

Women of God, Arise!

SIX INTERNATIONAL LEADERS ARE CALLING THE WOMEN OF GOD TO RISE UP AND TAKE THEIR PLACES IN THE CHURCH.

Is God mobilizing women for kingdom authority in our day in a way we have not experienced since the book of Acts? Six women with decades as leaders in international ministry believe He is, and they're already moving forward with plans to mentor, advance and release women into their destiny in God.

On July 6-7 these leaders met face-to-face for the first time in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to share what they sense God is doing among women today and where they think He's leading women tomorrow. They believe God sovereignly spurred them into action. Furthermore, they are convinced that women who are serious about living for God stand on the brink of a worldwide movement that will position them in the kingdom for such a time as this.

They speak of it as a mandate from God specifically for women. Before they left Ann Arbor, they committed to hosting five Apostolic Mandate to Women conferences in 2005: one in Asia, one in Canada and three in the United States.

Nearly a year ago, four of the women individually experienced unprecedented encounters with God that changed the course of their lives and ministries. The events occurred during November and December, 2003.

The catalyst for their coming together in Ann Arbor was Naomi Dowdy's "event." One night in late November, God sent Dowdy, apostle-senior pastor of the 5,000-member Trinity Christian Centre in Singapore, a powerful dream and gave her the names of five other women in leadership: Jane Hansen, president-CEO of Aglow International, a worldwide women's organization; Barbara J. Yoder, nationally known speaker and apostle-senior

pastor of Shekinah Christian Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Barbara Wentroble, founder of International Breakthrough Ministries, whose ministry includes the marketplace; Indri Gautama, former business executive and founding pastor of a growing church in Jakarta, Indonesia; and Pat Francis, founder of Pat Francis Ministries and senior pastor of Kingdom Covenant Centre in Toronto, Canada.

As a result of the dream, Dowdy was prompted to call a meeting with these women. That was step No. 1.

GOD EVENTS All six leaders believe that God will reveal their next steps to them. Right now, however, they're moving on what happened to them in 2003.

The initial "God event" took place at Aglow's worldwide conference in Indianapolis in November. While delivering her second message, Yoder sensed something shifting in the spiritual realm.

In response, she released the women to shout to the Lord. What happened next jolted everyone on the platform, including Yoder, who backed away from the podium for several minutes to sense what God was doing.

Other leaders watched in amazement as women vaulted out of their seats and began marching, dancing, grouping together, roaring with release. "It was as if they were forming platoons all over the arena," Hansen says. For the next 30 minutes, speakers and leaders formed a line at the edge of the stage in a corporate request to God to continue releasing the estimated 5,000 women from 100 nations into the full purposes of God.

Hansen stared into the pulsating crowds and sensed the Lord say to her that what she was witnessing was not only the "new Aglow"; this powerful impact of the Holy Spirit was a forerunner of what God wanted to do in and through women around the world.

"I stood beside Barbara and said, 'This is bigger than Aglow,'" Hansen told SpiritLed Woman. Yoder adds: "We recognized that something had happened that was far beyond us."

The minute Yoder left the Aglow platform that day to catch a plane, she began to sob uncontrollably. "I was being apprehended by God about women," she says. She cried all the way to Pasadena, California.

Those who know Yoder well know her as a compassionate leader, but sobs? As Yoder herself says, "It's just not part of my DNA."

For two months after the conference whenever Yoder and Hansen talked about what God wanted to do with women in this season, the tears came.

At the same time two other international ministry leaders were experiencing their own unusual moves of God.

In November, Dowdy was awakened in Singapore several nights in a row by a series of dreams. "God began to speak to me about women," she says.

Like Yoder's uncharacteristic tears, Dowdy's dreams were unusual for her. "God speaks to me through His Word, in prayer, in other ways, but not in dreams," she says.

Dowdy, Yoder and Wentroble all believe their first call is to the whole body of Christ, both male and female. Still, Dowdy is convinced that God wants her to focus on women for this season. She says He reminded her gently that although she had allowed Him to establish a large ministry in Asia through her, she still had not "mentored women." He used the dreams to mobilize her for a new role.

"We [the six leaders] will be models, mentors, to develop and release women," she says, citing Psalm 68:11 as an example of

men and women taking the land together: “The Lord gives the word [of power]; the women who bear and publish [the news] are a great host” (The Amplified Bible).

Wentroble’s encounter came soon after Dowdy’s—when Wentroble was speaking at an apostolic-prophetic conference hosted by Destiny International Ministries in Canfield, Ohio.

At the end of her message on December 9, she was startled to hear herself call for apostolic women to come forward. Immediately, women flooded the aisles to stand in front of the platform. “When I finished ministering, I was shaking under the power of the Lord,” Wentroble says of the experience.

She is ordinarily not a “shaker,” she claims; yet, no longer able to stand, she sat on the platform, and women lay all over her feet and hung around her neck as they soaked in the Spirit. She wondered what was happening.

“I was crying out to God, ‘What have we stepped into?’”

She called Yoder to see if she had any insights. By that time, Yoder had spoken with Dowdy about her series of dreams. “You need to talk to Naomi,” advised Yoder.

Interestingly, Dowdy had already phoned Wentroble’s office. When Wentroble returned her call, the two leaders talked for more than an hour about what God seemed to be saying to them and how He could use their experiences to impact the lives of women.

FULFILLING GOD’S PURPOSE Yoder, who has already hosted more than one apostolic event for women, says she has received numerous e-mails, letters and phone calls since the six leaders spoke at the July conference in Ann Arbor. The women who attended that conference believe something was imparted that went way beyond the teaching moments. “They feel empowered to go forth with purpose and direction,” she says.

That is the goal of the Apostolic Mandate to Women conferences the leaders are planning for 2005 as well. Their purpose is not to provide another “pit stop” for women determined to perfect their training and ministry skills. Nor will they be events designed to simply lift the heart and soul.

“These conferences are not about feeling good,” Dowdy says. “They are about releasing apostolic women.”

In her book *Mantled with Authority* (Wagner Publications, 2003), Yoder clarifies the meaning of the terms “apostle” and “apostolic.” Not all women (or men) are called to be apostles, she says.

Hansen agrees. “It’s not that every woman is to be an apostle, but she needs to rise in her calling.”

A key difference for Yoder is in governing authority. “An apostolic believer is just as sent and equipped with miraculous power as an apostle,” she writes. However, “an apostle [male or female] has the mantle to govern the church, whereas an apostolic believer is to govern her own life and that of her family (with her husband).” In other words, all believers can be members of the apostolic body as defined in Acts, just as men and women equally share the responsibility God gave them to subdue and take dominion over the earth.

All six leaders see releasing as the final step in mentoring. “My idea of mentoring is that I help you come into your destiny,” Yoder says.

“Mentoring is not ‘ministering,’” Hansen explains. “It is relational, strong encouragement; it is coaching people who are already in the game.”

Why do these leaders believe God is moving women to the forefront of His kingdom agenda in this hour? Because, they say, women who know who they are in God are vital to the completion of God’s purpose. That purpose is what Hansen calls

“ultimate reconciliation”—the reconciling of male and female that is part of the “complete restoration” destined to take place before Christ’s return: “Heaven must receive [and retain] [Him] until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke” (Acts 3:21).

“[God] will not skip over or ignore the many prophetic promises of restoration He has spoken of to His people from the beginning of time,” Hansen says.

Male-female reconciliation is not an end in itself; it is the means to bring forth the kingdom of God on Earth. The Bible tells us, “God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27).

“When God created Adam,” Hansen says, “he was created fully in the image of God. When the woman was taken out of him, the image of God was not added to or subtracted from. It was divided. Man was no longer in his original form. Now the image of God on Earth was male and female. Yet they were one.”

Hansen believes that if God’s expression of Himself on Earth is both male and female walking as one together, then giving women a revelation of their purpose in God will help to bring about His original plan for mankind to take dominion over the earth.

Yoder explains that this doesn’t mean women are going to be “in front of” the man. “But we are coming back up to stand beside him and to take our place, because when God first spoke to a man in the garden, He didn’t choose the gender. He spoke to male and female. He said to them, ‘Bear fruit and multiply, subdue the earth and take dominion.’”

“There is an alignment taking place within the church,” Hansen says—and God is using that alignment to move us toward His larger purpose. Women who know who they are in Him are a key to the fulfillment of it.

“Even in Indonesia,” Indri Gautama claims, “it’s time for the women to rise up. Our president is a woman. Why not [leaders] in the church?”

God’s call to women in this hour is global; it is not restricted to those who will be impacted directly by Dowdy, Hansen and the other leaders He has sovereignly brought together in recent times. If you want to be a part of what God is doing among women in these last days, you can position yourself for purpose by taking the following steps:

1. Press in to God for an impartation and release into your destiny. Ask Him to bring a mentor into your life who can teach and encourage you, and attend conferences that are designed to release women to fulfill their callings.

2. Before developing a relationship with a mentor, ask God to heal any emotional wounds and hurts you may have. Mentoring is about healthy relationships. Also, if there are associations in your life that are not conducive to your going on with God, be willing to cut them off or reduce your contact with the people who are holding you back.

3. Finally, take dominion over the strongholds in your mind, especially the religious strongholds that may have developed through the years regarding the role of women in the church. Ask God to reveal the concepts you grew up with that may be unconsciously affecting your mind-set and keeping you from your destiny.

You aren’t alone in your desire to be a part of what God is doing in our day. So rise up, woman of God—and take the place God has destined just for you!

Read a companion devotional.

Karen E. Anderson is the Communications Director for Aglow

International.