



Wading into the Waters of Ministry

Meagan Gillan, executive minister of women ministries, shares her own journey of service in the church and encourages women to listen for God's call.

An inveterate tomboy as a kid, I loved to explore. My suburban world was bountifully stocked with tall stands of cattails, gummy ponds flashing with tadpoles, and deep woods laced with railroad tracks. Later my love of exploring took me into north woods, national parks, and desert expanses. Yet in all of these explorations, there was no clear destination wooing me. The pleasure was in the unknown, the potential treasures and delights that lay in wait, perfectly placed for the adventurer to stumble onto them.

Looking back, you could say that's how my call to ministry developed. A brave and trusting youth pastor invited me to serve for a summer, leading a program for kids ages ten and eleven. I was eighteen and had just finished my freshman year in college. "You plan it, Meagan," he said. "You figure out what

the kids want to do. Develop the program and let us know where it's going. We'll help you with the transportation and support, but you can do this." As I ministered that summer I waded deeper into the waters of ministry, trying my hand at other age groups, skills, and opportunities. Junior-high girls small group, weekly breakfast, bicycle trips, Bible study.

I am grateful for those years of permissibility, for opportunities to learn where my strengths and talents lay and which jobs were best designated for someone else. That love of ministry nudged me to take more Bible and theology classes in college. It pushed me to go deeper into God's word and God's world. In time, I found myself in full-time ministry, working with adjudicated juvenile delinquents in a locked state institution, blending my sociology major with my love for youth work



serve. Scot urged me to live into my call enthusiastically and faithfully, and I am so thankful for that. Yet along the way, I always felt there was more for me—more I wanted to explore, more training I wanted to gain, more to learn, more ways to serve God and advance his kingdom.

As our children grew, I returned to work but always felt the pull of ministry. In fact, that pull led me to begin seminary classes, where I thrived on opportunities to grow and explore further.

At the same time my career was demanding more of me, and it eventually won out. “Death by

Hebrew is not a pretty sight,” my professor told me. He was right.

Through all these experiences, it never occurred to me to question if I *should* serve in ministry. I never thought to parse who my audience was or to consider whether I would be breaking holy rule by speaking to this group or that. I simply knew it was the right path for my life. Whether in youth, children’s, or adult ministry; small groups; Sunday school; women’s ministry; denominational or conference boards—I have relished every opportunity God has offered. What a privilege it is to serve, and how grateful I am to have had such diverse ways to answer God’s call.

Two and a half years ago when the opportunity came to serve as the Covenant’s executive minister of women ministries, I was surprised and grateful that after decades of adapting my ministry call to my husband’s, I was now invited to serve in a separate role. And this role was based on who God had made *me* rather than who God had made *us*. Both are wonderful—but each affords a different experience.

I’m exploring still, trying out new

things, learning what is needed, what is wanted. This position gives me opportunity to encounter women in all kinds of roles, in the United States and Canada and in the world.

How fortunate we are to be a denomination that chose long ago to ordain women and to affirm their place in every role in the church. It has been meaningful and moving to watch my only daughter answer her call to pastoral ministry by stepping into the pulpit every week, at the

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same time nurturing, caring, planning, and leading. She and her peers and the courageous women who preceded them are gifted and good.

And yet. As I travel to Covenant congregations throughout the denomination, I see many lay women with extraordinary gifts, and I wonder if they are meant for more in God’s kingdom.

Women are often found in secret, in the background, in the back room, on the sidelines. And those serving functions are deeply important, as are the women who choose them. But what happens when women are able to explore other opportunities as I did under the watchful eye of my trusting youth pastor? What happens when women gather together and open themselves up to the prospects available to them—when they examine their lives listening for God’s call and discerning what shape that call has taken? We know that we are all called to God in salvation, and each one is called to service.

Many opportunities abound for women in the Covenant—as both cre-

Meagan Gillan is executive minister of women ministries for the Evangelical Covenant Church.

and the word of God. I loved it.

Fast-forward to marriage to a man who was never headed for ministry until an encounter with a Covenant church that loved him into the pastoral rather than the counselor’s chair. And there I was with a new title: ministry spouse. Pastor’s wife. The other half of the “We got two for the price of one”—an appellation that we found simultaneously flattering and awkward.

The journey of serving alongside my husband, Scot, in churches from Colorado to Kansas, Massachusetts to Arizona, and now Illinois has been wonderful. We have teamed up in a variety of ways, loving the privilege of serving together in ministry. When four children came along in rapid-fire succession, I became caregiver and he pursued ministry, always encouraging me to find the places I felt called to

denialed ministers and lay persons. In Women Ministries, we focus on a few key areas that deeply affect women. Through Advocacy for Victims of Abuse (AVA) we raise awareness and provide support for women impacted by any form of abuse—a significant population, for one in four women experiences some form of abuse by age eighteen. We provide a sound, biblically grounded healing Bible study/support group through our partnership with Mending the Soul (MTS), a nonprofit that offers training and resources to leaders, so that churches and individuals can advocate for survivors of abuse. MTS facilitators lead these vital, life-giving groups and also train women and men to conduct the groups. Unresolved abuse and unhealed woundedness deeply impact the health of our congregations; through AVA and MTS, we offer victims a pathway to health. These ministries require rigorous training, a devoted prayer life, and love for those who hurt. More than 2,500 people have received the basic AVA training, and thirty-eight regional coordinators continue to equip and educate Covenanters in the basics of domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse.

Other women are called to fight the scourge of human trafficking, and Break the Chains has provided a meaningful way to do that. We see many congregations engaging in this battle, and one way to do that is through the booklet *PROTECT: A Strategy to Prevent Human Trafficking in Our Communities*. Created by the Covenant's Human Trafficking Task Force, *PROTECT* offers informational articles as well as resources including agencies, ministries, and hotlines. Engaging this work, some congregations raise awareness, others connect with local ministries, others host anti-trafficking forums that pull in members of the community. What a valuable statement this makes to those

who do not know the love of God in Jesus Christ—that we are people who care enough to gaze steadily at such a heinous problem and stare it down, rather than turning away in fear or disgust.

Through Missional Moms, a brand-new initiative for us, we call all women to live missionally, connecting with other likeminded women and serving God's purposes in their communities. Missional Moms invites women to thoughtfully consider the cultural expectations placed on all women—and mothers in particular—and to respond by living fully into their calling to serve God and God's mission in their communities, families, and in the world. This initiative offers resources and opportunities that include full- or half-day conferences, Bible study resources, book clubs or online discussion groups, and mentoring relationships that connect women in multigenerational relationship for mutual sharing and encouragement.

Our desire is to see women in each congregation throughout the Covenant thriving and growing deeper in their discipleship and commitment to Jesus, as well as to be generating ministry for, by, and with women that is uniquely aligned with where God is taking their church. Through our newly updated Leader Development initiative, we aim to help raise up self-aware, biblically grounded, spiritually sound leaders who are vital assets to their faith communities. We want to see women deeply engaged in ministry, exploring their calls in ways that advance God's kingdom.

At Triennial XIV, held in August in San Diego, twenty women participated in an event called Exploring the Call. This pilot experience offered spiritual direction, Bible teaching, journaling, group prayer, and times of silence and listening to help participants listen to what God might be saying to them about their own call.

They learned about the many roles for which they could pursue training: Theological education? Yes. Certificate in spiritual direction? Yes. Training in youth and family ministry? You bet. Advocacy for victims of abuse? Definitely. Preparation to be a Mending the Soul facilitator? Absolutely. Going deeper in Christian formation? For sure. And for some, the answer is to continue in the roles they already play in their church, serving, teaching, and leading.

Exploring the Call is a project that we plan to refine and duplicate throughout the Covenant, to help many more women and men become equipped to advance God's kingdom and to call people to grow. Many of us will never know what treasures are waiting to be discovered until we go exploring.

In the Covenant we affirm that there is a place for every woman to explore how God is calling her to serve. How grateful I am personally for the freedom this affords each of us to discover new opportunities, open doors to service, and pathways to ministry. It's a great adventure indeed.



For more information on any of these initiatives, go to CovChurch.org/women.

For video of North Park Theological Seminary professors Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom and Klyne Snodgrass discussing call and scriptural texts about women, go to CovChurch.tv/exploringcall.