

“Women Preachers in the IPHC”
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First of all, thank you Presiding Bishop Carpenter, Bishop Thompson, Dr. Hunter, and the Centennial Committee for having me here to speak today. And thank you Dr. Synan, Bill Loving, and Larry Jones for helping me to accomplish this work as well. And thank you to Erica Rutland, to my parents, to my husband, and to my family for their long-time support of my work. And thank you to Reggie Till for helping me to establish the new Women’s Heritage Scholarship Fund. I am very privileged to be here speaking to you today and it only through the help of these people, through the generosity of the women I interviewed, and through the help of God that I have received such a great opportunity to share my work with all of you. So thank you.

I would like to begin with a psalm that highlights the value of legacy.

Psalm 145 says:

“I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name forever and ever.
Every day I will praise you
and extol your name forever and ever.

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.

They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
They tell of the power of your awesome works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.”

You see, legacy has value because the legacy of what God has done for us is a form of worship. So, I am here today to talk to you about the women of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and to share some of the legacy they have left to you.

I have had the opportunity to interview several women, including Peggy Eby, Charlene West, Debbie Whipple, Wanda Baker who is the daughter of Ruth Moore, my mother LaDonna Scott, Louise Mayhue, Delores Cox, Rita Warren, Ruth Powell, Leona Coker, Lois Van Dyke, Jewell Stewart, and Betty Sue Walling. It is my hope to interview many, many more in the future.

I have also read some of the autobiographies left to us, such as that of Dan and Dollie York, Lee and Lucy Hargis, Agnes Ozman, Grace Hope Curtis, Mary Sue Evans, and Laura Graham.

I believe the legacy of the women of this church is tied up in the ethos of these women.

Up to now, my research has focused on understanding the “ethos” of Pentecostal Holiness women preachers. “Ethos” is a key part of the research question that has guided my work, but you might not be familiar with that term.

Scholar Margaret Zulick defines ethos as “a powerful but ambiguous term. Depending on the source, it can refer to ethics, to argument, or to a personal or collective identity” (20).

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle described ethos as one of the three basic “modes of persuasion” to be used in a speech (153). Ethos depends heavily upon the “personal character of the speaker.”

In fact, Aristotle once wrote: “We believe good men more fully and more readily than others” and a person’s character “may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (153-4). Yet, Aristotle treats ethos and the presentation of good character as something malleable. He advises the future politicians and lawyers who will be using his text to learn to argue effectively that “the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, in the right frame of mind” (160).

So, in the world’s view, ethos can be shaped, it can be manipulated, it can be dressed up in order to win an audience over in an argument. Indeed, ethos can be an effective tool for changing people’s minds even when it is not tied to a person’s real character.

But, preachers use ethos. In fact, we all project ethos in a speech, an interview, a written text, a conversation--- whether we want to or not. And when we speak in front of others and particularly when we leave an autobiography to our families and to our church, we think about how we will present ourselves.

A Christian’s sense of ethos is different than the worlds. For the apostle Paul, ethos is primarily built through intimacy with God and humility, not through education, expertise, or rhetorical technique in speaking. The knowledge that is valued is that of God’s wisdom, and the preacher’s job is to communicate that knowledge to others.

As it says in 1st Corinthians 2:13, the preacher interprets “spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit” and speaks “of these gifts of God in words taught us not by our human wisdom but by the Spirit.”

Therefore, the legacy of the women of this church is tied up in an ethos that is built through an intimate relationship with God.

Yet when you study ethos and women, people want to know the answer to this question: Are women preachers feminists? In other words, how does their belief in the equality of the sexes play a role in how they present themselves through ethos? Please allow me to briefly answer.

The answer is found in scripture.

Philippians 2: 1-8 says:

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above

yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!”

While there are many types of feminists, from very conservative feminists to very liberal feminists, this scripture reveals the mindset of Christians. And, while a conservative brand of feminism might embrace the humility and the unity described here, since so many ultra-liberal feminists represent a mindset completely opposite of the one represented in this scripture, it is fair to say that women preachers identify with Christ’s humility, not with a body of theories that defend women’s equality by creating division and by elevating a focus on the self.

So to answer the question: Are Pentecostal women preachers “feminists”? The answer is no, they are Christians. But in answering that question, be aware that, in our modern time, some conservative feminists are also Christians.

Now please allow me to briefly address a second question people often ask me. It is:

If a particular interpretation of scripture is being used today which justifies ungodly lifestyles, then how do we know that the interpretation of scriptures that support the role of women as preachers aren’t just a matter of interpretation as well? How do we know that our theologians and our preachers didn’t bend scripture to fit our own goals and desires?

Let me offer you an answer.

In 2nd Peter, Peter teaches us how to verify prophecies.

In chapter 1, verses 19-21, he wrote:

“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that **no** prophecy of Scripture came about **by the prophet’s own interpretation of things**. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

When Pentecostals are asked about why they allow women to preach, they point to the prophecy of Joel that is repeated in Acts 2, the scripture describing Pentecost. Peter’s speech is recorded as follows:

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

We can also point to the validation of this prophecy by the fact that Spirit-filled men and women who were also “carried along by the Holy Spirit” have been called or have been a part of the call of women to preach. More than one woman preacher I spoke with described how a Spirit-filled man or woman played a role in the moment she was called to preach and in securing a place for her to preach later on.

The Holy Spirit plays a central role in validating the truth. I John 5: 6-12 speaks about the Holy Spirit testifying to Christ’s divine nature.

We can conclude that if the Holy Spirit testifies to it, we can rest assured that it is true and not just an outgrowth of our culture. Those people today who tell us that scriptures can be used to support and to justify their ungodly lifestyles need to do more careful reading. They need to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to them.

So, now let me share with you some of what makes up the Pentecostal woman preacher’s ethos. Let me tell you about the character of our people and how it is has left a legacy for you.

Women preachers are part of God’s plan and so is legacy. When David wrote a psalm about how he sought God and wanted God to be his refuge, in Psalm 61:5 he wrote:

For you, God, have heard my vows;

you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

One key part of that heritage is a reliance on the leadership of the Holy Spirit as opposed to a reliance on one’s self.

For example, Louise Mayhue of Roanoke, Virginia remembered when she was at Holmes Bible College and J.H. King was preaching. She was slain in the Spirit and while she was slain, she said God called her to preach. She told God, “No, I’m a woman!” But King would ask her “Will you preach?” every time he passed her. Both the Holy Spirit and a Spirit filled leader validated her calling.

Through her music, Louise would let the Spirit draw out an emotional response. Her son Allen said, “She affects even the hardened men.” As we know from Paul’s description of the ethos of a preacher, this is exactly how the Holy Spirit works through a preacher.

Louise's legacy to us is this: Let the Holy Spirit use you and your talents to bring conversion to the lost.

Another woman preacher, Betty Sue Walling, told me that she was saved at the age of 9 and called to preach then as well, even though her religious upbringing did not allow for women preachers. Still, she knew God had a special plan. She was baptized in the Holy Spirit at the age of 15 and taught Sunday School, but she did not really preach until after her first husband passed away and she met her second husband. Her second husband brought her into the PH church and she was licensed in 1991 and ordained to preach in 1993. It was Donald Duncan who called her and Robert on their honeymoon to ask them to pray about four churches because one was for them. Again, the Holy Spirit was there when she was called to preach and a Spirit filled leader in this church validated that by offering her a place to preach.

When I asked Betty Sue what her advice would be for future women preachers, she said: "You need to get away from preconceived ideas and listen to the Holy Spirit." She believed her husband's ministry should come first, but she also said they took turns in the pulpit and it was often the Holy Spirit who would decide who was to preach. Her ethos and her legacy to us is: Listen to the Holy Spirit. Respond to his leadership. Let him be your teacher.

The evidence that the ethos of women preachers is defined by a reliance on the Holy Spirit is clear. Again, listening to and responding to the Holy Spirit is a key part of the ethos of Pentecostal women preachers and when I asked what these women preachers what their greatest successes were, it was no surprise that the Holy Spirit played a key role.

For Ruth Powell, her greatest success was a thirty day revival where the Lord moved and there was great conviction. When I asked her what services were like at the time this happened, she said, there was a lot of emotion. People were hungry and it was easier to preach to people back then. When I asked her how she prepared to speak, she said that she would pray, seek God's will and guidance, and then read all of the scriptures on the topic. While in that process, it was the Holy Spirit who would reveal things to her through her thoughts and through scripture.

Ruth's legacy to us might be: Let the Holy Spirit reveal the wisdom you need.

For Rita Wrenn, her greatest success was a service she preached in Russia.

She told me that when she worked in the office in Lake City, North Carolina that a woman in the office prophesied over her and said she would go to Russia and do something so phenomenal that she would not believe it. Seventeen years later, when she had forgotten the prophecy, an African-American man who did not know her prophesied over her with the same words and the Lord reminded her of what he co-worker had told her seventeen years ago.

And not long after, she went. She said before she went, she was told to not be too doctrinal, to preach the basics, to this foreign people. But the Holy Spirit took over and spoke through her.

And what was the sermon about?

It was about the third person of the godhead. The Spirit said through her that the people had the word, but could not understand it unless they had him to guide them.

Rita said the room was full. It was so full the lofts were full. It was so full people were standing in the aisles. It was standing room only.

And she got caught up in delivering the message and she forgot about her interpreter.

She faced one way and he faced the other. They weren't looking at each other anymore. Later, some of the onlookers who went with her told her that every gesture she made, he made. If she kicked her foot, he kicked his foot. The Holy Spirit was giving the same message through the interpreter. Her onlookers were fascinated with this.

And as they preached, Rita remembers that all of a sudden everybody in the theater stood to their feet and a roar came from them at the same time.

Startled, she stopped. She turned to the interpreter. She turned to the crowd, and they were all swaying like they were singing and she asked the interpreter: What are they saying? He did not know. And that is when it dawned on her:

Every one of her listeners had been baptized in the Holy Ghost.

As she reminisced with me, she recalled that the African-American prophet who had spoken to her before the trip had told her that God would send men later, but for this first trip, he wanted to send women.

Rita said to me, "I think I know why. It's because the orthodox church will not even allow women to speak."

She remembered that the Holy Spirit said through her during that sermon that the women had a job to do and they were to go and tell the people in the village that he would dwell in them.

And what is Rita's legacy to us?

It is that God calls women to preach. You see, the Holy Spirit is always part of the way a woman preacher will construct her ethos because the Holy Spirit is the one who anoints a Pentecostal to preach and the Holy Spirit is the one who gives a preacher the influence that is needed to convict and to win souls for Christ.

Yes, women preachers are different than men.

In Exodus chapter 28, the priest's breast plate is described. Over the priest's heart are the names of the leaders of the tribes; in other words, over his heart are the names of his people. In verse 30 the Bible says that this was how the priest Aaron was to bear the judgment of his people, with them over his heart continually while he was before the Lord.

For the woman preacher, the difference is in the way she holds the names of her people over her heart.

I heard this in the tender words of Leona Coker as she explained that sometimes people might try to send a young man to preach when what they needed was a seasoned preacher who was in love with Christ, someone who could take a grieving church and nurse it like a child.

Leona was speaking of a self-sacrificing love.

Indeed, the popular Christian author Lisa Bevere has a book called *Fight Like a Girl*. In it, love is a great spiritual weapon. She writes:

“The world trembles before the woman who chooses fearlessly to love. As guardians of the heart, women have the amazing power to strengthen and encourage others” (112-13). Rather than be competitive with others, Lisa asks if we can glimpse the hearts of those around us and awaken their strengths? (119).

Leona’s ethos of self-sacrifice comes through in the way she describes the anointing. She says that when you are anointed, there is nothing more important than getting that message across.

In the pulpit, she says, you lose yourself.

Jude wrote that false prophets were “shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.”

Even the way the women preachers of this denomination describes their successes is Christ-focused. And what is striking is that even one person saved is enough for them to feel they have been successful. A characteristic of the ethos, and a key part of the legacy they leave to you today, is to cherish every piece of the victory. Stop counting. Stop measuring with your own measuring sticks, but use the cross to measure your victories instead.

When I asked Lois Van Dyke her advice would be to young preachers, she said to stand firm and study the Word of God. Don’t back down but stand for what you believe. It’s not always popular to go the way God tells us to go, but don’t compromise.

When I asked Jewell Stewart for her advice about how women should cooperate with men, she said that in the kingdom of God, we must understand that it has to be men and women together. In these last days, men and women must work together.

When I asked Leona Coker about the future of the IPHC, she said, “I hope that this denomination will recognize that we are equal and that men and women and boys and girls will stand shoulder to shoulder, not as a divided people, but as one, fighting against sin.

The women of this church do not have a worldly ethos. While the world emphasizes the abilities of the human, Paul teaches us that the ministers of God preach Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have learned from listening and from reading their stories that their ethos and their legacy to you can be summed up in just one sentence: Worthy. Worthy, worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Even though they paid a price to follow him, as Dorothy Cox told me anyone taking up the call would, worthy is the lamb. Even though I have read testimonies where these women often went hungry and did not own all of the newest things, their response to hardship tells me worthy is the Lamb. Even though people rejected them and fellow Christians even questioned

their call to preach, worthy is the lamb. And even though more than one of these women lay the bodies of their sons and their daughters in the grave, worthy is the Lamb.

Dorothy Cox has left us a Christ-focused legacy.

She told me that young preachers need to be faithful to their calling, regardless of the price. They need to obey the Lord for obedience is better than sacrifice. They need to let the Holy Ghost have control—let him, not you, have control of your life. For he will counsel you, guide you and direct you. He will do surprising things.

And this is the legacy of the women preaching and ministering among you today and this is the legacy of those standing in heaven, listening in on us right now. It is the legacy that ties the past to the future and the old to the young. It is the legacy that will bridge the gap between the generations and light a fire in the bones of our people.

While at the South Carolina conference last summer, the congregation was divided up by age and a special praying time was devoted to having the younger members pray for the older members.

I was saddened by the lack of younger people in attendance, the lack of younger people as leaders in this church. However, I was filled with hope as I watched a young mother, with her sleeping baby tenderly balanced on her hip, reaching out with her other arm to touch people as she prayed for members of the older generation.

Full of the spirit, the beauty of her prayers showed me again that God doesn't use the same measuring stick that we use; he just needs one to show us what it means to reflect the image of our Maker. Indeed, this young woman is our pattern; she is our legacy. She is our future. What characterizes her?

Devotion to Christ. Humility. Tenderness. The embrace of motherhood. A respect for those ahead of her. A desire to seek God's will.

This pattern is incompatible with self-centeredness, with a greedy grip on power, with pride.

And as more women are called to preach, as more women are called to serve in the administrative offices of this denomination, it is the legacy of women such as her that will keep us on the right path, with the right attitudes, and the right priorities as we head into our future.

United, I believe that the people of this church will go forward together, hand in hand and heart to heart, to face the challenges that lie ahead. So, I urge you to embrace the legacy left to you by the women of this church and go forward, trusting in God.

Thank you for your time today.