

Pentecostal University Studies Women's Issues

The Center for Women's Studies researches the needs of women in the ministry, workplace and home

Vanguard University is working to advance the status of women worldwide through its Center for Women's Studies (CWS), the first

such program at an Assemblies of God (AG) institution.

Launched in 2002, the center, located at Vanguard's main campus

in Costa Mesa, Calif., uses research, education and advocacy to study

issues such as women in leadership, domestic violence, the status of

women in the church, media images of women and human trafficking.

Carol Taylor, Vanguard's provost and CWS director, said the center seeks to empower both men and women to be the "head, heart and

hands" of Jesus—the head being informed and educated, the heart being

broken for those who are suffering from unjust causes, and the hands

being practically extended to make a difference.

The center currently offers a minor in women's studies and its leaders hope to develop a bachelor's and master's degree program. Until

then, they are raising awareness about women's needs through workshops,

including CWS' annual Gender and Justice conference, hosted in partnership with Christians for Biblical Equality. Past conferences

have featured speakers such as senior U.S. State Department adviser Laura Lederer, National Assemblies of God Women in Ministry Task Force chairwoman Beth Grant, and Lisa Thompson, Salvation Army liaison for the abolition of sex trafficking.

CWS leaders insist that the program does not promote female superiority, but affirms that men and women are equal spiritually.

Elizabeth Leonard, Ph.D., a sociology professor at Vanguard and CWS board member, believes there are several instances in the Bible when Christ challenged cultural limits put on women.

"The resurrected Christ chooses not to reveal Himself to His disciples, but chooses to reveal Himself to the women," she said. "Why? I think He's once again broadcasting that women are equal to men. We're not trying to twist the gospel; we're trying to expose the cultural biases through which we read the life of Christ."

"[Men and women] need to lead together," Morgan said. "That's what we're doing here at the Center for Women's Studies. We're trying to learn how to lead, how to live in mutual respect for the greater purpose of seeing God's purpose accomplished in our world today."

CWS leaders note that globally women are at greater risk of being trafficked for sex, raped and abused. "Figuring out what we can do so women aren't at risk is part of our goal," Morgan said.

Leonard's research on women imprisoned for killing their abusers and an alumna's efforts to rescue women abused by soldiers in the Congo are part of those efforts. The center also sponsors an international scholarship; the first recipient is an Iraqi woman who plans to pursue a master's degree in marriage and family therapy so she can serve as a counselor in Iraq.

The women's studies center comes at a time when more women are pursuing ministry leadership. In its 2005 Ministers Report, the AG found that the number of credentialed women rose almost 17 percent that year, a trend that is being mirrored nationwide. Yet Morgan said that though the AG has ordained women as pastors since 1914, many women still don't know how to balance gender roles with pastoral leadership. She said the center was taking a group of students to the AG's women in ministry conference to show them models of women who are doing that successfully.

CWS continues Vanguard's commitment to address the needs of diverse groups, as the school has developed centers for Hispanic leadership, urban studies and peacemaking. The next Gender and Justice conference will be held March 6-7.

—Adrienne S. Gaines with Vanessa Chandler