

Winter 2025

# CARING FOR THE SACRED CALL OF CLERGYWOMEN

*A Study of Clergywomen Experience  
in the Tennessee–Western  
Kentucky Conference*

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Prepared by

*The Cabinet and the Commission on the Status and Role of Women*

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# Introduction

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As we embark on a new quadrennium of ministry together, we write to share with you the results of the 2024 COSROW survey and to affirm the immeasurable value of clergywomen leadership in our conference and the Church.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences, opportunities, and challenges faced by clergywomen in our conference. Through the survey and subsequent focus groups, we heard from clergywomen across the TWK Conference, representing a wide range of ages, appointments, and ministry contexts. Each response provided invaluable insight into the joys and struggles of navigating God's call as a woman in ministry.

What we have learned is both inspiring and challenging. Clergywomen gifts and graces are bearing extraordinary fruit in our churches and communities. At the same time, the survey revealed persistent barriers and inequities that must be addressed to ensure that all clergywomen are supported, affirmed, and empowered in their ministry. From systemic issues such as pay equity and appointment opportunities to personal concerns such as mentorship and well-being, responses illuminate the ongoing work required to create a more just and inclusive Church.

The insights from this survey are not the conclusion of a conversation but a catalyst for deeper collaboration. COSROW and the Cabinet are committed to working together, in partnership with local churches, to advocate for systemic change within our conference. Already, we are exploring actionable steps to improve policies, provide resources, and foster a culture where clergywomen can thrive. We recognize that this work is ongoing and requires transparency, accountability, and partnership. We pledge to keep the lines of communication open and to engage with you regularly as we move forward together.

Clergywomen embody the gospel of Jesus Christ in unique and powerful ways. They preach, teach, serve, and lead with courage, creativity, and faithfulness. They inspire us and challenge us to be the Church God calls us to be. On behalf of COSROW and the Cabinet, we thank you for your ministry and your willingness to share your experiences through this survey.

We invite you to join us in this work. Please feel free to reach out to [cosrow@twkumc.org](mailto:cosrow@twkumc.org) with your thoughts, questions, or suggestions. Your insights will remain at the heart of our efforts as we strive to create a conference where every clergywoman is valued, supported, and equipped to fulfill her calling.

With gratitude and hope,

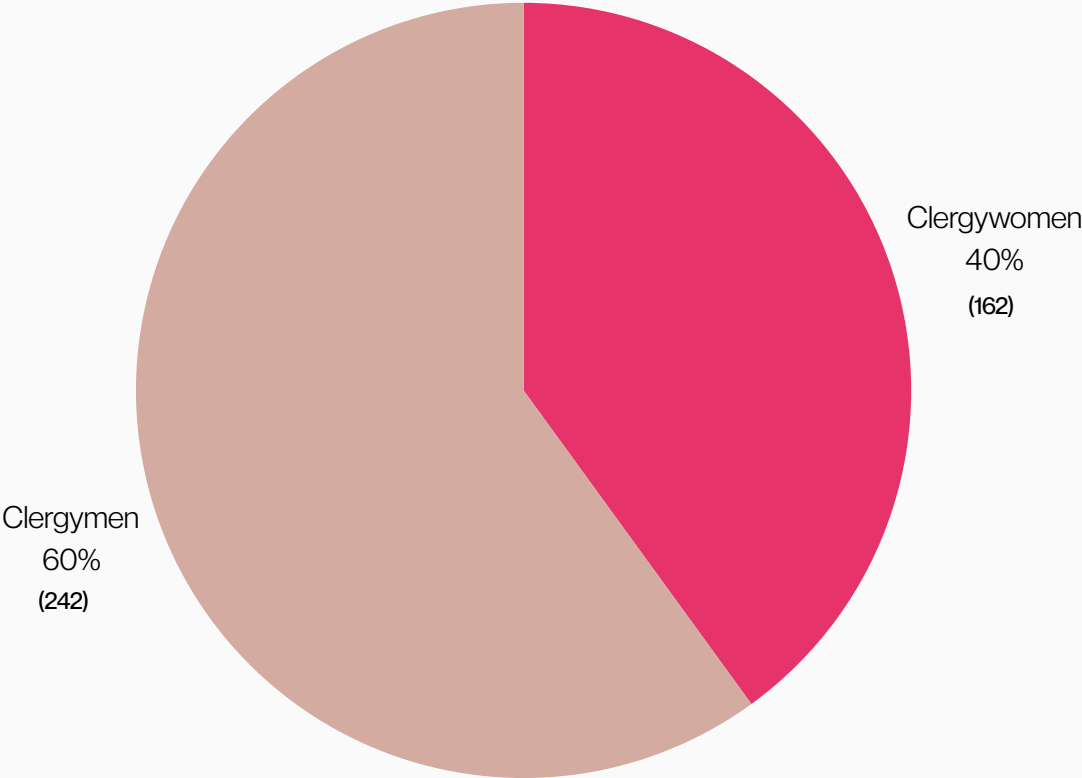


Rev. Pat Freudenthal  
Dean of the Cabinet



Rev. Sarah McWhirt-Toler  
COSROW Chair

# Clergy in the TWKUMC

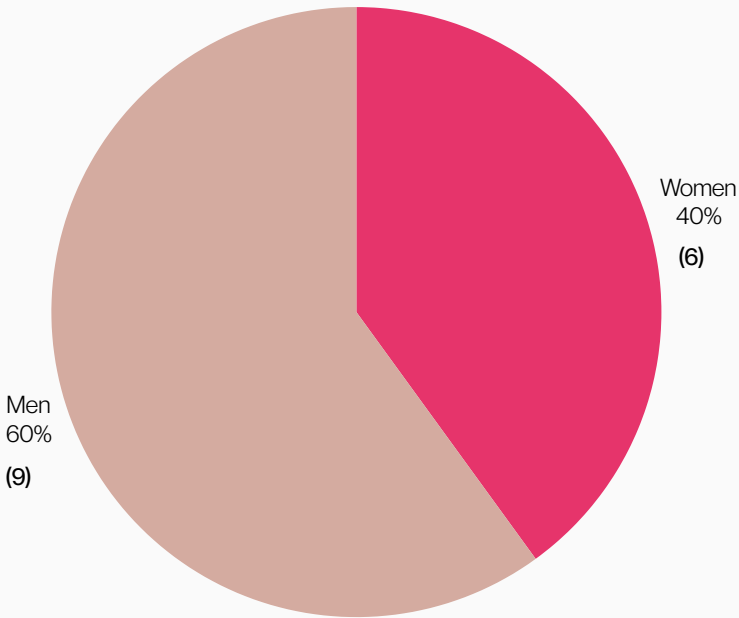


	Clergywomen	Clergymen
<b>Total Active Clergy</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>242</b>
Total Years Under Appointment	5.5	8.1
Years in Current Appointment	5.7	8.3
Base Compensation (Deacons)	\$65,641	\$80,072
Base Compensation (Elders)	\$87,489	\$93,636
Base Compensation (Local Pastors)	\$65,482	\$64,265

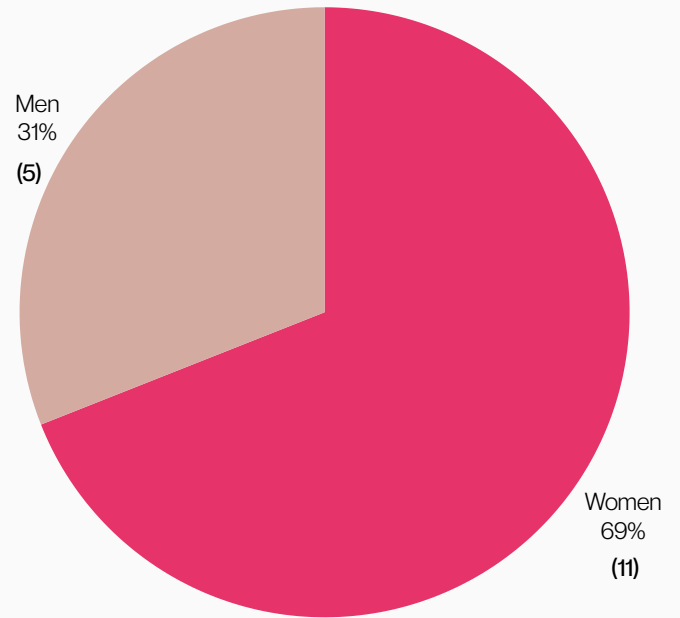
These base numbers represent the full-time and full-connection Licensed Local Pastors, Deacons, and Elders of the 2023 Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference. While for brevity's sake we have limited the report, we are willing and able to work with anyone who would like to further inquire into the data. Please email [kevin.crawford@twkumc.org](mailto:kevin.crawford@twkumc.org)

# Leadership Representation

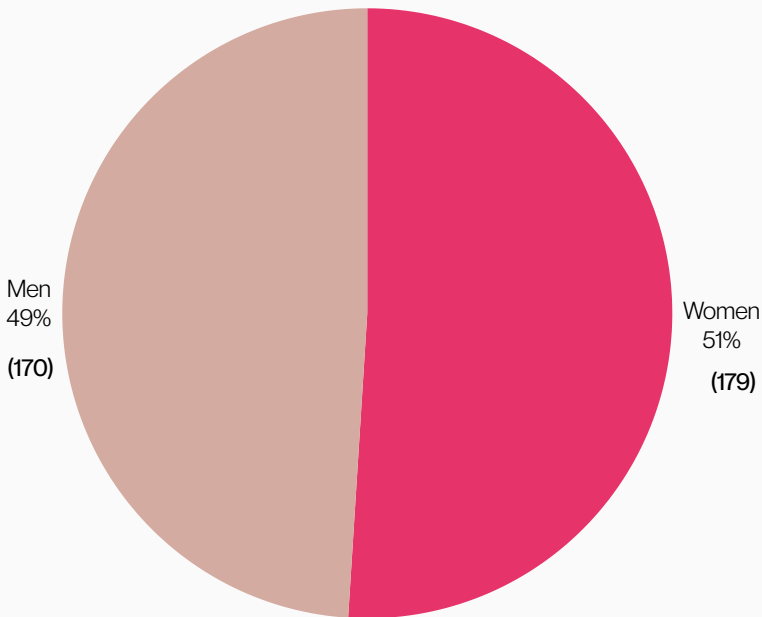
### Appointive Cabinet



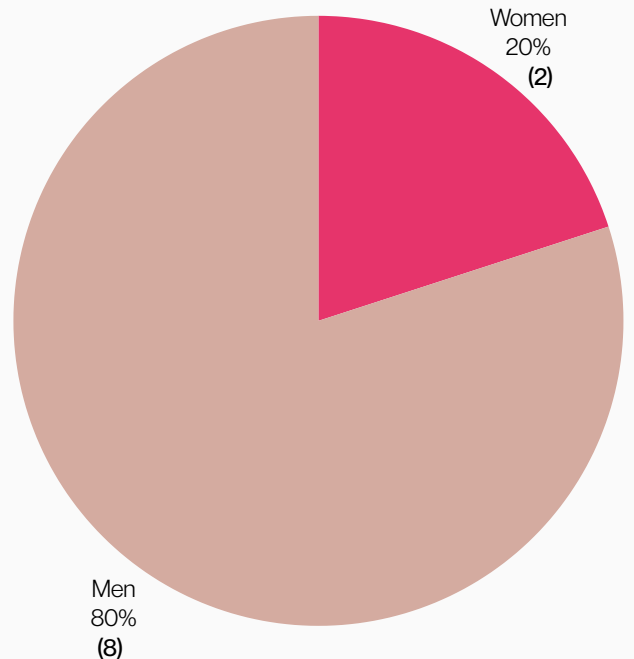
### Connectional Table



### Volunteer Leadership



### Senior Pastors of Top Ten Largest Congregations



# Clergywomen Survey



We asked clergywomen about their perceived access to leadership and growth opportunities in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference.

**32%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing women have the same financial opportunities to advance as men in the TWK Conference.

**41%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing that women have the same opportunities as men to advance professionally.

**41%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing women have the same opportunities as men to “have a seat at the table” (access to leadership and the ability to influence others).

**47%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing a church or employer has turned them down because of their gender.

# Supporting Clergywomen

We asked clergywomen about their support system.

Of respondents, most clergywomen rely often on trusted friends and family. 61 percent of clergywomen rely on a mental health therapist, 47 percent rely on spiritual director, 73 percent rely on church staff personnel, and 69 percent rely on a fellow cohort member. It should be noted that zero percent of clergywomen who identify as Black or African American seek support from a therapist; 20 percent from a spiritual director.



**85%**

of clergywomen respondents reported feeling supported by their District Superintendent



**61%**

of clergywomen respondents reported relying on a therapist



**47%**

of clergywomen respondents reported relying on a Spiritual Director



# Equal Treatment

We asked clergywomen if they believe they are treated equally to clergymen by others in our connection.

It should be noted that clergywomen serving in rural communities who completed the survey reported significantly less equal treatment in their context. Of clergywomen serving in rural communities, 25 percent believe women are treated mostly and totally equal by staff; 67 percent by volunteers; 50 percent by Finance Committee members.

**78%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing they are treated equally by the Staff Parish Committee Members

**76%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing they are treated equally by staff and volunteers

**75%**



of clergywomen respondents reported believing they are treated equally by Trustees or Finance Committee Members

**73%**



of clergywomen reported believing they are treated equally by congregants

# A Call for Action

All of us share responsibility for nurturing the sacred call of ALL people, including our clergywomen in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference. Below are the identified action steps to which our Cabinet and COSROW are committed. COSROW and Cabinet will meet annually to review progress on these action steps.

## Cabinet

The TWK Cabinet have set the following goals in response to the survey presented:

**SPEAK OUT** when congregations want to reduce the compensation when receiving female leadership.

**ADVOCATE** against/educate when congregations refuse female leadership.

**LISTEN.** Use better questioning techniques when in conversations with women clergy so that we can listen to their stories. Use questions such as, "I would be curious to know...", "Please tell me more...", etc. Hold ourselves accountable for learning to listen better and acting on what we hear.

**SCHEDULE** regular dialogue with COSROW and Cabinet where we have authentic conversations.

**BE** willing to be vulnerable enough to learn.

## COSROW

The TWK Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) is committed to full participation and inclusion of women in the total life of the United Methodist Church. We're helping the church recognize every person as full and equal parts of God's human family. Here is what we are prioritizing this quadrennium:

**ADVOCATE** for TWK clergywomen, including family leave, access to leadership, transparency in appointments and salaries.

**CONNECT** women in ministry across the TWK through in-person gatherings and quarterly newsletters.

**RESOURCE** clergy and local churches with tools to prevent and respond to harassment and sexual misconduct.



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# A Call for Action (continued)

Additional action steps have been identified for local church Staff Parish Relations Committees (SPRCs), clergymen and clergywomen to consider.

## Staff Parish Committees

- **Comment on substance and not appearance.**  
As you leave the sanctuary or a meeting and you have something to say to your female pastor, make it something of substance. Perhaps you heard the scripture in a way which really spoke to you. Tell her that. Do not: comment on the color of her nail polish, recommend that she not wear pants, etc.
- **Be an advocate.** If you are in a position where you see or hear something that crosses the line, say something. When someone invades your pastor's space or treats her disrespectfully, say something. Make it clear to friends and church members that we all have a responsibility to make sure our clergy are never treated in ways that might diminish them or their work.
- **Set fair salaries.** It is an unacceptable practice to reduce the pastoral salary because a pastor is female. The salary is set in consultation with the District Superintendent who can help guide this conversation.
- **Prepare to welcome women clergy.** All churches--whether they are currently appointed a female clergyperson or not-- should take steps to prepare to welcome women clergy in the future. Explore a COSROW onboarding resource, [welcomingthewomanpastor.org](http://welcomingthewomanpastor.org)

## Male Clergy Colleagues

- **Close the wage gap.** When salary disparities exist on your staff, find ways to raise the clergywomen's salary or sacrifice some of your own to make take home pay more equitable.
- **Amplify the voices of female clergy and ministry leaders.** Work toward gender balance in worship and congregational leadership. Intentionally seek out the perspective of female clergy and ministry leaders. And, share credit liberally with clergywomen when genuine and appropriate.
- **Know when to talk, and when not to talk.** Be mindful of who is dominating conversations.

## Clergywomen

**Lean on your resources.** There are many available to clergywomen in the TWK, including support with onboarding, mentorship, and navigating incidents of harrassment. COSROW can help you access all of these and more. Contact COSROW Chair Rev. Sarah McWhirt-Toler at [cosrow@twkumc.org](mailto:cosrow@twkumc.org)

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# Contact Us

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## *Commission on the Status and Role of Women*

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