# INVESTIGATING CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN-LED MINISTRIES: A CASE STUDY OF PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN THOHOYANDOU, THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY

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**Of**

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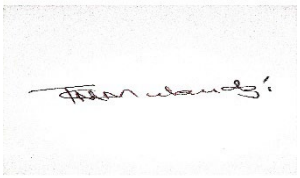
**2025**

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## DECLARATION

I, **Mulaudzi Tshilidzi Nomsa**, hereby declare that this dissertation for the Master of Arts in Theology, at the University of Venda, submitted by me, has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that it constitutes my original work in both design and execution, with all referenced material appropriately acknowledged.



**Signed(Student):** .....**Date:** 17/06/2025

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated women-led ministries within the Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality, concentrating on the obstacles encountered by these female leaders. There is a focus on spiritual empowerment in the Pentecostal churches; despite this, their women leaders face distinct challenges that differ from those of their male counterparts, such as resistance to female leadership and gender stereotyping, which hinder their capacity to accomplish their ministerial roles. The study aimed to: (1) identify obstacles faced by women-led Pentecostal churches; (2) investigate attitudes within these churches, and (3) analyse statistical growth trends in women-led Pentecostal churches. A qualitative approach was utilised, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine purposely-selected female leaders from Pentecostal congregations in Thohoyandou. A thematic analysis was employed to examine and interpret the data. The results indicated considerable differences in leadership experiences between males and females in Pentecostal congregations, with women encountering cultural, theological, and institutional obstacles. Notwithstanding these hurdles, women-led churches showed favourable development trends due to the women's inclusive leadership approaches and community involvement. The study advocates for awareness campaigns, educational activities, and additional research on women-led ministries to tackle the highlighted challenges and advance gender equality in religious leadership.

**Keywords:** complementarianism, discrimination, egalitarianism, patriarchy, Pentecostal churches, women leaders.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFA : African Theological Anthropology

AFM : Apostolic Faith Mission

CBE : Christians for Biblical Equality

PC : Pentecostal Church

PCS : Patriarchal Churches Structures

SGP :Statistical Growth Patterns



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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Historically, Pentecostal movements have exhibited differing degrees of acceptance of women in ministerial roles and notwithstanding initial advancements, such as the ordination of women in the Assemblies of God during the 1920s, obstacles persist. Female leaders in Pentecostal congregations often encounter gender discrimination due to conventional biblical interpretations that restrict their roles within the church hierarchy (CBE International, 2023:5). This bias is generally founded on passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which have traditionally been employed to rationalise the limitation of women's leadership roles within the church (Alvarez & Materne 2020:42-43).

According to Ikyernum (2023:237-253) females are probably the most oppressed, mistreated, and discriminated people in all of history. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that even in the 21st century, some churches still forbid women to preach. Some churches have women ordained to teach, preach, and even be senior pastors, however, most churches still do not have ordained female preachers (Mupangwa & Chirongoma, 2020:2). Moen (2020) states that the church is basically polarised around two contrasting views on the matter: the first view, usually referred to as the Complementarian View, argues that, notwithstanding the fact that women deserve to be honored and permitted to participate in ministry, certain ministries, or leadership roles are reserved for males. The second view, the Egalitarian position, as it is usually called, maintains that men and women are equal despite their differences in gender, and should, thus, be afforded the same opportunities in ministry and leadership.

With these differing views on the subject, women usually find themselves victims of a patriarchal system of socialisation, with male dominance that does not appear to be challengeable, in most cases (Jaiyeola, 2020:3-4). Powell (2014:249-268) asserts that people often judge leadership on the basis of what



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is regarded as suitable behaviours for either men or women. This influences why women are more likely to be viewed in a less favourable way, compared to their equivalent male counterparts, especially in settings where masculine styles are stereotypically favoured. Cuadrado et al. (2012:993-1012) argue that women are more democratic in their approach to leadership, and encourage participation more than men, and that evaluation of women leaders' effectiveness is dependent on a number of variables, including work context and culture.

Alvarez and Materne (2020:46) promote women's leadership within the Church, often using historical instances of influential female leaders in early Christianity, such as Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla, to illustrate the significant impact women have had on the Church's history. The Church's proactive method involves reevaluating and reinterpreting theological principles to enhance their relevance to contemporary circumstances. This theological perspective empowers religious leaders to direct and support their adherents in managing the intricacies of contemporary norms and standards. It entails balancing the adherence to fundamental principles with the adaptation of interpretations to address the distinct difficulties and opportunities of the current context. Aune (2015:122-145) asserts that women in leadership are often anticipated to prioritise their responsibilities as spouses and mothers; thereby, these are expected to constrain their capacity to dedicate time and energy to their ministries. Resistance to female leadership constitutes a substantial obstacle, as certain members and leaders may have conventional perspectives of women's roles in Pentecostal churches. This research analyses women-led ministries, focusing on the challenges faced within the Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a fast growth of Pentecostal churches in Thulamela Municipality, however, it appears that women are routinely barred from ministerial leadership roles. This exclusion happens, despite biblical precedents of female spiritual



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leaders and the Pentecostal movement's long-standing emphasis on Spirit-led ministry, regardless of gender (Ikyernum, 2023:237-253). Women leaders in Pentecostal church ministries encounter a variety of gender-specific problems, such as patriarchal attitudes, theological misinterpretations, cultural biases, and institutional restrictions. These obstacles lead to limited opportunities for advancement, a lack of recognition for their contributions, and increased psychological stress - all of which impede their ability to fulfil their leadership potential and contribute meaningfully to church growth and community development (CBE International, 2023:5).

While extant literature tackles women's responsibilities in mainstream Christianity, there is a huge study gap about the specific experiences of female leaders in Pentecostal churches in South Africa, particularly in rural places such as Thohoyandou. The combination of African traditional culture, patriarchal church structures, and Pentecostal theology generates a distinct set of issues that have not been effectively studied or addressed. The influence of these problems on church growth, community perception, and the spiritual development of congregations is largely unknown. Understanding these relationships, hence, is critical for devising measures to promote gender equality in religious leadership and maximise women's contributions to the Pentecostal movement.

## 1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study, it is anticipated, will significantly enhance the existing body of knowledge by elucidating the problems faced by women leaders in Pentecostal women-led church ministries, within the Thulamela Municipality in Limpopo Province, as they guide congregants in a traditionally male-dominated environment. Social stigma attached to women's leadership in churches makes the effort of such women to be in vain; hence, this study intends to destigmatise convictions in society on the matter (CBE International, 2023:5). This study is expected to benefit women-leaders and the entire church community, as recommendations will be made based on the findings. The findings will also contribute towards spiritual, intellectual, social, and economic growth and



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maturity in society. Additionally, the field of Theology under Pentecostal churches shall also be enriched by the findings of this study, by adding contemporary and relevant knowledge for prospective scholars, thereby identifying areas of interest for further research.

## 1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The study's aim was to investigate women-led ministries by examining issues surrounding female pastors in the Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality.

### 1.4.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify challenges faced by women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou.
- To explore perceptions held by Christian communities on women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou.
- To examine statistical growth patterns of women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou.

### 1.4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the perceptions held by Christian communities on women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou?
- Which challenges are faced by women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou?
- How are the statistical growth patterns of women-led churches in Thohoyandou?

## 1.5 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

### 1.5.1 Complementarianism



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Complementarianism is a theological position within Christianity that maintains that men and women are created equal in dignity, worth, and value before God, but have separate and complementary functions, particularly in marriage and church leadership (Feminism, 1991).

### 1.5.2 Custom

The phrase often denotes a conventional or customary practice, behaviour, or method that is broadly recognised and adhered to within a specific community or society (Choudhry, Fang & Mohamed, 2007:993-1012). Customs are established patterns of behaviors that have developed over time, which are considered normative within a specific cultural context, and which often reflect the values, beliefs, and norms of a particular group or society. They, hence, play a vital role in shaping social interactions and maintaining social cohesion.

### 1.5.3 Egalitarianism

This is a philosophical and social theory that advocates equality and equal rights for all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social class, or other characteristics (Martin & North, 2022:337). It asserts that men and women should have equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in all areas of life, including education, employment, politics, and family. Egalitarians reject the notion that one gender is intrinsically superior or should have a preferential status over the other.

### 1.5.4 Hermeneutic

This concept covers a field of study concerned with the theory and methodology of interpretation, particularly the interpretation of texts (Gillo,2021:42-45). The term "hermeneutics" is derived from the Greek word "hermēneutikos," which means "interpretive" or "explanatory" (Jemielniak, 2016). It seeks to establish principles and methods that help unravel the meanings, intentions, and messages embedded within texts. It is widely applied in various fields, including literature, theology, law, sociology, anthropology, and literary criticism.



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### 1.5.5 Pentecostalism

A Protestant Christian movement that promotes direct Holy Spirit experiences and the application of spiritual gifts, particularly glossolalia (Kobylinski, 2016:2). The word comes from the biblical event of Pentecost, as described in the New Testament book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' first disciples.

## 1.6 PRELIMINARY CHAPTER DIVISION

This research study comprises five chapters. The segmentation of this investigation into chapters was utilised to impart coherence to the research, thus assisting readers in identifying the specific type of facts to seek within a chapter. The sections of this investigation are delineated below.

### 1.6.1 Chapter One

This chapter delineates the study's orientation, encompassing the introduction and backdrop of the investigation. The introduction and context of the study delineate the challenges faced by women-led ministries within the Pentecostal churches. Chapter One focuses on the following components: background, problem statement, significance of the study, study aim, study objectives, research questions that guided the research, and definitions of key terms.

### 1.6.2 Chapter Two

In this chapter, the theoretical framework and the existing literature in the areas of the topic are examined. The research is grounded in the Appreciative Inquiry Theory and African Healing Theory. The reviewed literature elucidates current understanding on the relevant aspects of the study, concentrating on the challenges faced by women-led ministries within the Pentecostal congregations, as well as those in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality.

### 1.6.3 Chapter three



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This chapter summarises the study's methodology. The chapter's discussions revolve around research design, population, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Also detailed are measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and ethical considerations adhered to during the conduct of the study.

### 1.6.4 Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents findings from the thematic analysis of the obtained data, supported by direct quotations from the participants. In this process, responses to the research questions of the study are interpretated, in accordance with the themes which emerged.

### 1.6.5 Chapter five

The chapter concentrates on a summary of the study's results, followed by the conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for further research in the area of the topic.



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# CHAPTER TWO
# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter provided a concise overview and delineated areas such as the study's primary aim, problem statement, and objectives. This chapter comprises two sections: a theoretical framework and a literature review. Researchers employ a theoretical framework to examine theories, ideologies, and traditions to ascertain a study's trajectory and assure coherence with its objectives and foundational principles. A literature analysis examines prior and contemporary research to discern existing knowledge, deficiencies in comprehension, and research voids, and in this study, issues regarding women-led ministries within the Pentecostal churches of Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality. The study's objectives direct the review, hence encompassing works related to the research issue.

## 2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Theories are formulated to elucidate, predict, and comprehend phenomena, aiming to contest and enhance current knowledge within the confines of fundamental boundary assertions (Abend, 2016:463–469). A theoretical framework is a collection of organised concepts that directs scientific inquiry. A theoretical framework allows the researcher to elucidate the reasoning underlying the study's issue, thereby supporting the rationale behind the research questions and answers (Simon, 2011:55). A theoretical framework, hence, does not resolve the research problem; instead, it undergirds the researcher's approach and discussions on the topic (Cresswell, 2012:24).

### 2.2.1 Hegemonic masculinity theory

The theory of hegemonic masculinity is a sociological concept that explores a dominant form of masculinity within a particular culture or society (Demetriou,



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2001: 337). It was developed by sociologist R.W. Connell (1987) and is often associated with the field of gender studies. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the socially constructed and culturally specific idea of masculinity that is privileged and considered the normative standard within a given context. Key aspects of the theory of hegemonic masculinity include - dominance and power, involving exertion of power over others. It involves the control and subordination of women and marginalised masculinities, reinforcing hierarchical gender relations (Trott, 2022:22).

Heterosexuality and sexuality, in which hegemonic masculinity typically associates masculinity with heterosexuality and places a high value on sexual conquest and prowess (Oliffe, et el., 2017:33). It often marginalises or stigmatises non-heteronormative expressions of masculinity. Emotional restraint, which is promoted by hegemonic masculinity, discourages displays of vulnerability or feminine emotions (Smoliak et al., 2022:22). Men who express emotions such as sadness, fear, or sensitivity may be seen as deviating from the norm and risk facing social sanctions. Physical strength and aggression are emphasised by hegemonic masculinity as desirable traits (Scott, 2015:109).

Men are urged to exhibit assertiveness, competitiveness, and the ability to protect themselves and others through physical prowess. Economic success, being a breadwinner, and the capacity to support oneself and one's family are frequently associated with the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Lynch et al., 2009; 33). Attaining economic success and serving as the principal provider in the family are regarded as significant indicators of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, however, is neither a universal or static term; it changes among cultures, historical epochs, and social circumstances (Hirsch & Kachtan, 2018:90). It can also intersect with other social categories such as race, class, and sexuality, resulting in different forms of masculinity that may challenge or subvert the original dominant ideal. The theory of hegemonic masculinity offers a framework for understanding how societal expectations and norms shape notions of masculinity, influence gender relations, and contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities. It invites critical analysis of the ways in which dominant forms of masculinity impact individuals, relationships, and



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social structures. This theoretical framework will be the yardstick to measure any pattern of male dominance and gender inequality in the churches studied in this research.

## 2.3 "LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Talbot (2020:16), a literature review informs the researcher about other studies that were similar and relevant to this one, since after research findings have been analysed and comprehended, they can be related to literature on the current issue under consideration (Polit & Hungler, 2014;33). This current study, therefore, attempts to investigate relevant research and current data to bring new insights about women-led ministries in Pentecostal churches in Thulamela Municipality.

### 2.3.1 FEMININITY, FEMINISM AND FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Landsberg (2013:23-24) asserts that femininity is typically linked to qualities such as nurturing, empathy, care, sensitivity, intuition, compromise, cooperation, and accommodation, which are progressively recognised as vital not only to human well-being but also for efficient administration in various contexts. These characteristics are valuable, yet women possessing qualities conducive to effective church leadership nevertheless encounter significant obstacles hindering their advancement to leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007:45).

Chaluvadi (2015:1-5) asserts that leadership styles of men and women are distinct. Men frequently perceive leadership as a sequence of transactions, but women exhibit transformative qualities, inspiring their followers via interpersonal skills rather than through positional status or authority. Most women exert influence by utilising their relationship competencies to disseminate power and knowledge, foster engagement, and enhance the self-esteem of their followers.

Cuadrado et al. (2012:993-1012) contend that women exhibit a more



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democratic leadership style and promote engagement more than men, and that the assessment of women leaders' success depends on various variables, including the work environment and cultural context. Powell (2014:249-268) maintains that individuals evaluate leadership according to the perceived suitable conduct for either gender. This elucidates why women are more frequently seen unfavourably than their male counterparts, especially in contexts where masculine traits are conventionally esteemed.

Feminism is the examination of gender, aimed at comprehending and confronting gender-based inequalities, discrimination, and societal norms (MacArthur et al., 2022:102635). It developed in response to the historical exclusion of women's experiences and perspectives from academic and public discourse (Dill & Zambrana, 2020:108-116). Gender analysis, as a feminist tenet, rigorously examines gender roles, identities, and expectations (Brassel & Anderson, 2020:447-462). It recognises that gender is a socially-constructed concept that transcends biological differences, impacting power dynamics and social structures. Feminist scholarship recognises the intricacies of individual identities and experiences by analysing the intersections of many forms of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality underscores the necessity of examining multiple facets of identity to comprehend an individual's experiences.

Feminism is intrinsically linked to social justice objectives (Weatherall, 2020:471-486). It aims to uncover and solve imbalances and injustices faced by individuals based on their gender, along with intersections including other identities such as race, class, sexual orientation, and ability. It emphasises elevating the perspectives and opinions of marginalised groups, particularly women, who have traditionally been marginalised or silenced (Chaudhary, 2023:207). It contests prevailing narratives and seeks to illuminate previously overlooked or undervalued experiences. Feminist research analyses power relations and societal norms that perpetuate gender discrimination and oppression (Mowafi & Al-Hasan, 2023: 4482547). It aims to deconstruct hierarchical frameworks and illustrate the mechanisms of power in diverse contexts. Feminism is a complex framework encompassing several theories and viewpoints (Gurung, 2020:14). Various feminist scholars and movements



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may prioritise distinct aspects of feminism as a research paradigm. The primary objective is to interrogate and alter oppressive systems while simultaneously fostering the creation of a more equitable and just society for all genders (Garland-Thomson, 2020:181-191).

Feminist theology is a prominent global movement wherein women from diverse histories and cultures contest patriarchal doctrines and practices inside the church, offering their own interpretations of the divine (Fiorenza, 2015:22). "Notwithstanding variations in feminist theologies, they uniformly adhere to a shared faith in Jesus Christ grounded in women's experiences" (Hogan, 2016:34). Clifford (2001:30) contends that feminist theology articulates women's experiences with the divine and their exegesis of Christian texts through various academic approaches. Clifford contends that a simplistic interpretation of the Bible fostered a negative perception of women within Christian communities, resulting in their marginalisation from ecclesiastical authority.

The term "feminism" is frequently associated with the viewpoints of Western, white, middle-class women (Hogan, 2016:33); these views tend to characterise "feminism" as a form of religious liberty accessible to all women. Feminist theology is a critical liberation theology that illustrates how male-centric language, theological objectives, and theological scholarship collaborate to sustain and advance patriarchal systems within society and the church. Walton (2019:3) asserts that feminist theology aims to reveal the prevailing influence of patriarchal theology by examining women's experiences of oppression and fragmentation in both societal and religious contexts. Western women theologians inadvertently established "feminist theology" as the overarching benchmark for women's experiences in their struggle for emancipation. Feminist theologians have made substantial contributions to the ordination of women. Mudimeli (2011:33) asserts that the existing few topics have incited "more fire and less light" on the responsibilities of women in society, the household, and the church. The role of women in the church is a primary source of contention among committed evangelicals. The ordination of women for pulpit ministry has generated conflict and division within churches



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and organisations (Machingura & Nyakuhwa, 2015:93-113). Christian women, aspiring to serve the Lord in leadership positions encounter divergent perspectives and ambiguity on suitable roles for women within the church (Graham, 2016:7). Neal (2007:44) asserts that there is insufficient scholarly data focusing on the scarcity of women in ecclesiastical leadership roles and the absence of role models for female leaders in senior ministerial positions, within the churches.

Feminist theology established its own methodology and diverged from prior approaches of seeking to encompass all women's theologies. Landsberg (2013:45) asserts that the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians plays a crucial role in advancing theology from the perspective of African Christian women. Feminist theology is a prominent global movement wherein women from diverse histories and cultures contest patriarchal ecclesiastical teachings and practices, offering their own interpretations of the divine (Fiorenza, 2015:12). Notwithstanding variations in feminist theologies, they together uphold a common faith in Jesus Christ rooted in women's experiences in the biblical context (Hogan, 2016). Clifford contends that feminist theology articulates women's encounters with God and their exegesis of Christian texts through various academic approaches. A simplistic interpretation of the Bible resulted in a simplistic view of women within Christian communities, culminating in their exclusion from ecclesiastical authority.

These adverse perceptions surrounding feminist theologians, have substantially influenced current scriptural interpretation, in the historical context of gender inequality, especially, within the church (Harrison, 2007:44-45). Nineteenth-century Christian feminism emerged as a response to the traditional Christian notion of female subjugation which is unlike feminists, who denounce gender inequality from its inception, as a transgression (Faxneld, 2017:22-23).



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### 2.3.1.1 FEMINIST THEOLOGY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The ongoing fight for feminist theology to establish itself in culture is further substantiated by its academic prominence, especially in South Africa. It is a relatively recent theological subject; however, its insufficient presence in educational institutions, when juxtaposed with other contemporary theologies, prompts questions regarding other priorities, such as adherence to anti-sexism, curriculum content, and pedagogical approaches. The feminine voices pose essential enquiries regarding the essence and dissemination of information and the need to highlight this subject in academic curricula (Ackermann 1991:210).

Researchers must approach feminist theology from a South African perspective, with caution, to avoid categorising it in a manner that is just pertinent to feminist theologians. Individuals ought to perceive themselves as engaged in perpetual interaction and dialogue with one another, notwithstanding their significant differences in methodologies. Feminist theologians are a heterogeneous collective, thereby embodying a diverse array of concepts and methodologies. The limited number of publications in this area indicates that feminist theology in South Africa remains nascent (Ackermann 1991:23).

Draper et al. (1991) released - "Women Hold up Half Sky" - a compilation of writings by black and white women, alongside a select number of males, addressing the topic of women in churches in Southern Africa. Feminist theology is endeavouring to secure its rightful position in South Africa due to various factors. These include, prolonged isolation from counterparts in Africa, North America, Europe, and the developing world which has impaired South African female theologians, a situation further intensified by the patriarchal structure of the culture and churches. The movement against apartheid has conventionally emphasised racial injustice as the principal wrongdoing. The structural mechanisms of race, gender, and class in human subjection remain inadequately comprehended in this process. Women have historically been divided by class, geography, and economic status; these differences have estrange us from one another instead of offering solutions for conversation, as this divide has been entrenched and perpetuated over many years of repressive



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white dominance.

Feminist theology encounters many obstacles in achieving prominence in our culture owing to its scholarly standing. It is a relatively recent theological subject, however, its insufficient representation in educational institutions, in contrast to other contemporary theologies, raises issues about priorities, anti-sexist commitments, curricular content, and pedagogical approaches. Achievement may be possible if both male and female students receive enough education regarding gender differences. The scarcity of female voices prompts significant enquiries on the essence of knowledge and its dissemination; thus, feminist theologians ought to highlight this subject in their research agendas (Ackermann 1991:13).

**(a) Action for Justice and Transformation**

As stated by Rakoczy (2001: 45), the objectives of the "Action for Justice and Transformation for Women" program are formidable, with a focus on promoting women's rights, tackling gender inequality, and fostering a more just and equitable society. This endeavour should consider applying various procedures and approaches. Each community is distinct, and the methodologies employed may differ based on cultural, social, and economic influences. The essential task is to heed the requirements of the women in the South African region and modify the plan accordingly, while preserving the initiative's emphasis on women's empowerment and development. An admirable woman conducts herself with propriety. Women who acknowledge their intrinsic value as individuals can unite to transform their environment into a flourishing centre for human existence. The generosity of women manifests in behaviours that confront surrounding malevolence while collaboratively fostering new avenues for justice and peace within the human society, akin to healthy trees yielding bountiful fruit. Ethics, the foundation of moral action, spans a broad spectrum of interrelated issues with the individual as a moral agent, being the paramount concern.

Many women have not operated from a robust sense of self, making this a



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crucial starting point for them. In conversations about women as people, they have frequently been held accountable for the world's immorality. The choice to act virtuously is fundamental to ethical conduct, yet malevolence is occasionally justified under the guise of benevolence (Ducan 2019:7). The disparity between men's and women's perceptions of evil and sin is therefore a secondary issue. Sin transcends mere individual actions; it constitutes a societal reality, an intricate web of oppression that inhibits the possibility for life and progress in individuals and society (Rakoczy 2001: 12). According to Christians, salvation, as imparted by Christ, our Lord and Saviour, serves as the remedy for sin, consequently, there is a major difficulty in formulating a concept of atonement that is comprehensible to women and facilitates their liberation. An autonomous woman, a restored woman, may make ethical decisions that influence her own life and the lives of those in her vicinity. This thesis also aims to elucidate the principles of African feminist ethics and the corresponding methodologies of moral assessment. Consequently, chapter five (5) will examine these and additional issues in greater depth.

### 2.3.2 PERSPECTIVES FROM AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY (AFA)

Alvarez and Mateme (2020:10) assert that women's experiences within the church and society fluctuate with time, influenced by culture, geography, and religious denomination. Women have historically encountered many forms of marginalisation, prejudice, and injustice. Women often experience restricted access to - education, property rights, and roles in authority and decision-making. Women's activities in the church were often confined to supportive functions, and they were prohibited from holding official leadership positions. The status of women in society has transformed over time due to various social, cultural, and legal changes, requiring an examination of women's positions within different systems and contexts, including the church. Feminist activism and women's suffrage movements have been instrumental in promoting women's rights and enhancing their social status. Women are progressively attaining access to education, employment prospects, and political representation; nonetheless, gender prejudices and inequalities continue to



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exist in the workplace, domestic settings, and media representations (Block 2009:115).

The status of women in the church and society pertains to their social, economic, and political standings, for despite considerable progress in certain regions, globally, racism and gender inequality endure (Ducan 2019:7). Women frequently encounter obstacles, including pay disparity, insufficient leadership possibilities, and heightened vulnerability to abuse and harassment. The status of women in the church differs significantly, based on denomination and theological perspective. Certain religious institutions actively endorse women's empowerment and gender equality, championing women's comprehensive involvement in all facets of religious practice. Others embrace conventional perspectives that categorise men and women into separate roles according to theological interpretations. The experience, position, and status of women in the church and society are intricate and dynamic issues that are ever changing. There are noticeable advancements; however, further efforts are necessary to guarantee that women possess equal opportunities and rights in all facets of life, to achieve genuine gender equality, even in the church context (Block 2009:120).

The experiences of women in the church and society throughout history differ based on culture, geography, and religious denomination. Women have historically encountered many forms of marginalisation, prejudice, and injustice; for instance, they often encounter restricted access to education, property rights, and roles of authority and decision-making. Women's activities in the church were often confined to supportive functions, and they were prohibited from holding official leadership positions. The status of women in society has transformed over time due to numerous social, cultural, and legal developments, prompting an evaluation of women's responsibilities within diverse systems, such as society. Feminist activism and women's suffrage movements have been instrumental in promoting women's rights and enhancing their social status. Women are progressively attaining access to education, employment prospects, and political representation, nonetheless, gender biases and inequalities endure in professional environments, domestic settings, and media



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representations (Block 2009:115).

The status of women in the church and society pertains to their social, economic, and political roles and notwithstanding considerable progress in numerous regions globally, racism and gender inequality persist. Women frequently encounter obstacles, including pay disparity, insufficient leadership possibilities, and a heightened vulnerability to abuse and harassment. The status of women in the church differs significantly based on denomination and theological perspective. Certain religious institutions actively endorse women's empowerment and gender equality, championing women's complete involvement in all facets of religious activity. Some adhere to conventional perspectives that categorise men and women into separate roles according to theological interpretations. As stated by Block (2009:120). The experience, role, and status of women in both the church and society are intricate, diverse issues that are ever changing. Notwithstanding progress, further efforts are necessary to ensure that women possess equal opportunities and rights in all facets of life, so as to achieve genuine gender equality. Moreover, no individual in this universe exists in isolation; we are humans who require extensive assistance. The same is true for topics and concerns pertaining to females. Women possess the ability to assemble and organise effectively, rendering them tough to overlook, particularly when domestic circumstances are unfavourable. This is also apparent in religious institutions and communities.

Block (2009) asserts that women were not regarded as suitable for leadership roles, resulting in their marginalisation within churches; in this context, the experiences, empathy, and essence of women are deemed the culprits. Women exhibit compassion and fervour due to their meticulous approach in all endeavours. This should not hinder their advancement, hence, it is imperative to address a woman's place in the church and society. Every woman in the church must understand and fulfil the sacred roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and friend; these obligations pertain to the commitment of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Women are steadfast in their dedication to family, faith, and assistance, and those in the Bible hold significant positions in society,



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encompassing church service and the execution of their responsibilities. The Bible urges all Christians, regardless of gender, to adhere to God's directives while evangelising others and in leadership positions (Block 2009:120).

Christians are frequently criticised for exhibiting a chauvinistic or sexist disposition towards women, although the Bible underscores that women possess a distinctive position within the church and society. They share the same objective as Christian men: adhering to God's commands. Christian women ought to engage actively in evangelism and provide leadership. Men also have distinct responsibilities; however, the Bible does not depict men as superior or domineering. According to the Bible, the sole distinction between individuals is in their degree of salvation and faith in Christ. 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:3, however, convey the notion that women ought to be "quiet" within the church, especially concerning matters related to the church and marriage. These verses may seem contrary when the context is not taken into account, for in the Bible, God has enabled numerous women to disseminate the gospel and guide others in virtuous conduct beyond the church. Women have significantly contributed to the realisation of God's plan throughout the Bible. They have also occupied leadership roles and responsibilities pertaining to the dissemination of the Gospel. Paul prohibited women from occupying overt, authoritative roles within the church, however, he recognised their contributions to church activities and their endeavours in disseminating the gospel. In Romans 16:1, Paul references Phoebe, a female deacon or servant inside the church. Additional biblical references are Nympha in Colossians 4:15 and Chloe in 1 Corinthians 1:11.

#### 2.3.2.1 AFRICAN VIEWS OF WOMEN

This section investigates how traditional African civilisations have historically positioned women in subservient roles, citing particular cultural instances to demonstrate gender hierarchies. Women's secondary status in traditional African communities was more than just social; it also included spiritual ideas about their core nature. A very dramatic example came from certain parts of South Africa, primarily within Xhosa culture, where the concept of Thembalethu (literally "Our Hope") expressed profoundly ingrained gender-based spiritual



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discrimination. Under this traditional belief system, women were seen as spiritually imperfect beings, with some believing they lacked a spirit totally (Chinchen 1999:118). Because spiritual essence was regarded as a basic component of personality, this theological perspective positioned women as inherently inadequate in their humanity. The natural conclusion of this notion was that women could only reach spiritual fulfilment through marriage. Women were believed to get access to their husband's spiritual essence by marrying, basically borrowing or sharing in his spirit to compensate for their perceived spiritual lack. This transformed marriage from a social institution to a spiritual imperative for women to acquire full personhood within the cultural framework. This conventional viewpoint explains how cultural and religious ideas converged to promote women's reliance on men, defending their subservient status as a natural or divinely appointed arrangement rather than a societal construct.

This aligns with Augustine's notion that a woman embodies God through her husband. Similarly, due to their supposed physical and intellectual vulnerabilities, the Masai people of eastern Africa, particularly the Nguni and other groups in South Africa, perceive women as subordinate. Previously, this was widely accepted, although the present circumstances have diverged significantly. Men held the belief that the blood associated with childbirth and menstruation rendered women impure. African Christian men were also significantly impacted by the notion that women are inferior to men. In an anecdotal account, a Kenyan pastor was asked about the number of individuals accompanying him. He replied, "There are two males and three ladies in the group", - since he did not regard women as persons (Chinchen 1999:119).

Numerous African narratives and proverbs employ pejorative language to belittle women, hence, statements like - she is the origin and foundation of all her husband's misfortunes; she is an object of contempt; she possesses numerous flaws; she is gossipy and incapable of keeping a secret; she is incessantly critical, and envious (Nasimiyu 1992:23). Wasike (1992:106-107) posits that the conventional foundation for polygamy was the notion that women's status and dignity were contingent upon their capacity to bear children



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and enter into marriage. A woman was required to be under the protection and guidance of a male, initially as a daughter and then as a first, second, or third wife (Wasike 1992:106). Nyambura Njoroge, a distinct Kenyan woman, was responsible for a legislative proposal presented in the Kenyan Parliament aimed at criminalising domestic violence against wives; however, it failed due to the strong opposition from all male members of the Parliament (Nyambura Njoroge, 2015). This crime of violence, therefore, was perceived not only as a personal issue but also legitimised by tradition (Njoroge 2000:80). African proverbs often exhibit negative sentiments towards women. A Gikuyu proverb reflects the Kenyan men's conviction that - "Women possess no honest words, just deceitful ones,"; this is encapsulated in the Kenyan phrase - "Do not disclose to a woman, a secret" (Ayanga 2016:16).

### 2.3.3 PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES' LEADERSHIP BY WOMEN

The Pentecostal movement came about in 1906 due to the renowned revival in Azusa Street in Los Angeles, where many people experienced conversion, got filled with the Spirit of God and spoke in other tongues, under a black minister, William Seymour, from Louisiana (Langford (2017: 70). That Azusa Street mission accommodated all races and genders and became very powerful, despite the fact that Pastor Seymour involved women in the church leadership. A number of women leaders like Ozman and Taylor, were role models for those who followed in their footsteps, like Aimee Semple, Lucy Farrow, McPherson and many others; these were courageous and godly women without any fear of spreading the good news of Pentecost (Simoneaux 2017:11). At one stage, at least half of Azusa's leadership committee comprised of twelve members who were women (Langford 2017:71). Such bold women believed that the Holy Spirit's baptism had empowered them and justified their engagement in activities traditionally meant for men. Unfortunately, since the Azusa Street revival, there has been a downward trend in the ministry of women. The Assemblies of God in America had women making up only 17.4% of the clergy in 2003, and 3.64% who were serving as senior pastors of churches (Clifton 2009:172). The empowerment of women leaders, that followed global Pentecostalism and brought about a revival could not be



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sustained and appeared to fade over the centuries that followed (Clifton 2009:72). Church leadership by women is still subject to a variety of cultural factors that limit such women's ability to be as effective in ministry, as they possibly could be (Mudimeli 2011).

### 2.3.4 WOMEN IN THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION (AFM)

The Apostolic Faith Mission is a Pentecostal congregation that originated from the Pentecostal revival initiated in 1901 at the Bethel Bible School in Houston, Texas, led by Charles Fox Parham. Prominent South African theologians of the AFM, such as Isak Burger (2008:18), do not recognise Parham as the progenitor of the twentieth-century Pentecostal revival, attributing the initiation of the movement to his disciple. Parham, however, is frequently acknowledged for formulating Pentecostal ideology. He actively participated in disseminating the message and many of his students acknowledge him for this.

Hyatt (2002:153) states that when Parham established a short-term Bible school in Houston, Texas, Seymour also enrolled. Parham contravened conventions and regional customs to permit Seymour's enrolment in the Houston Bible School. Owing to segregation regulations and protocols, Seymour was permitted to attend courses from a neighbouring room, where he could listen to lectures through an ajar door. At his Houston camp gathering, Parham allegedly appointed Ms. Lucy Farrow, an African American woman, to the position of minister. Hoel (1964:37) stated, "Ms. Farrow showed an extraordinary capacity to convey the Holy Spirit by the imposition of hands." The prayer group expanded as additional members joined, and the house ultimately became inadequate to accommodate all attendees. They relocated to the more spacious residence of Mr. Richard Ashbury, a Baptist, where six individuals in his residence commenced speaking in tongues. Seymour led a significant revitalisation that ultimately moved to 312 Azusa Street. Parham did not intend to establish a church; rather, he designated the movement as "The Apostolic Faith Movement" or "The Apostolic Faith Mission" (Burger and Nel 2008: 23). Interracial relationships were common throughout the Renaissance. Seymour designated it the Apostolic Faith Movement/Mission for the Azusa



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edifice (McClung 2012:28). This perspective highlights women's involvement in the Pentecostal awakening that initiated the AFM in Zimbabwe in 1915 (Burger and Nel 2008: 24). In South Africa, the movement was referred to as the "Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa".

Women's historical participation in the AFM in Zimbabwe has predominantly been theologically conservative, hence, the church evolved into a comparatively insular organisation. The documentation of women's history at that time was inadequate, restricting current access to vital knowledge. Women's difficulties and concerns have not been sufficiently documented or addressed. This led to the marginalisation of women in an inequitable society, depriving them of the capacity to effect change. Women perceived the existing *status quo* as a manifestation of divine will, on a theological level. In this perspective, each human community is characterised by the intrinsic structural injustice of an imbalanced relational dynamic between the sexes, wherein males collectively exert dominance over females (Slee, 2003:18). The author continues that this intrinsic inequity has endured over recorded history, is pervasive, and is embedded in language, culture, social interactions, mythology, and religion. This holds true in numerous domains where both genders are involved. Women and men, however, collaborate in many capacities inside the AFM, although many senior leadership roles are occupied solely by men. This study also examines the leadership opportunities accessible to women inside the AFM ministerial services in which they participate.

### 2.3.5 HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Historically, Pentecostal movements have had varying levels of acceptance for women in ministerial positions, but despite early progress, including the ordination of women in the Assemblies of God in the 1920s, challenges remain. Women pastors in Pentecostal congregations frequently face gender discrimination as a result of traditional biblical interpretations that limit their position in the church hierarchy (CBE International, 2023). This prejudice is typically based on texts like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,



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which have historically been used to justify the limiting of women's leadership roles in the church (Gabriel, 2018:60).

Pillay (2017:2) claims that philosophical and theological discourse, throughout history, has influenced social and faith communities' perspectives and treatment of women. Biblical narratives capture the cultural circumstances of their day, particularly those involving women. The New Testament books emerged within the Greco-Roman culture, where the church fathers' thoughts have had a considerable impact on the development of Christian theology, particularly on women's worth, status, and function. The works of the church fathers, especially the Greek and Latin fathers, reflect beliefs from their various eras (Sawyer 1996:149-152); these cultural settings have altered people's attitudes towards women; these ideas have become the cornerstone of the treatment of women. Various philosophical and theological beliefs about women have had and continue to have a negative impact on their dignity, environments, relationships, and livelihoods, both directly and indirectly. The prevailing beliefs define social and religious discourse regarding women, which in turn determines their status and function within their communities, as well as the churches they attend. This tradition will be briefly investigated, and its impact on the AFM in Zimbabwe will be assessed.

Plato and Aristotle's philosophies influenced both the New Testament texts and the church founders. This research will look at significant scripture passages that are relevant to the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe's views on women, leadership, and ecclesiastical positions, such as 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, Ephesians 5:22-23, and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. These scriptures will be examined using a variety of techniques, including literal and metaphorical interpretation.

Historically, male theologians' opinions have had a profound impact on women's daily lives. Lerner (1993:142) expands on this by maintaining that women are inherently inferior, according to the Scriptures and the early male theologians, who refer to the male intellect, implying that greater intelligence is awarded to men and inferior intellect to women, like Eve. These church fathers' views of Eve have had a lasting impact on current women.



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### 2.3.5.1 THEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Theological barriers play a significant role in the challenges faced by women in Pentecostal leadership. Many Pentecostal denominations adhere to a "theology of submission," which posits that women should submit to male authority within both the home and the church. This theology is often reinforced by cultural norms that view leadership as inherently male, creating a significant hurdle for women aspiring to leadership positions (CBE International, 2023:8-10). Additionally, the integration of Pentecostalism into mainstream evangelicalism has often led to a retreat from earlier practices of empowering women, as churches seek broader acceptance within conservative Christian communities (Gabriel, 2018:60). Cultural and societal influences on women's leadership also play a significant role in shaping how women are viewed and accepted in positions of authority, particularly within religious institutions. These influences, which are deeply embedded in social structures, customs, and gender norms, often determine the level of access women have to leadership roles in various contexts, including churches. In the context of Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, these cultural and societal factors often present unique challenges for women seeking leadership roles.

### 2.3.5.2 PATRIARCHY AND CULTURE

According to Nadar (2009:55), the inclusion of women in traditionally male-dominated religious environments is contingent on the maintenance of patriarchal normativity within the clergy, which is aided by the transmission of knowledge. Referring to female ministers and elders as "mothers" fosters a sanctified patriarchal hierarchy while also maintaining the priesthood's intrinsically patriarchal nature. Furthermore, neither the clergy nor the laity sectors of the church faced the exclusion of women from the priesthood, nor the doctrinal advances that supported a different viewpoint. A sizable portion of the congregation, however, refers to the clergy as "father" or "minister", and the male clergy frequently maintained solidarity, while many female clergy members seek authentic methods to transcend patriarchal normative



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constraints within ecclesiastical contexts, intentionally or unintentionally (Pillay 2017:2). Headship theology confers a dual sanctity on patriarchy, providing both theological and cultural legitimacy.

In recent years, there has been an increase in conservative religious movements, some of which are affiliated with nationalism or right-wing politics, resulting in widespread support for male headship among ecclesiastical circles. Fighting patriarchy is frequently interpreted as an attempt to undermine Christian ideas or African practices. According to Chitando (2015:277), multiple African women theologians have continuously argued that gender inequities in power and privilege exist throughout a wide range of important domains, including sexuality, health, family, religion, education, economy, and politics.

Women are frequently introduced into traditionally male-dominated venues to sustain the existing gender hierarchy (Pillay 2017:8). As a result, while women's ordination has opened up new leadership options, there is no sign that traditionally male-dominated ecclesiastical contexts are changing. The social dynamics of religious institutions highlight the long-term repercussions of patriarchy as an institution. The societal authority that supports hyper-normative patriarchy stifles inventive, emancipatory alternatives and despite its ubiquitous and invisible impact, institutional and societal gender inequities persist as a result of it.

In many nations, including those in Africa, patriarchal cultural traditions continue to have a significant influence on gender roles, particularly in leadership positions. Patriarchy, which favours male authority and primarily assigns leadership positions to men, is a deeply ingrained social framework that shapes perceptions of women's leadership qualities. In many African communities, traditional gender viewpoints see men as natural leaders, but women are usually assigned submissive roles in both the household and public realms. This is encouraged by traditions that emphasise a woman's role as a wife, mother, and carer, limiting her opportunities for leadership positions.

In rural areas, traditional gender roles are typically prominent. Cultural norms,



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therefore, may limit women's access to leadership positions, particularly in religious environments with male-dominated leadership structures. The societal notion that women are better suited for supportive or caring positions frequently leads to a reluctance to accept women as pastors or spiritual leaders, as these roles are thought to need authority and decisiveness, which are culturally associated with men (Gaitskell, 1990:17). Patriarchal standards shape opinions of the validity of female leadership among both men and women, limiting women's leadership chances.

**(a) Gender norms**

Gender norms dictate that "men and women are anticipated to adhere to distinct behavioural and physical standards" (Haslanger 2000:33). The expected behaviours of men and women, or gender norms, vary by culture and location. In certain countries, societal rules are profoundly oppressive towards women, while men are seen as the unquestioned authorities. Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches perceive societal and cultural gender roles as biblically founded; this is supported by the interpretation of specific biblical texts.

**(b) Gendered traits and virtues**

Concerning gendered characteristics and virtues, Haslanger (2000:33) elucidates that in numerous civilisations, specific psychological features are considered either masculine or feminine. Masculine qualities are regarded as virtues in males and as vices in women, and vice versa. When women demonstrate independent agency in societies that regard this as a masculine characteristic, they are perceived as breaking from traditional norms that designate them as followers and males as leaders.

**(c) Gender identity**

Gender identification refers to an individual's self-perception of being, either male or female (Haslanger 2000:33). The comprehension of one's identity underpins his/her interactions with the surrounding world. Individuals may



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possess either a robust and authentic sense of identity, allowing their lives and actions to align with this self-perception, or they may have a distorted self-concept, resulting in detrimental connections and behaviours in society.

The traditions of certain communities influence individuals' identity formation in either a positive or negative way; this is true within the unique culture of the AFM in the setting of Zimbabwe. In this setting, leadership traditions impact the formation of individual identities; hence, men command respect and honour for themselves as church and family leaders, while relegating women to submissive roles. Unfortunately, this artificial and unsupported construct denies women the freedom and opportunity to serve God in accordance with their divinely-bestowed gifts, talents, and personal callings.

**(d) Gender symbolism**

Symbols are significant in establishing the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Certain inanimate objects are associated with a gendered field of representation as these items are connected with a certain gender. A garage is commonly associated with men, while a kitchen is connected with women. In certain communities, males wear trousers and women wear dresses and skirts. These exhibit gender representations in public settings, for instance, they designate the appropriate bathrooms for each gender. Skirts and dresses imply weakness, but trousers symbolise strength and power; an example is the linguistic phrase of - “wearing trousers at home” – meaning the authority figure in the house.

### 2.3.6 RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND DOCTRINES

Cultural and societal views on women’s leadership are also reinforced by religious traditions and doctrines, particularly those that emphasise male headship. In many Pentecostal churches, traditional interpretations of scripture are used to justify male leadership and limit women’s roles in ministry. Passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are often cited to argue that women should not hold positions of authority over men in the



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church (Amanze, 2013). These interpretations become deeply intertwined with cultural norms, creating a powerful barrier against women's leadership.

Pentecostal churches often reflect the broader societal attitudes toward gender roles, which means that even when women are allowed to participate in ministry, they are often limited to roles that align with traditional expectations of femininity. For instance, women may be encouraged to serve in ministries focused on children, women's groups, or hospitality, rather than preaching or leading congregations. The cultural expectation that women should remain in the background and support male leaders is reinforced by religious teachings that emphasize submission and gender differentiation (Grudem, 2004:34).

### 2.3.7 INSTITUTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

Institutional and structural challenges also impede women's leadership in Pentecostal churches. These challenges include limited access to formal theological education and training, which are often prerequisites for leadership roles. The hierarchical nature of church governance in many Pentecostal denominations means that decision-making power is typically concentrated among male leaders, further marginalising women (Ikyernum, 2023:19). These structural barriers are exacerbated by local cultural expectations that prioritise male leadership in both religious and secular spheres; these limit women's access to and effectiveness in leadership roles. These challenges are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and historical traditions that have persisted over time. While women in leadership have made significant strides, institutional and structural barriers continue to inhibit their progress in both religious and broader societal contexts.

#### 2.3.7.1 Patriarchal Church Structures (PCS)

One of the primary institutional challenges that women face in leadership within religious settings is the patriarchal structure of many churches. Historically, most religious institutions have been led and governed by men, with decision-making powers and leadership positions predominantly reserved for males. In



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many cases, church leadership positions such as pastors, elders, and bishops are occupied by men, leaving little room for women to assume roles of authority (Amanze, 2013:3-5). These structures are often maintained by deeply embedded theological interpretations that emphasize male headship, such as readings of 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3, which are used to justify male-only leadership in the church (Piper & Grudem, 1991:2). In Pentecostal churches, this patriarchal hierarchy is reinforced by church governance models that limit the decision-making power of women. Even when women are permitted to serve in ministry, they are often confined to roles considered appropriate for their gender, such as leading women's groups, children's ministries, or administrative tasks. Leadership roles that involve preaching, teaching, or leading the entire congregation are often off-limits to women due to institutional policies that prioritize male leadership (Gaitskell, 1990;1-2). These patriarchal structures not only limit women's opportunities for advancement but also reinforce the perception that women are not suited for leadership roles in religious contexts.

#### 2.3.7.2 Social and Interpersonal Dynamics

Women leaders in Pentecostal churches often navigate complex social and interpersonal dynamics. They frequently face resistance from male colleagues and congregants who question their authority and legitimacy. This resistance can manifest in various forms, including overt opposition, subtle undermining of their leadership, and exclusion from essential decision-making processes (Gabriel, 2018;34). In addition, women leaders must often balance their ministerial roles with societal expectations related to family and domestic responsibilities, which can limit their availability and effectiveness in leadership positions (CBE International, 2023:204).

The disparate treatment of men and women has been ingrained in civilisations over generations, despite efforts at social and political reform. Munroe (2001:23) asserts that, although the legislation in most nations stipulates gender equality, public perception may not align with this principle. Women in society are progressively experiencing frustration and a sense of manipulation.



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Hadebe and Chitando (2009:10) assert that culture and religion are crucial in defining and controlling gender relations in many African cultures. The well-being and status of women in Africa can predominantly be demonstrated through a cultural framework. The AFM is integral to culture and has assimilated traditional perceptions regarding the roles of men and women, which extends to the roles assigned to women by the church. African cultures embody an African perspective; hence, any type of emancipation in this field must first reconcile with culture (Hadebe and Chitando 2009:10). It is imperative for African individuals to cultivate the ability to interrogate, analyse, and critically assess culture. This approach may facilitate the critique of various institutions, including social, religious, economic, and political systems, all of which contain elements of injustice.

Culture is a social construct; hence, it is susceptible to social deconstruction. According to Perry and Perry (1991:23), successive generations of humans develop culture for the benefit of their descendants, allowing each generation to augment, delete, alter, and adapt components of culture that have become outmoded.

This study will take a comprehensive approach to culture in order to understand how socio-cultural factors influence the implementation of gender-sensitive legislation. The study looks into how cultural ideas, practices, knowledge, punishments, and values affect morality and gender notions. The communitarian ethos, as well as language and discourse, are studied historically, with an emphasis on traditions and social legacy (Hadebe and Chitando 2009:12). In this context, culture refers to beliefs, knowledge, sanctions, values, language, traditions, and social legacy.

This research is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between gender and culture, a relationship that has an impact on the implementation of gender policies. The AFM has reached a moment when male leadership must be willing to share authority with women at the national level, particularly at the top of the hierarchy of this oldest Pentecostal church. The AFM leadership, from the provincial to the national level, appears unwilling to share power with women



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who, like males, accept their divine calling to ministry. Male leaders who wield authority restrict women from participating in high-level leadership and policymaking, thereby limiting their unique, innate qualities and contributions. Women who are divinely called should be allowed to serve in the same ministerial roles as men who believe they are also called to ministry and leadership.

The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is central to Pentecostalism, and this should be evaluated in both its conceptual and practical contexts. The investigation concerns the extent to which this fundamental aspect of Pentecostalism and its operational methods influences the AFM in Thulamela Municipality. In practice, men dominate top leadership activities because they believe they know best. As a result, men have guided the activities of the church based on their understanding. Nonetheless, if the AFM in Thulamela believes in the primacy, function, and baptism of the Holy Spirit as stated in its statement of faith, individuals' attitudes, particularly those of leaders, should reflect this. Baptism is considered one of the church's most important sacraments, so each historical age places a strong emphasis on Holy Spirit baptism. Both men and women have to demonstrate the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to qualify as leaders. Women's involvement in the Pentecostal church dates back to its founding on Azusa Street and continues to this day.

Throughout the Church's history, different theories have evolved concerning how the Holy Spirit gifted individuals with spiritual gifts, allowing them to accomplish miracles and wonders. Women's distinct positions within the church distinguish them in each era, for they carried out their tasks as a result of their Holy Spirit baptisms. The Church's Constitution is critical for reconciling biblical evidence about the role of women with church practices. The historical engagement of women in all elements of church life, as individuals baptised by the Holy Spirit, leads the AFM in Thulamela to reconsider their position on the role and status of women in leadership, as well as to be accountable for their attitudes and behaviours. The norms used by male leaders, who claim they are based on scripture, will be evaluated. This study will engage in a theological



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discussion about the current viewpoints and practices of church leaders within the AFM in Thulamela.

### 2.3.8 CASE STUDIES AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

Personal accounts from women in Pentecostal leadership highlight the ambiguity and affirmation they experience. While some women report positive experiences and support from their congregations, others recount instances of discrimination and marginalisation. These mixed experiences underscore the complexity of the challenges faced by women leaders in Pentecostal churches (Gabriel, 2018:34). In Thohoyandou, women leaders may face additional pressures from the broader community, which often holds conservative views on gender roles.

The challenges faced by women-led ministries in Pentecostal churches are likely to be multifaceted, encompassing theological, cultural, institutional, and social dimensions. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to reinterpret restrictive theological doctrines, dismantle structural barriers, and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in ministry. By understanding and addressing these challenges, Pentecostal churches can move towards greater gender equality and more effective ministry.

### 2.3.9 PERCEPTIONS HELD BY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Exploring the perceptions held by Christian communities towards women-led Pentecostal churches is essential in understanding the broader socio-cultural dynamics. This review examines existing literature to identify prevailing attitudes and beliefs within these communities, focusing on both supportive and opposing views.

There are segments within the Christian community that express support for women in leadership roles within Pentecostal churches. Supporters often cite egalitarian theological interpretations that advocate for gender equality in all aspects of life, including church leadership. These perspectives are reinforced



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by biblical examples of female leaders, such as Deborah and Phoebe, which are used to argue that women's leadership is biblically sanctioned (CBE International, 2023:203). Additionally, some community members recognise the unique contributions that women bring to ministry, such as fostering inclusive and nurturing church environments.

There are pockets of support; however, strong hostility to women-led Pentecostal churches persists. Opponents frequently use traditional and patriarchal readings of scripture, particularly 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, to argue that women should not assume authoritative roles in the church. These interpretations are strongly ingrained in many Christian communities, leading to hostility towards female pastors and leaders. Cultural norms and societal expectations about gender roles reinforce these contrasting viewpoints, with many community members perceiving male leadership as the natural and divinely established structure (Ikyernum, 2023:8-10). There are also conflicting perceptions and ambiguities among Christians about women in church leadership. Some community members may personally favour female leaders but feel restricted by society and ecclesiastical standards that discourage or prohibit such leadership. This internal tension can rise to ambivalence, in which people express support in private but avoid public endorsement for fear of repercussions or ostracisation. Furthermore, some people believe women leaders are competent in particular jobs, such as children's ministry or administrative responsibilities, but not in pastoral or senior leadership positions, indicating a partial acceptance that still maintains existing gender hierarchies (CBE International, 2023:203).

During patriarchal periods in history, prevailing cultural norms and institutional structures that valued male authority and domination, frequently curtailed and restricted women's leadership. A patriarchal social structure is defined by male domination in positions of authority, with women frequently relegated to lower roles. This has been a defining aspect of numerous societies throughout history, from ancient civilisations to more recent times. It is critical to recognise that women's leadership during patriarchal ages was characterised by resilience,



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ingenuity, and the capacity to navigate social restrictions. Civilisations around the world, despite the long path, are making progress towards gender equality and recognising women's leadership potential. The belief that Christ abolishes inequalities between male and female is vital to Christian theology and is typically derived from the Apostle Paul's teachings. This viewpoint highlights the belief that by faith in Christ, all believers, regardless of gender, have the same spiritual status before God (Ruether 2011:13).

The New Testament contains a key scripture that supports this viewpoint, Galatians 3:28, where the Apostle Paul declares *"There is no Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male and female, because you are all one in Christ Jesus."* This verse emphasises that within the realm of religion, divisions such as nationality, social status, and gender are superseded by the unity that Christians experience in Christ. It holds that within the Christian society, all individuals are equal recipients of God's favour, with no gender receiving preferential treatment (Ruether 2011: 14). This viewpoint challenges traditional gender roles and hierarchical structures in both the church and society. It promotes the idea that both men and women are capable of pursuing leadership positions.

### 2.3.10 COMMUNITIES' PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN CHURCH LEADERS

The presence of women leaders in Pentecostal churches can also influence community perceptions over time. As women in leadership roles demonstrate their capabilities and contribute positively to church growth and community well-being, perceptions may gradually shift towards greater acceptance and support. Success stories of women-led ministries, where women pastors have successfully managed congregations and initiated impactful community projects, serve as powerful testimonials that challenge prevailing stereotypes and biases (Gabriel, 2018:34). In Thohoyandou, such shifts in perception are crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable church environment. Perceptions of women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou may be shaped by a complex interplay of theological, cultural, and societal factors. While support exists, opposition rooted in traditional interpretations of scripture



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and cultural norms, also remain strong. Mixed perceptions reflect the ongoing tension between evolving views on gender equality and entrenched patriarchal values. Understanding these perceptions is essential for developing strategies to promote gender equality in church leadership and foster a more inclusive Christian community.

### 2.3.11 STATISTICAL GROWTH PATTERNS (SGP)

**Introduction**

Understanding the statistical growth patterns of Pentecostal churches led by women in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality, is crucial for assessing the impact of female leadership on church expansion and community engagement. The following sections review existing data and research findings on the growth dynamics of these churches.

#### 2.3.11.1 Statistical Growth Trends

Recent studies indicate that Pentecostal churches led by women in various regions, including Thohoyandou, have experienced notable growth. According to a study by Ikyernum (2023:34), churches with women in leadership roles have shown positive growth trends in terms of membership, community outreach, and engagement. This growth is attributed to the inclusive leadership style and community-oriented approach often employed by women pastors.

**(a) Factors Influencing Growth**

Several factors contribute to the growth of women-led Pentecostal churches:

1. **Inclusive Leadership**: Women leaders tend to foster a more inclusive and nurturing environment, which can attract a diverse congregation. This inclusivity often leads to higher member retention rates and increased community involvement (Gabriel, 2018:38).

2. **Community Engagement**: Women pastors are often deeply involved in community development initiatives, which enhance the church's visibility



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and relevance in the community. These initiatives can include educational programs, health services, and social support, which contribute to the church's growth and sustainability (CBE International, 2023:204).

3. **Innovative Approaches**: Women in leadership positions are frequently noted for implementing innovative strategies in church management and worship practices. These innovations can appeal to younger generations and those seeking a more contemporary worship experience, thereby driving growth (Gabriel, 2018:36).

#### 2.3.11.2 Statistical Evidence

The growth of women-led Pentecostal churches is limited but emerging. Anecdotal evidence and small-scale studies suggest that these churches are growing at a comparable, if not faster, rate than their male-led counterparts. Ikyernum (2023;34) found that women-led churches have reported a 15-20% annual increase in membership, over the past five years, compared to a 10-12% increase in male-led churches.

### 2.3.12 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Debates about women's roles in church leadership typically revolve around biblical ideas on women in ministry. There are numerous passages in both the Old and New Testaments that show how women performed major religious roles, however, varied readings of these passages have resulted in differing views on whether women should hold leadership positions in the church or not. Relevant biblical texts reviewed, provide a varied and sometimes contradictory picture of women's involvement in ministry.

#### 2.3.12.1 Old Testament Perspectives

The religious life of Israel was profoundly shaped by women in the Old Testament, although their responsibilities were often secondary to male



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authority. Deborah (Judges 4:4-5), a prophetess and judge of Israel, is a prominent example. Deborah exemplified that women might attain leadership roles with divine endorsement by guiding Israel to triumph in battle while also wielding spiritual influence. Moses' sister Miriam is another significant figure, identified in Exodus 15:20 as a prophetess who led the Israelites in worship. These cases suggest that women were sometimes granted positions of spiritual authority, in ancient Israel.

The Old Testament illustrates a patriarchal system wherein males held dominant positions of authority, as kings and priests. The Levitical priesthood was exclusively male, with men occupying the bulk of leadership roles within the religious society. This has prompted some to argue that the patriarchal norms of the Old Testament validate the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the ministry (Grudem, 2004). Conversely, some argue that the presence of women such as Deborah and Miriam demonstrates that God allowed women to assume leadership roles, when deemed suitable.

The Pentecostal form of Christianity in Africa has embraced the importance of women from indigenous culture. Language influences and expresses individuals' lifestyles and ideologies (Muhwati 2017:10). An example is the term "*musikana*," which denotes a woman as the giver of life. *Musika* signifies 'creator,' while *-na* denotes 'together.' A woman cannot conceive a child by herself; she needs collaborate with a man to do this. This refers to Genesis 2:18, where she is characterised as Adam's “helper”, or “helpmate” – in relation to the Genesis 2:18 narrative regarding the creation, specifically, of a man's consort. Spencer (1985:23-24) examines the phrase "a helper fitting for him," focussing on the Hebrew interpretation of "fit for him." She asserts that the term *kenegdô* comprises three elements: *ke* + *neged* + *ô,* which can be rendered as "as + before + him" (Piper et al. 2006:103). Spencer (1985:24) reads the term as signifying a "helper seemingly positioned before him." She characterises it as "forward" or "visible," indicating dominance or parity (Spencer 1985: 25).
This viewpoint prompts the inquiry of whether the assistance formed subsequent to Adam, can be deemed superior than Adam himself; however, in accordance with the sequence of creation, Adam was created first, which



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undoubtedly influenced the cultural hierarchy.

Muhwati (2017) asserts that women occupied a distinctive role as religious functionaries owing to their association with the essence of life. Women begin ascending to prominence as Pentecostal Christian leaders in Zimbabwe, particularly circa 2000. Nonetheless, the AFM encountered difficulties in integrating its female pastors. Lagerwerf (1990:34) asserts that, notwithstanding the intimidation, resistance, and challenges encountered by most African women pastors, women persist in leading successful churches in Zimbabwe.

The conventional roles of men and women in African nations resemble those of the Hebrew communities in the Bible, characterised by a prevailing patriarchal structure and perspective. Men assume leading positions in political, religious, and social spheres, while women are relegated to supportive roles and home responsibilities. The kitchen is the sole area in the home where women can exercise autonomy and make decisions impacting the entire household, without male interference or veto. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African theologian, designates this phenomenon as "kitchen power" (1995:1). Women pursue this form of power due to constraints in other domains. Chinweizu (1990:14) asserts that this 'kitchen power' must be incorporated into discussions regarding African women, as it is an essential aspect of their identity.

Mapuranga (2013:180) asserts that religion significantly influences gender roles and restricts women's access to certain places and activities. Chitando (2004:123) contends that women occupy a significant position in African-initiated Churches (AICs) and garner considerable attention. This stands in stark contrast to the restricted opportunities available to women in the AFM. Chinweizu (1990:14) maintains that women possess the ability to bear children and oversee domestic responsibilities, whereas men display psychological immaturity in this situation.

When an African woman achieved any significant accomplishment or excelled



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in ethical, religious, or intellectual domains, she was seldom lauded as a virtuous individual, instead, she was perceived as having adopted masculine traits (Chinweizu 1990:13). The roles of women in the Bible parallel those in traditional African civilisations. The Bible is highly esteemed in African Christianity, however, there are discrepancies in the interpretation and application of the Bible. Some adherents of African Christianity integrate traditional practices with Christian concepts. African Pentecostalism fluctuates between adherence to perceived biblical doctrine and deviation from it, for specific cultural issues, thereby, making culture to transcend scriptural authority. The Bible embodies a confluence of cultures. Individuals residing for almost four hundred and thirty years in a foreign locale, with its distinct cultural values and institutions, would undoubtedly have been influenced by those civilisations. It would be very limiting to overlook culture and its influence while examining the Bible and its significance, in subsequent eras.

The status and functions of women differ across civilisations, for within the African continent, civilisations exhibit both similarities and substantial differences. Certain males perceive women via a cultural lens, however, in certain instances, these individuals forsake their culture when confronted with particular demands that conflict with their cultural norms. Male AFM leaders in Thulamela frequently endorse a certain culture when it aligns with their convictions.

The subjugation of women is not exclusive to the African Christian tradition; it is also present in Islamic culture, for instance. Most predominant religions advocate for cultural patriarchy. Certain biblical verses substantiate the Judeo-Christian faith, for instance, Genesis 16:2-4; 41:45; Numbers 12:1-2; and 27:1-11. In these cultures, women were wed to much older men at a young age, typically between twelve and thirteen, akin to practices in Ancient Greece and Rome. A woman's husband was referred to as her “Baal”, or lord (Gur-Klein 2014:149). Throughout her life, a woman was anticipated to be subordinate to a man, initially her father, followed by her spouse or other close male relatives. 1 Peter 3:6 articulates, "As Sarah surrendered to Abraham, calling him Lord, you are her daughters if you act righteously and are unperturbed by



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fear….."The Abrahamic narrative illustrates total male dominance, for Abraham could even concealed his intention to sacrifice their long-anticipated son, Isaac, from Sarah (Gen 22; Van Seters 2014:166). This verse indicates that the wife had no knowledge about the sacrifice. Sarah's treatment of her slave, Hagar, was severe and disagreeable, notwithstanding her counsel for Abraham to conceive a child with the slave woman (Gen 16; McKeown 2008:114).

This narrative exemplifies African feminist theology. Hagar is an African-Egyptian servant. As a slave, she is the possession of her mistress, Sarai, who may utilise her at her discretion. The rules designed to safeguard Hebrew nationals did not extend protection to her as a foreign national. Her service include sexual exploitation and coerced surrogacy. Hagar endures domestic violence from her mistress due to the perception that her son Ishmael poses a danger to Sarai's status as the primary wife (Ruether 2012:194).

At Sarai's behest, she is banished into the wilderness, twice, due to the perceived threat of Hagar's motherhood. She is forsaken, devoid of resources, and must manoeuvre through a circumstance in which both she and her son seemed certain to perish. In the desert, she experiences a direct encounter with God, her sole hope in an unfamiliar territory. God reveals to her that via her son, she would establish the foundation of a formidable nation. This vow exemplifies God's covenant with Abraham. Initially, Hagar is banished, but God instructs her to return and yield to Sarai, however, she is unequivocally expelled and compelled to navigate life independently with her son, following Sarai's birth of a son.

Rosemary Ruether (1998:232) asserts that the God encountered by Hagar in the wilderness does not fully consider her an oppressed woman, but instead advances Sarai's interests. Conversely, Hagar perceives God as a visionary deity, embodying a more positive experience from a non-Hebrew culture, hence, Ruether (1998:232) suggests that the Hebrew God exhibits ambivalence about black women.

A multitude of male religious leaders effectively consign women to the desert



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to meet their demise; their divine endowments are fated to perish with them. These women's creativity, expertise, and connection with the Divine could and ought to have significantly helped the church. The downtrodden face intrinsic dangers while opposing tyranny, apprehensive of retribution from oppressors intent on preserving their hegemonic structure, thus, numerous women in the Bible remain silent and compliant. Jesus serves as a paragon and source of inspiration for Black women. He exemplifies a role model by resisting the allure of unjust authority in the wilderness and promoted life, in opposition to lethal systems. Similarly, African women regard Jesus as a proponent for their survival and enhanced quality of life inside the ministry.

Ancient Hebrew and African cultures have numerous characteristics. In ancient societies, the patriarch exerted total authority over his offspring, for instance, Jephtha demonstrated his power by sacrificing his own daughter (Judges 11:30-40). In Genesis 19:6-8, Lot safeguarded a male guest's honour by proposing sexual assault on his own daughters. In 1 Kings 3, Solomon negotiated an marriage alliance with the Pharaoh of Egypt by marrying his daughter. The Old Testament has numerous instances of women being regarded as men's possessions rather than as autonomous beings. Even inside the institution of matrimony, couples were evidently unequal. In biblical times and ancient African civilisations, men were permitted to take multiple wives, as both polygamy and concubinage were legally sanctioned, but women were restricted to a single marriage. This continues to be a reality for numerous African women today.

#### 2.3.12.2 New Testament Perspectives

The New Testament provides a more nuanced perspective of women's involvement in ministry, particularly within the early Christian church environment. Jesus often created unconventional relationships with women in the Gospels. He diverged from contemporary traditions by openly conversing with women, healing them, and incorporating them into His ministry. Mary Magdalene, frequently designated as "the apostle to the apostles," was entrusted with informing the apostles of Jesus' resurrection after being the first



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to witness Him alive in John 20:18. Certain scholars have construed this as evidence that women were entrusted with substantial spiritual duties in the early church (Cunningham & Hamilton, 2000:567).

The prolific biblical writer, Paul, likewise portrays women in positions of leadership and ministry inside his epistles. Paul commends Phoebe for her contributions and identifies her as a deacon of the church in Cenchreae (Romans 16:1-2). Priscilla and her husband Aquila, for instance, are referenced with Paul as associates; Priscilla is often cited first, suggesting she may have held a more prominent position (Acts 18:26). These narratives demonstrate that women, in conjunction with males, participated in ministry and had leadership roles in the early church, nevertheless, certain Pauline passages have been interpreted as restricting women's roles in church leadership. Paul asserts, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a male; rather, she is to remain silent," as exemplified in 1 Timothy 2:12. Likewise, ladies are instructed to remain silent in churches according to 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Proponents of the view that the Bible prohibits women from occupying pastoral or leadership roles within the church often reference these scriptures (Piper & Grudem, 1991).

Many scholars, however, argue that these passages must be understood within their historical and cultural contexts. Some contend that instead of instituting a blanket prohibition on women in ministry, Paul's directive for the women of the Corinthian church to be silent may have been aimed at specific disturbances during worship (Fee, 198;3457). The assertion "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) is regarded by many as a foundational principle of equality within the body of Christ, encompassing ministry (Witherington, 1998).

Hannah’s distress regarding her childlessness is powerfully depicted, with her husband's enduring affection for her, in spite of this circumstance. Upon bearing a child, she exhibits autonomy and consecrates her exceptional son to the worship of God at the Shiloh temple. She, rather than her husband, recited the profoundly spiritual and revolutionary hymn (1 Sam 2:1-10) that subsequently



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served as the template for Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-54). In Judges, 3:3-22, Manoah's nameless wife exhibits greater religious sensitivity than her husband (Le Roux, 2016:246). Abigail's intellect and prudence are starkly juxtaposed with her husband's uncouth demeanour (1 Sam 25:3, 23-25, 33). Ruth, a Moabite, exemplifies loyalty and faithfulness in the eponymous book.

The Book of Esther vividly exemplifies the bravery and resilience of the queen, whose valour is annually celebrated during the Jewish festival of Purim (Edwards 1989:31). Miriam, in the well-known narrative of Exodus 2, employs her ingenuity to save Moses; following the exodus from Egypt, she grasps a timbrel and leads the ladies in dance, singing the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:21). She is characterised as a prophetess (Ex 15:20) and collaborates with her brother Aaron in admonishing Moses when they perceived his conduct as being imprudent; however, she is afflicted with leprosy as a retribution, but Aaron stays unharmed (Num 12). This is perceived by many as a message to women - they may prophesy but should refrain from judging the words and works of men. They ought to submit to males like Miriam was expected to submit to Moses' leadership and not to question him. The prophet Micah, nonetheless, venerates her as divinely sent, alongside Moses and Aaron, to serve as a national leader (Mic 6:4).

Similar to Miriam, Deborah, a married woman and mother who demonstrated civic, religious, and military leadership, was likewise designated as a prophetess (Judges 4:4). She was one of the judges of Israel, alongside the men. She proactively called upon Barak in the name of the Lord, to assemble forces against Sisera, and her might and valour starkly contrast with the ineffectiveness of this male commander of Israel. Their valour, together with that of Jael, who assassinated Sisera, is commemorated in the illustrious Song of Deborah (Judges 5). Additional female prophets include Isaiah's spouse (Isaiah 8:3) and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14).

**(a) Pauline perspectives**



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In order to come to an understanding of Paul and the Pauline tradition on the issue of women, a brief survey of some relevant passages in his letters will be done. Three rather difficult passages that refer explicitly to women's roles in the ecclesial community, merits close attention, namely 1 Corinthians 11:2-6; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 and 1Timothy 2:8-14.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-6, Paul is responding to a specific problem. The Corinthians, under a sense of direct prompting from the Spirit, were indulging in very free, disorganized worship, so much that Paul twice advised them to speak one at a time. They so much overvalued glossolalia that Paul needed to remind them that other gifts are important, especially love 1 Cor 12-14 ( Barnes 2014:247-253; Cartledge 2017:66). Paul's response in this situation was to urge decorum in worship, and a proper respect for traditional ways. This passage contains a number of difficulties and ambiguities.

Firstly, the term 'veil' does not appear in the Greek text. Seifrid (2014:168-170) contends that Paul is simply advocating for women to maintain long hair (to differentiate them from men with short hair) or to style it neatly rather than in a dishevelled manner (in opposition to certain orgiastic cults where women kept their hair unrestrained). Certain church fathers interpreted this verse as mandating head coverings, a practice prevalent for married women in both Judaism and the Greco-Roman civilisation (Edwards 1989:65). In the passage, Paul appears to advocate for women to cover their heads (verses 5-10) and to maintain long hair (verse 14).

Concerning the head-covering, sometimes interpreted as a show of power over her, the Greek text does not specify "over her," but just indicates that women must have authority, specifically, over their heads (Hurley 1981:143-145). Certain senior pastors and elders, for instance, within the AFM in Zimbabwe hold a strong conviction that the veil is worn as a symbol of a woman's authority to pray and prophesy in the contemporary Christian society. The veil, hence, ought to be regarded as a symbol of women's modesty, dignity, and the respect they deserve (Khan 2006:307). A further ambiguity resides in the interpretation of the term "head" in the statement "the head of a woman [or wife] is man [or



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her husband]." The ambiguity encompasses multiple aspects: it may signify “chief”, implying that the husband possesses control over his wife, or “source”, suggesting that the woman was created from man.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, Paul is once more preoccupied with maintaining proper conduct inside the group. He insists that only two or three prophets should speak at each instance, and that they must do so sequentially, emphasising that God is a deity of order, not chaos (1 Cor 14:26-33). The issue arises from two verses (1 Cor 14: 34-35), asserting that women must remain silent, as they lack the authority to speak. Their role is subordinate, as stated by the Law itself. These appear to contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5, which depicts appropriately-dressed women praying and prophesying among the crowd (Sherwood 2017:480). The overall tone appears significantly more legalistic than Paul's typical manner.

It is uncertain if these verses represent a genuine Pauline directive or if they were inserted by a subsequent editor of the Pauline school as an interpolation. As these verses cannot be dismissed on textual-critical bases but are typically deemed inauthentic for theological reasons, it is more exegetically sound to regard them as original Pauline utterances and thereafter interpret them within their current context. For an extended period, many have regarded 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as genuine segments of Paul's epistle (Porter 2004:263). This text prohibits women from occupying leadership roles within the church; it can therefore, be concluded that individuals who are urged to remain silent cannot assume any leadership position within the community. Hurley (1981:146) posits that the phrase, "stay quiet" transcends mere prohibition from talking, but that women were purportedly not to engage in discussions, within places of worship (Hendriks et al., 2012:118-120).

Paul exhibits a shift in his demeanour in 1 Corinthians 11, where he recommends complete involvement of women in worship services but, his increasing apprehension with the disorderly practices in Corinth results in an unfortunate reversal in Cor 14:34-35. A considerable number of academics, for instance, Newsome et al., 2014:97, contend that Cor 34-35 were not authored



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by Paul, but rather represent an early modification by a stringent commentator, perhaps of Jewish origin, who believed that women should be subjugated. If we maintain the amended text, we must conclude that, prompted by the unsettling conduct of certain women, Paul is temporarily prohibiting women's voices. He, however could not have intended this ban to be either permanent or universal without violating the entirety of his theological framework. This passage may have been an interpolation by a student of Paul or individuals seeking to promote their teachings.

Payne (2009:12-13) asserts that male dominance over females is a consequence of sin and that the situation evolved over time as the New Testament developed. Ruether (2011:5) maintains that the equality of men and women was reinstated in Christ, who commanded that women, equally with men, serve as prophetic evangelists of the gospel. Individuals who seek to suppress women in the church are the “seed of Satan,” perpetuating the fallen condition of humanity who has yet to attain the inner illumination of the redeeming Spirit.

This ideology seeks to reinstate the equitable involvement of women in missionary endeavours. The injunction for women to remain silent in 1 Corinthians 14:33-34, therefore, appears to contradict the notion in 1 Corinthians 11 that women were prophesying, and it also conflicts with other New Testament accounts of women prophesying, among other ministries, as indicative of the new age (Acts 2:17-18, Mathews et al., 2003:240-241). The assertion that a Christian wife and church member can prophesy, as stated in Acts 2:17, suggests that she may possess valuable ideas and insights that a discerning and supportive husband and pastor should consider and embrace.

In the aforementioned perspectives, women are esteemed as prominent leaders who significantly contribute to leadership. Some recognise that women may be selected for service to the Lord, yet, the patriarchal mindset persists, asserting that church leadership is exclusively reserved for men (Mapuranga 2011:182). A similar prejudice is prevalent against the majority of female pastors within Pentecostal Christianity. Ephesians 5:22-33 is frequently utilised



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by even women in positions of authority within the church to advocate for the subordination of women to their husbands as a means of demonstrating virtue (Robertson, 2010:41). These women oversee areas at the church, including decorations and administration, with some males serving under their guidance.

Chitando (2007:217) assesses patriarchy in the Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe and concludes that, despite some advancements, a comprehensive reform of church leadership structures and attitudes is necessary for women to attain equality with males. Fiorenza (1999:43) introduces a neologism to characterise the dominance of patriarchy. She refers to it as "*kyriarchy",* derived from the Greek terms *kyrios* (master) and *archē* (rule), indicating that domination transcends mere patriarchal, gender-based dualism and encompasses more extensive, interrelated hierarchical structures of oppression, manifesting in various forms, such as racism, poverty, heterosexism, and colonialism, hence, she conceptualises systems of domination as *kyriarchal* rather than patriarchal (Fiorenza, 2011: 9-11).

Paul discusses the topic of veils, with caution in 1 Corinthians 11, although, he also strongly calls for women's silence in the church. Newsome 2014: 72, at this juncture asks very pertinent questions - *How can women exercise their accepted right to pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11) if they must remain silent? How can women like Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3), Prisca (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19), Mary (Rom 16:6), Junia (Rom 16:7), and Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom 16:12) serve as coworkers in churches if they are not allowed to speak in them? How can Phoebe be a deacon (Rom 16:1-2) if she is not allowed to speak in the assembly?* A plausible explanation is required in this situation.

According to Alston et al. (2007:235) and Stephenson (2011:38), the praying and prophesying mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11 took place at home, whereas women were required to keep silent in public places, including churches. Reading of 1 Corinthians 11, however, does not suggest a household situation; for in 1 Corinthians 14, worship sessions were deemed an appropriate context for prayer and prophecy. From this situation, there appears to be a divide between inspired talk (1 Cor 11), which Paul encourages, and uninspired



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conversation (1 Cor 14), which he forbids, hence, 1 Corinthians 14 seems to cover all types of talk.

Reading 1 Timothy 2:8-14, one can ascertain that the Deutero-Pauline letter of 1 Timothy contains various ambiguities about women. Grudem (1998:133) first argue that the noun “authority” (*authenteō*) occurred in a neutral context, denoting "have authority" or "exercise authority," with no negative connotation. In this sense, owning and wielding authority distinguishes itself by needing its enactment. Women's use of leadership in the church makes some men uncomfortable, for some people still believe in the African tradition that men are always in charge. Grudem (2002:106) then changed his mind, claiming that the phrase is generally positive or neutral, and that it refers to a constructive application of authority. It is unlikely that either position may be correct, since the phrase's immediate context, as well as a thorough lexical study, support its negative connotations.

The interpretation of *authenteō* (commonly rendered as "have" or "usurp authority" by Strong (2000:1611) is uncertain. Staton (2003:123) claims that the primary goal of these utterances was to prevent women, although empowered by the gospel of Jesus Christ, from using their newfound authority to address their husbands or men in a dominating manner, so undermining the social structure. The specific interpretation may differ, but the main message is clear - the author, in conjunction with his cultural background, calls for the subordination of women or wives which limits their leadership roles (Beck 2005:233). The theological reasoning is based on an exegesis of Genesis 2-3, in which Eve, rather than Adam, is held responsible for the Fall, and Adam's status, in the order of creation is interpreted as male supremacy over females (Davidson 2007: 145. The author of 1 Timothy (2:15) indicates that a woman/wife will achieve salvation through reproduction if she lives a prudent life and remains consistent in faith, love, and holiness. This remark is difficult to reconcile with the author's central tenet of justification by faith through divine grace, however, the passage's affiliation with the prevalent cultural framework is clear.



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### 2.3.13 INTERPRETIVE DEBATES

There are continuous discussions among Christians regarding the various biblical viewpoints on women's roles in ministry. The two most common interpretive stances are egalitarian and complementarian. Inspired by scriptures, such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, complementarians hold that men and women are equal in worth but have distinct roles, with men called to lead and women called to support (Grudem, 2004:34). Conversely, egalitarians contend that both men and women are called to equal roles in ministry, citing passages from Galatians 3:28 and biblical figures like Phoebe and Priscilla to bolster their position that gender differences should not bar women from leadership positions (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005:453).

The biblical views of women serving in ministry paint a complex and occasionally illogical picture, for although female leaders and ministry figures, such as Deborah, Miriam, Phoebe, and Priscilla are honored, some Pauline writings have been construed as limiting the power of women in the church. There are theological and cultural conflicts about gender roles in the ministry that are reflected in the ongoing discussions about how to interpret these scriptures. It is crucial to comprehend these biblical viewpoints in order to address the current obstacles that women in ministry face, especially in conservative settings where these interpretations continue to hold sway.

### 2.3.14 CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL INFLUENCES ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

#### 2.3.14.1 Societal Expectations and Leadership Styles

Certain traits are considered more suitable for leaders in many cultures, where societal expectations regarding leadership styles are gendered. Qualities that are culturally classified as masculine, like assertiveness, authority, and control, are frequently linked to leadership. Contrarily, women are frequently expected to possess traits like empathy, nurturing, and support, which are thought to be



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incompatible with the attributes required for leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002:573-598). This puts women in a difficult situation, whereby, if they choose traditionally "feminine" leadership styles, people may think less of them or that they are incompetent, and if they choose traditionally "masculine" styles, people may think that they are aggressive.

These social norms have a special impact on religious environments since leaders there are frequently expected to be role models for authority and moral guidance. Due to societal perceptions of gender, leadership in many Pentecostal churches is linked to a forceful, authoritative preaching style that may not be suitable for women, however, if their leadership philosophies are viewed as being at odds with what is expected of church leadership, women may find it difficult to be accepted as leaders (Chaves, 1997:34).

**(a) Gender and Education**

In many societies, the lack of education among women also contributes to their limited leadership opportunities. Women's access to formal education and theological training has historically lagged in some locations, which can make it more difficult for them to assume leadership positions within the church (Tripp, 2000:456). Women may find it challenging to obtain the credentials required to lead in patriarchal societies, where men are usually given preference for educational opportunities, especially in religious contexts where theological knowledge is essential. Like in many rural African communities, poverty, cultural norms surrounding marriage and motherhood, and the preference for boys' education over girls' can all be obstacles that women in Thohoyandou may have to overcome in order to pursue an education. If women do not have the same access to theological education as men, they may find it difficult to claim leadership roles in the church. Women are still viewed as less capable of taking on leadership roles, which perpetuates the cultural and societal barriers to women's leadership created by this educational disparity.

**(b) Shifts in Cultural Norms**



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In spite of these obstacles, cultural norms have changed in many regions of the world, particularly Africa, where women are increasingly defying gender stereotypes and rising to positions of leadership. The rise of women's rights movements and changing social attitudes toward gender equality have begun to open up new opportunities for women in leadership, including in religious institutions (Tripp, 2000:456). This progress may be uneven and frequently met with resistance, however, women are increasingly being appointed to leadership positions in some Pentecostal and women-led movements; there is also a growing recognition of their spiritual authority. Notable African female religious leaders, like Mama Sarah Omakwu in Nigeria have shown that women are capable of leading sizable, powerful ministries, despite social and cultural barriers, (Gaitskell, 1990:34). These women's accomplishments have paved the path for other women in ministry, although they have faced theological opposition as well as cultural disapprovals. Deeply-ingrained societal attitudes may continue to pose significant challenges, however, there seems to be a potential for greater acceptance of women in leadership roles, as cultural norms evolve.

### 2.3.15 THE HEAD COVERING OF WOMEN AND MALE HEADSHIP

The discourse about women's head coverings is pertinent to this study as it highlights the marginalisation and segregation of women within the AFM at Thulamelas places of worship. The practice is employed to confine women to their designated roles, particularly when they prophesy or minister, via the power of the Holy Spirit, within the house of God. The commandment for women to cover their heads across diverse traditions and its role in shaping social discourse will now be examined. The Pauline epistles mirror the cultural context of their era. This study will analyse its application in subsequent church traditions, particularly within the AFM in Thulamela, and the implications for church leadership.

The principal texts for this discourse are 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15. The topics of head covering, hierarchy, and authority are examined in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In examining 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Wood



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(2012:34) concluded that, within Paul's context, head coverings were mandated for women rather than men, as men represent the image of God and reflect His splendour. A woman, rather embodies the man's splendour as they were derived from men and produced for his benefit. The head covering for women signifies male power over women and reflects their obedience. In the AFM in Thulamela, the head covering is metaphorically associated with concealing the nakedness of femininity.

Both prayer and prophecy are performed by women and men alike, frequently without any discernible indication in their attire that suggests a submissive position for women. In many communities, the requirement for head covering remains significant, and a woman is prohibited from assuming any function before a congregation without her head covered. A prophetic message received via baptism by the Holy Spirit cannot be received without a head covering; this edict diminishes the status of women in church leadership. Wire (1990:130) asserts that, although the covering may not serve as a tangible obstruction, like a facial veil that impedes a woman's ability to project her voice, it nonetheless represents a symbolic barrier that constrains societal expectations of women and influences the woman's self-assessment of her vocation. The question here is whether the empowerment conferred by the baptism of the Holy Spirit can be fully and discerningly commemorated, given the influence of the head covering regulation on expectations (Longwe 2000:16).

As stated by Wire (1990:13), when a woman chooses to defy societal norms which have been deemed honourable, she simultaneously repudiates the roles linked to head covering, in social history. The powers bestowed upon individuals via the baptism of the Holy Spirit are not concealed within a fabric and neither such fabric nor its absence can impede women from proclaiming God's word or executing God's mandate. Phase Three of the AFM's history in Thulamela provided greater clarity regarding the roles performed by individuals baptised in the Holy Spirit and their operations within the church. Comprehending Paul's elucidations on women's head coverings and men's headship within their cultural milieu can illuminate the contemporary interpretations and management of these concepts. This will now be examined



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in greater detail.

Historically, in the AFM in Thulamela, head coverings were mandatory for any woman who preached or conducted a service in the church. This practice persists within the churches today, in numerous provinces, especially where the leaders are traditionalists. Historically, ladies donned caps during services in the AFM in South Africa (Nel and Burger, 2008:375). In 1975, the Council of AFM in South Africa examined the biblical text of 1 Corinthians 11 and determined that women should wear a hat or veil as a mark of their compliance with the divine hierarchy of power, which designates man as the head. Kwaramba & Dreyer (2019) assert that a new position offers an analysis of leadership from the perspective of an AFM in Zimbabwe. Until recently, there has not been a singular stance favouring "head cover" as a principle. This issue should be addressed by considering the context of the Pauline writings.

Kroeger (1993:375) notes that the term *kephalē* has garnered significant attention due to its application in Ephesians 5:23, which states, "The husband is the head (*kephalē*) of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church," and in 1 Corinthians 11:3, which asserts, "The head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." Kroeger (1993:75) contends that *"kephalē"* predominantly signified “source” rather than “authority”, and that this interpretation was consistent not only during the New Testament era but also in the prior classical period and the succeeding patristic period in Greek literature. The term denotes leadership broadly and specifically within the familial context. This broadens the parameters of leadership beyond the ecclesiastical domain. Numerous scholars who have examined the term "head" have concluded that it cannot be merely understood at face value as male dominance over a subordinate female - it is a significantly more intricate cultural issue.

The term "head," as employed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 as a metaphor, is analysed by New Testament scholar Anthony Thiselton (2000:811). He refers to it as a "living metaphor" for Paul's readers, since a metaphor possesses multiple interpretations and emotional nuances. Consequently, a singular



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response will neither be enough nor satisfy possible interpretations. Thiselton (2000:821) asserts that the physical head of an individual is the most salient feature, thus the metaphor "head" signifies prominence, representing the most conspicuous or superior manifestation, which also serves as a synecdoche for the entirety. The author's assertion that the head is the most prominent aspect of an individual does not imply that it serves as the source or origin of the person. He dismisses both the source of the translation and the translation itself, asserting that it has unavoidable overtones of authority in contemporary English. The head may not be more prominent than a person's face, rendering the assertion inadequate.

### 2.3.16 PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF THE DISCOURSE ON WOMEN

Plato's Academy, established in the 4th century BC, is the inaugural educational institution to admit female pupils (Chroust, 1967:25). While many remarkable women are referenced in the author's work - The Republic - such as those who acted as guardians, Plato's perspectives on ordinary women, as evidenced in Timaeus and Laws, are predominantly misogynistic (Rosser, 2008:4). In these essays, Plato characterises women as "womanish," with obsessive desires and unrestrained emotions. If women are already situated in this manner during this early period, and the impact of eminent philosophers like Plato extended beyond his day and endured for centuries, then the emancipation of women necessitates considerable work and substantial assistance. Women have been stereotyped as possessing inferior intellect, very far back in history.

Plato's anthropology presents a hierarchical conception of humanity - the master was superior to the slave, the man to the woman, and humans to animals (Trainor 2001:42). In practical terms, this indicated that slaves were subjugated and frequently abused by their masters, just as women were by men. Strong (2000:65) asserts that the term 'dominion' in Genesis 1:28 is "to tread upon", implying subjugation. It also signifies to triumph over or to dominate. The Pauline theology in Ephesians 5:22 illustrates a comparable mentality, specifically emphasising obedience, subjugation, and submission



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(Strong 2000:84). If taken literally today, as some churches do, women are perceived as subordinate to men - like slaves under their masters; however, Plato was also perceived in certain respect, as an advocate for women (Olugbade 1989:512).

Plato thought that women should be dominated by men because they are naturally weak, although, he did seem to see a role for educated woman in the politics and philosophy of his time (McGrath 1997:141-143). In Plato's paternalistic society, complete equality among the sexes would have been unthinkable and his idea of women as “weak” was carried forward for many centuries. Aristotle was a student of Plato, hence His work also attests to rather sexist and misogynist views of women (Morsink, 1979:85-88; Freeland 1994:145-146). He disagreed with his mentor in most things but agreed on the hierarchical order of things in the world, including nature, which was ranked low by him and reason which was ranked high. Men are associated with reason and women with nature, it was, therefore, obvious to Aristotle that men were dominant and superior. Only male persons were born free.

### 2.3.17 INCLUSION AND GENDER EQUITY

As Alvarez and Materne put it (2020:10), gender inclusion is a term that goes beyond equality. The belief is that all services, opportunities, and facilities are available to everyone and those roles and expectations in society are not determined by gender stereotypes. Gender equality is important because it protects women and girls from abuse, isolation, and exclusion which are essential for personal and spiritual growth. Gender equality is a human right because a society that treats women and men equally is safer and healthier. Equality means everyone has the same opportunity and is linked to justice and gives people, often, different means to achieve equal and fair outcomes. With all of this comes the responsibility to accommodate people and be respected (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Inclusion and gender equity are fundamental principles that promote fairness, equality, and social justice in our society. At their core, they aim to create an



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environment where every individual, regardless of gender, can fully participate, contribute, and thrive without facing discrimination or bias (Scotland 2018). Inclusion entails embracing diversity in all its forms and recognizing that each person brings unique perspectives and experiences to the table. It means breaking down barriers and ensuring that no one is excluded or marginalized based on their gender identity (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Alvarez and Materne (2020) maintain that gender equity, on the other hand, strives to rectify historical and systemic imbalances that have disadvantaged women and gender-diverse individuals. It seeks to level the playing field, ensuring that opportunities, resources, and responsibilities are distributed fairly, regardless of one's gender. Gender equity recognizes that differences in gender should not determine one's access to education, employment, healthcare, or leadership roles. It is about empowering everyone to reach their full potential while dismantling the stereotypes and biases that have perpetuated inequality (Alvarez & Materne 2020).

Inclusion and gender equity are not just ethical imperatives, they are also critical for the well-being and progress of societies and organizations. By fostering diverse perspectives and providing equal opportunities, we harness the full spectrum of human talent and creativity. Ultimately, embracing inclusion and gender equity leads to stronger, more vibrant communities and workplaces where everyone can thrive, irrespective of their gender, and contribute to a more just and equitable world (Alvarez & Materne 2020:36-37).

### 2.3.18 THE CHURCH'S EMBRACE OF PROACTIVE CHANGE

The notion of the “church's embrace of proactive change" suggests a positive and forward-looking approach within the context of a religious community. This implies that the church is not merely reacting to external forces or circumstances, but actively and willingly taking steps to bring about positive transformations. The use of the phrase, "proactive change", indicates a deliberate effort to initiate positive shifts, possibly addressing issues, adapting



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to societal changes, or promoting a more inclusive and progressive stance within the church community.

One aspect of the church's proactive change is reflected in its response to social issues. Rather than maintaining a rigid stance, many religious institutions are increasingly addressing topics, such as social justice, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability. This embrace of change seeks to align religious values with the evolving moral consciousness of society, fostering a sense of relevance and connection among believers (Alvarez & Materne 2020:40). Technological advancements have, also not been overlooked by the Church in its pursuit of proactive change. Embracing modern communication tools, social media, and digital platforms, religious organizations are leveraging technology to reach a broader audience, facilitate community engagement, and spread their messages. This adaptation not only acknowledges the changing modes of communication but also recognizes the potential for technology to enhance the spiritual experience of believers (Alvarez & Materne 2020:40-44).

Alvarez and Materne (2020) advocate for women's leadership in the Church and often point to historical precedents of strong female leaders in early Christianity, such as Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla, to argue that women have played significant roles in the Church's history. In addition, the Church's proactive approach involves revisiting and reinterpreting religious doctrines to make them more applicable to contemporary circumstances. This process of theological reflection allows religious leaders to provide guidance and support to their followers in navigating the complexities of modern life. It involves a balance between preserving the core Christian principles and adapting interpretations to address the unique challenges and opportunities of the present (Alvarez & Materne 2020:46).

Overall, the Church's embrace of proactive change underscores a commitment to remaining relevant and responsive in a dynamic world. By engaging with societal shifts, utilizing technology, and re-examining traditional teachings, religious institutions aim to continue playing a meaningful role in the lives of their followers while contributing positively to the broader global community.



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This approach not only ensures the continued relevance of religious institutions but also fosters a sense of inclusivity, compassion, and understanding within the diverse tapestry of contemporary society.

In conclusion, the Church's call to empower women in leadership positions represents a significant shift in the way many Christian communities approach gender equality and inclusion. It reflects the changing theological interpretations, evolving social norms, and a desire to ensure that all individuals, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to contribute to the spiritual life and leadership of the Church.

### 2.3.19 BREAKING PATRIARCHAL NORMS

The presence of women in traditionally male-dominated religious settings, is founded on the notion that patriarchal normativity is still upheld within the clergy through the reproduction of knowledge. Using the term "mothers" to refer to female ministers and elders, in my opinion, sanctifies patriarchal hierarchy and preserves the priesthood's essentially patriarchal nature. Furthermore, neither the clerical nor the lay spheres of the Church addressed the "exclusion of women from the priesthood, as well as theological developments that convinced otherwise." Instead, a large portion of the congregation still refers to the clergy as "father or minister," and the male clergy tends to stick together, while a large number of female clergy members look for sincere ways to navigate their ministry beyond patriarchal normative barriers, in ecclesial settings, whether from design or not (Pillay 2017:2).

Headship theology gives patriarchy a double-banded, religion-cultural halo when it justifies its norms. In recent years, there has been an increase in "conservative" religious movements that are frequently linked to nationalism or right-wing politics, which have led to the defence of male headship in many church circles, therefore, opposing patriarchy is frequently "seen as an effort to undermine Christian" beliefs or "African traditions" (Pillay, 2017). Any attempt to challenge this viewpoint results in subtle or perhaps unconscious patriarchal re-inscription, for instance, African nationalists have resisted the need for



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gender reform because "it is a Western imposition," according to Ezra Chitando (2015:277). In the study, the author discovered that men are "more willing to accept the pursuit of gender justice when it has been proven that its importance" is in the protection of African culture. African women theologians have long expressed their worries about the degrading impacts of patriarchy on both women and men, Chitando's argument, as I have previously noted, "smacks of androcentric" and drowns out both men and women "voices" (Pillay (2017: 8–13).

Over the years, numerous African women theologians have consistently contended that disparities in power and privilege within ecclesiastical settings need the implementation of critical thinking. The Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa's decision to admit women to the priesthood granted them the power to preside over the "table". This remark does not preclude other denominations that have achieved progress in their endeavours to empower women. Consequently, it is essential to recognise the diverse methods by which language is employed to manipulate the formation and continuation of gender bias in patriarchal societies. It is essential to reform ecclesiastical environments while simultaneously revealing or dissecting patriarchally-imposed information by challenging conventional ideas and behaviours. Bell Hooks (1994) states in the work - Teaching to Transgress - that resistance exists in the self-aware engagement with prevailing normative discourses and in the proactive creation of counter-analytic and cultural spaces. In the next sections, the researcher will employ interruption as a transformative strategy; the process will involve the evangelist Luke's narrative of the annunciation to exemplify gender-normative ideas and actions, as well as a prospective ecclesiastical resource (Hooks 1994:22).

### 2.3.20 INTERRUPTION: HOW TO FIGHT AGAINST AND CHANGE THE PREVAILING MASCULINE CULTURE

Cannon (1994:60) asserts that when empowered, faith-oriented women interact with their male counterparts, they are often presented with a subtly institutionalised option to conform to established norms. The readiness of



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women and other marginalised groups to confront or embrace a prevailing male culture in religious contexts is contingent upon the intensity of their conviction. Proponents of this concept assert that knowledge and authority reside with influential, knowledgeable individuals from whom one should acquire learning; conversely, detractors contend that knowledge is dictated by a prevailing culture and that "truth" is perceived as contextual. This indicates that the latter condition recognises the acquired information as provisional rather than definitive; this facilitates diverse interpretations of liberation as a normative concept. When "the usual" is disrupted by innovation, alternative interpretations are explored, leading to the emergence of creative possibilities. Interruption, as a persuasive strategy, subverts expectations and incites disorder by contradicting the established norm (Cannon 1994:66–63).

Claassens, a South African biblical scholar, asserts that this interpretive alternative is not an unfamiliar endeavour, as it is already present within the biblical tradition. Concerning the concept of "what it means to be responsible readers of the text," (Claassens, 2008:55–59) referenced the translated works of Derrida and Levinas in an article entitled - "Interrupting God-language: Rethinking the image of God as a liberator in Isaiah 42". She observed that employing interruption as a hermeneutical method involves "dissecting" the text and reassembling it with a thread that is already inherent in the text. Claassen's (2008) theory posits that it disrupts the normative and presents a countercultural alternative inside the inner texture of the specific text. The researcher proposes that an inter-textual analysis can disrupt and alter patriarchal norms in the Bible when they are reiterated inside the text. Comprehending the dynamics of intertextuality serves as an effective reading strategy to differentiate between historically contingent elements or ideas within the text and those that are timeless and universal, as the Bible is a multicultural, polyvocal document, encompassing writings from various centuries and cultures (Claassens 2008:55–59).

## CONCLUSION



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This chapter presents a detailed theoretical framework and literature analysis that lays the groundwork for understanding women-led ministry in Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality. The theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity theory provides a critical perspective for investigating patterns of male dominance and gender inequity in ecclesiastical environments. The literature research indicates a diverse environment of difficulties and opportunities for female Pentecostal leaders. Key findings show that, despite women's historical prominence in the early Pentecostal movement, particularly at Azusa Street, their leadership roles have gradually declined over time. Contemporary female leaders confront numerous challenges, including theological constraints based on conventional biblical readings, patriarchal church institutions, cultural norms that prioritise male headship, and limited access to formal theology study.

The review shows that feminist theology and African theological anthropology offer alternative interpretive frameworks for challenging limiting gender roles and advocating for more diversity in church leadership. Biblical opinions on women in ministry are divided, with some verses promoting full engagement in ministry and others understood to limit their duties. This interpretive tension continues to shape modern arguments concerning women's ordination and leadership in Pentecostal congregations.

Cultural and cultural influences, notably traditional African perceptions of women and patriarchal systems, have a considerable impact on women's access and effectiveness in leadership roles. However, current statistical development patterns indicate that women-led churches are enjoying positive growth trends, implying that they have the capacity for ministry and community engagement.

The literature also emphasises the significance of proactive change within religious communities, emphasising the need to challenge patriarchal norms and embrace more inclusive practices. The concept of interruption as a transformative approach provides a means to challenge dominant macho norms inside religious institutions.

This comprehensive review provides the theoretical and contextual framework for investigating the specific experiences, problems, and effects of women-led ministry in Thohoyandou Pentecostal congregations. The findings of this



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literature study will guide the empirical investigation that will take place in later chapters, offering a framework for understanding how these broader themes appear in Thulamela Municipality.



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# CHAPTER 3:
# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research design and methodology applied in this study. The goal is to explain the approach taken to gather, analyse, and interpret the data in alignment with the research objectives. A carefully chosen research design and methodology are crucial for ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. In this chapter, the study's research design, population, sample, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and quality control measures are detailed. In addition, the chapter also outlines the data collection methods used and how they helped the study meet or achieve its desired objectives. The later parts of the chapter cover the ethical considerations adhered to and measures taken to ensure trustworthiness. The study sought to research under the title - Women-led ministries: A case study of challenges in the Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou. The adoption of the case study approach allowed the researcher to gain comprehensive new knowledge pertaining to the topic.

## 3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research methodology provides details of the scientific approach used to conduct the study (Creswell, 1994). Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit (2004:4) view methodology as a means of delivering data that is philosophically aligned with the study's objectives. For this study, a qualitative research methodology was employed, as the approach seeks to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of participants in their natural context. A qualitative research is particularly suited to exploratory studies that seek to understand the "why" and "how" behind human behaviors and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:11). As Tracy (2019:8-9) reiterates, qualitative research is ideal for understanding complex social phenomena through techniques, such as interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection tool, as they allow for flexibility while ensuring that key topics are



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covered. The semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in exploring sensitive topics that may emerge, such as gender roles in religious leadership. Additionally, Tracy (2020:8-9) suggests that qualitative research provides the depth and richness in data needed to capture complex, context-specific insights; this aligns with the study's goal of understanding leadership within women-led Pentecostal ministries.

## 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to a structured plan that guides the collection and analysis of data. As Nieveen and Folmer (2013:40-45) explain, the design functions as a framework that provides coherence and logic to the study's methodology. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2011:30) emphasise that the choice of a research design is informed by the nature of the research question, the purpose of the study, and the available resources.

### 3.3.1 Qualitative Research Design

Pernecky (2016:45-46) explains that qualitative research is a type of research in which data are not in the form of numbers and puts the researcher in the natural environment. Qualitative research design is mostly utilised in the social sciences to conduct their studies on cultural and socially-oriented phenomena (Fusch, & Ness, 2017:27-28). The researcher was interested in understanding the meaning people have established, that is, how they perceive their realm and knowledge and practices regarding women's leadership in the Pentecostal Church, hence, the qualitative design (Hammersley, 2013;45).

The qualitative research design was deemed relevant to this study because it is based on a philosophical state about the interpretations of the social world; how it is understood, experienced, and produced. The researcher conducted this study in a natural setting, making efforts to make logic of, or to understand, the topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:68). A qualitative research design provides an opportunity for direct contact with respondents in the study area, which assisted the researcher in gathering relevant information based on the



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experiences and perspectives of women-lead ministries. The qualitative design in this study was exploratory.

### 3.3.2 Exploratory research

Stephen and Kasim (2015:34-45) illustrate that an exploratory qualitative research design is directed at a problem that has not been studied before, in more detail using different types of questions (what, why, how). An exploratory research design helps a researcher to gather extensive data about a phenomenon in its natural environmental setting.

## 3.4 STUDY AREA

According to Given (2018:83-1090), a study area is a place or location which is selected to conduct the study. This study was conducted in Thohoyandou, Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The Vhembe District Municipality consists of four local municipalities - Thulamela, Makhado, Musina and Collins Chabane. The researcher selected this site because the location offers a diverse cultural and socio-economic context, allowing for more relevant comprehensive understanding of the topic; in addition, the area has a high concentration of women-led Pentecostal churches ensuring a sufficient number of participants and churches. It is a substantial area and most of the habitants are Tshivenda speakers, thus, the researcher could communicate easy with a participant and collect the data successfully.

Figure: 1 Vhembe District Municipality map



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Source : www.municipalities.co.za

### 3.5 STUDY POPULATION

According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016:45-47), a population refers to the complete set of individuals or objects sharing specific characteristics relevant to research. For this study, the population consisted of pastors, elders and women ministerial leaders in Pentecostal churches located in Thohoyandou, within the Thulamela Municipality. These leaders are central to the research focus as they can narrate the experiences and challenges that the study sought to explore. The study involved 10 participants.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants**

| Group | Justification |
|---|---|
| 1. Pastors | They were chosen because they serve as ministers and co-pastors in the Pentecostal churches. |



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| | |
|---|---|
| 2. Elders | They were selected because they serve as deacons in the Pentecostal churches. |
| 3. Women ministerial leaders | They were chosen because they lead various ministries within the Pentecostal churches, such as preaching and being in charge of outreach initiatives. |

### 3.6 SAMPLING

Sampling is a process of selecting a portion of the main population for study (Seaman and Baxter, 2009:509). According to Lance and Hattori (2016:56) sampling is selecting units from entities, like organization, people or events from a population of interest, and the results can be generalizable to the whole population. The method used for this study was non-probability sampling.

#### 3.6.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is also known as - judgmental, selective, or subjective (Lance & Hattori, 2016;56). Purposive sampling is a technique that intentionally selects participants based on their relevance to the research question (Suri, 2011:23). In this study, ten participants from Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou were purposively sampled. This sampling method ensures that the participants possess the necessary experiences and insights to contribute meaningfully to the study. Purposive sampling is an intentional selection method aimed at identifying participants who are most relevant to the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018:45). The criteria for selection for this study include women who have held leadership positions in Pentecostal churches for at least five years. This criterion ensures that participants have adequate leadership experience and can provide meaningful insights. The sample size of ten is consistent with qualitative research, which focuses on depth over breadth (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2013:45).



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### 3.6.2 Snow-ball sampling

Snowball sampling is a type of non-probability technique. Non-probability sampling focuses on the judgement of the researcher and is a useful choice of strategy when the population you are interested in studying is not readily available or hard-to-reach. Snow balling involves identifying a solitary case that is associated with the phenomenon to be examined who then identifies other comparable people (Grinnell, 2008:45). This strategy was employed as the researcher did not know the relevant participants, hence, could only approach some few appropriate participants who the researcher knows, then got referrals to others who are knowledgeable about women-lead ministries in the Pentecostal churches.

## 3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is a process of acquiring data (Barrett and Twycross ,2018:63-64). The main objective for collecting data is to capture the experiences of the participants; the analysis of the data brings about sound answers to questions posed to the participants (Hammersley,2013:687-688). The researcher collected data using semi-structured interviews.

### 3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is a form of consultation in which the researcher seeks to learn more about an issue, such as an opinion expressed by an interviewee (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017;34-35). A semi-structured interview is an interaction in which there is no strictly-formalized list of questions that an interviewer goes, although there are outlined topics and questions organized around the main research question.

The researcher chose to use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time; this allows the interviewer to be prepared during the sessions. Semi-structured interviews also allow informants to express their views in their own expressions. The researcher interviewed pastors, elders and women ministers who are residing in Thohoyandou. Semi-structured interviews



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are those where interviewers have a list of questions, but are free to ask further, differentiated follow-up questions based on the responses given. Gill et al., (2018:56) explains this approach as sessions where several key questions are asked which help to define the areas to be explored but also allow the researcher to be flexible to pursue an idea in response, for more detail. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observations that allow the researcher to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest, necessary for developing relevant and meaningful questions for the sessions. Many researchers like to use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time. Semi-structured interviews, hence, can provide reliable, and comparable qualitative data (Gill et al., 2018:34).

## 3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a method of studying, examining evidence/data to learn valuable information which can be utilized to back up suggestions and inform decision-making (Chekanov,2016:23). It is also defined as the process during which collected data is organized so that essential evidence can be derived from it (Xia & Gong,2015). In this study, thematic analysis was used.

### 3.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing data in qualitative research which focuses on identifying, assessing, and recording forms or themes within data (Hammersley, 2015:687-688). It is a process during which themes are identified in the data, coded and grouped together (Guest et al., 2015:215-250). This analytical method assisted the researcher by providing description, understanding and interpretations of the of the answers that participants provided.

The researcher collected data and analyzed it according to emerging themes, thereby assisting to discover structures and patterns in the evidence provided by the participants (Hammersley,2015:215-250). The researcher, hence, developed themes from the responses of participants about the women-led



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ministries' challenges faced in the Pentecostal churches' use of African indigenous medicine in the treatment of sexually transmitted infections (Field, 2006:7).

## 3.9 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

When conducting a qualitative inquiry, the researcher bears the responsibility of making sure that definite processes are adhered to ensure trustworthiness. The ability of the researcher to be believed by the readers is due to honesty and truthfulness in conducting the study. Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were guaranteed in this investigation.

### 3.9.1 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the research findings. The researcher reflected on personal biases throughout the study and ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants perspectives rather than the researcher's assumptions (Bengtsson, 2016:22). Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining a reflexive stance throughout the study, acknowledging the researcher's personal biases thereby ensuring that these did not influence the interpretation of the data.

### 3.9.2 Transferability

This measure was supported by providing thick descriptions of the context, allowing others to determine whether the findings can be applicable in similar different contexts (Shenton, 2004:2-4). While qualitative research is not always generalisable, transferability ensures that the findings have relevance to other similar contexts (Maxwell, 2021:45-47). This was achieved by offering detailed descriptions of the research context and participants' experiences.

### 3.9.3 Credibility



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As Anney (2014:8-9) argues, credibility reflects confidence in the accuracy of the data. To enhance credibility, participants were given the opportunity to verify the findings and provide feedback on the interpretations drawn from their experiences. To enhance credibility, member checking, therefore, was employed, where participants reviewed the transcribed data and initial findings to ensure accurate representation of their perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:31-33).

### 3.9.4 Dependability

Dependability ensures that the research process is logical, traceable, and documented. A comprehensive account of the research design, data collection, and analysis procedures was provided (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2020:3-4). This measure was performed through a detailed methodological description, including the use of a research journal to document decisions and reflections during the research process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Dependability was ensured through a detailed methodological description, including the use of a research journal to document decisions and reflections during the research process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014:6).

## 3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hammer (2017:60) explains that ethics are a set of moral principles that guide or influence a person's behavior; ethical consideration is one of the most critical aspects of research. Ethical concerns have significance due to their in-depth influence in qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2014:25-30). The consideration of ethical issues becomes essential when conducting interviews and focus-group discussions. According to Polit & Beck (2014:30), participants typically may experience anxiety while sharing their opinions or thoughts with the researcher or other participants and it is the researcher's responsibility to attend to this. A proper research study takes standards and ethical issues seriously, particularly in qualitative research. Most ethical concerns are dealt with on a societal or personal level. The ethical principles that the researcher followed in this study are presented below.



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### 3.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent means that the participants have a complete understanding of the study conducted with them so as to give the researcher informed permission to be involved in the study (Babbie, 2019:78). The choice of the participants to take part in a study and avoid exploitation is based on the provision of detailed description of the study, by the researcher. It is important that the participants understand the study nature and purpose and how it will affect them (Lawrence & Neumann, 2014:12). The researcher explained the study comprehensively, detailing also the expectations from the participants so that they can decide whether they want to be part of the study. Then, a consent form was furnished for participants to sign to indicate their understanding of the study and their willingness to be involved.

### 3.10.2 Avoidance of Harm

Research participants can be harmed in a physical as well an emotional way during the research process. In this study, the emotional harm to research participants was considered, therefore, no abusive arguments were allowed and there was no violation of their rights. According to Strydom (2012:43-45), “emotional harm to research participants can have immense negative consequences, therefore attempts were made not only to minimise the harm before and during the interviews but also to inform the participants of the potential harm beforehand.” The researcher ascertained that the participants were aware of any potential emotional harm and assured them that should they decide to withdraw from the study at any time, they will be allowed to do so without any penalties

### 3.10.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality constitute a set of regulations or commitments that restrict access to specific information (Surmiak 2018:8-10); it is also



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recognised as a non-disclosure agreement. The persons involved with or have specific information consent that such details will not be accessed by external entities without consent of a participant (Fan, 2015:56). Anonymity and confidentiality are intrinsically linked to privacy, and are defined as the protection of information from unauthorised individuals (Abdekhoda, Dehnad, & Khezri, 2019:463–469). This facilitated participants' feelings of comfort and trust during data collection, enabling them to offer more detailed information, since they felt assured that their personal identities would remain confidential.

## 3.11 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with many studies, this study also has its delimitations in terms of its scope and boundaries. This study is delimited to the Thulamela Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa, and will not give an account of experiences in other municipalities. Only experiences of women-leaders heading Pentecostal churches will be investigated, and those of women serving in other leadership positions, or other churches which are not Pentecostal will not be investigated in this study. The study is delimited to Thulamela Municipality in Limpopo Province and focuses solely on women-leaders in Pentecostal churches. Other churches or leadership roles are beyond the scope of this research.

## 3.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the research design and methodology that guided this study. The use of a qualitative methodology, purposive sampling, and thematic analysis ensured that the study is well-positioned to provide meaningful insights into the experiences of women-leaders in Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou. The next chapter presents the findings of the research.



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# CHAPTER FOUR
# DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data and analysis of data collected. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. The interview questions were developed from the research questions presented in the first chapter. The researcher interviewed pastors, elders and women-leaders ministries established in Thohoyandou. The researcher had several key questions which helped to define the areas to be explored but also allowed the researcher to be flexibility to pursue an idea in a response, in more detail. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observations that allow the researcher to develop a clear understanding of the topic of interest, necessary for developing relevant and meaningful insights; this allowed the interviewer to be prepared during the interview. Semi-structured interviews also allowed informants the freedom to express their views in their answers, hence, sessions can provide reliable, and comparable qualitative data (Gill et al., 2018:34).

## 4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

For this research to be successful, the researcher had to ask the pastors, elders and women ministry-leaders in Pentecostal churches, in Thohoyandou to provide information. This was necessary for the researcher to gain an understanding regarding women-led ministries. As the understanding may vary depending on the participants' specific characteristics, their demographic profile is shown in the Table below.

**Table 2: Demographic profile of participants**

| Categories | Pseudonym | Age | Gender | Marital Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pastors | Participant no 1 | 40- 50 | Male | Married |



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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Participant no 2 | 50-60 | Female | Married |
| | Participant no 3 | 50-60 | Female | Married |
| | Participant no 4 | 60-70 | Male | Married |
| Elders | Participant no 5 | 60-70 | Female | Married |
| | Participant no 6 | 50-60 | Male | Married |
| | Participant no 7 | 70-60 | Female | Widow |
| Women ministry leaders | Participant no 8 | 40-50 | Female | Married |
| | Participant no 9 | 40-50 | Female | widow |
| | Participant no 10 | 50-60 | Female | Married |

The above Table presents the demographic profile of participants who took part in the study by providing data through semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The participants were - four pastors, three elders and three women ministry leaders.

## 4.3 DATA PRESENTATION

The study aimed at exploring women ministry-leaders in Pentecostal churches located in Thohoyandou, within the Thulamela Municipality. The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews within a period of three weeks without interrupting the working schedules of the participants. The following themes with their sub-themes were identified after data collection and analysis. The information gathered from the participants was analyzed and interpreted according to the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions held by Christian communities on women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou?
- Which challenges are faced by women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou?
- How are the statistical growth patterns of women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou?



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### 4.3.1 PERCEPTIONS HELD BY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ON WOMEN-LED PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES LED BY WOMEN

The study discovered that the presence of women leaders of Pentecostal churches influenced community perceptions over time. To show the relevance of this study in the current day, the researcher interviewed diverse participants to find out the perceptions held by Christian communities on women-led churches, in order to understand the broader socio-cultural dynamics. The study found that women leaders have been assimilated by societies for generations, despite social and political change. Even while the legislation, of the country states that men and women are equal, Munroe (2001:23) notes that this does not necessarily reflect public opinion. Women in society are feeling more and more controlled and frustrated. Additionally, the study found that some people believe women leaders are strong in administrative or children's ministry roles but not in pastoral or senior leadership roles, indicating a partial acceptance, although, maintaining some traces of traditional gender hierarchies (CBE International, 2023). Participants mentioned that cultural perspective and biblical perspective are the key factors influencing the perceptions held by Christian communities, on women-led churches. These interpretations are deeply ingrained in many Christian communities, leading to some resistance against women pastors and leaders. Culture and religion have entrenched these opposing views, with many community members viewing male leadership as the divinely ordained structure (Ikyernum, 2023). These points are discussed below.

#### 4.3.1.1 Cultural perspective

Nadar (2009:55) states that the challenges women face in traditionally male-dominated religious settings is based on the notion that patriarchal normativity is still upheld within the clergy. The study discovered that through social discourse of male superiority and female inferiority, men and women are separated in responsibilities by a patriarchal social mindset. Society expects of



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women to perform supportive tasks and assume posture of servitude; these are due to gender roles and gender norms.

(a) Gender norms

Gender norms apply where men and women are expected to comply with different norms of behavior and bodily comportment (Haslanger 2000:33). The different behaviors that are expected of men and women, or gender norms, differ according to the culture and location. In some cultures, the norms are extremely oppressive to the women and men are the uncontested lords and masters. Participants mentioned that women-led Pentecostal churches regard the social and cultural norms, regarding gender, as based on the Bible. This manifests in how certain biblical texts are interpreted.

#### 4.3.1.2 Biblical Perspective

The study discovered that women in church leadership frequently centre on biblical perspectives on women in ministry. There are numerous passages in both the Old and New Testaments that demonstrate that women played important religious roles; however, different interpretations of these scriptures have produced conflicting opinions regarding whether or not women belong in leadership roles within the church. Relevant biblical texts were examined, and the results showed a nuanced and occasionally contradictory picture of women's roles in ministry.

(a) Old Testament perspectives

The narrative of the creation of male and female humans (Gen 1:26-28). The study discovered that man and woman were formed together in the image of God, and both were granted dominion over creation. According to the majority of participants, women were present in Israel's places of worship (Lamb 2011:48), and although there were few women in positions of leadership in ancient Israel, it is amazing that their existence and function were documented in history. Women in leadership were scarce in ancient Israel, however, the fact



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that there were female leaders in that culture and that their presence and role were recorded in history, is remarkable. With regard to Deborah and her leadership role in Israel, Schreiner (1991:113) initially states that Deborah did not prophesy in public and did not exercise her ministry in a public forum as male prophets did.

The Old Testament affirms women on a number of times, giving instances of their initiative and leadership. Some verses even suggest that women are equal to males in God's eyes. The majority of participants refer to the narrative of Genesis 1 - the passage describes how God created Adam, that is humankind or humanity, in His divine image, as the crown of creation and to rule over the animals. The text makes it clear that both male and female were made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-28):

> *"Then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth".*

The researcher learnt from the participants that the religious life of Israel was significantly influenced by women's role in the Old Testament, although these roles were frequently subordinated to those of males'. Deborah (Judges 4:4-5), a prophetess and judge over Israel, is one of the most notable examples. One of the participants replied that Deborah demonstrated that women can be in positions of leadership with God's approval by her leading Israel to victory in a battle, in addition to exercising spiritual authority. Another noteworthy person is Moses' sister Miriam, who is referred to in Exodus 15:20 as a prophetess who guided the Israelites in worship. These instances imply that women were occasionally given positions of spiritual authority in ancient Israel.



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(b) New Testament perspectives

The study discovered that the New Testament literature was influenced by Jesus's earthly life. He had a devoted following that gathered around him to learn from His parables. His apostles, under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit, continued Jesus' teachings after He was gone. The study, however, also discovered that their goal of delivering God love, complete acceptance, and freedom to all people was occasionally hampered by cultural beliefs and behaviours that ran counter to the gospel message of liberty. Both in the patriarchal Hebrew and Greco-Roman cultures of the time, women were regarded as inferior to men, embedded in men and not as people with full humanity or freedom (Greenspahn 2009:31). In the account of Jesus life, Mary of Magdalene was one of the women who was present from the beginning of His public work (Mk 15:40-41).

According to Participant no: 8

> *"There were also women looking on afar off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him) and many other women which came up with Him unto Jerusalem".*

The preceding discussion indicates that women participated in the ministry of Jesus or were, at least, carefully observing the events of His mission. These women, along with numerous other women who accompanied Him to Jerusalem, emphasises the significant participation of women in the ministry of Jesus (Gottwald 1989:424). The researcher also investigates Paul's response to the topic in 1 Corinthians 11, where there is a great emphasis on women being required to be silent in church (Newsome 2014:72).

(i) Pauline perspectives



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In this study, the researcher discovered that Paul also depicts women in leadership and ministry roles in his letters. Paul praises Phoebe for her work and describes her as a deacon of the church in Cenchreae (Romans 16:1-2). The findings of this study show that In the Deutero-Pauline epistle of 1 Timothy there are a number of ambiguities with regard to women. The study also discovered in 1 Timothy 2 it is unclear whether all female teaching is forbidden, or only whether women may not teach to their own husbands or men in general, hence, this is in relation to authority.

### 4.3.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN-LED PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

The study sought to outline the challenges faced by women-led Pentecostal churches. Ikyernum (2023:237-253) maintains that women-leaders are faced with challenges that appear to be unique for women leaders in ministry, therefore, the researcher deemed fit to explore challenges faced by women-led Pentecostal churches to understand them. Participants mentioned historical context and gender discrimination as one of the significant challenges; however, one of the participants emphasised institutional and structural factors as other challenges in women-led Pentecostal churches.

#### 4.3.2.1 Historical Context and Gender Discrimination

In this study the researcher discovered that historically, Pentecostal movements have shown varying degrees of acceptance of women in ministry roles and despite early progress, such as the ordination of women in the Assemblies of God in the 1920s, challenges persist. Women leaders in Pentecostal churches often face gender discrimination rooted in traditional interpretations of scripture, which restrict their roles within the church hierarchy (CBE International, 2023:3-4). Participants revealed that this discrimination is frequently founded on cultural and theological scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15, which have historically been used to support restricting women's leadership positions in the church (Gabriel, 2018:60). The



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following section will address the issue of theological and cultural barriers, as well as the relationship between culture and patriarchy.

(a) Theological and Cultural Barriers

In this study, participants maintained that the challenges that women have in women-led Pentecostal churches are largely caused by theological barriers. The theology of submission, which holds that women should subject to male leadership in the household and the church, is practiced by many women-led Pentecostal churches. Cultural norms that consider leadership to be fundamentally male, frequently perpetuate this ideology; this poses a serious obstacle for women who aspire to hold leadership roles (CBE International, 2023:3-4).

According to Participant no: 4

> *"Cultural and societal influences on women's leadership also play a significant role in shaping how women are viewed and accepted in positions of authority, particularly within religious institutions".*

It can be noted that these influences, which are deeply embedded in social structures, customs, and gender norms, often determine the level of access women have to leadership roles in various contexts, including churches. In the context of women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, these cultural and societal factors often present unique challenges for women seeking leadership roles.

(b) Patriarchal and culture

According to Nadar (2009:55), the idea that patriarchal normativity is still maintained within the clergy explains the challenges women face in historically male-dominated religious institutions. The study found that gender roles, especially in leadership, are still significantly influenced by patriarchal cultural norms. Deeply ingrained social structures like patriarchy, which favours male



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authority and gives leadership jobs to males, influence how people view women's leadership potential.

According to Participant no: 5

> *"Our traditional views of gender see men as natural leaders, while women are often relegated to subordinate roles within both the family and public life. This is reinforced by customs that emphasize a woman's role as a wife, mother, and caretaker, limiting her opportunities to pursue leadership positions".*

The above quotation shows that societal view, that women are more suited to supportive or nurturing roles often translates into an unwillingness to accept women as pastors or spiritual leaders, as these positions are seen as requiring authority and decisiveness, qualities that are culturally associated with men (Gaitskell, 1990:10). These patriarchal norms shape how both men and women view the legitimacy of female leadership, resulting in barriers to women's leadership opportunities.

#### 4.3.2.2 Institutional and Structural Challenges

Participants mentioned that Institutional and structural challenges also impede women's leadership in Pentecostal churches. These challenges include limited access to formal theological education and training, which are often prerequisites for leadership roles. The hierarchical nature of church governance in many Pentecostal denominations means that decision-making power is typically concentrated among male leaders, further marginalizing women (Ikyernum, 2023:49). Questions were posed on how these challenges impede women leadership. In answering, participants mentioned that structural barriers are exacerbated by local cultural expectations that prioritise male leadership in both religious and secular spheres. This limits women's access to and effectiveness in leadership roles. The participants provided insights on the challenges, patriarchal structures and social and interpersonal dynamics that have persisted over time .



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(a) Patriarchal Church Structures

In this study it was discovered that the patriarchal structure of many churches is the main institutional obstacle that women encounter when assuming leadership roles in religious contexts. A large number of religious organizations have historically been run by men, with them primarily holding leadership roles and making decisions. There is, therefore, minimal opportunity for women to pursue positions of responsibility because men typically hold church leadership positions, including being pastors, elders, and bishops (Amanze, 2013:8). The study also discovered that structures are often maintained by deeply embedded theological interpretations that emphasize male headship, such as readings of 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3, which are used to justify male-only leadership in the church (Piper & Grudem, 1991:67).

According to Participant no: 1

> *"In Pentecostal churches, this patriarchal hierarchy is reinforced by church governance models that limit the decision-making power of women. Even when women are permitted to serve in ministry, they are often confined to roles considered appropriate for their gender, such as leading women's groups, children's ministries, or administrative tasks as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3.*

The above discussion shows that leadership roles that involve preaching, teaching, or leading the entire congregation are often off-limits to women due to institutional policies that prioritize male leadership (Gaitskell, 1990:10). These patriarchal structures not only limit women's opportunities for advancement but also reinforce the perception that women are not suited for leadership roles in religious contexts.

(b) Social and Interpersonal Dynamics.

Women leaders must often balance their ministry roles with societal expectations related to family and domestic responsibilities, which limit their



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availability and effectiveness in leadership positions (CBE International, 2023:3-4). The study discovered that women leaders in Pentecostal churches often navigate complex social and interpersonal dynamics and they frequently face resistance from male colleagues and congregants who question their authority and legitimacy. This results in resistance which can manifest itself in various forms - overt opposition, subtle undermining of their leadership, and exclusion from important decision-making processes (Gabriel, 2018:60).

### 4.3.3 STATISTICAL GROWTH PATTERNS OF WOMEN-LED CHURCHES

The researcher interviewed the participants to gather their understanding regarding statistical growth patterns of women-led churches. This exploration was done to gather understanding on the statistical growth patterns of Pentecostal churches, led by women in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality. This process, hence, was undertaken, to assess the impact of female leadership on church expansion and community engagement. The diverse categories of participants in the study gave different responses guided by life experiences and knowledge they possess on the growth dynamics of these churches. Participants mentioned that Pentecostal churches led by women in various regions, including Thohoyandou, have experienced notable growth. According to a study by Ikyernum (2023:49), churches with women in leadership roles have shown positive growth trends in terms of membership, community outreach, and engagement. The current study's participants also mentioned that statistical growth patterns of women-led churches is attributed to the inclusive leadership, community engagement and innovative approaches often employed by women pastors.

#### 4.3.3.1 Factors Influencing Growth

The researcher manages to get insight into several factors which contribute to the growth of women-led Pentecostal churches and these factors will be discussed below, as themes.

(a) Inclusive Leadership



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The study discovered that inclusive leadership has significantly contributed to the growth of women-led Pentecostal churches. By fostering an environment that values diversity and promotes equal opportunities, inclusive leadership can empower women to take on key roles and responsibilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:34). The study also discovered that inclusive leadership has increased attendance, membership, and community engagement, as women leaders are able to tap into the needs and aspirations of a broader range of individuals (Bass, 2018:34).

According to Participant no:10

> *"In my view women leaders tend to foster a more inclusive and nurturing environment, which can attract a diverse congregation. Inclusivity often leads to higher member retention rates and increased community involvement".*

The above extract shows that women-led Pentecostal churches that adopt inclusive leadership styles are more likely to experience numerical growth, spiritual growth, and positive community impact (Smith, 2020:22). Inclusive leadership allows women to utilize their unique gifts and talents, leading to more effective ministry and outreach (Joustra, 2021:68). Furthermore, inclusive leadership can help to break down barriers and challenge traditional gender roles, creating a more equitable and just environment for women in leadership (Klassen, 2019:77).

(b) Community Engagement

In this study, the researcher discovered that women pastors are often deeply involved in community development initiatives, which enhance the church's visibility and relevance in the community. These initiatives can include educational programs, health services, and social support, which contribute to the church's growth and sustainability (CBE International, 2023:3-4).



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According to Participant no:9

> *"In my opinion and understanding community engagement can contribute to the growth and sustainability of women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou".*

The researcher learnt from the participants that community engagement can significantly contribute to the growth of women-led Pentecostal churches. By actively participating in community outreach and service programs, these churches can build trust, foster relationships, and demonstrate their commitment to the well-being of the community (Chaves, 2004:67). This can lead to the church's increased visibility, credibility, and attractiveness to potential members.

(c) Innovative Approaches

The findings indicated that Women in leadership positions are frequently noted for implementing innovative strategies in church management and worship practices. These innovations can appeal to younger generations and those seeking a more contemporary worship experience, thereby driving growth (Gabriel, 2018:54). Below is the view of the participants regarding the innovative approaches as a factor which can contribute to the growth of women-led Pentecostal churches.

According to Participant no:2

> *"According to my knowledge, by embracing innovative approaches women led ministries can stay relevant and contribute to the growth and church management".*

It can be noted from the above quotation that by embracing innovation in women-led Pentecostal churches, they can stay relevant, adapt to changing circumstances, and thrive in a rapidly-evolving world. Furthermore, innovations



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can appeal to younger generations and those seeking a more contemporary worship experience, thereby driving growth.

## 4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter delineates the data gathered in Thohoyandou on women-led Pentecostal. This chapter examined the perceptions of Christian communities on women-led Pentecostal churches, the challenges encountered by these churches, and the statistical growth trends of women-led congregations, in line with the themes that emerge from an analysis of the data gathered. The subsequent chapter provides an analysis of the study and offers recommendations.



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# “CHAPTER FIVE
# FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter provides a full overview of the research findings, connecting the empirical data to current literature and addressing the study's aims and research issues. In this chapter, therefore, is summarised the significant findings on women-led ministries in Thohoyandou Pentecostal churches, the findings implications for theory and practice, and makes evidence-based suggestions to stakeholders. Furthermore, the chapter acknowledges the study's shortcomings and makes recommendations for future research.

The study aimed to investigate women-led ministries by looking at the challenges that female leaders encounter in Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou. The research has provided unique insights into the complicated dynamics of women's religious leadership in this environment through qualitative interviews with pastors, elders, and women ministry leaders.

## 5.2 FINDINGS

### 5.2.1 PERCEPTIONS HELD BY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ON WOMEN-LED CHURCHES

The study found that cultural and biblical viewpoints have impacted community members’ attitude towards women-led Pentecostal congregations, with significant resistance stemming from traditional interpretations of scripture and patriarchal cultural norms.

**Discussion:**

The findings are consistent with previous research, which indicates that the junction of cultural traditions and theological interpretations has a significant impact on attitudes towards women's religious leadership (Nadar, 2009; CBE International, 2023). Participants responded that gender norms and biblical



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perspectives are significant impediments since they support the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity theory, which holds that patriarchal structures are sustained through cultural and religious institutions. The discovery of patriarchal social mindsets that divide men and women into discrete categories reflect the larger societal power structures highlighted by Chitando (2015). This finding implies that changing perceptions necessitates addressing not only religious interpretations but also deeply ingrained societal beliefs regarding gender roles.

The study's discovery that both Old and New Testament viewpoints are employed to support and question women's leadership speaks to ongoing hermeneutical issues in Christian theology (Grudem, 2004; Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). The participants' references to Deborah and Phoebe, as well as limiting Pauline passages, highlight the complexities of biblical and societal interpretation of gender roles.

These findings contribute to feminist theology studies by revealing how local cultural settings influence the reception and understanding of religious texts. The combination of African traditional norms and Christian theology presents novel issues that necessitate culturally-sensitive ways to achieving gender equality.

### 5.2.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN-LED PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

Women leaders encounter a variety of problems - historical gender discrimination, theological restrictions, cultural obstacles, and institutional limitations - all of which impair their ministries' effectiveness.

**Discussion:**

The study's analysis of historical hurdles to women's ministry participation demonstrates that discriminatory practices continue to exist despite theological efforts towards equality (Ikyernum, 2023). The result that discrimination is founded in traditional scriptural interpretations is consistent with Alvarez and Mateme's (2020) observation that biblical texts are frequently utilised to justify gender hierarchies.



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The revelation that "theology of submit" continues to affect church actions underscores feminist theologians' worries about the use of religious teaching to preserve patriarchal hierarchies (Fiorenza, 2015). The blending of cultural standards with theological interpretations results in what Nadar (2009) refers to as "sanctified patriarchy". The identification of patriarchal church systems and limited access to theological education reflects earlier research findings (Amanze, 2013; Gaitskell, 1990). The discovery that decision-making authority remains concentrated among male leaders highlights the systemic basis of gender discrimination in religious institutions.

The study's discovery that women leaders confront criticism from colleagues and congregants while juggling family duties emphasises the special burden that female religious leaders bear. This conclusion backs Gabriel's (2018) insight regarding the complex social dynamics that women face in religious leadership.

These issues highlight the urgency of holistic measures in advancing women's religious leadership; the process should include not only policy improvements, but also cultural transformation and theological reinterpretation.

### 5.2.3 STATISTICAL GROWTH PATTERNS OF WOMEN-LED CHURCHES

There have been major hurdles, despite this, women-led Pentecostal churches have shown favourable development trends, thanks to their inclusive leadership, community participation, and innovative ways.

**Discussion:**

The discovery that women-led churches are experiencing positive growth trends despite prejudice demonstrates the effectiveness of women's leadership styles in religious settings. This is consistent with Smith's (2020) research, which shows that inclusive leadership techniques can help churches expand.
The identification of inclusive leadership, community engagement, and innovative approaches as growth determinants supports previous research



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indicating that women's leadership styles are especially effective in religious and community settings (CBE International, 2023). The emphasis on community engagement reflects African cultural values such as communal responsibility and collective growth.

These findings imply that promoting women's leadership could contribute to overall church growth and community development, giving a practical case for gender equality that goes beyond theological concerns.

## 5.3 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS WITH RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### Objective 1: Identifying Challenges

The study successfully identified a variety of problems, including cultural, theological, institutional, and interpersonal constraints. The comprehensive nature of these difficulties highlights the necessity for multifaceted intervention options.

### Objective 2: Exploring Community Perceptions

The study found that most community opinions are unfavourable or restricting, stemming from conventional interpretations of culture and scripture, emphasising the importance of education and awareness campaigns.

### Objective 3: Examining Growth Patterns

The study found positive growth patterns in women-led congregations, demonstrating the effectiveness of women's leadership in religious environments.



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## 5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

### 5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

- Applies hegemonic masculinity theory to religious situations in rural South Africa.
- Contributes to feminist theology studies by documenting participants' personal experiences.
- Empirical data support the link between culture, religion, and gender.

### 5.4.2 Practical Implications

• Emphasises the importance of holistic ways to encouraging women's religious leadership.

• Highlights the potential benefits of supporting women-led ministries in church growth.

• Offers evidence for policy formulation in religious institutions.

### 5.4.3 Policy Implications

- Advocates for gender equality policy in religious institutions.
- Evidence supports the effectiveness of women's leadership in community development.
- Emphasises the necessity for theology education reform.

## 5.5 CONCLUSIONS

According to the research findings and conversations, several major conclusions emerge:

### 5.5.1 Primary Conclusions

Women's religious leadership in Pentecostal congregations has complex, interwoven problems stemming from cultural traditions, theological interpretations, and institutional frameworks. These issues cannot be addressed with a single solution, but rather require comprehensive, culturally-relevant approaches.

There are negative community beliefs, despite this, women-led churches show



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effectiveness in expansion and community participation, indicating a mismatch between prejudiced perceptions and actual performance.

Women leaders show great endurance and inventiveness in overcoming obstacles and adopting new approaches to ministry that benefit church growth and community development.

The interaction of African traditional culture and Christian theology generates distinct dynamics that necessitate specialist knowledge and culturally relevant remedies.

### 5.5.2 Broader Implications

The results demonstrate that gender disparity in religious environments is a major social justice issue that requires ongoing attention and intervention.
Given the community-oriented methods that women leaders take, supporting their religious leadership has the potential to help greater community development.
The findings add to current theological discussions concerning gender equality and biblical interpretation in African Christian communities.

## 5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.6.1 Recommendations for Religious Institutions

**Immediate Actions:**

1. **Policy Review and Development**

   Conduct thorough examinations of institutional policies affecting women's positions in the church.

   Develop egalitarian policies for women's advancement in the Pentecostal ministry.

   Establish grievance processes to address gender discrimination.



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2. **Educational Initiatives**

Implement biblical literacy initiatives that highlight women's responsibilities in scripture.

Create theology education programs that promote gender equality.

Create chances for current leaders to receive continuing education on gender problems.

3. **Structural Changes**

Create women's leadership development programs.

Establish mentorship networks for seasoned and developing female leaders.

Establish gender-balanced decision-making structures.

**Medium-term Strategies:**

1. **Cultural Engagement**

Create culturally-sensitive techniques to promoting gender equality.

Engage traditional leaders and elders in discussions concerning women's responsibilities.

Establish platforms for intergenerational conversation on gender issues.

2. **Community Outreach**

Launch awareness campaigns featuring successful female leaders in religious contexts.

Create community education initiatives promoting gender equality and religion.



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Collaborate with other organisations which are focused on gender issues.

### 5.6.2 Recommendations for Educational Institutions

1. **Curriculum Development**

Incorporate gender studies into theological education programs.

Create courses for women's leadership in religious situations.

Incorporate African feminist theology into curriculum offerings.

2. **Research and Scholarship**

Establish research centres on gender and religion.

Support graduate research on women in religious leadership.

Create publications that promote women's contributions to theology.

3. **Support Services**

Create scholarships for women seeking theological study.

Establish counselling services in the religious context, for gender-related issues.

Develop career placement services for female graduates in Religious Studies.

### 5.6.3 Recommendations for Government and Policy-Makers

1. **Legal Framework**

Review legislation regarding religious discrimination.

Develop standards that balance religious freedom and gender equality.

Support programs encouraging women's leadership, across all areas.



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2. **Funding and Support**

Provide funds for study on gender and religion.

Support community development activities run by women and religious organisations.

Create funding for organisations advocating gender equality.

### 5.6.4 Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

1. **Advocacy and Awareness**
    - Develop advocacy campaigns for women's religious leadership.
    - Create platforms for dialogue between religious and secular organizations.
    - Support networking among women religious leaders.
2. **Capacity Building**
    - Provide leadership training programs for women religious leaders.
    - Develop resource materials on gender equality and religion.
    - Create support networks for women facing discrimination.

### 5.6.5 Recommendations for Individual Churches and Communities

1. **Local Implementation**
    - Assess current practices regarding women's participation.
    - Develop action plans for promoting gender equality.
    - Create safe spaces for discussing gender issues.
2. **Community Engagement**
    - Organize community dialogues on women's roles in religion.
    - Develop intergenerational programs addressing gender issues.
    - Partnership among churches promoting gender equality.

## 5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

### 5.7.1 Methodological Limitations

The study was limited to the Thohoyandou area, which may limit generalizability of the results to other regions.



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Ten participants, while appropriate for qualitative research, may not capture the full diversity of available experiences.

Findings are specific to the Venda cultural context and may not apply to other African cultures.

### 5.7.2 Contextual Limitations

The study focused specifically on Pentecostal churches, limiting applicability to other Christian denominations.

The three-week data collection period may have limited the depth of some insights.

Participants spoke in English, hence, some nuances may have been lost in participants translation from their indigenous languages.

### 5.7.3 Access and Participation Limitations

The researcher's gender (female) and position as Pastor may have influenced the participants' responses.

Some participants may have been reluctant to fully disclose negative experiences.

Purposive sampling may have introduced bias toward selecting participants willing to discuss sensitive topics.

## 5.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### 5.8.1 Expanded Scope Studies

1. **Comparative Studies**
    - Compare experiences across different provinces and cultural groups.
    - Examine differences between urban and rural contexts, in terms of participants' experiences.
    - Compare Pentecostal churches with other Christian denominations.
2. **Longitudinal Research**
    - Track changes in attitudes and practices over time.
    - Follow the career progression of women religious leaders.
    - Monitor the impact of intervention programs.

### 5.8.2 Specialized Focus Areas

1. **Theological Research**



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- Examine biblical hermeneutics and gender in African contexts.
- Study the development of African feminist theology.
- Investigate the role of prophecy and spiritual gifts in women's leadership.

2. **Social and Cultural Research**
   - Explore the intersection of traditional African religion and Christianity, regarding gender.
   - Study the role of women in indigenous spiritual practices.
   - Examine generational differences in attitudes toward women's religious leadership.

### 5.8.3 Methodological Innovations

1. **Mixed Methods Research**
   - Combine qualitative insights with quantitative data on church growth and participation.
   - Use survey methods to gather broader community perspectives.
   - Employ participatory action research approaches.
2. **Digital and Technology-Enhanced Research**
   - Use social media analysis to understand public discourse on women's religious leadership.
   - Employ digital storytelling methods to capture women's experiences.
   - Develop online platforms for data collection and participant engagement.

## 5.9 FINAL REFLECTIONS

This study shed light on the complicated landscape of women's religious leadership in Thohoyandou's Pentecostal congregations, exposing considerable problems as well as extraordinary resiliency. The findings show that, despite significant constraints founded in cultural traditions and theological interpretations, women continue to develop new approaches to services that promote church growth and community development.

The study reveals that fostering gender equality in religious contexts necessitates multifaceted approaches that consider cultural, theological, institutional, and interpersonal factors. It also emphasises the potential benefits of promoting female religious leadership for both religious institutions and



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broader community development.

As South Africa grapples with issues of gender equality and social justice, the religious sector's role in sustaining or fighting discriminatory practices becomes increasingly essential. This study adds to understanding of how religious institutions can be agents of positive change while upholding cultural values and theological convictions.

Gender equality in religious leadership is a complex and continuing undertaking that requires long-term commitment from a variety of stakeholders. The resilience and efficacy displayed by female religious leaders in this study, however, offer hope and motivation for future development towards a more inclusive and egalitarian religious landscape.

## 5.10 CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the experiences of female religious leaders in Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, adding to both academic knowledge and practical awareness of gender issues in religious contexts. The findings underline the necessity for ongoing research, lobbying, and action to ensure women's full involvement in religious leadership while respecting cultural and theological diversities.

The results show that tackling gender disparity in religious contexts involves nuanced approaches that take into account the intricate interplay of cultural, theological, and institutional elements. It also demonstrates that promoting women's religious leadership benefits not only individual women, but also religious institutions and larger communities.

This study concludes by opening up new paths for research and action, contributing to the ongoing discussion about gender equality, religious freedom, and social justice in contemporary South Africa and beyond.



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**APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**MULAUDZI TSHILIDZI NOMSA**

**STUDENT NO 8702801**

I, ……..

1. the undersigned understand that I am being asked to:

2. To participate in a research study under Makhado municipality. This research study is titled - Women-led ministries: A case study of challenges in the Pentecostal churches

3. I also understand that I will be given a code name by the researcher which will not identify me.

4. I am aware that there are no benefits for participating in this study.

5. I also understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that I may withdraw from this study at any time should I wish to do so. If I decide to discontinue my participation in this study, I will continue to be treated in the usual and customary fashion.

6. If I agree to participate in the study, I am free to ask any questions about the study or about being a subject, and I may contact Mrs Mulaudzi TN



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(Master's Student) on 0645472200.

7. The study has been explained to me. I have read and understood the consent form, all my questions have been answered and I agree to participate. I understand that I will be given the findings should I be interested to know about the outcomes.

**Signature of participant .....** **Date .....**

## APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CERTIFICATE



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ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
**Mrs TN Mulaudzi**

STUDENT NO:
**8702801**

PROJECT TITLE: **Challenges in women-led ministries: a case study of women-led ministries in the Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou Thulamela Municipality.**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/25/HS/03/1205**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

| NAME | INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT | ROLE |
|---|---|---|
| Dr HP Khosa | UNIVEN, Human Sciences | Supervisor |
| Dr LM Mudimeli | UNIVEN, Human Sciences | Co-Supervisor |
| Mrs TN Mulaudzi | UNIVEN, Human Sciences | Investigator -Student |

Type: Master's Research
Risk: *Minimal risk to humans, animals, or the environment (Category 2)*
Approval Period: May 2025 – May 2026

The Research Ethics Social Science Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
  - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
  - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
  - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: May 2025

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro

Signature: .....

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2025 -05- 12
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## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHIC IFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Instructions: please answer all questions and explain on the provided space. There is no right or wrong answer, feel free to express views and feelings.

NB: please tick or put a cross in the boxes below:

1. Gender

| | |
|---|---|
| Male | |
| Female | |

2. Age group

| | |
|---|---|
| 20-30 | |
| 30-40 | |
| 40-50 | |
| 50-60 | |
| 60-70 | |
| 70-80 | |
| 80-90 | |
| 90-100 | |

3. Occupation

| | |
|---|---|
| Pastors | |
| Elders | |
| Women leaders | |



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**Research Questions**

Women-led ministries: A case study of challenges in the women-led Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Municipality

**1. What is your experience of women leaders in Pentecostal churches?**

**2. How do women-led Pentecostal churches perceive and respond to women in leadership?**

**3. What are the cultural, theological and institution contribute to challenges faced by women-lead ministry?**

**4. How do leaders in women-led Pentecostal churches navigate and negotiate power dynamics with their congregation?**

**5. What role do mentorship, networking and support systems play in the development and sustainability of women-lead ministries?**

**6. How do women-led Pentecostal churches teach on gender roles and women leaders?**

**7. How do women leaders in Pentecostal churches balance their callings and family responsibility?**



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