

Pentecost Empowers Women in Ministry

As a journalist who has worked in Christian media for more than 45 years, I've interviewed many key leaders in the charismatic world. But a recent conversation I had with Dr. Beth Grant for my *Strang Report* podcast moved me deeply. Grant, the first female executive presbyter of the Assemblies of God (USA), highlights a powerful link between Pentecost and women who are empowered by the Spirit and called to ministry. Because of its importance in the month we celebrate Pentecost, I want to share it with you.

Women continue to face challenges—both inside and outside the church. Through the years, various denominations have denied them the right to seek ordination or other credentials for professional ministry.

But as you have read in this issue, the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has a powerful history of women in ministry. People still talk about female ministers such as Maria Woodworth-Etter or Aimee Semple McPherson, who founded The Foursquare Church, or even Kathryn Kuhlman, whom I interviewed shortly before she died in 1976. And of course the more contemporary charismatic female leaders such as Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyer and Paula White-Cain bless us today.

I've always been grateful that the Assemblies, my own denomination, has a long history of women in ministry. In fact, my grandmother Alice Kersey (later Farley) was ordained as an Assemblies minister in 1914, the very year the denomination was founded. She served as an evangelist for a number of years as a single woman and then ministered alongside my grandfather, also ordained in the Assemblies in 1919.

"It's great to look back at the beginning of the history of the Assemblies of God," says Grant, the co-founder with her husband, David, of Project Rescue, a ministry devoted to restoring victims of sexual slavery. She adds that from its earliest days, the denomination "was comprised of powerful pioneer women who were called to pastor, to evangelism, to missions. Many places in the world, there were women who were the first ones to go into countries—many of them single women—who were incredibly courageous. And so we had this great legacy."

"And so from the very beginning, the Assemblies of God has had very much as a part of who it is, the recognition that when the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—is moving, there are women and little girls, as well as men and boys, who stand up and say, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,'" Grant says. "'He has anointed me; He's called me to preach. He's called me to teach.'"

Grant says Dr. George Wood, who later served as the denomination's general superintendent, contacted her some 20 years ago because the percentage of credentialed female ministers in the Assemblies had dropped to just 15%. "And he said, 'Considering our history and our theology, what is going on?'" she recalls.

"And so his heart was to initiate something which would encourage women ministers to step up and become credentialed, but not because that's where ministry comes from," Grant says. "That credential doesn't give us a call, and it doesn't empower us, but in a sense, it acknowledges and recognizes, 'We see God's hand on your life.'"

In response to Wood's request, Grant started a task force to call out and empower women in ministry. Their approach was: "How can we equip you? How can we encourage you? And how can we empower you to fulfill the call of God, whatever that may be?"

Grant says the task force worked with female ministers for about 10 years. Today, "We are to a point where 30% of the credentialed ministers in the Assemblies of God are female," she says.

But God's work through women extends far beyond the Assemblies, Grant says, adding that this Spirit-birthing call on women's lives represents a prophetic movement in the world. "What I feel passionately, the more I look at Scripture: The call of God is not a gender issue. It's an obedience issue."

I agree with Grant, and I want to go on record as standing behind her statement that God's call extends past gender, nationality or denomination. Scripture makes it clear that God uses women. We must not attempt to construct man-made boundaries around the power of Pentecost.

Stephen Strang is founding editor of Charisma. Learn about the books he's written at .

This article was excerpted from the May issue of Charisma magazine. If you don't subscribe to Charisma, click here to get every issue delivered to your mailbox. During this time of change, your subscription is a vote of confidence for the kind of Spirit-filled content we offer. In the same way you would support a ministry with a donation, subscribing is your way to support Charisma. Also, we encourage you to give gift subscriptions at , and share our articles on social media.