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## Editors' Notes

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## Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

We are pleased to include this issue in *Leaven's* twentieth volume. It tells the stories of churches that have made the courageous decisions to become gender-inclusive in leadership roles of worship, paid members of the ministerial staff and various congregational ministries. We feel that these narratives can be instructive and provide models for churches that are considering questions of gender for their congregations. We are grateful to Kathy Pulley for her work in moderating a panel of church elders at the 2011 Christian Scholars' Conference that became the core of this issue. She then continued working with us as our guest editor as we filled out the issue.

Dr. Pulley is a professor of religious studies at Missouri State University and has been a faithful friend to *Leaven* through the years, serving on our editorial board and contributing numerous articles that have enriched the ministries of our readers. Kathy was also the first woman in Churches of Christ to preach any known sermon in the twentieth century. It is fitting that we included that sermon, preached in 1984 at the Brookline Church of Christ, in this issue.

We are also pleased to announce that *Leaven* is now online. Through the generosity of the Pepperdine University Libraries, we are in the process of putting all of our past issues online through Digital Commons, an archival system. Currently we have volumes 9–19 available online and are working to add volumes 1–8. Our current issue will be posted at the end of 2012. You can visit the site at <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/>.

## Guest Editor's Introduction

KATHY J. PULLEY

First, I want to thank D'Esta and Stuart Love for their ongoing commitment to women in ministry. Through the years, their efforts to share information and ideas and to promote dialogue through *Leaven* have made and continue to make a significant difference. It is a privilege and a pleasure to work with them on this issue.

This issue, *Gentler-Inclusion Among Churches of Christ*, developed from a panel session at the June 2011 Christian Scholars' Conference at Pepperdine University. There are a number of churches that are moving toward greater inclusion of women; that session targeted a specific group of church leaders in four churches that are moving toward greater inclusion. The invited representatives include four men, who are not only scholars but also elders in Churches of Christ: John Willis, Highland Church of Christ, Abilene, Texas; Robert Randolph, Brookline Church of Christ, Brookline, Massachusetts; Stuart Love, University Church of Christ, Malibu, California; and Patrick Graham, Northlake Church of Christ, Atlanta, Georgia. Then Ken Cukrowski, Minter Lane Church of Christ, Abilene, Texas, was invited to respond to the four papers. In addition, Tom Robinson, elder and minister of the Manhattan Church of Christ, Manhattan, New York, was in attendance at the session and subsequently invited to write the story of the Manhattan Church for this issue. Amy Bost Henegar, associate minister, co-authored that article with him, providing a fifth narrative. In addition, Stephen Johnson and Lynette Sharp Peña permitted us to reprint their research on gender inclusivity in Churches of Christ, previously printed in *Restoration Quarterly*. Finally, included are sermons by Kathy Pulley and D'Esta Love.

The session was also intended to represent primarily congregations that have been established for a good number of years and that maintain a strong commitment to our tradition. Geographically, the churches represent

four different regions of the United States; four are from large metropolitan areas. Two are closely associated with a Christian college, but all have ministries that reach out to all ages.

It is important that each congregation's story was told by an elder because it indicates that an institutional decision has been made for the greater inclusion of women. These are not churches in which one person is responsible for change. Many people are involved; thus, these narratives do not represent the views of an outlying individual or group but rather reflect a process that has taken place in their churches over a period of years. Each scholar-elder was asked to consult with his co-elders because these congregational stories will become a part of our collective church history, as well as a part of each of these local congregations' histories.

The timing is right for congregational reporting to be made available. More and more churches are moving toward greater inclusion of women. Many more are having discussions. Over the last several years, I have been a part of several conversations in which someone notes that a given church is involving women in one way or another. This is good, but it is my hope that the stories included in this issue will not only speak to what is going on but will also provide details about the process and how individual congregations are reaching the conclusions they are reaching. That is, these narratives may answer some of the "how" questions for those churches that want to move beyond conversations and change their practices. Each congregation's initial approach may be slightly different, but the outcomes are similar—that is, all are moving forward. With the exception of Brookline, none is totally gender-inclusive in regard to both public participation in worship and leadership. Also, it should be noted that the transitions that have been made thus far have often been challenging and difficult. Uncertainties and risks were a part of the processes. However, all the authors remain hopeful about the future.

The specific request to write their stories was open-ended. I asked each scholar-elder to answer the questions of what are women doing in your congregation and how did your congregation reach the decisions it reached? I suggested that the report include some chronology, theology and methods behind the transitions that have been made. I also asked them to summarize where things stand in their congregations today. Within those general parameters, the authors tell compelling stories. Here is a glimpse of each.

**JOHN WILLIS'** story about Highland talks about the process beginning in earnest in the late 1990s. At that time, Highland had about two thousand members and thirty-eight elders. Over a two-year period, the elders met with all members, discussed and studied how they might move forward. **PATRICK GRAHAM'**s account of the Northlake Church of Christ recalls that the beginnings of women speaking in public and sometimes in the pulpit go back to when they had two admired missionary women who would come back from the Honduran mission field and report on their work. **STUART LOVE** reports that the beginnings of change at the University Church can be dated informally to 1979 and formally to 1988. A key part of the process at Malibu was home Bible studies about the topic and later, home worship services that were gender-inclusive. **ROBERT RANDOLPH** has been a part of the Brookline Church since the late 1960s. His reflections on how that church came to incorporate women in every aspect of the church's life include the story of how they hired a woman to be a pulpit minister in the mid-1980s. **TOM ROBINSON AND AMY BOST HENEGER** share specific biblical and theological positions that were important in their congregation's studies. They also share an impressive number of blessings that have come because of gender inclusion. **KEN CUKROWSKI**, as a respondent to the congregational stories presented at the Christian Scholars' Conference, offers ten reflections on change. He notes that the reported changes toward gender inclusion came "*because of and not despite* scripture." This issue of *Leaven* also includes a fascinating study by **STEPHEN JOHNSON AND LYNETTE SHARP PENYA** (Abilene Christian University) of congregational practices related to gender inclusivity. The article is based on their national survey of Churches of Christ conducted in 2010. Their survey identified sixty-six congregations that claimed gender inclusion. In addition to many specific findings, they also found that the exploration of gender inclusivity has been going on for fifty years. We have also included sermons by **KATHY J. PULLEY** (mentioned above) and **D'ESTA LOVE**. D'Esta's sermon was preached in 2011 at the Manhattan Church of Christ.

I hope this issue stimulates thinking. Complete gender inclusion has a long way to go, but these reports indicate that progress is being made.

