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Women and Evangelism: Biblical Foundations, Adventist Heritage, and Contemporary Missional Participation

Christopher Osimhen OGAH[1]
Department of Religious Studies,
Babcock University Ogun, Nigeria

Stanley Osemudiamen OJIEABU[2]
Department of Religious Studies,
Babcock University, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Women have participated in the mission of God across the biblical narrative and throughout Christian history, yet their gifts and capacities have not always been fully recognized or mobilized in ecclesial ministry. This article examines the role of women in evangelism with particular attention to biblical foundations, Seventh-day Adventist history, and contemporary missional practice. Employing a qualitative, text-based theological method, the study brings selected biblical narratives into conversation with Adventist historical materials, Ellen G. White's writings, contemporary African scholarship on women and ministry, and current denominational evidence. The analysis argues that women's participation in evangelism is not a peripheral concession to modern social change but is consistent with the biblical witness to women as prophets, disciples, witnesses, patrons, teachers, co-workers, and proclaimers of the risen Christ. The article further shows that Adventist history contains significant precedents for women's participation in evangelistic and missional work, even where debates concerning ministerial office and ordination remain unresolved. Contemporary evidence likewise demonstrates that women contribute substantially through public evangelism, Bible study, discipleship, mentoring, community outreach, digital ministry, family ministry, and leadership development. The study concludes that churches strengthen their missionary witness when they intentionally identify, train, mentor, and deploy women according to their spiritual gifts. It recommends a shift from merely affirming women's value to constructing sustainable structures that enable their meaningful participation in the gospel commission.

Keywords: women; evangelism; ministry; Seventh-day Adventist Church; mission; discipleship; African Christianity

Introduction

Ministry is for everyone who has been called into the life and mission of Christ. Yet the practical experience of many congregations suggests that this conviction is easier to affirm than to implement. Women often constitute a substantial part of the worshipping and serving community, but their gifts may remain

[1] ogahch@babcock.edu.ng; 08133802415; https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2058 775
[2] ojieabus@babcock.edu.ng, +2348112765586, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9828-5873

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concentrated in a limited range of activities or may be insufficiently recognized in the church's public mission. The problem is therefore not simply whether women are present in church life, but whether the church intentionally recognizes, equips, and deploys the gifts that women bring to evangelism, discipleship, teaching, pastoral care, administration, community service, and public witness.

The concern underlying this study grows out of a simple conviction already present in the original lecture from which this article develops: women have something significant to offer in serving God and humanity. Their service takes different forms. Some are gifted for public proclamation; others flourish in small-group ministry, Bible instruction, seminars, administration, music, mentoring, visitation, digital communication, health ministry, family ministry, or community outreach. The Great Commission does not reduce Christian witness to a single method. Rather, it summons the whole community of disciples to participate in making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20). The Seventh-day Adventist Church similarly describes its mission as making disciples through Christ-like living, healing, serving, proclaiming, teaching, and training [3]

The question of women's participation remains important because ecclesial practice is shaped not only by biblical interpretation but also by inherited institutional patterns and cultural assumptions. African scholarship continues to show that women's ministries are negotiated within contexts where gender expectations, patriarchal structures, and ecclesial traditions can either facilitate or constrain participation [4]. At the same time, women remain active agents of Christian witness, and their participation frequently extends beyond formal office into networks of discipleship, caregiving, education, public proclamation, and digital ministry.

This article therefore asks three questions: What biblical foundations support women's participation in evangelism and ministry? How has women's evangelistic participation been expressed within Seventh-day Adventist history and identity? What practical structures can churches develop to move from verbal affirmation of women's gifts to sustained missional participation? The argument is that the biblical and Adventist witnesses together provide substantial theological and historical grounds for mobilizing women in the church's evangelistic mission, while contemporary African realities make such mobilization both pastorally necessary and missiologically strategic.

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3 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," 2023, https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/mission-statement-of-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/.

4 Gift T. Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's Model of 'Partnership between Women and Men' in African Christian Ministry," HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 78, no. 2 (2022): a7598, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i2.7598; M. M. N. Mphahlele, "Orality, Gender and Sacred Texts in the Context of Tele-Evangelism," HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77, no. 1 (2021): a6959, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i1.6959; Fidelis Nkomazana and Dinah S. Setume, "The Role of Women in the Church in Botswana," International Review of Mission 112, no. 2 (2023): 326–36, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12481.

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Method and Scope

This is a qualitative, text-based theological study. It employs biblical-theological interpretation of selected Old and New Testament passages, historical analysis of selected Adventist examples, and constructive practical-theological reflection on contemporary ministry. The biblical material is not presented as an exhaustive study of every contested text concerning gender and ecclesial office. Instead, the focus is narrower: the participation of women in the mission, witness, service, and proclamation of God's people.

The study also distinguishes evangelistic participation from the separate and more contested question of ordination. The two issues intersect, but they are not identical. A church may debate the theology or polity of ordination while still recognizing that women have historically preached, taught, discipled, served as Bible workers, led ministries, engaged communities, and contributed directly to evangelistic outcomes. Keeping this distinction clear allows the article to address the missional question without pretending that all ecclesiological debates have been resolved.

A further methodological concern is source integrity. The original lecture drew substantially on Adly Campos's 2003 Ministry article, "Women in Evangelism: The Church's Buried Talent?" Rather than reproducing Campos's autobiographical experiences as though they belonged to a new author, the present article treats Campos[5] as a source and preserves the lecture's central pastoral concern in a new scholarly argument. Recent African scholarship and current official Adventist materials are added to place that concern within contemporary theological and missional discussion.

Biblical Foundations for Women's Participation in Mission

The biblical witness does not present women as passive observers of salvation history. Women appear as prophetic voices, covenant participants, patrons, disciples, witnesses, teachers, and co-workers in the mission of God. Galatians 3:28 is not by itself a complete ecclesiology, but Paul's declaration that believers are one in Christ establishes a theological horizon within which gender cannot be used to deny the equal salvific worth of women and men. The question then becomes how this shared identity is embodied in service.

In the Old Testament, Deborah is both prophet and judge (Judg. 4:4–7). Her leadership occurs in a decisive moment of Israel's national and covenant history. Huldah authoritatively communicates the word of the Lord during Josiah's reform (2 Kings 22:14–20). These narratives do not erase the patriarchal character of the ancient world, but they demonstrate that the biblical tradition itself remembers women whose speech and leadership served the covenant community. Their presence cautions against theological systems that make female agency in God's work conceptually impossible.

5Adly Campos, "Women in Evangelism: The Church's Buried Talent?" Ministry, October 2003, https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2003/10/women-in-evangelism-the-churchs-buried-talent.html.

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The New Testament broadens this picture. Elizabeth speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit in the infancy narrative (Luke 1:39–45), while Anna is explicitly identified as a prophet who speaks about the child Jesus to those awaiting Jerusalem's redemption (Luke 2:36–38). Luke also records women who travelled with Jesus and materially supported his ministry (Luke 8:1–3). Such participation is not incidental. It places women within the network that sustained the public ministry of Jesus.

The resurrection narratives provide an even more direct missional pattern. Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Christ and is commissioned to announce the resurrection to the disciples (John 20:11–18). Whatever terminology one uses for her role, the narrative unmistakably presents a woman as a commissioned witness to the central event of the Christian gospel. Mensah[6] similarly argues that the Gospel traditions, particularly John, require a more adequate recognition of women as disciples rather than treating discipleship as an exclusively male category.

The early church continues this pattern. Tabitha/Dorcas embodies compassionate service as a visible expression of Christian witness (Acts 9:36–42). Philip's four daughters prophesy (Acts 21:8–9). Romans 16 names women such as Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, and others within Paul's network of ministry and mission. These references differ in function and cannot all be collapsed into one ecclesial office, but together they demonstrate that women's labour was woven into the missionary expansion of the early Christian movement.

Pentecost supplies a theological rationale for this participation. Peter interprets the outpouring of the Spirit through Joel's promise that both sons and daughters will prophesy and that the Spirit will be poured out upon both male and female servants (Acts 2:17–18). The missional church is therefore a Spirit-gifted community. Spiritual gifts are given for service, and the church has a responsibility to discern and cultivate those gifts rather than bury them beneath cultural expectations.

Women, Discipleship, and the African Ecclesial Context

The question of women in ministry takes a distinctive shape in African Christianity because biblical interpretation, ecclesial tradition, and cultural constructions of gender frequently interact. Mphahlele[7] shows that women have long participated in oral and religious communication, yet public biblical discourse can remain shaped by gendered power structures. Baloyi[8], drawing on Mercy Oduyoye, argues for partnership between women and men as a constructive African theological model capable of challenging forms of ecclesial domination. Nkomazana and Setume[9] likewise demonstrate that women's

6 A. M. Mensah, "Women and Discipleship in the Gospels," Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology 11, nos. 1–2 (2022): 85–94, https://doi.org/10.4314/gjrt.v11i1-2.6.
7Mphahlele, "Orality, Gender and Sacred Texts.".
8 Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's Model.".
9Nkomazana and Setume, "Role of Women in the Church in Botswana.".

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ministerial development is affected by the cultural and doctrinal environments in which churches interpret leadership.

These studies are important because the challenge is not solved merely by placing women on a programme. Participation can be symbolic without being formational. A congregation may invite women to sing, pray, or organize events while withholding training, mentoring, theological education, decision-making opportunities, or avenues for public witness. A missional theology of women's participation must therefore move beyond token visibility toward the intentional development of gifts.

African women also possess forms of relational access that can be missiologically significant. In some cultural settings, women can enter domestic and interpersonal spaces that male evangelists may not access as readily. Women frequently exercise influence through families, neighbourhood networks, schools, health institutions, markets, professional associations, digital communities, and informal support systems. Umenyi[10] emphasizes the evangelistic importance of women's relational, educational, caregiving, and community roles in African Christianity. These should not be romanticized as naturally female tasks, but neither should their missionary potential be ignored. The digital environment further complicates and expands the field. Mphahlele[11] notes that tele-evangelism and digital religious discourse can reproduce existing gender hierarchies, yet the same media also create new spaces for women to teach, testify, organize communities, and communicate Scripture. Contemporary evangelism therefore requires the church to equip women not only for traditional public campaigns but also for digital discipleship, media literacy, online Bible study, and ethically responsible religious communication.

Women in Seventh-day Adventist History and Mission

Women have been present in Adventist mission from the movement's formative years. Ellen G. White's prophetic, literary, educational, health, administrative, and evangelistic influence is inseparable from the development of Seventh-day Adventism. Beyond White, women participated as Bible workers, missionaries, educators, organizers, writers, and evangelists. The historical record therefore makes it difficult to describe Adventist mission as an exclusively male enterprise.

The original lecture highlighted figures such as Rachel Oakes Preston, Maria L. Huntley, Catherine Revel, Betty Holbrook, Marie Spangler, Ellen Bresee, and Rose Otis. These examples should be handled historically rather than devotionally. Their roles were not identical, and some details require careful contextualization, but together they illustrate a long Adventist pattern of women contributing to doctrinal transmission, lay mobilization, family ministry, pastoral-family support, and denominational organization. Rose Otis, for example, played a major role in the institutional development of Women's

10 A. E. Umenyi, "The Role of Women in Evangelisation in the African Church," Hekima Review 63 (2021).
11Mphahlele, "Orality, Gender and Sacred Texts.".

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Ministries; the General Conference office became a full department in 1995, with Otis as director [12].

Campos's[13] testimony is also historically useful when correctly attributed. Her account describes both resistance to women's public evangelism and the fruitfulness of women's participation in evangelistic campaigns. Its value for the present study is not that one testimony settles an ecclesiological debate, but that it documents the practical tension between a church that depends heavily on women's service and congregational cultures that may hesitate to recognize women as public proclaimers.

The contemporary denomination has moved beyond anecdotal evidence in documenting women's missional activity. General Conference Women's Ministries reported for 2022 more than 73,000 series of evangelistic meetings conducted by women and more than 106,000 baptisms attributed directly to Women's Ministries activities, while also cautioning that reporting is incomplete across fields [14]. A 2025 denominational report further stated that from 1996 through 2024, more than 3.5 million baptisms and 1.3 million reclaimed members were associated with the direct efforts of Adventist women and Women's Ministries activities [15]. These figures should not be treated as controlled measures of causality, but they do demonstrate the scale of women's participation in Adventist mission.

The current official mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reinforces the theological relevance of such participation. The church describes all members as called to active witness and frames mission through living, healing, serving, proclaiming, teaching, and training [16]. Women's Ministries likewise defines its purpose in terms of nurturing, empowering, and equipping women to participate in the mission of the church and to use their spiritual gifts [17]. Thus, the question is no longer whether women contribute to Adventist mission; the historical and contemporary evidence establishes that they do. The more urgent question is whether local churches are organized to recognize and multiply that contribution.

Ellen G. White and the Mobilization of Women for Gospel Work

Ellen G. White repeatedly encouraged women to participate in gospel service. The original lecture rightly recognized this emphasis, but a publication-ready

12 General Conference Women's Ministries, "On Becoming the Department of Women's Ministries in 1995," 2020, https://women.adventist.org/on-becoming-the-department-of-womens-ministries-in-1995.
13 Campos, "Women in Evangelism.".
14 General Conference Women's Ministries, "Our Statistics: Women's Ministries Statistics for 2022," 2023, https://women.adventist.org/our-statistics.
15 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, "30th Anniversary of the Women's Ministries Department," 2025, https://executivecommittee.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/B7-30th-Anniversary-of-WM-Department.pdf.
16 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Mission Statement.".
17 General Conference Women's Ministries, "Our Identity," n.d., https://women.adventist.org/our-identity.

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treatment should avoid long chains of quotation and instead integrate her counsel analytically. White[18] maintained that women had a broad field of useful service in the cause of God. In her evangelistic counsel she also described women as capable of reaching families and persons whom male workers might not reach in the same way (White, 1970). Her concern was fundamentally missional: the church should not leave consecrated ability unused when the harvest requires workers.

This counsel is best read as a theology of gifted participation rather than as a simplistic claim that women and men must perform identical tasks. White's writings repeatedly connect service with consecration, spiritual gifts, practical usefulness, and the needs of people. The operative question is therefore not whether ministry belongs to one sex, but how the gifts of believers can be disciplined and directed toward the saving mission of Christ.

White's emphasis also challenges a recurring ecclesial inconsistency. Churches may celebrate women's sacrifice in homes, schools, health institutions, and local ministries while remaining hesitant to invest comparable resources in their theological and evangelistic formation. If women's labour is genuinely needed, then training cannot be optional. Recognition without formation is sentimental; formation without opportunity is wasteful. A coherent Adventist approach must join affirmation, preparation, accountability, and deployment.

From Presence to Participation: A Contemporary Framework for Women in Evangelism

A standard response to the subject is to list ministries women may perform. That is useful, but insufficient. The deeper need is a congregational framework that moves women from presence to participation and from participation to multiplication. Five elements are especially important.

First, churches should practice gift-based discernment. Women should be helped to identify spiritual gifts and ministry capacities rather than being assigned roles primarily because of gender convention. Some will be effective public evangelists; others will be stronger as Bible instructors, teachers, administrators, musicians, health educators, counsellors, digital communicators, small-group leaders, mentors, or community organizers. The diversity of gifts is a strength of the body of Christ, not a problem to be standardized.

Second, participation requires training. Every local church can become a training centre for mission by offering instruction in biblical interpretation, personal witnessing, public speaking, small-group leadership, digital ministry, pastoral listening, safeguarding, and follow-up discipleship. The global Women's Ministries programme itself emphasizes leadership development and training, and recent denominational initiatives continue to organize schools and evangelistic programmes specifically to equip women for mission [19].

18 Ellen G. White, Welfare Ministry (Review and Herald, 1952).
19 General Conference Women's Ministries, "Our Statistics."; Lucas Santos, "South American Division Holds First Women's School of Evangelism," Adventist Review, March

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Third, churches need mentoring structures. Emerging women leaders benefit from relationships with experienced ministers, Bible workers, professionals, and lay leaders who can model integrity, resilience, theological discipline, and practical ministry. Mentoring is especially important where cultural expectations discourage women from testing or publicly developing their gifts. A mentoring culture can create accountable pathways into service without turning ministry into competition between women and men.

Fourth, churches should normalize collaborative ministry. Baloyi's[20] model of partnership is useful here. Women's participation need not be framed as the displacement of men. The New Testament picture is more relational: co-workers contribute distinct gifts to a common mission. Team evangelism, mixed-gender ministry planning, shared Bible-work teams, health evangelism, family-life ministry, and coordinated follow-up can embody partnership while widening the church's access to communities.

Fifth, participation must include evaluation. Churches should ask not only how many women were invited to serve, but whether they received training, whether their gifts were used meaningfully, whether they participated in planning and decision-making, whether new disciples were formed, and whether younger women were mentored into ministry. The purpose is not numerical performance for its own sake. Evaluation protects the church from confusing symbolic inclusion with actual missional development.

Areas of Evangelistic Participation

Public evangelism remains one legitimate avenue. Women who demonstrate the gifts of biblical exposition, communication, and evangelistic appeal should be trained and given appropriate opportunities to exercise them. Contemporary Adventist reports show that women already conduct large numbers of evangelistic series across the world [21], and recent regional initiatives continue to train women for proclamation and evangelistic leadership [22]. Personal evangelism and Bible instruction remain equally important. The growth of Adventism historically depended heavily on Bible workers who entered homes, studied Scripture with individuals and families, prepared persons for baptism, and nurtured new believers. Women can continue this ministry through face-to-face study, small groups, workplace networks, campus ministries, and online platforms.

Community and compassionate ministry are also evangelistic when they arise from and point toward the gospel. Dorcas offers a biblical picture of service whose social visibility was inseparable from the Christian community's witness. Health education, literacy, support for vulnerable women, ministry to families, abuse prevention, mentoring of girls, and assistance to persons facing poverty can create relationships in which the gospel is embodied rather than merely

20, 2024, https://adventistreview.org/news/south-american-division-holds-first-womens-school-of-evangelism/.
20 Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's Model.".
21 General Conference Women's Ministries, "Our Statistics.".
22 Santos, "South American Division Holds First Women's School of Evangelism.".

announced. Current Adventist Women's Ministries identifies poverty, abuse, health risks, workload, illiteracy, and lack of mentoring and leadership training among the major challenges affecting women, thereby linking spiritual formation with concrete human need [23].

Digital evangelism now deserves explicit attention. Women who communicate effectively through social media, podcasts, livestreams, messaging platforms, and online Bible-study communities should be trained in theology, media ethics, privacy, safeguarding, and responsible communication. Digital visibility alone is not discipleship, but digital spaces are now real locations of religious encounter. The church cannot afford to treat them as secondary.

Challenges to Fuller Participation

Several obstacles continue to limit women's participation. The first is theological uncertainty. Congregations often collapse every discussion of women's evangelistic activity into the ordination debate, with the result that ministries not dependent on ordination become unnecessarily restricted. A clearer distinction between spiritual gifts, evangelistic functions, denominational credentials, ecclesial offices, and ordination would reduce confusion.

The second obstacle is cultural expectation. Gender norms can shape what congregations imagine a woman should say, where she should speak, whom she may lead, and how visible she may become. Such expectations require theological examination rather than automatic baptism as biblical principles. African scholarship has shown that church practices can absorb cultural assumptions about male authority and female subordination even when women are already performing substantial ministry [24].

The third obstacle is inadequate preparation. Inviting women into ministry without training can expose them to avoidable failure and then reinforce the prejudice that they were never suited for the task. The answer is not exclusion but formation. The church should provide women the same seriousness of biblical, ethical, communicative, and leadership preparation that it expects of anyone entrusted with public ministry.

The fourth obstacle is tokenism. One woman on a platform does not necessarily indicate an empowering ministry culture. Sustainable participation is visible when women are trained, trusted, mentored, resourced, evaluated, and given repeated opportunities to serve according to their gifts. This also requires safeguarding against exploitation: women should not be expected to carry extensive unpaid ministry burdens merely because the church celebrates their willingness to serve.

23 General Conference Women's Ministries, "Our Identity.".
24 Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's Model."; Nkomazana and Setume, "Role of Women in the Church in Botswana.".

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Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Mission

The missional implication is straightforward: a church cannot consistently affirm the priesthood and giftedness of believers while leaving a large portion of its membership underdeveloped for mission. The issue is not institutional fashion but stewardship. Gifts that are not recognized, trained, and deployed represent missional capacity left unused. For pastors, this means becoming equippers rather than gatekeepers. Pastoral leadership should identify women with evangelistic and teaching gifts, create safe opportunities for development, connect them with mentors, and include them in mission planning. For Women's Ministries departments, the implication is that programming should not end with events for women; it should increasingly prepare women for ministry to the church and the world. For theological institutions, it means ensuring that women have meaningful access to biblical, theological, pastoral, and missional formation. For local congregations, it means treating women's participation as part of normal discipleship rather than as an occasional emphasis.

The scale of contemporary Adventist mission makes this especially important. The denomination reported more than 23.6 million members at the end of 2024 and an established presence in 212 countries and areas [25]. A mission of this scope cannot be sustained by clergy alone. The church's own mission statement recognizes all members as active witnesses, and the documented evangelistic work of women demonstrates that this principle is already being practiced in many parts of the world. The task is to make intentional formation and participation more consistent at the local level.

Recommendations

First, local churches and conferences should develop structured pathways for women's evangelistic formation, including Bible instruction, preaching, small-group leadership, digital ministry, pastoral care, and community engagement. Second, pastors should institute mentoring systems that connect emerging women leaders with experienced ministers and lay professionals. Third, Women's Ministries should be integrated into the wider mission strategy of the congregation rather than treated mainly as an internal fellowship programme. Fourth, churches should conduct periodic gift and ministry audits to identify women whose capacities are presently unused or underused. Fifth, denominational institutions should document women's contributions with greater consistency so that missional planning rests on evidence rather than assumption. Sixth, theological education and ministerial training should address both biblical texts and the cultural dynamics that shape gendered participation in African churches. Finally, churches should cultivate a theology of partnership in which women and men serve as co-workers in the gospel without turning mission into a struggle for visibility or status.

25 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Statistics," 2025, https://adventist.org/identity/statistics.

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Conclusion

The role of women in evangelism is not a marginal question for the church's mission. Scripture remembers women who judged, prophesied, supported Jesus' ministry, witnessed the resurrection, served communities, taught, prophesied, and laboured alongside apostolic workers. Adventist history likewise records women whose ministries contributed to the theological, organizational, educational, pastoral, and evangelistic development of the movement. Contemporary denominational evidence shows that this participation continues on a global scale.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to declare that women are valuable. The church must create conditions in which their God-given gifts can mature into responsible service. This requires biblical conviction, theological clarity, training, mentoring, opportunity, accountability, and partnership. The gospel commission belongs to the whole community of disciples. When women are equipped to participate fully in that mission, the church does not surrender its biblical identity; it exercises more faithfully the gifts already present within the body of Christ.

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