

## Some of Our Best 'Men' Are Women

By Dr. Fletcher Tink

"Some of our best 'men' are women," or so said Dr. Phineas F. Bresee, pivotal personality in the founding of the Church of the Nazarene a hundred years ago. Apparently, he wasn't uptight about women in leadership, even in the crazed centers of the city where his deaconesses would roam. Furthermore, he dared start ordaining women for ministry throughout the world.

Apparently, women in ministry weren't a big problem for Nazarenes in industrial Glasgow, Scotland in the early 20th century, where in 1912, according to the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Rev. Olive Winchester, an American, was ordained, the first female to receive ordination rites in Scotland in any denomination. Five years later, Rev. Jane Brayton Sharp was the first Scottish woman ordained, at the Parkhead Church where her husband served as founding pastor of British Isles Nazarene ministries. In turn, in 1924, their daughter, Agnes Kanema Hynd, wife of Dr. David Hynd, pioneer medical doctor to Swaziland, was the second to be recognized so.

The Bible doesn't pull punches on exhibiting a wide range of women engaged in unusual ministries: Miriam (Exodus 15:2-21), Deborah (Judges 4:4-14); Ruth; Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20), Esther; Anna (Luke 2:36-38), the woman at the well (John 4:7-29), Priscilla (in four references), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40), Junia (Romans 16:7), and Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:12). And Paul says about Phoebe, whom he commends to the church in Rome, "Receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me" (Romans 16:2). More information about women in ministry can be found in the publication, *Churches Starting Churches: Needed Missional-Minded Women to Start Churches* by Richard Houseal.



Dr. Nina Gunter

And now I am part of a denomination that has elected its first woman general superintendent, Dr. Nina Gunter, my alma mater's first female president, Dr. Corliss McGee, of Eastern Nazarene College and my former district's leader, Superintendent Rev. Jossie Owens, not only a woman, but an African-American from the bowels of Boston, now serving the New England District. Women are now breaking through the church glass ceiling as never before.



Dr. Corliss McGee

I contend that the urban environment offers a supreme challenge for women. Let me offer five speculative reasons:



Dr. Jossie Owens

1. The suburban ministry world is skewed towards white males who aspire to the comforts and convenience of "arriving" at large, financially secure churches that mirror their own cultural orientation. Given the "old boy network," there is a rash of urban male pastors that move on and out of the difficult city core, to options elsewhere, leaving ministry vacancies in older sections of the city. Women can fill the void.

2. The particular sensitivities and skills of women, nurtured over centuries of "care-giving" are especially conducive and appropriate for the dysfunctional needs of urban peoples in crisis. Not that these needs are exclusive to the inner city, but they are more publicly apparent.

3. An inordinate percentage of urban families are female-centered. Many of these families are church-involved. Female leadership both in the church and outside is given more credibility, and offers more rapport with the sociological realities of the inner city. A thousand store-front churches and beyond attest to the pervasive presence and power of women pastors.

4. Because women have frequently had to fight against the social currents to attain public responsibility, they often show tenacity and courage to improvise ministry and operate “outside of the box” in ways that allow them to contextualize where funds and fame are lacking. Their success depends less on skeptical denominational support than on spiritual gifting and community awareness.

5. In conflicting and dangerous situations, women are seen as less contentious and competitive than men, perhaps providing a special measure of protection and peacemaking skills. Whether it be Elizabeth Elliott living with her husband’s murderers in the Auca jungle, or Mother Teresa, standing up to the urban Brahmins in Kolkata (Calcutta), many Christian women leaders can enter when men do not dare.

The Church of the Nazarene has opted out of many of our cities. Perhaps it will take a wave of women, anointed by God, either with or despite the Church, to march into, or emerge within, our cities, providing uncanny experience and skills to help bring redemption to those who so desperately need it.