

Learning to think systems means learning to ask and answer two questions: "What is my role in keeping this problem in place?" and "How can I change my role?" Thinking that the problem is out there somewhere actually *is* the problem. An old proverb has it that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, while expecting some other results. Another version affirms that if you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting. From a systems perspective, one might put it this way: "The system is perfectly designed for the present results." Someone has to take the lead in changing the system by learning to respond to anxiety rather than react to it. Someone has to think systems and watch the process. [emphasis theirs]²⁸⁶

The authors continue,

The second step in being able to respond differently is *the ability to see what is happening with clarity*. Objective observation of the emotional processes at work in the system is a major change in itself. In an anxious system, the leader tends to join others in focusing on symptoms (the complaints and problems) rather than process (the systemic issues and reactions that keep a problem in place). The symptoms, problems, issues, and people in the system get the attention of those who are unable to think systems. This second step is watching process, the ability to see the emotional processes as they play out.²⁸⁷

The authors later point out,

In *Generation to Generation*, Friedman observed that the more one tries unsuccessfully to change the relationship of two others, the more likely the person is to wind up bearing the stress that rightfully belongs to the other two. Changing the lives of people is ultimately the work of God's Spirit. At times we feel compelled to take on that role ourselves, but to do so is foolish and fruitless.

Dallas Willard describes such behavior as an attempt at control, equating it with Jesus' warning against casting pearls before swine. "God has paid an awful price

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 173.

²⁸⁵ Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, 2003).

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 50.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

to arrange for human self-determination,” he says in *The Divine Conspiracy*; “he obviously places great value on it.” Ironically, we do not make others more responsible by taking responsibility for them.²⁸⁸

The authors address the influence of our family of origin. They observe,

We almost always underestimate the importance of the emotional processes that travel through our extended family into our nuclear family and ultimately into our own lives. This is not to say that our family *causes* us to be the way we are; remember, systems theory is not about blame. Rather, the multigenerational family, as a living organism, transmits anxiety, stress, function, and dysfunction through its ranks. In turn, the individual members of the family learn unique but predictable ways of managing that anxiety. Many of those adaptive responses work against us later as we form intimate relationships with others.[emphasis theirs]²⁸⁹

The authors encourage the development of family diagrams and mention several benefits. They point out that a family diagram can encourage a person to stop focusing on only one person in their family as the “cause” of “their problem” and begin to see the family as a whole with each person being influenced by other members in the system. As people become aware of the various dynamics active in their extended family, they may also predict future challenges they may face as certain patterns of behavior within the family are assessed. The family diagram also encourages a more global perspective. As each member sees himself or herself as part of the bigger system, he or she can take responsibility for his or her part within the system. And, as an accurate family diagram is developed, the facts are clearly seen rather than being clouded by family myth or perception.²⁹⁰

The authors later speak to the limitations resulting from cause-and-effect thinking as well as the hope seen in looking at things from a systems model,

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 88.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 90-93.

...Most of us automatically think in terms of cause and effect. When we see an effect in our relationships, such as conflict or depression, we immediately look for the cause. Our thinking appears to be logical on the surface: if I can decide who is responsible for my problem, I can change that person and then my problem will be solved. In our struggle to understand our relationships, we tend to focus on how other people treat us. This kind of cause-and-effect thinking pushes us to consider people in our lives only in terms of how they relate to us. We become the center of our own universe. Unfortunately, things are almost never that simple.

As we have seen in previous chapters, thinking systems means remembering the big picture: each member of the family is part of a series of increasingly larger systems (the extended family, the church, the culture, and so on) that have an impact on us and are in turn affected by us. Therefore, a problem with any one member of a family is usually a bigger problem, touching the system as a whole. The good news is that it takes only one family member to make a positive change (in how he or she relates to the family) to change the whole family. When the family changes, every other family member has new opportunities to make changes of their own.

In fact, when we learn to see ourselves as part of a larger, living system (the family), we break free from the self-centeredness that cause-and-effect thinking induces. We now realize that we are part of a meaningful whole, neither more nor less important than the other parts. Rather than demanding that the system revolve around us and our needs and preferences, we are able to follow Paul's admonition to "look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4), realizing that they too are valuable parts of the whole.²⁹¹

This book encourages a person to look at relationships from the perspective of a systems model. This will result in a broader perspective rather than a self-centered view encouraged by the cause-and-effect approach. The result is the focus for change is the individual within the system causing system-wide change rather than a focus on the problems or the problem individuals. It encourages individuals to be responsible for their actions.

These books taken together provide a good foundation for understanding systems theory within the church context. It helps one see connections between individuals rather

²⁹¹ Ibid., 109-110.

than isolated individuals. And, systems theory can provide a useful tool for women who find themselves in the role of the “pastor’s wife.”

Books On Emotional Health

A final area to be considered is also not specifically about the role of the “pastor’s wife.” However, like systems theory, this area can yield valuable insights and resources for such women. Peter Scazzero, the founding and senior pastor of New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, New York City, a large, multiracial, international church, and the author of several books, shares this idea: “...emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. It is not possible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.”²⁹² Scazzero identifies “the top ten symptoms of emotionally unhealthy spirituality” as:

1) Using God to run from God; 2) Ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear; 3) Dying to the wrong things; 4) Denying the past’s impact on the present; 5) Dividing our lives into “Secular” and “Sacred” compartments; 6) Doing for God instead of being with God; 7) Spiritualizing away conflict; 8) Covering over brokenness, weakness and failure; 9) Living without limits; and 10) Judging other people’s spiritual journey.²⁹³

These symptoms are indicators of an emotionally “unhealthy” spirituality, which will hinder a woman in the role of the “pastor’s wife” from becoming all God desires for her and from fully functioning in a manner that will support her husband. Augustine’s prayer is quoted to help identify the importance of self-knowledge: “Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee.”²⁹⁴

Scazzero also shares three temptations leading to what he calls a false self (seeking an identity apart from or in addition to our identity in relationship with God): I

²⁹² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 17.

²⁹³ Ibid., 24-36.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 65.

am what I do (performance); I am what I have (possessions); and I am what others think (popularity).²⁹⁵ Scazzero looks at the impact one's family of origin can have on them as individuals. By taking the time and realistically facing one's past, a person can "own" his or her true history. People can then embrace what is helpful while letting go of what is not by replacing it with truth. He says, "[T]he goal of the Christian life is to love well."²⁹⁶ In his previous book, which was aimed more toward leaders, Scazzero said, "Making incarnation the top priority in order to love others well is both the climax and point of the entire book."²⁹⁷ Scazzero's books share material helpful to both the pastor and his wife.

These selected studies as well as the Biblical and historical reviews give one a foundation from which to study the challenges faced by women who find themselves in the role of "pastor's wife." The most recent study reviewed was done with a focus on the church planter's spouse. The most recent studies focusing on the pastor's wife that have been reviewed were conducted in the 1990's. These studies do not reveal the current state of women in the role of "pastor's wife," especially in reformed churches (which are of particular interest for this study).

In order for men in pastoral ministry to better appreciate the unique challenges and opportunities their wives face in the role of pastor's wife these men need to be educated concerning these challenges and opportunities. For pastors to gain needed resources as well as understanding with which they can encourage and support their wives, these resources need to be identified, developed and disseminated. For the women married to men in pastoral ministry to gain resources that will enable them to become more fruitful and fulfilled, these resources must also be identified, developed and

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 74-78.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 51.

²⁹⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

disseminated. With a lack of current, specific information for women who must fill the role of “pastor’s wife,” more study must be done in seeking to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.”

With the completion of the survey of the literature, the need for further study has been established. This study’s goal was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.” Chapter three will share the methodology followed by this study to achieve this goal.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.” Its design followed the structure for qualitative research. This chapter presents the research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, researcher bias and assumptions, and, finally, study limitations.

The Research Design

The research format of this study was qualitative in design. This is defined by Sharan B. Merriam as a study in which the “focus is on interpretation and meaning” with “the researcher [as] the primary instrument in data collection and analysis” who inductively collects data through “fieldwork” yielding an end product which is “descriptively rich.”²⁹⁸

This research study focused on the phenomenon of the role of “pastor’s wife” surrounding the woman married to the pastor in local ministry. This study was collective since it used multiple “focus groups/cohorts” that were a part of the Pastors Summit, which was a qualitative case study at Covenant Theological Seminary funded by a Lilly Endowment, Inc. grant investigating the issue of understanding factors contributing to sustaining pastoral excellence.

The Pastors Summit research project was an ambitious effort to attain a better understanding of the factors contributing to sustaining pastoral excellence. There were six cohorts with a total of sixty-one participants selected through reputational sample

²⁹⁸ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education: Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 25.

representing twenty-six states in the Midwest, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and Southwest. Most of the participants were senior/solo pastors. Wives were included for one meeting per year during the first summit, then when the importance of their participation was recognized, the cohort's wives were included in the second summit in as many of the sessions as they could attend. These cohorts met for three two-day meetings per year for two years. Topics discussed during the meetings included calling, relationships and skill development. The topics had been developed based on a previous survey of Covenant Seminary graduates currently in the pastorate. While not every session was recorded, the discussion meetings of each two-day session were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants were dominantly PCA, although they included pastors of reformed conviction from other denominations. The pastors served churches varying in size from new church plants to churches of 1,200+ members. There have been two rounds of the two-year study. The first cohort consisted of three small groups with the majority of participants having served in ministry from 5-15 years; there were a few who had been in ministry for 20+ years. Both rounds of the study were shared between Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) and Covenant Theological Seminary (CTS). The second cohort was divided as follows: RTS represented 0-5 years out of seminary, WTS represented 5-15 years in ministry and CTS represented 15+ years in ministry.²⁹⁹

Coming out of the Pastors Summit research were five factors that promote ministry for the long haul. The five factors were: Spiritual Formation, Self Care, Emotional Intelligence, Marriage and Family, plus Leadership and Management. Under the "Marriage and Family" characteristic, one of the areas identified was "Understanding

²⁹⁹ Pastors Summit, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO: publicity material, 2008

the strategic role their wife plays in their life and ministry.” This was the prime area of interest as it relates to the focus of this study, which is to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife”.

Sample Selection

The sample selection was largely determined by the unique opportunity of access to the data resulting from the Pastors Summit. The participants have been described above. In addition to the participants in the Pastors Summit, the author chose to mail an additional twelve questionnaires to pastors’ wives whom he thought might be willing to participate in this project and who live within a single presbytery. This would provide opportunity to gather more data through additional questionnaires. It was recognized that not all the questionnaires mailed out would be filled out and returned. In fact, about ten questionnaires were returned unanswered due to faulty address information (participant had moved with forwarding address expired).

Data Collection

I recognized that the focus of this study was just one sub-point (“Understanding the strategic role their wife plays in their life and ministry”) of one of the five main ideas (the “Marriage and Family” characteristic) within the overall focus of the Pastors Summit. This meant that all of the discussions would not be focused on the topic of this study. And, while initial surveys of the data from the Pastors Summit appeared to show material sufficient to be useful for this study, I realized that the material would be limited. With this in mind, I asked permission to mail questionnaires to the wives who participated in the Pastors Summit in order to provide a “richer” source of data for this study. I mailed sixty questionnaires (cf. Appendix One). I also mailed twelve

questionnaires to the wives of pastors who were not participants in the Pastors Summit. This resulted in a total of seventy-two questionnaires mailed. Of these, I received sixteen completed questionnaires: ten were returned as undeliverable; six of the twelve questionnaires I mailed to non-Pastors Summit participants were completed and returned; and, ten of the questionnaires I sent to the sixty Pastors Summit participants were completed and returned. I then grouped responses by question and removed anything that would identify the individual respondents. I did, however, number the responses to identify any patterns. For each question, I marked all the responses I received for that question (there were multiple responses per questionnaire to some of the questions) with a number (1-16) identifying the questionnaire on which the response(s) appeared. That way I could track all the responses given to each of the questions.

The Pastors Summit data consisted of the transcribed conversations from the various discussion meetings of the different small groups within the cohorts. The data totaled about 12,000 pages (roughly 3,000 pages per year over the four-year period). This data was thoroughly reviewed by the researcher using the constant-comparative method. Merriam described this method as follows:

The constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences (for example, one quote about returning to school as an adult with another quote by the same or another participant). Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory.³⁰⁰

The goal of this study was to distinguish between those experiences common to wives in general and those uniquely pertaining to the wife of a pastor in pastoral ministry. The

³⁰⁰ Merriam, 18.

patterns of data within those experiences uniquely pertaining to pastors' wives were evaluated in light of the perspective of the research questions:

1. What is the relationship of the pastor's wife to the pastoral ministry?
2. What unique opportunities does a pastor's wife have?
3. What unique challenges does a pastor's wife face?

In order to locate and identify material relevant to this study within the wealth of data generated by the Pastors Summit, I conducted key-word searches. Lacking any sophisticated database-searching software, I first attempted to use the "search" feature of Microsoft Word. However, as I understood it, the feature allowed only one search per document at a time. That was not a practical method of searching Pastors Summit transcripts, which were contained in four folders and totaled 349 files, each of which was an MSWord document containing the transcript of a meeting or interview. Instead, I converted the MSWord files into MS OneNote. I selected each of the 349 files and clicked "rename" so I could copy the file name into the page-name section of OneNote. This way, my OneNote section names would correspond to the names of the files in the Pastors Summit database. I then took the Pastor's Summit files of the transcripts given to me by CTS and inserted them into their own pages (insert menu/ file as printout) in OneNote. I separated the four file folders into section groups. By doing this, my structure in OneNote was identical to the structure of the files in the Pastors Summit database. Also, by converting the documents this way, I preserved the original page-numbering of the transcripts so that my references to the transcripts would be accurate. I labeled as "Pastors Summit" the notebook containing all the transcripts from the database. I was

then prepared to conduct searches of the entire notebook (all the Pastors Summit transcripts) for each of my key words.

As I looked at the listed files/transcripts, there were nine sessions whose title contained the word “wives.” I read each of these sections in their entirety. As I read, I copied sections of the transcript (selected quotes) that appeared to be applicable to the focus of this study and then pasted them into a separate notebook created in OneNote to act as the collection point for the data.

When I began the key-word search, I chose to start with the word “wife” since this study was focused on trying to understand the experience of those serving in the role of “pastor’s wife”. I found that if I searched for “wives” (plural possessive), then I would find all the occurrences of the words: “wife”, “wives”. and “wives” in one search. With this key-word search, I found that 285 out of the total of 349 files/transcripts had at least one occurrence of at least one of these three words. Some transcripts – those of individual exit interviews – were about a half-page in length and garbled due to poor recording quality. Other transcripts were well over fifty pages in length and contained dozens of occurrences of these key words. I read the context surrounding each occurrence of the key words to see whether the quote was relevant to the experience of a pastor’s wife or simply to wives in general. For each of the relevant quotes, I opened the corresponding file from the original Pastors Summit database in a MSWord document, copied the desired quote from the transcript, then pasted it into a section of OneNote in the data-collection notebook labeled “wife, wives, wives”. This section had multiple pages to contain all of the quotes. Thus, my key-word searches in OneNote allowed me to find the desired quotes in the original transcripts so that I could copy them into a data-

collection section. I also manually recorded the original page numbers from the transcripts when I pasted quotes into OneNote. During my key-word search, I found what seemed to be software attempts to conceal the names of participants.³⁰¹ These were only found in certain sections of the Pastors Summit database.

I continued the key-word searches with the synonym “spouses”, trying to find more occurrences of relevant data. This key-word search resulted in all of the occurrences of “spouse, spouses, and spouses”, and showed that eighty out of the 349 files/transcripts contained at least one occurrence of at least one of these three words. I looked up all occurrences and read the surrounding context for each to determine relevancy, then copied and pasted the relevant quotes into the data collection notebook under a section labeled “spouse, spouses, spouses”. I found some occurrences of “overlap” of sections of the Pastors Summit data I had reviewed during the first key-word search. I also tried using as key-word searches “husbands” (229 out of 349) and “participants” (twenty-nine out of 349), but neither proved helpful.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data; I first read through each of the quotes collected and gave them descriptive tags (typed out to the right on the OneNote page). I also described the location of the quote so I could find it later.³⁰² I sorted the data under the three research questions: “What is the relationship of the wife of the pastor to pastoral ministry?”; “What unique contributions does the wife of the pastor make?”; and, “What

³⁰¹ For example, for the name April, I found the occurrence of “WIFE 15th or tax day” and for the name Liz, I found multiple occurrences of examples, such as “reaWIFeE” = realize with liz replaced by “WIFE”.

³⁰² The method of describing the locations was as follows: “www” for “wife, wives, wives”; “sss” for “spouse, spouses, spouses”; “Sherry’s study” for “Shari Thomas’ study” and “Q + # + #” for Questions from pastors’ wives questionnaire mailed out and the page on which the quote was recorded (i.e.: Q 1 2 = Questionnaire question No. 1, page 2 in the pages containing quotes from question No. 1).

unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?” As I went through the quotes and copied the descriptive tags under one of the three research questions, I developed subheadings to further sort the tags collected under each question. I added a fourth heading of “Misc.” for those descriptive tags that did not seem to fit under any of the three research questions.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

It should be noted that this project followed the approach modeled by London and Wiseman:

Although more and more women are entering the ministry, it is still the rule for more men than women to be called by churches, and for their wives to find themselves playing a supportive role. While that more-common situation is usually assumed in this book, the authors cordially invite female ministers to reverse the assumed gender perspective as they read.³⁰³

It was assumed that the women who responded to the Questionnaire for Pastors’ Wives answered honestly and to the best of their ability. It was assumed that the transcripts for the Pastors Summit were faithful reproductions of the conversations held during the actual events (barring recording or transcription errors beyond their control).

The researcher is an ordained minister in pastoral ministry with the Presbyterian Church in America. I hold to the doctrinal standards of our denomination. I have been married to my wife for 27 years and we have three children. I have a personal interest in the subject of this study as a means to learn more about the challenges my wife faces in the role of “pastor’s wife” and to discover resources that will be helpful to her and other women who are married to pastors.

Limitations of the Study

³⁰³ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor’s Wife*, 12.

While the Pastors Summit provided access to the responses of more pastors (and their wives at times) than the researcher could have gained personally, it was a limited sample whose participants were reformed in their theological framework and predominantly PCA. This was desirable for the researcher as this was the area of his interest. In addition, since the researcher was not personally present in the small-group interactions that were recorded and reduced to transcripts, certain nuances of body language, tone of voice and other non-verbal clues were unavailable to him. The poor nature of the recording and the resulting garbled transcripts from some of the meetings was also a limitation. And, due to the nature of using focus groups followed up with a questionnaire for the wives sent by the researcher who is unknown to the participants, the actual “richness” of the descriptive data was limited by the extent of the willingness of the participants to be open and transparent concerning personal experiences.

It was also noted that although using key-word searches was a useful method of sifting the database in order to find comments relevant to this study, it was easily possible to have missed valuable comments that did not include any of the key words. For example, comments referring to a wife by name would not have been picked up by the key-word searches. Due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to read through the entire Pastors Summit database. Also, it was quite possible that due to fatigue, distraction, or the development of “categories” in the mind of the researcher during the data-gathering phase of the project that some relevant comments were omitted from consideration.

As part of the original research design, phone conversations, e-mail, or written correspondence was to be requested through the Pastors Summit administrators in order

to contact individual participants with the goal of seeking clarification of certain comments, gaining deeper responses to identified topics, or even to solicit anecdotal material for illustrative purposes. This would have allowed for a richer, descriptive end product from the data gathering phase so as to enhance the interpretive phase. However, due to time constraints, this was not done.

This chapter has reviewed the research framework and method of this study to give the reader an understanding of the process involved. The data analysis of the material will be reviewed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Data

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.” This chapter will present the data obtained from a survey of pastors’ wives and examination of the transcripts of the Pastors Summit cohort meetings.

Source and Focus of the Data

As described in Chapter Three, the data collected during this project came from a survey of pastors’ wives in the form of a questionnaire mailed by the author (cf. Appendix One) as well as from key-word searches of the transcripts from the Pastors Summit meetings. The Pastors Summit was a qualitative research project conducted by Covenant Seminary, funded by a Lily Endowment, Inc. grant, and which focused on sustaining pastoral excellence in ministry for the long-term. The data obtained, which consisted of quotations from the transcripts, were collected, given descriptive tags then sorted under the three research questions. Some of the quotations reflect poor recording quality, which made it difficult for the transcribers to obtain an accurate transcript. In other instances, the transcribers or the software used simply “misunderstood” what was said, as was obvious from some of the punctuation and the spelling of certain words in the transcripts. The data grouped under each research question was then further sorted by this author into topical groupings. The quotations reported from the data have been “flattened out” to remove any identifying names or unique circumstances. Generic names have been inserted where appropriate to protect privacy. However, since the participants

in the Pastors Summit were not generally known nor specifically identified to the author, these instances are rare. Some of the responses to the questionnaire mailed out by the author did contain identifying names, and thus needed more attention to protect the privacy of the respondents.

Because the focus of this research project was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife,” the data collected reflected the aspects unique to that experience rather than the experience of wives in general or even couples in ministry. The three guiding research questions were: “What is the relationship of the wife of the pastor to pastoral ministry?”; “What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?”; and “What unique challenges does the wife of the pastor face?” Representative and illustrative data have been subdivided into topical groupings under each of these research questions.

What is the relationship of the wife of the pastor to pastoral ministry?

This first research question had four topical groupings of data related to it. These groupings were: “Health of marriage key to health of ministry”; “Systems”; “Importance of pastors’ wives to pastors”; and “Calling for pastors’ wives.” Each of these groups will now be presented with representative quotations.

The first group under this research question to be presented is, “Health of marriage key to health of ministry.” Located in some of the discussions by the pastors participating in the Pastors Summit the following three quotes were obtained:

I suppose this goes without saying, but I don’t know how a man can thrive in the ministry unless his wife is thriving with him. That was my argument last time What is the key to success for long-term ministry? My answer is: your marriage. To me, that is the No. 1 thing.

The most effective way to develop a spiritually healthy church is to be spiritually healthy and maintain the health of my marriage. I've had my wife tell me, 'He's never around, you know. If the bell rings, he's like the old fire horse, he just goes off.' And, 'If he would only put one-tenth of the energy into the family, we'd have a great marriage. He's there for everyone else, but he's not there for me.' Understanding [the] strategic role that the wife plays in the life and ministry. This is exactly what the guys from WTS were saying, but to understand that and affirm that is critical.

and

The men were saying that they like having the wives [at the meeting]; instead of having to come home and telling you what they are experiencing, you're experiencing it with them. Like I said, unstructured, hang-out time. And the key importance of longevity in ministry is marriage. Those are some of the key themes that we are pulling out.

These quotes share the opinion of the speakers that marriage is important to ministry. They are saying the health of the marriage strongly affects the health of the ministry. In fact, the first quote says that your marriage is the number one key to success for long-term ministry.

The next related topic under this research question was the idea of "Systems" and how it relates to the role of "pastor's wife" in the context of the pastoral ministry. "Systems" will be understood in this study to be persistent recognizable groupings of relational interactions composed of individuals, groups, or a mixture of the two. The first was made by Dr. Bob Burns as he led one of the pastor's discussion groups.

When we were at the last Lilly meeting, we made a big deal out of the role of the pastor's spouse. That became one of the integral things in the major talk that was given at the conference on Sustaining Pastoral Excellence. The speaker said, "One of the things that we've learned about sustaining pastors is the place of the family." It's about the entire family system, not just the pastor. The whole system has to be sustained

The second quote was made by Shari Thomas as she presented her findings from her study on the experience of church planting wives to one of the Summit cohorts:

The second one was the importance of a healthy marriage and family life. Again it was because of a lack of a support system that increased her sense of isolation and loneliness. Because of added pressure on the marriage, if a clergy couple is relying primarily on each other for support, the marriage may function well most of the time. Yet a narrow support system will become a problem when either one is not able to fulfill that role. So in other words, it's kind of obvious in any marriage we're looking to each other to be the primary support system but the main thing is when we struggle, who else can we rely on if our only support system is our spouse? Also as I read further in the study, men feel the same way that their primary support system is also their wife, and so when there is any type of a struggle or added stress, it puts extra stress on the marriage.

The third was made by Dr. Phil Douglass of Covenant Theological Seminary, who was speaking to a Summit cohort. He said:

Ok. now here's where I'm going to drop a theory on you guys. Are you ready for this? That the sovereign God places us with the wife whose personality represents the kind of church—at least a significant portion of our church—that we're going to be ministering to. And therefore, we have to learn to not change our personality; you must never change your personality. You can't do it anyway, but don't even try. But to stretch and learn to communicate with the personality type your wife represents. And then there will be transference in ability to communicate with that subculture, or dominant culture, of the church that you serve. Now that's the case with me – my Rebecca's ESFJ. Emmanuel is an ESFJ church. So that's my working theory.

These quotes reflect the opinion of the speakers that the relational interconnectedness (systems) of the husband and wife, couple and church cannot be overlooked. The first quote mentions that one must not look only at the pastor for sustaining pastoral excellence for the long-term, but at sustaining the entire family system. The second quote shows that stress on any part of the system affects the whole system (family). And, the third quote presents the idea that God may sovereignly place a couple together in order to teach the husband/pastor how to love the church better.

The third topic under this research question, “What is the relationship of the pastor's wife to pastoral ministry?” is “Importance of pastor's wives to pastors.” Some

examples of the data collected under this area are the following. The first came from a presentation Dr. Bob Burns made to a combined meeting of Summit participants:

The fourth area, marriage and family came screaming at us from the first round of cohorts. Your cohorts have only confirmed this. This is one of the major things that you have brought the Lilly endowment in the issue of sustaining pastoral excellence. Do you realize that of the 300+ organizations that applied for grants and the 65 groups that did receive grants, there is only one grant initiative that even mentioned the issue of looking at the marriage and family and how that impacts sustaining pastoral excellence? That was our grant. Marriage and family is a commitment of maintaining the spiritual and relational health with one's spouse, children, and extended family. As one of the pastors said, "I just feel the pressure sometimes to have this model home that everyone could follow and imitate, and I'm not good at that." What are the areas that are important to be attentive to? First, for pastors to understand the strategic role that their wife plays in their life and ministry. It sounds logical doesn't it, but most pastors never take the time to look their wife in the eye and tell them how important they are. And yet when we talked about calling in the first round of the Pastors' Summit, one of the things we discovered was the fact that humanly speaking, the most significant instrument keeping pastors in the ministry is the pastor's wife, far beyond any other thing keeping them in the ministry is their wife that has kept them encouraged and strengthened and encouraged them to stay in the ministry. One pastor said, "I know now more than ever that I could not answer this calling without my wife. I realize I've undervalued my wife in ministry even while thinking I wasn't good at that

The following three quotations were those of unidentified leaders/participants within the Pastors Summit small group meetings:

Learning to listen to our wives. One of the responses at the Westminster cohort when we did the 360 (leadership instrument) – I asked the guys what's your greatest take away from this 360 and what we learned from this? And the greatest takeaway was, I need to take my wife's feedback more seriously. These are the things my wife has been saying to me all along.

My wife and I met a guy a few months ago who began asking us a series of questions: "Should I do church planting? Should I move to Texas and pastor a church there? Should I go get my PhD over here?" I said, "What does your spouse think?" He said, "Whatever Jesus tells me to do is what she said I should do." And I said, "Oh come on give me a break." I said, "What does she really think?" And He said, "No, she said whatever I feel is what God wants." After about a half hour of this, I said, "Honestly, if you really got to it, what do you think your wife really wants?" He replied, "Oh I know she really wants to live next to her mom and dad in Ohio." And I said, "But you ... you gotta help her grow up. She's a

separate person. She too has desires and passions and you gotta talk this thing over together. You're a couple. You're not God and don't let her make you God. You're two separate people discerning God's will together and she's a factor. And that God speaks to her too and you're trying to discern what's God saying." A piece of what God is saying is what's God speaking to my wife. And vice versa. I mean somehow we get this thing that I'm the man, I'm moving. But hey you made a vow to this person for life and it's a factor in discerning. I'm not saying it's the only factor but it sure is a factor. What is God saying?

and,

You know, may I add to that last one I said, particularly the way that was expressed, was really with such high esteem for you, our wives. Recognizing that we could not have been, that we would not be at this point without your very, very active and very professional and highly called partnership with us.

These quotations reflect the perspectives of the speakers as they express their belief that the wife of the pastor is very important in her role. In fact, the first quote said,

humanly speaking, *the most significant instrument keeping pastors in the ministry is the pastor's wife*, far beyond any other thing keeping them in the ministry is their wife that has kept them encouraged and strengthened and encouraged them to stay in the ministry. [emphasis added]

This speaks highly of the importance of the pastor's wife. The remaining quotes show that the wife provides valuable feedback to her husband, she helps him to hear the leading of God in their lives, and, in fact, the recognition by the pastors that they would not be where they are without the contributions of their wives.

The final topic under the research question, "What is the relationship of the pastor's wife to pastoral ministry?" was "Pastor's wives as a calling." Some of the data identified for this area are the following quotes from pastor's wives:

That breaks out into a question of, "What is the calling to be a pastor's wife?" Can that be different for different people? Those kinds of questions come up. You have to look at the broader calling. I'm called because I'm Fred's wife to be his wife. But what am I called to be other than Fred's wife and a pastor's wife? Calling is to understand where the Lord is going to use you, and what he's going to teach you to do.

I think that is one of the disservices that the whole women's movement caused, or was part of that. That women felt like they had to have an important separate career from their husbands. I feel like in the pastorate we're fortunate because we can participate so much with our husbands. We can be a big part of their work and know what goes on. Business wives I wouldn't think get to participate as much as we do. We see our husbands at work, and I think that's a blessing that we have. I like that, and it's easier to be partners. I also think about calling—we're called to be wives, and we're called to be mothers as well. That doesn't mean I think we also shouldn't have other jobs either. I think that division of career, like I need to be as important in a career as you are. It's a competition thing. I don't know if there's as much of that as there used to be.

I've always conceived that one of my most important roles is to be a wife to my pastor-husband. Pastors are often lonely, as well, and often have no one to share with, no one they feel comfortable sharing with. So, I've been my husband's confidante, lover, friend, someone he can 'let his hair down' with. No one else is called to be that for him in the way that I am. All other ministries are subordinate to this.

It is okay to be yourself. God made you. He called you as you are. Don't try to be 'the pastor's wife.' Too many wives try to be different things for different people. That can get messy if everyone ends up in the same room. Then you will not know who to be. So just be yourself and trust the Lord to everything else.

No different than anyone else. I've only been in two churches, but the first one I went, [previous church]. I smiled at Joe, and I said, 'Watch, I bet the first question they're going to ask me is if I play the piano.' It was the first question. I had already talked to Joe. I said, 'I'm just going to say, no I don't, but my husband does.' It was his first question, too, when we went down to [current church]. It was very interesting, but it was instructional, and I said, 'You know, I'm called to serve in the church. We have all different gifts, all of us, and I'm going to use my gifts in the church, and I'm going to be thrilled to be serving with this body of Christ, just as you give your gifts.' I was working with the kids and all the different other areas, so that's why I think all of us are going to look different in the church because we all have different gifts.

She continues:

Yes. Well, our philosophy has always been from the get-go that I am Joe's wife and he happens to be a pastor. And so, but that is not to say that I don't recognize that there are certain things I need to do, I want to do and should do to assist him in his ministry, um, and just as a doctor's wife assists a doctor or whatever. And so when the church was younger, like from when it didn't even exist to when it was maybe up to 300, I was pretty much involved in everything. And that's not because I was his wife, but because someone needed to and I just filled in. I just did what needed to be done. So I think the church was used to Joe's wife was

always there, and they liked that, you know, you always like that. And then I'd say from about 300-350 on, I was finally able, because we had more staff, to not have to be at every event... And I was able to specialize in the areas that I felt I was more gifted in. And so the transition would be from being everywhere all the time to being more involved in the areas that I had specific skills and gifts in which was certain ministries, not all the ministries.

And, this comment by one of the pastors:

Bob, can I ask if we do something simply for the wives to encourage them in this whole issue of calling? Because they follow us around, a lot of our wives are miserable. They are going to continue to be miserable as long as we are where we are and doing what we're doing.

Finally, one of the wives commenting on a "call to be a martyr:"

We're the ones to get put on hold and we're supposed to just deal with that and sacrifice. And there are incredible implications to the sacrifices in our own marriages, our own families. And I just appreciated her calling the minister and even the wives for us to be able to articulate our needs and not just to say, 'I've got to sacrifice; I've got to sacrifice.' Because that's often what we feel like: That's what our responsibility is as the wife. Lay down their own rights, and just take it up It turns us into martyrs, and that's wrong. We're not called to be martyrs, we're called to be in partnership and part of our role is, I think, calling our husbands into accountability for his responsibility to us and our family. And I thought that was really good.

These multiple quotes reflect the breadth of thinking within this topic. There is the opinion that the primary calling of the women is to be the wife of her husband who happens to be the pastor in a local ministry setting. There is an emphasis that the woman is called to be herself first. She then can use the gifts, talents, personality, etc. that God has given her in the various opportunities such as roles, ministries, etc. One woman reflected the idea that one's calling can change over time in that she "was always there" early in the ministry, and then shifted to be able to focus more on areas of her giftedness later in the life of the church. The final comment is recognition that sacrifice is part of ministry; however, she rejects the idea that "pastor's wives" are called to be "martyrs."

The preceding data reflects those comments related to the research question, “What is the relationship of the wife of the pastor to pastoral ministry?” The larger question was subdivided into four related areas. Each area has been represented by quotations taken from the listed sources. Quotations provided were selected to be representative of the larger data pool.

What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?

The next research question to be presented is, “What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?” This broader question has been subdivided into four smaller topics: “Ministry to the pastor,” “Ministry from/with the pastor,” “Support systems,” and “Opportunities for ministry.”

The first topic was “Ministry to the pastor.” The following comments were made by pastors:

When it’s gotten bad, what has kept you in the ministry? When it’s to the point where you’re doubting your call, what is it in the bottom line keeps you in the ministry? My wife. Because there’ve been a few times when I’ve been ready to leave the ministry in the last couple of years, and she said, “We haven’t been called somewhere. When we came to [this congregation], we were called. It was clear to both of us.” And we have not been in agreement [when we felt like leaving]... there have been times when she’s been like, “We need to get out of here” and I’ve said, “No it’s not time.” But mostly it’s her telling me, “It’s not time yet.”

One of the comments from when we were initially together was that when we were together we’d talk shop, when our wives would come in, we would talk from our hearts.

Can I just ask a quick question? It’s interesting to me that we’re talking about wanting to spend time with our spouses. Is that not happening? I can’t imagine the difficulty of the ministry borne alone. That’s suicide. Who is the closest person in the world to you? For me, when my heart is broken, when I’m angry, I don’t go to the session, I don’t go to my pastor. I go to my real pastor, which is my wife.

These comments reflect ministry opportunities the pastor's wife has to minister to her husband/pastor. She can help encourage him to remain true to his calling until the Lord calls him elsewhere. Her presence can encourage her husband toward greater openness and sharing. And, there is her opportunity to be a "pastor to the pastor."

The second topic presented under this research question is, "Ministry from/with the pastor." The data from this topic are comments made by pastor's wives such as: "I benefit from hearing about the sermons ahead of time and being able to talk to my 'pastor' about them afterward." and, "Our family gets to 'work' with Dad at the outings/events/retreats." The following comments speak to this topic:

My husband and I can really be a part of each other's world. We are partners in ministry. We can share in church-work together. He values my voice and input. I can be a part of the leadership at many levels. My husband can be home in time to help with dinner and play with the kids. He can take Fridays off to be with us or volunteer at school or give me a day off!

Although the pastor works very hard and often has long days and long weeks, his schedule is flexible, and I like that. Sometimes he can run errands or do family business things more easily than other men with a regular 9-5 job.

I do enjoy it when Sam asks me to choose hymns for the worship service. He also has given me pretty much free rein to develop the Foreign Missions focus for the church, and is helpful when I want to promote something, or need an announcement at the last minute.

These are the quotations which represent the data under the topic "Ministry from/with the pastor." They reflect some of the "perks" or opportunities of being a "pastor's wife" in ministry with the pastor. Some of the perks listed are: hearing and discussing the sermons with the pastor, working together as a family in ministry, being a partner in ministry and having input, the flexible schedule of the pastor can be helpful in various ways to the family, and the opportunity to be involved in the organizing of the worship services or even the foreign missions ministry.

“Support systems” is the next topic under the research question, “What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?” In this study, “Support Systems,” were seen to be any relationships which helped sustain the wife, ministry couple, or even the entire family within the ministry context. The data representing this topic are comments by pastor’s wives such as: “The blessing of being encouraged, prayed for, and supported by the dear ‘saints’ in the church!” and:

I do have a large, ready-made support group (the church). People tend to welcome me, even yield respect to me, purely on the basis of my husband’s role. Several people in the church have been very kind to our children over the years, probably because they have been grateful for their dad’s ministry to them.

I love having people who love me and our family, and express their appreciation for us. It feels like a safety net beneath us. They genuinely care about my life and what I am experiencing. They are anxious to serve and help me.

The Lord has blessed us in many ways by the generosity of the church. People have allowed us to use their summer vacation homes every summer. The church has paid for our whole family to go to overseas for three months on a sabbatical. The church raised a large portion of the down payment on our second home when we needed to move. The generosity of the church has been amazing to our family.

As well as the following comment:

Being in a presbytery gives me a wider circle of friends than women who are in independent churches, or who work in an office. I love having friends all over the world!

These quotations represent the data pool associated with this topic of “Support Systems.” There is a special place in the prayers of the local congregation for their pastor as well as for his wife and family. There is also special recognition of the pastor’s wife. There are acts of kindness shown to the wife and family out of gratitude for the ministry of the pastor as well as that of the pastor’s wife. And, the position of the wife of the pastor gives her access to opportunities for developing friendships around the world.

The final topic under the research question, “What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?” is “Opportunities for ministry.” “Ministry” is understood in this study to be opportunities to be involved in the work of God in this world to change lives, the community, or even the world for His glory and the advancement of His Kingdom. These opportunities for ministry may be formal programs within the local church, presbytery, or denomination or they may be individual opportunities to share the love of God with an individual or group of individuals. The data associated with this topic are the following comments made by some of the pastor’s wives:

If I invite a woman over or to go out for coffee, I know she will be anticipating some significant, meaningful conversation as well as just chatting. It’s like I have a green light to pursue women spiritually and emotionally beyond the normal level, and find out how they are really doing. When strangers find out I’m a pastor’s wife, they might ask for spiritual advice. I have opportunities to share more than the average woman would. It can be a bridge in the neighborhood. One woman, a Catholic, asked me to come over and share verses about heaven after her mom died. Many neighbors knew that our church was being remodeled, and they came to the first Sunday in our new building to help celebrate and take a look.

I have had the opportunity to lead discussion groups, music, prayer retreats, children’s ministries and write my own curriculum. We have been able to go on some amazing trips to see and be a part of ministries, events, conferences and missions, that might not have otherwise been possible.

I am able to influence the pastor! Because I enjoy reading, I am able to fill in some gaps for him on a variety of issues. Also, as a listener (and not a speaker), I am able to pick up on people’s concerns and pass them along to him so he can correct potential misunderstandings.

I have been able to help and minister to so many people through my husband’s ministry. I have been given a platform to speak for Christ. I have been able to use my God-given gifts for His Bride, the church.

There were also these comments reflecting a different perspective:

I don’t think there had been much of a difference between me and any other church volunteer, but I have been able to use my gifts in many different ways to serve.

I don't really feel like the fact that I'm a pastor's wife brings me any advantage to do or accomplish anything! It may even hinder my ability to accomplish certain things.

One pastor's wife responded to the questionnaire question "What are some of the things you are able to do/accomplish because you are in the position of a pastor's wife?" with the response, "I can't think of any."

These quotations reflect the data pool related to the topic, "Opportunities for ministry." One of the responses saw the opportunity within the expectations of people toward the "pastor's wife" as a "green light" to "pursue women spiritually and emotionally beyond the normal level." There are enhanced opportunities to share spiritual advice as well as to reach out to those in the neighborhood due to expectations associated with the role of "pastor's wife." There are often greater opportunities within the church to be involved in various ministries. There is the unique opportunity to influence the pastor who is her husband. There are also opportunities to have "a platform to speak for Christ" due to the role of "pastor's wife." However, within the data was also the perspective that there did not seem to be any difference between the "pastor's wife" and any other woman in the church. In fact, one commented that the role of "pastor's wife" may even be a hindrance to "accomplishing certain things."

The previous listed quotations in this section reflect the data gathered under the research question, "What unique opportunities does the wife of the pastor have?" While the listing of quotations has not been exhaustive, these quotes provide an accurate representation of the data pool for the research question as it has been subdivided into the above topics.

What unique challenges does the wife of the pastor face?

The third and final research question is “What unique challenges does the wife of the pastor face?” This question had by far the most responses. The data related to this question has been subdivided into five topics: “Two wives,” “Lack of support system,” “Friendship issues/Loneliness,” “Secondhand Smoke,” and “The weight of the role of pastor’s wife.”

The topic, “Two wives,” is a descriptive term to express the understanding that the pastor seems to be married to both his wife and the church as a “second wife.” The following are representative responses for this topic. One pastor explained, “My identity was the church. The church was my first wife and Sally was my second wife.” Another pastor said, “I think the heart of the issue is actually as a pastor you have two wives. You have your wife at home and your wife that's at church, and oftentimes that second wife dominates.” One pastor's wife put it simply this way, “My husband is in an adulterous relationship, and he loves the church more than he loves me.” And, another wife said,

Our family ‘shares,’ has to share, their daddy/my husband. An example: Our daughter recently had a migraine on a Sunday. She desperately wanted her daddy, but he couldn’t come when she wanted him because he was preaching (I was home with her). She had to wait.

These quotations are representative of the responses related to this topic of “Two wives.” They reflect the emotional feelings of a perceived “adulterous” relationship between the pastor and the local church. The pastor’s wife and family feel the assignment of a “lower priority” on the husband/pastor’s list of importance.

The next topic to be presented is “Lack of support system.” Again, in this study, “support systems,” were seen to be any relationship which helped sustain the wife, ministry couple, or even the entire family within the ministry context. The responses

which represent the data pool for this area include a comment from Shari Thomas in her presentation to one of the cohorts:

The first thing I want to look at is basically what other literature is saying about women in ministry. ... This is what other research has said and what the main issues they have found. . . . The six prevalent themes. The first one is lack of sufficient clergy/spouse support system. And I don't think any of this is going to come as too much of a surprise for any of us, but the major factor which restricts clergy spouses from the support they need is that their primary support comes from their husbands. Men who are usually gone on evenings and weekends. And it's usually the time that we need them the most, especially when we're raising a young family, and that's usually when they are gone.

Another is a comment in one of the pastor's cohort meetings:

We are naturally in relationship ... Our wives aren't able within the church to have the same kind of relationships. At least my wife is not able to have that same kind of relationship in the church— I mean there're outlets for me and I look for them—a pastor friend, and I've got the presbytery. She doesn't have any of that. So I think it would be really helpful for her to have a strategy to find and develop such relationships. I think that would be huge.

There are some related responses made by pastor's wives concerning the lack of support. One wife said, "Who can I share my frustrations with the church with? It can't always be my husband—I don't want to bring him down." Another wife explained, "I find that I am missing my family, as we live far away from them. And the congregation expects that we be home (at the church) for holidays." One wife said the hardest thing about not having support is, "NOT having a pastor" [emphasis hers]. This was because her pastor was also her spouse. One pastor related the following story:

My wife said to me a couple years ago – we were driving in the car, and I almost drove off the road – she said, 'You haven't asked me about whether I'm doing my devotions for six months. You do that for a new Christian in our church.' I just about hit a telephone pole. It hit me like a ton of bricks; she was right. I'm concerned about the others in the church, the new Christians and the others, but not taking care of my family. Spiritual formation for my family – finally investing time and energy into one's marriage and family.

These quotations reflect the responses related to the topic “Lack of support system.” While a previous section recognized the existence of a support system, this section spoke to some deficiencies in that system. The wife felt the absence of her pastor/husband due to his activities in the church ministry. Pastors recognized the lack of supportive friends in the church for their wives. Distance from grown children (and grandchildren!) as well as extended family added to the lack of a support system especially with the expectation of the congregation for the ministry couple to be at the church during the holidays when family is usually most accessible. And, there was the recognition that the pastor’s wives felt the lack of “pastoring” from their husbands.

The next topic to be presented under the research question, “What unique challenges does the pastor’s wife face?” is “Friendship issues/Loneliness.” “Friendship issues/Loneliness” can be defined as the challenges facing pastor’s wives to establish and maintain friendships in the context of the pastoral ministry and the resulting loneliness that occurs in the absence of sufficient supportive relationships. Pastor’s wives had a number of important comments about this topic. One wife stated:

Several women said, “My husband tells people my wife is just like everyone else,” and you can say that, but it’s not true. People don’t hear me the same as they hear the next lady in the pew. So you know – I do feel like there is a pressure like I can’t say exactly what I think politically. So what about that expectation? Is that something we want to talk about or do we just put up with that sort of low-grade isolation?

Another wife expressed:

Um, and I think a lot of pastors’ wives don’t necessarily feel like they can go and say, ‘Well, this is what’s happening in my life or my family,’ to everybody, and so a lot of them are like, ‘Well, who can I talk to?’ So that’s, that’s an important thing I think that I keep hearing repeatedly from these women: how to overcome loneliness and how to ... within the ministry ... [build] friendships.

Another wife said,

To me a friend is someone you can call at 2 o'clock in the morning bawling about whatever trial is going on in your life. How can a minister's wife ever do that? So the idea of the difficulty of having authentic friendships.

Other pastor's wives shared,

People have commented to me several times that they assume I wouldn't want to be friends with them because I am the "pastor's wife" and everyone wants to be my friend and we are probably being invited everywhere.

Well, I think sometimes we're as isolated as we make ourselves. I think we can be afraid of pursuing people because of who we are, and obviously there are boundaries of what you do and don't say, but that honestly should be what everyone – you shouldn't be airing all the laundry with anyone besides the Lord. ... I think that we can make ourselves isolated and, yes, in some sense we should be, but in the same sense, that's a – we're as lonely as we make ourselves....

I didn't talk to my friends at church at all. I mean we just did stuff with our kids and you know – had a normal [interaction] ... But if [we can't talk about what is bugging us], we can't survive that. So we have to have friends. I'm so grateful for an older pastor's wife, Sharon Scott. At one pastor's wives meeting, a lot of girls were saying they couldn't have friends and she just said, "I'll die if I don't have friends." And she said, "Do it. You know, just be thoughtful, be careful, and you don't talk about church people." Which I don't. I mean it was about me and them, personal things. So we found a place after trying a lot of different things that worked for us. I was telling Sally earlier since we left our former church and came to this new one, how I've described it is I have hundreds of people who would be there in a minute if somebody died or got hurt, but they're not there day to day. You know, nobody's calling and saying, "How are you?" And that's hard because I know I can depend on them in need, but I just want them to just hang out. So we've been trying to start that more. It hurts me but it doesn't overwhelm me because I can't really handle it anyway.

Loneliness!! My husband and I have wrestled for *years* about whether you can be friends with church members. We have concluded that you can't, but church members are also people you see most often. There is no one I can talk to.
[emphasis hers]

It can be difficult to connect with women in the church. Many of the women in the church have been together for a long time. They have already developed their way of talking and doing things. They can be very welcoming at some levels, but in some ways, the pastor's wife can always feel like an outsider.

And finally, there was also this comment:

Sometimes when connecting with other women, it can also be difficult because they may see you differently because you are the pastor's wife. I have often walked up to a group of women who are having a conversation, and once I get there, they stop talking. They all turn toward me as if I was only there to say something brilliant. In reality, I just wanted to say 'Hi, what are you talking about?' I just wanted to connect.

These responses reflect the data pool associated with the topic, "Friendship issues/ Loneliness." The first comment spoke of a "low-grade isolation" and the last comment illustrated it as the pastor's wife simply wanted to "connect" but she was seen as an intrusion. Some challenging questions were presented. Who can a pastor's wife talk to? Can a pastor's wife call someone at 2 am bawling about whatever trial is going on in her life? There is the recognition of a general support system, "hundreds of people who would be there in a minute if somebody died or got hurt" but nobody to "hang out with" on a daily basis. The pastor's wife is often seen as an "outsider" who is trying to break into well-established social networks of friends. These networks were there when she arrived and will be there after she is gone. Ironically, one wife shared that some women in the church refrain from friendship with the pastor's wife because they think everyone wants to be the pastor's wife's friend and think she is probably being invited everywhere. Some pastor's wives have concluded that you cannot have friends in the local church. Another perspective is recognizing that we all need friends so friendships can be established in the local church but they will just have to be limited as to their content.

The next topic under the research question, "What unique challenges does the wife of the pastor face?" is "Secondhand Smoke." "Secondhand Smoke" is an analogy Geri Scazzero shared in one of the Cohort meetings to express the emotional baggage the pastor's wife receives from some of the information which is shared with her. The

responses which reflect the data pool associated with this topic include the meeting where Geri Scazzero shared this concept:

Pastoral spouses are at a very unique place because we have the liabilities of ministry. Yes, our spouses get a lot of hits etcetera, but they also get a lot of pats on the back. When they're in the conflicts and confrontations and we hear about it, we hear these nasty things. Then they go and resolve them. But I'm still in the nasty stuff. And I have no way to resolve that directly. You know? So we get a lot of the indirect stuff without the privilege of the direct resolution. And my analogy is that we inhale a lot of secondhand smoke.

One of the pastor's cohorts had this comment:

We loved the Scazzeros but we haven't talked about the kind of dynamics that we face in our marriage or just talking about what's it like being married to a pastor and being the wife getting dumped on and she becomes a nuclear waste dump, she doesn't have any other place to go...

These two comments came from pastors' wives:

I hear of conflicts and disagreements but don't get to be a part of the resolutions when my husband does. And, I wish I could go to worship without knowing a lot of 'stuff' about people.

and,

We attempted to implement a reconciliation ministry in our church this year. I was responsible for coordinating its implementation and have served as one of the reconciliation ministry leaders. In God's sovereignty, one of the women in my group is involved in some church conflict we are currently experiencing – on the opposite side from me. My inability to work with/mentor this woman has been a source of humbling for me and a reminder of my dependence on God for wisdom.

These responses reflect the data pool collected in the topic, "Secondhand Smoke."

Geri Scazzero has vividly communicated a dynamic which exists but as one of the pastors mentions, has not been discussed. In addition to the emotional price the pastor's wife pays for the secondhand smoke, these comments also mention the burden it places on them in worship as well as challenges it adds to relationships within the church.

The final topic under the research question, “What unique challenges does the wife of the pastor face,” is “The weight of the role of the pastor’s wife.” The “weight” of the role of the pastor’s wife refers to the challenges, burdens or costs associated with this role. The data pool related to this topic contained quite a variety of responses. There are several topical grouping under this subdivision. While some pastor’s wives commented that being a pastor’s wife empowered them to have an influence and make a difference in the local ministry, there was also the following comment which reflects the weight of not having a voice:

One of the things I’ve heard screaming at me is in many ways how arguably more valuable for the wives has been this kind of an opportunity to share because we men, even in the pain of what we go through in church, we have a voice, we have a pulpit, we moderate sessions. Our wives don’t have a voice at the session meeting. They don’t have a voice at the pulpit. I’ve talked to any number of wives who said, ‘My voice is in the shower. That’s the only time I get to talk to anybody is in the shower, and I have my private conversations there.’ That’s a very lonely thing...

There were several comments made by the pastor’s wives related to the double standard that is placed on the pastor’s wife:

What I think Sarah is saying to some degree is when you're the pastor’s wife; your life revolves around the church. I'm not saying other people maybe aren't really involved in the church, but their husbands have a job somewhere else. They don't have to check what's going on at church first before they decide to do anything else. You know, most things we do revolve around the church because Harold's the pastor. We have to go to church every Sunday morning and Sunday night. People get their undies in a wad if you don't show up for something, but it's okay for them not to show up, but it's not okay for you. That's an issue that Harold and I have talked about a little bit.

Another pastor’s wife said,

While some women thought it fine to wear shorter skirts, they said it would not be appropriate for me as the pastor’s wife. To which I replied, ‘We should all dress modestly as *Christian* women, not just because some are pastors’ wives.’
[emphasis hers]

And, finally, a comment related to understanding the double standard and living it:

People will put higher standards on you and your children than they will put on any other family in the church. I understand that we are called to a higher standard but it is easier to understand that calling than to actually live it out day to day.

There were several comments where wives mention comparing themselves with some

“ideal pastor’s wife.”

My personality isn't suited to that of an "ideal" pastor's wife. I am an introvert who enjoys reading books and one-on-one close friendships. I don't feel comfortable speaking to large groups or organizing complex events. My strengths are more suited to a supportive role, rather than to a leadership role.

Earlier in her answers to the questionnaire, this same wife had said,

I also am challenged by the reality that I am not a dynamic teacher/speaker/leader of the other women in the church. After all, “really good” pastors’ wives are out front directing and leading the women’s ministries!

I also have compared myself to other pastors’ wives in our church who are more the leader-type and have to remind myself that God has a plan for my life too.

This comment was made during a discussion of another’s idea of what it’s like to be a pastor’s wife:

Last night our group was with two other couples and they were talking about pastors and pastor’s wives and one of the pastor’s wives from another cohort, discussed the ridiculous expectations for pastor’s wives. She commented on the thinking that if you marry a pastor, you’ll get pastored all the time. She said that she assumed because she married this pastor, a spiritual guy, she just assumed that at home it would be like just drinking in you know –

To which someone responded, “Oh you’ll drink it in, baby.”

Another area under this subdivision of “the weight of the role of pastor’s wife” is expectations. The following comments have been taken from those made by pastors’ wives.

Several times in the last few weeks, I’ve been expected to *know* lots of things: the password for the church security system, where and when specially called presbytery meetings are being held, what happened to the missing SS materials,

what hospital a church member was admitted to, what (confidential) session discussion caused the wife of a ruling elder to feel upset, who will set up the Christmas tree in the sanctuary this year. [emphasis hers]

At one church, there was an underlying expectation that I had to be at the church every time the doors were open, that our kids had to act a certain way, that I would be in charge of some activity at the church and that I was super-spiritual and could quote Scripture and lead Bible studies like my husband.

Other women expect me to attend every wedding or baby shower and every rehearsal dinner before every wedding. They are disappointed if I have a conflict, and are “chilly” when I can only come to part of the event.

I got a sort of feeling from one or two women that I should have people over to our house more often and that I should want to socialize a lot more.

I have had more difficulty with my *own* expectations for myself as pastor’s wife than others’ expectations. I feel like I should help with visiting shut-ins more, providing meals for members who are infirm or convalescing. Rather than being a single incident, it is a constant, nagging expectation that I should be doing more. [emphasis hers]

Then, there was this situation:

When we first came to [our first church] (1975), the “steering committee” told me that they expected nothing of me beyond what they would expect from any regular member. I believe they were trying to be gracious, but before long I found out what they expected from others: virtually nothing. I was eager (probably over-eager) to jump into the work, but there was little opportunity.

Another area under “the weight of the role of pastor’s wife” concerns dealing with criticism. One of the pastors’ wives commented that it is a challenge for her, “Being a sounding board for others as they criticize the church and my husband.” And, another commented, “Seeing or hearing my husband be ‘attacked’ is incredibly painful. Criticisms of many things in the church wear me down.” Other pastors’ wives made the following comments:

Most of the people in the region had developed immunity from the illnesses in the area. Our illnesses in the first three months kept me and the children away from the church most Sundays. In fact, an older woman in the church walked up to my husband to ask him if I was actually a Christian since I had not been in church

much. Summer came, and we were excited to be out of the house and in church more often.

When the session asked my husband to resign because they didn't "like" him, I was challenged to be kind to those that hurt him. I even had to leave VBS that next week! That was a *huge* challenge to not take my husband's hurts and foes upon myself. Overall, the hard part is separating myself from the role as 'his wife.' [emphasis hers]

When the session makes a decision for a direction or change in the church and things don't go as smoothly as we had wished, the church gets upset with the pastor. This is a challenge to face because though the decision was made by a group of men; only the pastor gets the brunt of the criticisms.

The following comments on "the weight of the role of pastor's wife" represented some of the other pastor's wives:

I guess the other challenge is one I put on myself. I am reminded of it as I write these thoughts. Too often I think, I am a pastor's wife so I need to have wise words or the right answer for everyone. This burden is a challenge for a lot of pastors' wives. It keeps us from just being ourselves.

No weekends! No friends within the congregation – friendly to all, but true friend to none. The sinfulness of my children/myself is a "reflection" of my husband's qualifications.

I have tried not to form expectations for myself. Some of the qualifications of elders do have to do with the wife (hospitality, for instance). I don't see God's expectations for me being very different from what he expects from any woman of God. I think the difference lies in being the helpmeet to the pastor, and raising the pastor's children. The pastor attends a lot of church functions. If we want to be with our daddy, and our daddy/hubby would like to have his family with him, we end up doing a lot of church things. Being a helpmeet to the pastor means that I'm often supporting a pastor who is drained from serving the church people, and doesn't have a lot of pastoring left to give to his wife.

She continued:

One of the pressures I do feel is the pressure of visibility. As an analogy, having a dirty house isn't a big deal, unless someone sees it. People see us. I try to keep squarely in mind what God thinks of us.

I enjoy church work - too much, I think. Thus, I have had frustrations. Also, having married a pastor, I guess I assumed I would develop a women's or children's ministry, or that John and I would do things as a team. But (though he

is always kind and patient!) he has tended to see my interest and suggestions as meddling. I confess I am sort of envious of pastors' wives whose husbands take them on pastoral calls with them. It would help a lot if I were more of a Mary instead of a Martha.

I used to feel the pressure (especially with newcomers) to make sure they felt welcomed, that I remembered their names, invited them over and that they liked our church and us! If anyone left our church, I felt as if I had not done enough. I had to quickly learn the difference in being a warm and welcoming presence and feeling responsible for everyone's well-being and happiness.

I'm looking at the other end with my mother because she's in her eighties. She's always been the pastor's wife, she's in terrible health and she's still trying to – my dad is still in full-time ministry. She's like, 'He's acting like we're still in our forties,' and she is duty-bound to be there when he's preaching. So sometimes she's in excruciating [pain] – she can't stay awake because of all the drugs they've got her on but she'll force herself to go, and then the next day, she'll be a mess because she's overextended herself.

And, in one cohort's discussion it was observed that the pressure of expectations does not just come from the congregation or from personal expectations:

And we did hear some of the wives feeling pressure from their husbands to live up to the expectation [for pastors' wives] because their living up to the expectation [for pastors' wives] reflects on them in some way and that's their own insecurity issue, so job security maybe [also in play].

These are the comments from the pool of data related to the topic of “the weight of the role of pastor's wife.” They reflect the variety and breadth of the comments collected. They began with the challenge of not having a voice, “my voice is in the shower.” There were comments about the double standards between those for “pastor's wives” (and their family) and those for the other members of the congregation. Some pastor's wives struggled with comparing themselves with some “ideal” pastor's wife standard and falling short. There was the expectation by some of the pastor's wives before they got married that if they married this spiritual guy that they would get “pastored” all the time. They thought that while they were at home they would just “drink

it in"...“Oh you’ll drink it in baby!” Pastor’s wives have been expected to know more than the average church member: from the mundane, to the church calendar, to theology. There is the expectation that the pastor’s wife is to attend every church service, wedding, bridal shower, women’s meeting, and so on. Dealing with criticism of the church, her husband, herself and her family is one of the biggest challenges for many of the pastor’s wives sharing comments. And, these women face the challenge of ministering/pastoring to a husband/pastor who is not reciprocating such efforts:

Being a help-mete to the pastor means that I'm often supporting a pastor who is drained from serving the church people, and doesn't have a lot of pastoring left to give to his wife.

In fact, as some of the comments show, the pastor may even be one of the sources of pressure on the wife to conform to the expectations of the “pastor’s wife” due to his own job insecurities or whatnot.

This concludes the presentation of data obtained from the questionnaire mailed to pastors’ wives by the author as well as from key-word searches made with the transcripts of the Pastors Summit cohort meetings. With the data presentation concluded, a summary of the overall findings of this project will be presented along with some conclusions drawn by the author. These will be presented in chapter five.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

This study began by looking at the challenges facing couples in ministry. The challenges are taking a toll on the ministry couples and resulting in marital troubles, including divorce, as well as persons leaving the ministry. The average length of stay for a minister in pastoral ministry is five years. That is most unfortunate given that the fifth year typically marks the start of those years that are most productive in a pastor's ministry: years 5 through 14. It was noted that the spouse plays a significant and strategic role in the life and ministry of the pastor. In addition to the various challenges these women face, they must also deal with the expectations associated with the role of "pastor's wife." Thus the purpose of this study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of "pastor's wife."

Summary

A survey of Biblical literature showed no term for "pastor's wife." Old Testament leaders of Israel as well as the priests were married. The New Testament showed married men who were called into ministry in the local churches. While marriage was not a requirement, many of the leaders of local churches were married. This also appears to have been the pattern in the early church. However, due to a decision in the fourth century, the church began restricting sexual relations in ministry couples. By the twelfth century, there was a call for the universal celibacy of ministers. This pattern was challenged on a large scale during the Reformation. After about a hundred turbulent years, the position of pastor's wife became established and accepted. The model of

married clergy moved from Europe to America and the role of “pastor’s wife” continued to develop.

Three authors were presented with three different approaches to developing a system of identifying various roles that pastors’ wives tend to play. Leonard I. Sweet identified roles based on his historical research. Donna Sinclair used a personal pilgrimage approach or “stages of development” to describe possible roles. And, William Douglas identified roles from his survey research.

The summary of selected studies covered a wide range of sources. Diane Langberg’s book, *Counsel for Pastors Wives*, in addition to addressing other issues, gave some helpful insights into the importance of a ministry couple’s understanding of the relationship between marriage and ministry. Shari Thomas’ study, presented to MNA (Mission to North America), looked into the sources of stress and satisfaction of church-planting spouses and contained various insights that were very relevant to this project. London and Wiseman also supplied helpful material. Their discussion on handling the expectations of others was applicable to the experience shared by pastors’ wives.

Following these three sources, were three books that focus on the marriage relationship, and two, on relationships in general. In light of the importance of the health of the pastor’s marriage to his effectiveness in ministry, these books added depth to the examination of challenges facing married couples in pastoral ministry and provided strategies for maintaining healthy marriages.

Next, five books written from the personal perspective of pastors’ wives were presented. Nancy Pannell speaks from thirty-five years in ministry and adds the dimension of having been a “staff wife” (her husband was not the senior pastor of the

church). Lorna Dobson shares insights from her thirty-plus years in ministry. Gail MacDonald speaks to the need of tending the inner fire of a woman's personal devotional life with Jesus. Senter challenges pastors' wives to wrestle with the relationship between the roles they play and who they are as individuals. Ruth Truman is very candid about her experiences as a pastor's wife.

These books written by pastors' wives were followed by a half-dozen books related to the systems theory of looking at relationships. Ultimately, the phenomenon of the role of "pastor's wife" is a product of the interactions within relational systems. Women married to pastors need to become aware of these dynamics and how they can develop strategies of coping so that they may not only survive but thrive in the pastoral-ministry setting.

The books on systems were followed by two of Peter Scazzero's books, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* and *Emotionally Healthy Church*. Scazzero challenges his readers with the relationship between emotional health and spiritual maturity. This selected study completed the Literature Review and was followed by the Methodology.

This project was a qualitative study carried out by the author using data derived from a survey mailed to pastors' wives as well as key-word searches performed on the transcripts of Pastors Summit cohort meetings. The resulting data (quotations) were then sorted according to the three research questions, and then further sorted into topical groupings within each question. The data was then presented by representative quotes from each of the sub-topics within each of the three research questions. This now leads to the conclusions drawn from this study.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of the wife of the pastor in the role of “pastor’s wife.” The principle findings of this study will be presented under three topics: The relationship between ministry and marriage, addressing expectations, and loneliness.

The Relationship Between Ministry and Marriage

Diane Langberg observes that ministry couples often feel a clash between marriage and ministry. She says:

...Many times couples feel as if marriage is in conflict with ministry. The attitude seems to be: “If I really give to my marriage what all these books and counselors say I should, my ministry will suffer. Marriage is important, but my ministry is for God, and he deserves 100 percent.” This type of thinking translates into the resolve that “I will respond to anyone who calls at any time. If I have promised my wife that I will stay home, she will just have to understand that God’s work comes first.”³⁰⁴

Langberg recognizes most couples are not so blunt about their position; however, such a perspective can creep in subtly:

The reason for this error is a misunderstanding of how marriage and ministry fit together. Many couples believe and live as if marriage and ministry do not fit together. They view these two areas as being in irresolvable conflict and feel that one must be subordinate. Frequently, this translates into a severe neglect of the family, because “serving the Lord” is more important. Those having this attitude define service to God as “those spiritual things that take place outside the home.”³⁰⁵

As Langberg observes other couples, she sees another perspective:

Other couples believe that marriage and ministry ought somehow to fit together, so they run back and forth between the two. The fit is never comfortable or easy, but they enjoy some success from their juggling efforts.³⁰⁶

Langberg continues:

³⁰⁴ Langberg, *Counsel to Pastors’ wives*, 14-15.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 15.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

The first approach, a neglect of the home, is clear disobedience to God's standards for those who oversee his church. Paul tells us that "[an overseer] must manage his own family well." (1 Tim. 3:4). Obviously, a pastor cannot manage his home if he is never present. The second approach will not work when both areas make major demands at the same time. Those who try to take on both equally are prime candidates for burnout.³⁰⁷

Langberg offers another approach:

There is a better way. I have seen it work for people who made a commitment to it from the beginning, as well as for those who first chose one of the above approaches and then struggled hard to change horses in midstream. This third option regarding marriage and ministry is that we view our marriage as part of our ministry. Just as we view our Bible studies, our singing in the choir, our teaching, or our counseling as a part of our ministry, so we must see our marriage as a viable part of our service to God... We are to honor him and give glory to him in *everything* we do. [emphasis hers].³⁰⁸

London's and Wiseman's findings support Langberg as they recognize many ministry couples fail to invest in their marriage:

Far too many ministry couples have settled into a monotonous mediocrity in their marriages – no surprises, no meaningful conversations, no increased fulfillment, no exhilarating excitement, and no intentional efforts to make it better.³⁰⁹

Comments from the data also support the perspective that pastors often put the ministry first. Three comments came under the topic of "Two wives." In the first, a pastor explained, "My identity was the church. The church was my first wife and Sally was my second wife." In a second comment, a pastor shared, "I think the heart of the issue is actually as a pastor, you have two wives. You have your wife at home and your wife that's at church, and oftentimes that second wife dominates." One pastor's wife put it simply, "My husband is in an adulterous relationship, and he loves the church more than he loves me."

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

³⁰⁹ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 72.

These comments could simply arise from workaholic tendencies in the person of the pastor. But it seems that in many cases, this type of situation stems from the very misunderstanding identified by Langberg. She explains that some ministry couples believe that ministry and marriage do not mesh, and that ministry takes the priority in any conflict between the two. These pastors also reflect what Gary Thomas identifies in his book as a “perspective found in much of Christian history that has unofficially... considered married believers to be ‘second-class Christians’ who compromised their integrity...”³¹⁰ As Langberg notes, these pastors define “ministry” as that spiritual activity that takes place outside the home.

Adopting the attitude suggested by Langberg that the ministry couple’s marriage is a part of the ministry could reap the results she suggests:

A good marital relationship provides a haven for couples in the midst of the pressures and struggles of ministry. A marriage that has been honored and lovingly nurtured provides wonderful support during difficult times.³¹¹

This attitude and subsequent investment in the marriage could also lead to reducing some of the pressure on the pastor’s wife identified by Shari Thomas:

A study conducted by Baker in 1989, finds that the major factor which restricts clergy spouses from experiencing the support they need is that their primary support system comes from their husbands – men who tend to be absent from the home evenings and weekends.³¹²

The pressures on the pastor’s wife are also seen in the following:

The stress with which clergy children struggle also implies an added stress on the wife. In traditional settings she may often be the primary caregiver of the family. Often this will be out of necessity as the husband becomes heavily committed and involved with his work (Warner and Carter 1984). The wife thus

³¹⁰ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 20.

³¹¹ Langberg, *Counsel for Pastors Wives*, 17-18.

³¹² Shari Thomas, *A Study of PCA Church Planter Spouse Stress and Satisfaction Levels*, 8.

finds herself not only carrying the majority of care for the family, but also carrying the additional emotional weight of children who are under stress. Thus, it is no surprise that clergy spouse scores on the emotional exhaustion scale were high. (Warner and Carter 1984)³¹³

Thomas suggests the impact a change in the attitude of the pastor/husband could have:

The key is the husband's participation. This cannot be stated enough. This raises questions of the husband's understanding of the impact this dynamic has on his spouse, family, and eventually on himself...The research suggests that by understanding how family life and ministry mutually reinforce each other, for better or worse, the church planter can have the long-range salutary effect of increasing his effectiveness, both in the church and in his family (Lee 1988).³¹⁴

The data contains one pastor's testimony to becoming aware of his neglect of his wife and the need to be more intentional in ministering to his family:

My wife said to me a couple years ago – we were driving in the car, and I almost drove off the road – she said, 'You haven't asked me about whether I'm doing my devotions for six months. You do that for a new Christian in our church.' I just about hit a telephone pole. It hit me like a ton of bricks; she was right. I'm concerned about the others in the church, the new Christians and the others, but not taking care of my family. Spiritual formation for my family – finally investing time and energy into one's marriage and family.

As pastors who are husbands see their families as part of their overall ministries, it would give them permission as well as incentive to invest themselves more in marriage and family, which would will provide better support for the pastor's wife. The importance of the wife in the pastor's ministry came out very clearly in several places in the data:

The most effective way to develop a spiritually healthy church is to be spiritually healthy and maintain the health of my marriage. I've had my wife tell me, 'He's never around, you know. If the bell rings, he's like the old fire horse, he just goes off.' And, 'If he would only put one-tenth of the energy into the family, we'd have a great marriage. He's there for everyone else, but he's not there for me.' Understanding [the] strategic role that the wife plays in the life and ministry. This is exactly what the guys from WTS were saying, but to understand that and affirm that is critical.

³¹³ Ibid., 10.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

Another pastor observed,

I suppose this goes without saying, but I don't know how a man can thrive in the ministry unless his wife is thriving with him. That was my argument last time What is the key to success for long-term ministry? My answer is: your marriage. To me, that is the No. 1 thing.

As well as the recognition that:

First, for pastors to understand the strategic role that their wife plays in their life and ministry. It sounds logical doesn't it? But most pastors never take the time to look their wife in the eye and tell them how critical they are. And yet when we had talked about calling in this group, and we talked about calling in the first round of the Pastors' Summit, one of the things we discovered was the fact that humanly speaking, the most significant instrument keeping pastors in the ministry is the pastor's wife. Far beyond any other thing keeping them in the ministry is their wife that has kept them encouraged and strengthened and encouraged them to stay in the ministry.

London and Wiseman say something very similar:

Those who live in ministry marriages know how much a pastor depends on his spouse to prop him up, to validate his ministry, and to challenge the mistaken assumptions he often makes about himself and others.³¹⁵

As pastors begin to learn how strategic their wives are to their ministry, it will strengthen their commitment to avoid neglect and strive toward greater effort when it comes to their families. It can provide the incentive to put into practice principles suggested by those who study and write about marriage, such as William Doherty in *Take Back Your Marriage*. His three principles would be most helpful to couples. He encourages life-long commitment that will weather the storms of life. He also encourages intentionality within the marriage to continue the courting rituals which will provide an atmosphere in which love, intimacy, and joy can flourish. And, he promotes the idea and give suggestions how couples can seek to develop a supportive community for their marriage. The development of a supportive community would overcome the weakness in

³¹⁵ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 12.

many ministry marriages: that of having too narrow of a support base. The research of Thomas supports the need for a supportive community:

The lack of a support system not only increases loneliness and isolation for the wife, it puts added pressure on the marriage. If a clergy couple is relying primarily on each other for support, the marriage may function well most of the time, yet a narrow support system will become a problem when either one is not able to fulfill that role (McMinn et.al, 2004, 21). Added to this, the demands of ministerial work and the boundary intrusions clergy families experience often allow little time to develop the intimacy needed and thus inhibit close marriage relationships (Warner and Carter 1984).

A notable conclusion from a study done by Orstrander, Henry, and Fournier (1994) showed that ministers' families who experience high stress levels related to church work will be in need of increased support systems beyond those normally available in their church, family, or networks. The interrelated aspect of the lack of a support system for the wife, and the increased importance this places on the relationship with the husband, adds further pressure to the marriage.³¹⁶

These results show a need for greater training of present and future ministry couples to enable them to assume the best perspective on the relationship between ministry and marriage. Understanding that one's marriage is a part of ministry will promote healthier marriages as well as healthier ministries. Senter made a comment on this issue as she was asked if ministry was "his job or our job?" She said,

His job or our job? Each person must answer this for herself. But as far as I'm concerned, it's both. It is his job in terms of details, hours invested, amount of expertise, and physical participation. But it is our job in terms of feeling with, being interested in, asking about, listening to, observing, and supporting. To me that is the meaning of being "one flesh."³¹⁷

This is a good response to the question, "What is the relationship of the wife of the pastor to ministry?" As a man gives himself to oversee his household [marriage and family] well, he will be better equipped to serve as an overseer in the ministry of the Church. This approach will also have great benefits for the wife of the pastor.

³¹⁶ Thomas, *A Study of PCA Church Planter Spouse Stress*, 9.

³¹⁷ Senter, *So You're the Pastor's Wife*, 99.

Addressing expectations

Expectations come from the congregation, the community, the pastor and the pastor's wife herself. In their discussion of expectations, London and Wiseman note that congregational expectations are the bricks and mortar of the role of "pastor's wife." However, these expectations are rarely outlined for the wife, much less logically thought through or voted on by the congregation. They are usually part of the tradition of the church. And, "some expectations are phantom notions perpetuated across decades without any test of validity or rationality."³¹⁸ London and Wiseman present a variety of sources for congregational expectations as seen in Chapter Two.³¹⁹ They present the challenge of expectations in the following statistic:

In a 1993 survey, 53 percent of ministers' wives believed unrealistic expectations to be the biggest problem they face in the ministry they share with their pastor/husbands.³²⁰

MacDonald shares what results when we let expectations get out of hand:

True guilt occurs when we've broken God's laws. False guilt erupts when we or others set up unattainable or superficial expectations of ourselves that even our Lord would not have attempted. Frankly, that's exactly what I was doing. I had the growing inner sense of being trapped. I was, in Henri Nouwen's words, becoming "a prisoner of people's expectations rather than being liberated by the Divine promises"³²¹

From the data presented in Chapter Four,³²² there were several areas of expectation mentioned by the pastors' wives. One said she was expected at any given time to "know" a wide variety of information, such as items on the church schedule, passwords, session activity, the location of missing Sunday School material, and which

³¹⁸ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 140.

³¹⁹ p. 34ff of this study.

³²⁰ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 134.

³²¹ MacDonald, *High Call, High Privilege*, 40.

³²² pp. 107f of this study.

hospital had admitted a certain church member. Thus, there is pressure on the pastor's wife to be "in the know" or "in the loop." Several wives said they and their families were expected to attend every church service. In addition, the pastor's wife was expected to attend all women's meetings, weddings and showers, and various other social gatherings. The same expectation did not extend to the other women in the congregation. This double standard also extended to clothing, as was illustrated by congregants who thought it perfectly acceptable for them to wear shorter skirts but not for the pastor's wife. Some expect the pastor's wife to be able to quote the Bible and lead Bible studies just as their husbands do. The pastor's wife was expected to have members over for meals or social gatherings. And sometimes the pastors' wives' own expectations of themselves were more troubling than that of their congregants:

I have had more difficulty with my *own* expectations for myself as pastor's wife than others' expectations. I feel like I should help with visiting shut-ins more, providing meals for members who are infirm or convalescing. Rather than being a single incident, it is a constant, nagging expectation that I should be doing more. [emphasis hers]

Langberg sees this experience of living with congregational expectations as arising from the role ambiguity often associated with the role of the pastor's wife:

Though pastors also deal with role-related struggles, their wives usually have more difficulty in this area. Part of the reason for this difficulty is the ambiguity of your position. Your husband has a job description that both he and the church have decided he can fill satisfactorily. You must also fill a job description, but one that is unstated by the church and unclear to you. You are left guessing and are accepted according to your ability to figure out the church's expectations and succeed in meeting them.³²³

Thomas also comments and elaborates on the challenge of the ambiguity of the role of pastor's wife:

For the clergy spouse, role ambiguity has been recognized as a source of

³²³ Langberg, *Counsel for Pastors Wives*, 68-69.

stress. As stated earlier, other professions do not demand the same level of involvement that the Christian ministry demands of the minister's spouse and family. The lack of clear expectations for the spouse, combined with a lack of friendship and community support (Zoba 1997), causes extremely high levels of stress.³²⁴

Thomas also shared this surprising discovery in relation to ambiguity:

It was noted in studies of families of POW's that there was an isolated variable of "boundary ambiguity" as a factor in family stress. In other words, the unknown prevented the family from obtaining closure and reorganizing itself. Therefore, not knowing who is "in" and who is "out" of the system creates stress for the family. In ecological terms, the boundary of the family is usually clearly delineated. The father and mother have their respective places of work, the children their school, and so on. One member of the family does not participate in the others' system. The father may visit the child's school but he does not attend with his child. This creates clear boundaries within each system. In the clergy family, however, the system is not clear. All members of the family participate either directly or indirectly in the church. There is some role expectation of the congregation which must be fulfilled by the minister, his spouse, and even his children. Hence, we see role ambiguity.³²⁵

Under physical ambiguity, Thomas later shared the following:

The home is often used in clergy ministry and especially in the early stages of church planting. It is common for home to be an office, a nursery, a Sunday school room, a worship-center, and a boarding house. The statements that came from the interviews were: "When can I say, STOP?" "I don't feel like I have any private space." "I even have to hide my bras when doing laundry as our home is a constant flow of people." "Do my kids always have to share their toys with all the children who are in our home?"³²⁶

It is easy to see the stress this ambiguity places on the wife in this situation. Thomas

explains that the ambiguity comes as a result of system interaction:

Ambiguity is endemic to ministry. For the spouse this ambiguity takes on three major forms which I term role ambiguity, emotional ambiguity, and physical ambiguity.

Lee (1988) presents the ministers' family as an "ecological system." He insists that the family must be studied as a whole, which would include the individual members, as well as their patterns and the quality of relationships

³²⁴ Thomas, *A Study of PCA Church Planter Spouse Stress*, 12.

³²⁵ Ibid., 11.

³²⁶ Ibid., 26.

between them. Further, the ecological systems approach does not end with the family system. “The assumption is that the family is embedded within a larger network of systems” (Lee 1988, 251). These systems also must be studied to understand the family itself. One notable result of his study was a unique characteristic he labeled “boundary ambiguity.” He found that the clarity of system boundaries is crucial to the healthy functioning of the whole system (or in this case, family).³²⁷

Thomas explains that role ambiguity has to do with what the pastor’s wife is expected to do or the roles she should fill. Emotional ambiguity has to do with the information she is given (i.e.: how much of the church’s brokenness is she expected to “carry” as given to her by the congregation or her husband, the pastor). This was described under the section in the data on “secondhand smoke”³²⁸. And, physical ambiguity relates to the privacy a pastor’s family has in their home due to the access granted to the congregation. This is especially challenging when the pastor lives in a manse supplied by the church.

Friedman elaborates on the systems in the church:

It is the thesis of this book that all clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of faith, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in any one of them can produce symptoms in the others, and increased understanding of any one creates more effective functioning in all three.³²⁹

Friedman comments on the similarity between the dynamics within a family and within a church:

...Of all work systems, however, the one that functions most like a family is the church or synagogue. This is true in part because it is so difficult for clergy to distinguish home life from professional life (whether or not there is a parsonage and whether or not the spouse is deeply invested), and partly because the intensity with which some lay people become invested in their religious institutions makes the church or synagogue a prime arena for the displacement of important,

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

³²⁸ p. 104f of this study.

³²⁹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 1.

unresolved family issues. Interlocking emotional triangles between personal family issues and congregational family issues are the natural consequence of such displacement...

The model being developed here is more analogous to electricity. The deepest effects that work systems and family systems have on one another come from the fact that they both run on the same current, if not the identical energy source. The influence is internal rather than external. They are plugged into one another and *their respective states of homeostasis join in a new overall balance*. [emphasis his].³³⁰

Friedman explains that a key concept in the systems model is homeostasis:

As stated, family systems thinking locates a family's problem in the nature of the system rather than in the nature of its parts. A key to that relocation is the concept of homeostasis: the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence... Family theory assumes that no matter what the various members' quirks or idiosyncrasies, if the system exists and has a name, it had to have achieved some kind of balance in order to permit the continuity necessary for maintaining its identity.³³¹

In light of this idea of homeostasis within a system (or system of systems!), it seems that the phenomenon of "the role of pastor's wife" is an attempt by a congregation to return to a previous state of homeostasis by encouraging the incoming pastor's wife to fill the role occupied by a previous pastor's wife.

In addressing the expectations of the congregation (or others), Friedman has this comment on how to attempt change within a system:

With an organic systems model, the criterion of whom to counsel is no longer who has the symptom, but *who has the greatest capacity to bring change to the system*. [emphasis his]³³²

What does this look like in pastoral ministry? While not mentioning systems specifically, Diane Langberg advises:

³³⁰ Ibid., 198.

³³¹ Ibid., 23.

³³² Ibid., 22.

...It may be beneficial for you to choose two or three women who are considered leaders by the others (your husband's input here would be helpful). Tell them you have a concern for the church and particularly for the women of the church. Ask them, based on their own experience with other pastors' wives, how they feel you might best be able to serve the women in the congregation. Obviously, your service would be unique, as it would be based on your gifts and personality, but perhaps these women would be in a position to offer some suggestions and to make more clear to you the needs and expectations you are facing.³³³

A helpful suggestion given by London and Wiseman for addressing unrealistic requests of the pastor's wife is to ask a decision group, "Does everyone agree?" This will often reveal the request may have come from an individual or minority and can possibly be negotiated without offending the majority of the congregation or placing undue strain on the pastor's wife.³³⁴ London and Wiseman also mention that not all expectations are "carved in stone" but, rather, while a congregation may need a church musician or a women's group leader, the request may merely represent a hope of the congregation rather than a demand.³³⁵

The challenges of expectations are far-reaching. It is recognized by the material in this discussion that the phenomenon of the "role of pastor's wife" is actually the result of systems interaction as they try to reach/maintain/reclaim homeostasis. The ambiguity of the expectations is due to the lack of a clear written or understood job description similar to that for the position of pastor. This ambiguity is one of the causes of greatest stress for the women in the role of pastor's wife. However, Diane Langberg's advice (above) provides a strategy with which this situation can be addressed. There are also some other suggestions from the pastors' wives whose responses were reported in the data that may also prove helpful:

³³³ Langberg, *Counsel for Pastors Wives*, 69.

³³⁴ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 140-141.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

I've always conceived that one of my most important roles is to be a wife to my pastor-husband. Pastors are often lonely, as well, and often have no one to share with, no one they feel comfortable sharing with. So, I've been my husband's confidante, lover, friend, someone he can 'let his hair down' with. No one else is called to be that for him in the way that I am. All other ministries are subordinate to this.

Another pastor's wife shared this advice,

It is OK to be yourself. God made you. He called you as you are. Don't try to be 'the pastor's wife.' Too many wives try to be different things for different people. That can get messy if everyone ends up in the same room. Then you will not know who to be. So just be yourself and trust the Lord to everything else.

There is also this comment in which a pastor's wife shares how calling/role may change over the life of the church:

Yes. Well, our philosophy has always been from the get-go that I am Mark's wife and he happens to be a pastor. And so, but that is not to say that I don't recognize that there are certain things I need to do, I want to do and should do to assist him in his ministry, um, and just as a doctor's wife assists a doctor or whatever. And so when the church was younger, like from when it didn't even exist to when it was maybe up to 300, I was pretty much involved in everything. And that's not because I was his wife, but because someone needed to and I just filled in. I just did what needed to be done. So I think the church was used to Mark's wife was always there, and they liked that, you know, you always like that. And then I'd say from about 300-350 on, I was finally able, because we had more staff, to not have to be at every event... And I was able to specialize in the areas that I felt I was more gifted in. And so the transition would be from being everywhere all the time to being more involved in the areas that I had specific skills and gifts in which was certain ministries, not all the ministries.

Thus, in recognition of God's sovereignty to work in the life of the woman called to fill the role of "pastor's wife," it will prove beneficial for that woman to carefully consider the gifts, personality, experiences, strengths and weakness she has (or in short, to consider "who she is in Christ"). Then, in light of the place to which she is being called with her husband, she should consult with some of the key local leaders to gain a clearer understanding of the expectations, as well as the opportunities, she will meet in that calling. With this information, she can prayerfully consider the various possibilities with

her husband. Then, remembering that marriage is part of ministry and her first calling is to be a wife to her husband, she will be free to enter into ministry with the goal to glorify God in all things.

This response has in view a situation in which the woman faces overwhelming expectations and perceived certain failure. But what about the situation faced by one of the pastors' wives when she went with great expectations to serve but was met with no expectations (or permission)?

When we first came to Oakdale (1975), the 'steering committee' told me that they expected nothing of me beyond what they would expect from any regular member. I believe they were trying to be gracious, but before long, I found out what they expected from others: virtually nothing. I was eager (probably over-eager) to jump into the work, but there was little opportunity.

What hope is there for her and other women in similar situations? First, by remembering that marriage is a part of ministry, the pastor's wife will see herself in ministry as she faithfully fulfills the role of wife and mother. Next, London and Wiseman remind us:

But for proactive Christian workers who view themselves as being in partnership with the Living Christ, nothing is ever as hopeless as it seems at first. They know something that has eternal significance can be done in every place.³³⁶

These women can take heart that as they faithfully serve where they can, God will open opportunities that will allow them to use their gifts for his glory and the advancement of the kingdom. These opportunities may occur outside the church in the local community or beyond.

This material has been eye-opening for the author. I was not aware of the impact ambiguity has on a pastor's wife and family. Or, at least, I did not understand ambiguity as one cause of frustration and exhaustion in the pastorate. With the admonitions seen in the section on the relationship of ministry and marriage, as well as the suggestions in this

³³⁶ London and Wiseman, *Married to a Pastor's Wife*, 151.

section, it is encouraging that there are some tangible steps and strategies with which to confront this challenge.

Loneliness

Loneliness seems to be commonly felt among women whose role is that of pastor's wife. One aspect of this issue is whether or not a pastor and his wife can have open, transparent friendships with members of the congregation they serve. This topic was mentioned in most of the books written by pastors' wives and also occurred repeatedly in the data. Ruth Senter shared:

There is a myth about the pastor's wife that contributed to my lonely times during the first years of marriage. I never read it in a book or heard a seminar that was built around it, and no pastor's wife ever spelled it out for me in terms of advice. But somewhere along the line I picked up the idea that a pastor's wife had to be a friend to all and close companion to none. Somewhere I got the picture that the church was full of people who were just waiting for the chance to be friends with the pastor's wife. In order to be fair to everyone and not have anyone get jealous over the fact that they were not my friend too, I would have to be friends to everyone.³³⁷

Lorna Dobson said:

Balancing friendliness with friendships is an area with which wives of ministers must deal. Some are hurt or betrayed by church members they thought to be friends. Nearly half of the women I surveyed say they feel a frustration in changing or developing friendships because of their husband's occupation.³³⁸

Senter suggests that there may be things that pastors' wives do which are actually creating barriers to the establishment of friendships and the creation or perpetuation of loneliness. She says:

As I thought about Joy's comment on my busyness, I came to the conclusion that one of the reasons I was lonely might be that I was so busy. There was always business to take care of, services to attend, projects to support, lessons to teach. I

³³⁷ Senter, *So You're the Pastor's Wife*, 87-88.

³³⁸ Dobson, *I'm More than the Pastor's Wife*, 45-46.

rushed by with my “hi, how are you” and smiled at people long-distance as I entered and exited from church.³³⁹

Later, Senter continues:

Another conclusion I’ve come to about loneliness is that movement does not make it go away—neither does physical proximity. Loneliness is not cured by simply being with a person.³⁴⁰

She concludes, “When activity becomes a substitute for intimacy, we’re lonely.”³⁴¹

Senter shares another thing pastors’ wives may do that creates barriers to friendship:

Another reason for loneliness is my predisposition to serve people. Call it genes, environmental conditioning, biblical mandate, or pastor’s-wife-itis, but it can make me a very willing giver and a very unwilling receiver. When I cannot allow another to give to me, I’ve got a one-sided relationship, and one-sided relationships can be lonely relationships.³⁴²

MacDonald echoes this:

But when you are seen *only* as *Mrs. Strength*, who out there imagines that they have anything to give back to you? Therein may lie the core of the reason why ministry wives have so often felt a stifling loneliness. Friendships are based on some sense of reciprocity. If I am all *give* and no *take*, then how can there be friendship? [emphasis hers]³⁴³

MacDonald points out the danger in only being a giver:

When I insist on being the *giver* in every relationship, I run the risk of becoming a controlling person. I now see the possibility of this as a rather serious shortcoming. I look back and see that there were times when I could have fallen into that trap.³⁴⁴

But, Dobson later says:

Whenever I hear that couples preparing for ministry are taught not to be too involved with special friends, my gut feeling is that this is illogical. If the Bible says to “love one another deeply” (1 Peter 1:22), then one must acknowledge that surface relationships do not love deeply, nor do they hold the loved one

³³⁹ Senter, *So You're the Pastor's Wife*, 84.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 85.

³⁴² Ibid., 86.

³⁴³ MacDonald, 151.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 152.

accountable. It is not enough to tell churchgoers to practice this principle and not live it out in our own lives!³⁴⁵

Dobson suggests that seminary is a good time to establish friendships.³⁴⁶ For those who did not establish friendships during seminary and are already out in ministry, Dobson suggests establishing support groups. She shares ideas to consider about the benefits of being in a support group and practical matters, such as the different types of groups, people to invite, activities and other matters related to support groups. She encourages this be done with the blessings of the husbands.³⁴⁷

Ruth Truman speaks of the importance of a woman's knowing herself before she can successfully interact with others or develop meaningful, lasting relationships:

You just don't spend a life with people well until you've checked out your inner resources. Knowing yourself is the key to knowing others. It unlocks a lifetime of happiness for you, regardless of what vocation your husband is employed in because it lets you be you, secure in the knowledge that you are answering responsibly to yourself and God for your actions and words and nothing further is required. That way, if somebody else doesn't like what you're doing, you know it's his hang-up, not yours!³⁴⁸

Some of the comments from the data speak of the loneliness pastors' wives face due to the ideas/expectations of others:

People have commented to me several times that they assume I wouldn't want to be friends with them because I am the 'pastor's wife,' and everyone wants to be my friend and we are probably being invited everywhere.

It can be difficult to connect with women in the church. Many of the women in the church have been together for a long time. They have already developed their way of talking and doing things. They can be very welcoming at some levels, but in some ways the pastor's wife can always feel like an outsider.

This comment was also shared:

³⁴⁵ Dobson, 46.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

³⁴⁷ Chapter Ten of Dobson's book is devoted to establishing support groups.

³⁴⁸ Truman, *Underground Manual for Minister's Wives*, 24.

Sometimes when connecting with other women, it can also be difficult because they may see you differently because you are the pastor's wife. I have often walked up to a group of women who are having a conversation, and once I get there, they stop talking. They all turn toward me as if I was only there to say something brilliant. In reality, I just wanted to say 'Hi, what are you talking about?' I just wanted to connect.

One pastor's wife stated she believed that some women face self-imposed isolation:

Well, I think sometimes we're as isolated as we make ourselves. I think we can be afraid of pursuing people because of who we are, and obviously there are boundaries of what you do and don't say, but that honestly should be what everyone – you shouldn't be airing all the laundry with anyone besides the Lord. ... I think that we can make ourselves isolated and, yes, in some sense we should be, but in the same sense, that's a – we're as lonely as we make ourselves.

Another pastor's wife shared her conclusion about friendships with members of the congregation and the resulting loneliness.

Loneliness!! My husband and I have wrestled for *years* about whether you can be friends with church members. We have concluded that you can't, but church members are also people you see most often. There is no one I can talk to. [emphasis hers]

At times, pastors' wives face isolation from their position:

One of the things I've heard screaming at me is in many ways how arguably more valuable for the wives has been this kind of an opportunity to share because we men, even in the pain of what we go through in church, we have a voice, we have a pulpit, we moderate sessions. Our wives don't have a voice at the session meeting. They don't have a voice at the pulpit. I've talked to any number of wives who said, 'My voice is in the shower. That's the only time I get to talk to anybody is in the shower, and I have my private conversations there.' That's a very lonely thing.

"My voice is in the shower." What a powerful statement! This shows how isolated and lonely the role of pastor's wife can be. It is encouraging that included in the data is an example of a wife who recognizes the importance of friendship and is trying to establish realistic friendships in the church:

But I was definitely not doing that at church. I mean, I didn't talk to my friends there at all. I mean, we just did stuff with our kids and you know – had a normal

... but then we just said, 'If that's, if that's true, we can't survive that.' So we have to have friends, and I'm so grateful for an older pastor's wife, Sharon Scott, who at one pastors' wives meetings, a lot of girls were saying they couldn't have friends and she just... I said, 'I'll die if I don't have friends,' and she came over and said, 'Do it.' Just – you know, be thoughtful, be careful, and you don't talk about church people. Which I don't. I mean it was about me and them, personal things. So we found a place (after trying a lot of different things) that worked for us, and it's been harder, I was telling Becky earlier, since we left South Carolina and came to Newton. How I've described it is: I have hundreds of people who would be there in a minute if somebody died or got hurt, but they're not there day to day. You know, nobody's calling and saying, 'How are you?' And that's hard because I know I can depend on them in need, but I just want them to just hang out. So we've been trying to start that more. It hurts me but it doesn't overwhelm me because I can't really handle it anyway.

She realizes that these friendships will be limited due to the nature of being the “pastor's wife,” but she does not reject the idea of establishing some realistic friendships. This is an example that points out the need for long-term friendships (such as those established in seminary) or a support group in which pastors' wives can receive the kind of acceptance and support we all need. MacDonald's words remind us of the price one must be willing to pay in order to develop friendships:

The fact is that friendships take time...prime time. They are not developed in the backwater of time left over from other things when we are exhausted, distracted, and disinterested. You've got to desire a friendship so badly that you're willing to set aside other things to develop it and maintain it. In earlier days, Gordon and I did not see the need for this.³⁴⁹

For those who see the need and are willing to pay the price there is some advice on how to approach developing friendship relationships.

John Gottman has provided some useful information and counsel that will be helpful for pastors' wives as they seek to establish new friendships.³⁵⁰ Gottman looks at

³⁴⁹ MacDonald, 153.

³⁵⁰ Gottman and DeClaire. *The Relationship Cure*.

what he calls the “bid,” which is “the fundamental unit of emotional communication.”³⁵¹

He goes on to define the bid and response:

A bid can be a question, a gesture, a look, a touch – any single expression that says, “I want to feel connected to you.” A response to a bid is just that—a positive or negative answer to somebody’s request for emotional connection.³⁵²

When there is a failure to respond to a bid, the bidder will usually get discouraged and quit trying to bid. Gottman points out that such failure is rarely malicious or mean-spirited. He says more often, we are simply unaware or insensitive to other’s bids for our attention.³⁵³ The result is loneliness:

They feel lonely despite their proximity to many significant people in their lives – lovers, spouses, friends, children, parents, siblings, and coworkers. Often they seem surprised and greatly disappointed at the deterioration of their relationships.³⁵⁴

Gottman’s explanation can help pastors’ wives better understand the dynamics behind similar feelings of being “alone in a crowd.” He observes, “Complex, fulfilling relationships don’t suddenly appear in our lives fully formed. Rather they develop one encounter at a time.”³⁵⁵ He continues:

If you could carefully observe and analyze those encounters – as my research colleagues and I have done – you would see how each one is made up of smaller exchanges. There’s a bid and a response to that bid. Like cells of the body or bricks of a house, such exchanges are the primary components of emotional communication. Each exchange contains emotional information that can strengthen or weaken connection between people.³⁵⁶

Positive responses to a bid usually lead to continued interaction, but a negative response to a bid typically shuts down emotional communication, and all bids cease.³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid., 5.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 6-7.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

With this information in hand, pastors' wives can prayerfully seek to establish new relationships within the congregation or community. They can intentionally focus on their bids and be persistent so that mere insensitivity will not deter them from making contact with others. If they are consciously rejected, then they can move on to another person.

As previously mentioned, the relationships within the congregation will have to be "limited" in the sense that there will be no sharing of information about other members or congregational business (unless it is public knowledge). This will also encourage the pastor's wife to seek other support relationships with other pastors' wives. Attending conferences or presbytery activities can provide opportunities to make contact with other women and even other pastors' wives.

The book *Safe People* is a good resource for pastors' wives. This book can empower these women to evaluate themselves and their relationships so as to develop healthier relationships. The authors describe "safe people:"

Safe people are individuals who draw us closer to being the people God intended us to be. Though not perfect, they are "good enough" in their own character that the net effect of their presence in our lives is positive. They are accepting, honest, and present, and they help us bear good fruit in our lives.³⁵⁸

Unsafe people come in three broad categories: the abandoners, the critics, and the irresponsibles.³⁵⁹ We live in a fallen world. Sin has brought isolation. As affected by the Fall, we tend to choose unsafe relationships (we ourselves may be unsafe from time to time). The authors share some of the reasons we choose unsafe relationships:

There are many reasons that we pick unsafe people. And it's good for us to look at those reasons, for they are all essentially issues of the spiritual life that the Bible commands us to look at anyway. Look at the list again: inability to judge character, isolation, false hope, unfaced badness, merger wishes, fear of confrontation, romanticizing, rescuing, familiarity, victim roles, guilt,

³⁵⁸ Cloud and Townsend, *Safe People*, 11.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

perfectionism, repetition, and denial. These are all issues that the Bible deals with very directly and tells us to face as part of our sanctification process.³⁶⁰

Safe People can help pastors' wives make good choices of individuals with whom they can develop friendships. These friendships can grow into a support system that can help sustain the pastors' wives through the challenges of ministry.

In light of the typically narrow support base for the pastor's wife, the toxic nature of "secondhand smoke," and all the stress that leaves many of these women emotionally exhausted, pastors' wives must realize that they are not trapped or hopeless. As they prayerfully ask God to provide the friendships they need for healthy support and in good faith make healthy bids for emotional contact with others, pastors' wives can have good hope that God's mercy and faithfulness will provide for them what they need.

As they are waiting on the Lord to provide nurturing relationships, the pastors' wives can apply material provided by Scazzero's books on emotional health to become healthier themselves. Also, as they reach out to minister to others as God provides opportunities; their focus is not simply on themselves and their own personal struggles. They can be faithful to God's calling on their lives to walk in the good works he has provided in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Final Thoughts

When considering the three models for describing the role of the "pastor's wife" given by the three authors and comparing them with the data and the descriptions given by the other selected studies, it seems that these role descriptions are still valid. However, they are descriptions not prescriptions. They can be seen by women who are married to pastors as choices from which they may choose rather than molds to be filled.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 108.

This seems to be the “take away” from this study. God is sovereign. He has created these women, called them into marriage, and then into a place of ministry. He has individually gifted each one. These women are to seek to please and serve God first and foremost. They prioritize their role as wife to their husband/pastor, which is a part of ministry. They meet the needs of family as circumstances dictate. And, they have the freedom to be who they are in Christ and to serve others out of love and the gifts God has given to them to the glory of God.

This project has revealed to this author the strategic role the wife of the pastor fills. It is a role that has often gone undervalued and unappreciated. It is a role that entails unique challenges and opportunities. It is a role that can become less burdensome and more fruitful for these courageous women with the implementation of some of the suggestions contained in the literature and data of this project, as well as the resources listed in the bibliography. As a “quick start” suggestion, I would suggest someone interested in further study should start with Diane Langberg’s book, *Counsel for Pastor’s Wives*. The book, *Safe People*, would also make an excellent resource for initial study. It is hoped that some of the mysteries surrounding the role have been clarified. It is also hoped that as a result of this study, women called into the unique role of “pastor’s wife” will become more cherished and supported as they face its challenges.

Churches might make use of this study in several ways. With the recognition of the importance of the pastor’s wife and the stress caused by ambiguity surrounding the expectations the congregation has for her, congregational leadership should try to discover their local “definition” of the role of “pastor’s wife.” Educational efforts can be made to inform the congregation as to the relationship of the pastor’s wife to ministry so

as to provide greater freedom for her to be herself in her calling. Also, out of pastoral concern, the leadership of a local church should inquire as to how the marriage of their pastor and his wife is doing in their present ministry setting. The local church may go so far as to invest in the marriage of their pastor by sending the couple to a marriage conference. In the candidating process, it would be helpful to raise the issue of expectations for the future pastor's wife. To begin the conversation of congregational expectations as well as the pastor's wife's personal expectations of herself and her role can benefit everyone as it moves toward a God-honoring resolution.

Suggestions for Further Study

At the conclusion of this study there remains much work to be done. A fruitful study which was beyond the scope of this project would be to investigate what seminaries are currently doing to equip potential wives of pastors for the challenges of the role of "pastor's wife." A follow-up project would be to investigate various curriculums in order to identify some profitable approaches to enhance the equipping of future ministry couples to successfully enter the pastoral ministry. In light of the misunderstanding of the relationship between ministry and marriage, there would be many benefits to seeing what seminaries are doing to overcome such ignorance as well as investigating helpful ways to best communicate the biblical truths. Recognizing the need for greater support for ministry couples, it would be productive to investigate what seminaries are doing to encourage the development of friendships as recommended by Lorna Dobson. It would also be good to research some additional approaches for fostering relationship development, as well as investigating methods of "cross-pollinating" from one seminary program to another seminary program the methods that seem most fruitful.

In addition to work at the seminary level, it would be worthwhile to investigate what denominations are doing to provide support for their ministry couples on a continual basis. It would also be profitable to develop potential programs or suggestions for denominations or (for Presbyterian denominations) presbyteries to develop better support for ministry couples in pastoral ministry. Shari Thomas made suggestions for the development of support for church-planting couples. It would be a good project to see whether something similar could be developed for couples in pastoral ministry.

The Pastors Summit has proved invaluable to its participants as well as the Church with the information and understanding that has been generated. It is hoped that this program can be continued.

In light of this Doctor of Ministry project, I have a few suggestions for possible future summits. There needs to be investment in better-quality recording equipment and more attention paid to enhancing the capture of the dialogue within the cohort discussions. This would include enhancing the transcription methodology (using transcribers or software). It was a source of frustration for this author to be reading a helpful discussion and have the sense of someone listening over a poor radio signal filled with static. The Pastors Summit might possibly become a “proving ground” for programs to enhance support to ministry couples in that such programs could be implemented and the participants chosen to be the members of the cohorts for that Summit. It may be fruitful to continue investigating the role of “pastor’s wife” to gain an increasingly better understanding in order to better equip these women and better enable the Church to support them. The study of women who have been fruitful in the role may provide

helpful models for others. The study of those who have suffered in the role and even left it may provide warnings for others and lead to the development of preventative measures.

In light of the comments in Shari Thomas' study of the spouses of church planters regarding the possibility of the existence of abuse (emotional and spiritual), it seems like it would be a good idea to explore this further. Such a project would have to be well constructed and executed. The results from such a study of examining the existence of abuse in pastoral marriages may prove an urgent incentive for implementation of corrective measures.

As can be seen, there is, indeed, much work to be done. There is a wonderful base of resources on which to build. However, individuals within the Church must come forward to advance the work for the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom.

Appendix One

The Wife of the Pastor in Pastoral Ministry Questionnaire (DMin Project by Jim Stark)

Please answer the following nine questions as you reflect on your experience of being the wife of a pastor in pastoral ministry.

1. Please share an incident when you encountered the expectations other's had for you simply because you were the "pastor's wife."

2. Please share a time when your personal expectation(s) for yourself as the pastor's wife were challenged or exposed.

3. What are some of the challenges you face being a pastor's wife?

4. What are some of the things you may see as the "perks" of being a pastor's wife?

5. What are some of the “costs” of being a pastor’s wife?
6. What are some of the things you are able to do/accomplish because you are in the position of a pastor’s wife?
7. If you could share some advice with the wives of seminary students preparing for the pastoral ministry, what would you tell them (i.e.: what do you wish someone had told you)?
8. What are some things you think would be helpful for pastors to know about being a pastor’s wife?
9. What are some things you would encourage pastors to do to encourage/help their wives as they face being pastor’s wives?

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