

**All the Single Ladies, All the Single Ladies<sup>†</sup>:  
Young Clergywomen's Experiences**

By

Caitlin Emma Louise Ratcliffe

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Approved: The Rev. Canon Dr. Jody  
Clarke  
Associate Professor of  
Pastoral Theology

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## Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

AST REB File number:	0142016
Title of Research Project:	All the single ladies, All the single ladies: Young Clergywomen's Experiences
Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Jody Clarke
Student Investigator	Cate Ratcliffe

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

Approval Period: 30 November 2016 to 16 April 2017

Dated this 30th day of November, 2016 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Dr. Alyda Faber  
Chair, Research Ethics Board  
Atlantic School of Theology  
660 Francklyn Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3H 3B5

# **All the Single Ladies, All the Single Ladies: Young Clergywomen's Experiences**

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## **Abstract:**

This qualitative research study examines the experience of young, single clergywomen in congregations across Canada. Because women have only been able to serve as ordained clergy in certain denominations in the last few generations, many young women are pioneers in their contexts today. The addition of the modern secular 'hookup culture' adds another layer of challenge for these young clergywomen. Using hermeneutical phenomenology as a method, participants were interviewed about their experiences in ministry. The selected participants were ordained clergy actively serving a congregation, female, identified as single, and were under 30 years of age. Some themes addressed in the context of this study are loneliness, dating, stress, and boundaries, all of which impact the well-being of the clergyperson, and, ultimately, their congregation and the Church as a whole.

## **Introduction**

Ministry is a sector that has historically been dominated by men, and more recently, by middle-aged men. Despite Christianity having existed for millennia, women being involved in prominent leadership roles, and indeed being involved in the workforce at all, is a relatively new phenomenon. The reality is, women are quickly rising up the ranks, in both the church and in secular contexts, and we are beginning to see an increase in younger women being raised up into ministry. This is not so different from the generations of young men who went into ministry before, and yet this generation of young women is a new phenomenon, one that comes with its own benefits, challenges, and realities.

One of the first questions I am asked when someone finds out that I am studying to become a priest, after the comment "But you're so young!", is "Does this mean you can't get married?!" This question has come from friends, family, acquaintances, and even complete strangers. I will preface this by saying that I am not in a serious

relationship and have no vision of marriage on the horizon, but apparently just about everyone around me is concerned for the viability of my inevitable impending future nuptials. I have reassured each person who has asked me that yes, I am young, and, yes, I can, in fact, potentially get married someday.

As I have moved through my studies at the Atlantic School of Theology, and that question has followed me throughout my time, I have been increasingly curious about what it will be like to be a young woman in ministry, what my supports will be, what dating will be like, and what pressures will be placed upon me. Because of the general demographics at AST, there were few opportunities for me discuss these sorts of things, or look at them from an academic perspective, which prompted me to examine this question for my Grad Project.

### **Research Question**

What is the experience of young, single clergywomen?

### **Purpose and Relevance of the Research Question**

The purpose of this research question was to explore the realities of being a young, single clergywoman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The well-being of any clergy person directly impacts the well-being of their congregation, their church as a whole, and their wider community. Relationships, whether romantic or otherwise, play a large part in an individual's well-being, and these relationships can be challenging for clergy to establish in the context of a new congregation, often because of boundaries and other associated regulations.

The predominant secular culture regarding relationships today is that of the hookup culture, which can be defined as “sexual encounters between strangers or brief

acquaintances, in which there is no anticipation of a continued relationship.”<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the last decade, with the increase in technology, social media, and online dating, the hookup culture has increased. This is the secular culture with which many young women today are faced, and one which does not always fall in line with the perceived stance of the Church. Young clergywomen are left to try to make sense of both categories together, that of their peers, and that of their vocation. This experience is not unique to clergywomen, nor is it necessarily unique to young, single women, and yet the overlapping of these two categories is one which could not be ignored.

The research involved a series of eight open-ended questions, which provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect upon and articulate their experiences of being a young, single clergywoman and the world of dating. All of the participants expressed that this is not something they frequently have an opportunity to discuss, which added another layer of value to the process of the interview.

For the wider community, this study will improve understanding of the experience of young, single clergywomen, which hopefully will lead to a consideration of these factors when working with and supporting young, single clergywomen. Additionally, this study may bring into view the forces that impact this group of clergy, and offer churches and congregations ways in which they can support young clergywomen, while also addressing ways in which they unintentionally undermine that intended support.

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<sup>1</sup> Tina Penhollow, Michael Young, and William Bailey, "Relationship Between Religiosity and 'Hooking Up' Behavior," *American Journal of Health Education* 38, no. 6 (2007): 338, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795608.pdf>.

## Methodology

Before delving into the research, a literature review and theological reflection were drafted (please see Appendices 2 and 3 respectively). Because this topic is based on individual experiences, the best-suited methodology was found to be phenomenology, specifically hermeneutical phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses on studying the subjective experience of those who have undergone a particular phenomenon, through the process of interviewing several individuals about their experience and then compiling data to try and comprehend the essence of the experience, or develop a “grasp of the very nature of the thing”.<sup>2</sup> By incorporating the hermeneutical perspective, the research focuses on the interpretation of the “texts of life,” or the hermeneutics, of the subjects being interviewed.<sup>3</sup> The focus of this research is on the unique lived experience of clergywoman.

To recruit participants, this study called upon the resources of several Research Consultants. With the aid of the Consultants, word of the study was spread on social media, using private and pertinent groups such as the “Canadian Anglican/Lutheran Clergy Born in 1973 or Later” group or “The Young Women Clergy Project” group on Facebook. Interested participants were invited to contact the researcher via email, and said email account was private and password-protected, used only for academic purposes.

The initial intention of this project was to examine the experience of clergywomen within the Anglican Church of Canada. As participants began to come forward, it became

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<sup>2</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, ON: The University of Western Ontario, 1990), 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

clear that there were simply not enough participants that fit within the primary category. The research was broadened to incorporate clergywomen from any denomination.

Data was collected through individual interviews via video chat, as participants lived across Canada. These interviews took place online, with the researcher sitting in a confidential area. Prior to the interview, each participant was presented with an informed consent form, and were asked to sign it. Prior to the commencement of the interview, each participant was invited to review the consent form, highlighting the fact that they may refrain from answering a question, end the interview, or withdraw from the research at any point. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Notes were taken during these interviews, and they were also recorded using a combination of video and audio. The interviews were transcribed to text and then were analysed, separating the data into overarching themes or categories that resonated throughout the interviews.

Data analysis in any form of qualitative research involves “preparing and organizing the data,” “reducing the data into themes through a process of coding,” and representing said data in some form of final product.<sup>4</sup> From a phenomenological perspective, this involves describing “the essence of the phenomenon,” grouping statements into “meaning units” or themes, and interpreting the data by developing a textural description, or the “what” of the phenomenon, a structural description or “how” the phenomenon was experienced, and finally by presenting the detailed description of the phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-60.

The importance of confidentiality was emphasized and maintained throughout this process. Participants selected pseudonyms for themselves, which were to be used if necessary. Although the participants ranged in age from twenty-four to twenty-eight, a median age of twenty-six was selected to be used in instances when it was referenced. For the purposes of anonymity, denominational phrases have been edited out, with terms such as “minister” and “congregation” being used. There was a mix of clergywomen serving in urban and suburban parishes across the country. All data has been stored in a secure location and electronic resources on a password-protected computer. Upon completion of the final written report, data will be given to the Graduate Research Project supervisor, the Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke, and he will securely store the data for one year, at which point it will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis and Emerging Themes**

Many of the participants had similar experiences in their ministry thus far, which can be grouped into certain categories. Although much of what was addressed in the interviews pertained to frustration and struggles within the context of ministry, all of the participants also spoke to the joys of serving in ministry. They each had a sense of call, and were living it out through their vocation as ministers in their churches. At the same time, each participant spoke to comments made about when they were going to “settle down,” or about starting a family, or trying to set them up with someone. It became clear that although they are actively serving their congregations now, their congregants would also like to see them filling the traditional roles of wife and mother. From their experiences, five major themes arose: Boundaries and Professionalism, Perception, Loneliness, Sex and Dating, and the Search for a New Norm.

## **Boundaries and Professionalism**

One of the topics that recurred in the interviews with the participants was that of boundaries, particularly connected to professionalism. Some of these boundaries revolved around the necessity to create strong boundaries for their own personal safety, with participants discussing the precautions they take to ensure their safety as young women living alone. One participant discussed her practice of only answering her front door in her home, because, as she put it, “then if they do come in and attack me, people can see from the road my front door, but they can’t see my back door”. Although to some, these precautions may seem odd, these are realities faced by women known to be living alone in the twenty-first century.

Precautions are also taken when dating, both to avoid the taboo of dating those connected to the church and to ensure personal safety when dating. All of the participants spoke of the taboo around dating congregants or those connected to the church, a topic that, according to one participant, “so many of my mentors had, like, drilled into me”. It was addressed that sometimes well-meaning colleagues broach the subject of the taboo on dating parishioners entirely out of the blue, often unnecessarily. As one participant put it, “[m]y perception is that those conversations are happening among the younger clergy. Which to me is so ironic because none of the younger clergy are dating their parishioners. We’re all finding our dates on dating apps who aren’t connected to the church, but you guys [older clergy] have all fallen in love with your parishioners and are really fearful about this, so it’s kind of an interesting conversation.” Although an important and helpful boundary to consider, this participant also expressed that all of this discussion had caused her to be hyperaware, overly cautious, and even awkward when dealing with congregants in the early stages of her ministry.

It had been noted that challenges often *increase* for clergywomen placed in rural congregations – which is a reality many young clergywomen face – and which can create a fishbowl effect in many communities.<sup>6</sup> Because rural communities are so small, it is not uncommon for the entire community to experience this “fishbowl” effect, however it was particularly addressed by some of the participants in their experience. It was noted that, at times, it can feel like being a small-scale celebrity, with one participant noting that people make comments along the lines of “I heard about you, I hear lots about you all the time,” and noted that often people she encounters “know more of the information than I do. I don’t even remember half the things they mention.” This can lead to feelings of frustration, as was expressed in the statement “some days I find the expectations, and the being in the public light, and the lack of privacy really difficult. Some days I wish that I was a nobody on the street. Or that nobody knew me.”

Even in the context of urban settings, personal boundaries in the church can be a challenge. One participant noted that “[i]t’s kind of assumed that my personal life is open for commentary,” and that “[as] clergy, [people] are much more involved and people are more interested. The nature of the work is quite relational and you share a lot about your personal relationships just in conversations.” Another participant stated that “people are interested, and they want me to be happy in terms of my dating life,” but that “people stick their noses a little too far. I understand their concern and their intent, like they want me to be happy and their intent is really great, but part of me is hesitant because of how much involvement might happen before they get ahead of themselves.” Another

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, "A Complex Life," in *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 37.

participant questioned “whether or not it’s better to keep your private life completely separate, or if there is a benefit to recognizing that working as a minister is just a totally different work environment,” and spoke to not knowing what the ‘norm’ for that would be, or what the expectations of the church would be in that area. One participant spoke about the need of keeping her private life private, and keeping everything behind closed curtains, saying that “[i]t’s like I don’t want people to see that part of my world. Like, I probably wouldn’t hold hands with someone. I probably wouldn’t show that...maybe if I was married? Maybe not even then.” This participant went on to talk about the fact that “part of following Christ and being the body of Christ is about looking out for one another in different aspects of our life” but that “at the same time, there’s a certain amount of boundaries that are healthy and that are safe and that are good for everyone.” Finding the line between secrecy and privacy seemed to be a struggle for most of the participants.

Boundaries also were addressed regarding balancing one’s time, and the challenges connected to that. One participant lamented that “it’s a very, very demanding job. And it’s easy to get caught up in the work and not find a lot of time for your own love life, friend life, whatever.” Finding the time to strike this balance, through the creation of boundaries, was very important to the participants. Several participants discussed the idea of being constantly on call, meaning that they may have to stop whatever they are doing at any given moment. Participants also spoke to the stress of expectations placed upon them, either by themselves or that they perceived from others, and how to live into those expectations.

## Perceptions and Assumptions

Young clergywomen are dancing between two worlds, that of their peers, and that of their churches. Sometimes the two coincide, and other times there is a striking disparity. This is particularly evident in the concept of identity, and the ways in which these clergywomen perceive themselves. Although each of the participants identify as ministers, and do not have qualms with fitting into this role, there tends to be a desire to fit into the category of “normal people,” as one participant put it, liking and being able to discuss topics that pertain to things outside of the church context. It was also noted “I can have a relationship. I can have a family. I do listen to the music that everybody else listens to on the radio and watch TV the same as everybody else. It’s not that I’m disconnected from the world.” Some of these stereotypes can become stumbling blocks in the lives of young clergywomen.

There are many assumptions made about ministers, particularly by those who are not active church-attenders. One participant noted of people who do not often attend church that “they really do have the image of the minister being this old, balding white guy.” Even within the context of the congregation, they are often seen predominantly, if not solely, in the role of minister. As one participant stated, with some annoyance:

there’s sometimes this idea where because I’m a minister I’m seen more as the office of minister rather than as myself... It’s kind of like that idea of kids thinking that the teacher lives at school. There’s a sense that the minister sort of lives at the church, and in some ways it kind of feels like that. You know, there is kind of this sense that my office is who I am. Which I am. I am a minister in that office. But, at the same time, there’s more to me than just the person who preaches and does funerals and does weddings.

Often these clergywomen want to be able to be seen as human beings outside of their role as clergy.

Each of the participants identified that at various points in their ministry they have worried about what others think of them or how they are perceived by others. They each readily admitted that their own expectations or believed perceptions of others were more intense than they needed to be, with most admitting that they are a “people-pleasers” or worry about the judgement of others. One participant stated that “I would say my expectations are probably stronger or more in-depth or harder on myself than what the congregation’s are,” while another expressed that there is “[a] lot of pressure to perform,” and that, at times, she “felt like all my public appearances as it were, like from the pulpit or presiding or meetings, had to be perfect.” This additional level of pressure can add stress for young clergywomen. One participant stated about perceived pressure that “I wouldn’t say it’s all them, I’d say some of it’s in my mind as well.” This perceived pressure relates to the clergywomen’s desire to present themselves in a way that will be acceptable to their congregation. It was also discussed that one participant feared before ordination that being a young, single clergywoman would be “a big deal”, but states that “I think half of the congregation forgets that I’m single. I think it’s only me that really notices it,” and that “it’s more I notice my singleness and youngness more than other people do.” The participants acknowledged that much of the pressure they feel is self-imposed, however pressure can be exerted from the outside as well.

Particular pressure pertaining the ways in which the young clergywomen act or dress came up. One participant stated that “there is kind of a sense that you’ve gotta dress a certain way” and that although she tries to break down these barriers as much as she can, she finds that “there are still things that I do as a young clergy that I kind of do to pacify the masses.” Congregants will often comment on the physical appearance of young clergywomen, typically under the guise of being caring or compassionate, and often at the

expense of other conversation. One participant spoke to the frustration of “having people comment on your appearance rather than ‘Your sermon was really interesting this morning.’” These comments can even come across as a violation at times. One participant told a story of her first Sunday in her congregation when someone told her how suited she was for family and children’s ministry, while visibly looking her up and down. She remembered thinking “Oh, I feel so violated.” This sense that the bodies of young, single clergywomen belong to others for observation and comment certainly makes people feel uncomfortable.

### **Loneliness**

One of the biggest issues of being single and in ministry is that of loneliness. As much joy as ministry brings, it can also be an exhausting job. For many single clergy, solace can be sought in friendship outside of their congregation, however some participants spoke to wanting more. They were also quick to offer that relationships are about more than the physical side of things, but to offer support, and to help hold people accountable. As one participant stated, “I wonder if people take into account how hard it is to be a single clergy and not have that support.” She continued, “it’s really important for me to spend time with someone, for me to receive hugs, physical touch is really important. As is thoughtful things like cooking meals or bringing me a coffee. Thoughtful things are comfort, this job is so high-stress and busy.” Later this participant lamented “I give everything to God, I just wish God could send some people in my life, or a person in my life who could give to me.” Another participant spoke to this idea, stating that “[t]here is a sense of loneliness, no matter how hard you try to avoid it, there is a sense of that.” There is a desire for kinship within this group, a desire to know that “there are other

people out there like me. I am not an anomaly.” Simply knowing that they are not the only person experiencing these challenges could be beneficial to young clergywomen across the country.

There is a sense of otherness within this group of young clergywomen. It is as if while young clergywomen do not fully belong in their generational demographic, they also do not fully belong in the world of their congregants. Because the majority of their social interaction typically tends to take place with those who are a generation or more older than they are, it can be hard to relate to peers. Many of today’s young adults do not attend church or have any experience with church, so finding a common ground in that field would be rare. Simultaneously, there can be the challenge of being significantly younger than their congregants, which can alienate young clergywomen from the experiences that coincide with that generation. There is also the additional consideration of boundaries. As one participant lamented, “ministry is lonely. As much as you are with people, there is a sense that even the people you’re closest with in your congregation, you’re never fully on the friend level. You can never fully share all of your feelings.” The need to maintain a pastoral relationship with congregants eliminates the ability to create a true friendship, as the two generally cannot be held simultaneously, which adds to the loneliness felt by young clergywomen.

This sense of loneliness in relationships with congregants is exacerbated for many by the lack of a romantic partner. When this partnership is lacking and creates loneliness, this can impact both the well-being of the individual, and the well-being of their church as a whole. As pastor and scholar Carolyn A. Crawford states, “for many singles who are in ministry the fact of ‘being alone’ leads to loneliness,” which can lead to a host of

unwanted coping mechanisms to avoid this sentiment.<sup>7</sup> Humans are not intended to be alone or without a support network. As early as the Book of Genesis we see that humans are intended to work together. God even says “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” (Gen. 2:18).<sup>8</sup> We see in both the gospel of Mark and Luke that Jesus, in commissioning his disciples to go out in pairs, implicitly addressed this loneliness (Mar. 6:7, Luk. 10:1). Perhaps this was to guard against the inevitability of being alone in such emotionally taxing work as ministry.

### **Dating and Sex**

It is speculated that “attitudes regarding premarital sex have become more permissive over time,” and that this may be connected “to a decline in religious values.”<sup>9</sup> The hookup culture has become quite prominent in North American secular culture, and has become somewhat of a societal expectation, which can be challenging for those who do not wish to engage in premarital sexual encounters to date in the same way as their peers.

All of the participants spoke to the reality of the hookup culture, and the challenges faced by being someone who is not interested in participating in it. One participant expressed that before going into ministry “I was scared of the hookup culture and the way things are” and that “I’m not a fan, but it is reality.” Another participant stated that “I found it very difficult to meet men who would even entertain anything but a

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<sup>7</sup> Carolyn A. Crawford, “Ministry from a Single Perspective: Assets and Liabilities,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 42, no .2 (1988): 121, accessed October 13, 2016, doi: 10.1177/002234098804200203.

<sup>8</sup> All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Penhollow, Young, and Bailey, "Religiosity and 'Hooking Up'," 340.

hookup approach to dating.” Another participant questioned the entire concept, stating “I don’t get the whole idea. I think sex is something you have with somebody that you have a strong relationship with already.” Despite not necessarily wanting to engage in the hookup culture, all of the participants recognized that it is a reality today.

One participant told a story about one of her experiences with the prevalent hookup culture. She had gone out with a group of friends, one of whom she thought was “cute.” She explained that he was

being super nice and knew I was Christian and studying to be a minister. [H]e would give me all these Bible quotes, and he would flirt with me using religion and all this sort of thing, and I thought it was really cute and adorable and fun. So we went for a little walk outside, and he kissed me, and that was nice, and then he turned around and was like “Hey, can I come home with you tonight?” And I was like “Where did you get the impression that that’s what I would do?!”

She remembers being surprised, and stated that she had not experienced this being “considered normal” or casual, and that “[i]t wasn’t actually what I was used to. I hope if a person gets to know me enough, and really would consider being with me because they know that’s what I want, then they would just...not do that. Or expect that.” There seems to be a conflicting ideal for these young clergywomen, where they want to be viewed as ‘normal’, and yet do not wish to engage in all of the common practices of today’s secular society.

In a study undertaken in the late 1990s, it was noted that over sixty percent of single clergywomen believe that being ordained negatively impacts their intimate relationships for a variety of reasons, including that “men are threatened by the thought of dating an ordained woman,” and the overwhelming demands on their time as clergy.<sup>10</sup> The participants had a wide range of experiences pertaining to this, from statements like

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<sup>10</sup> Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, "A Complex Life," 35.

“the fact that I studied and I am a minister now has never been a concern for any man that I’ve met yet,” to “I knew it was a complete turn-off to just name myself as a minister. And I’m proud of who I am as a minister. But it kind of puts the kibosh on dating,” to being seen as “this exotic person to date... kind of almost like this notch you didn’t have in your belt.” Much of the dating world for the participants seemed to fall into breaking down the barriers and assumed stereotypes of their roles as ministers.

Although each participant has experimented with online dating, none of them particularly enjoyed it, nor did they hope this was where they would meet their potential partner. One participant expressed that her experiences were not always enjoyable, and that “it was frustrating on both sides because I would kinda go into it being a bit more naïve and not realizing what the expectations were, and then the other person would go into it just assuming that, you know, you’re on this dating app so you’re clearly open to the hookup culture that goes along with it.” This led to what she deemed “like a discouraging 100 bad first dates.” This same participant commented that “On the whole, though, I think it comes down to how you approach the apps. I have a number of Christian friends who are women who are on these apps, and have found them just much more freeing because everything is so up front.” Although most participants spoke to the positive sides of dating apps, they all stated that they would prefer to meet people through friends.

Another participant expressed that in reading people’s online dating profiles, it becomes clear that they are interested in hooking up, rather than having a relationship. She explained that,

so often if you read between the lines that’s all what it’s all about. It’s like ‘I’m a big, muscular guy, and I like to work out a lot, and maybe we could meet up.’ And the people that you’d constantly get messages from, you could tell that’s what

they wanted, was just to have sex. And it's just, like, there's so much more to relationships than sex. No matter what your views on premarital sex are, there's so much more to it, and I find so often when it comes to online dating it's kind of an unwritten rule that that's what people are there for.

Because this was not what she was interested in, she found it difficult to meet others with similar standards on these apps.

Two of the participants in particular talked about the frustrations with having to break the stereotypes associated with ministers while online dating. One participant spoke about the fact that once people found out she was a minister, "it's like the mood changes." People often come into these conversations with certain beliefs or expectations about what ministers can and cannot do, particularly that they are subject to a strict and unyielding set of rules that are atypical in the twenty-first century. This participant spoke to the desire to explain to people that "I'm not a nun, we're not breaking the rules by me dating." She also expressed that,

it can be exhausting to have to get all of that out of the way before we can talk about *Game of Thrones* or the new Drake album. To get to the stuff that we can definitely have in common. Because there's the sense that the common ground is the movies, the books, what's going on in the news sort of thing that everybody else talks about too. So having to get it out of the way, trying to get past that is exhausting.

The other expressed the challenge that, by labelling yourself as a Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on dating sites, people often get matched with "men who held to more conservative beliefs" and often "weren't affirming of women in ministry or leadership positions." She stated that although some of them "came around", or "were, like, 'I'm going to be flexible on this because I think you're a great person' or 'I want to learn more'," she expressed that in these situations, "the onus was still on me to educate them or to present a compelling enough view for them to become affirming of women in ministry," which, as she put it, is "just a lot of pressure in a dating relationship when

you're trying to do everything else that comes with it." Online dating can come with other challenges and frustrations, such as an example of a single clergywoman labelling herself as a minister within the context of online dating, and ending up feeling like "the chaplain of Match.com" because of all of the pastoral care that resulted when potential matches found out she was a minister.<sup>11</sup> This can certainly add additional pressure, and may not help to alleviate the loneliness these women are seeking to remedy.

Those who lived in rural communities voiced the challenge of dating within their community, outside of the context of their church and congregation, because everyone tends to be quite interconnected. The problem becomes that "to get out of your community, the only days you can really do that are if you don't have something else scheduled, say on an evening, or it's your day off. And even then, if somebody calls that morning and says "So-and-so's dying, please come to the hospital," your day off gets postponed. So it's hard to set up a date." This adds an extra layer of challenge to the dating scene, on top of the geographical distance from people who they feel are acceptable to date, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

### **Search for a New Norm**

There is a certain search for a new "norm" in the twenty-first century, though it is unclear what that new norm might be. One participant stated that "[sex is] a natural part

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<sup>11</sup> Ashley-Anne Masters and Stacy Smith. "Romancing the Reverend: Singleness, Sex, Divorce, and Dating." In *Bless Her Heart: Life as a Young Clergy Woman*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011. Accessed October 20, 2016. [https://books.google.ca/books?id=gJxika93YlsC&pg=PT34&lpg=PT34&dq=bless+her+heart:+single+ministers&source=bl&ots=YrDJ8qmlB&sig=3JD4IlWB8YAi8R4Z1YyC9I3\\_SnI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit5MPOxvTPAhWL14MKHVcoBUcQ6AEIODAI#v=onepage&q=congregation&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?id=gJxika93YlsC&pg=PT34&lpg=PT34&dq=bless+her+heart:+single+ministers&source=bl&ots=YrDJ8qmlB&sig=3JD4IlWB8YAi8R4Z1YyC9I3_SnI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit5MPOxvTPAhWL14MKHVcoBUcQ6AEIODAI#v=onepage&q=congregation&f=false).

of where we are when we're human, but the church is often taking the stance that most of that happens after marriage." Another comment was "For me, it's like a don't ask, don't tell, and leave it between the two partners and what they want to make a decision about together that they think is loving and respectful to their beliefs." One participant summed up the struggle quite well, saying

I think sometimes that whole "Don't have sex until you're married or you're a terrible sinner" is not helpful. And then "Oh, it's fun and it's loving, do what you like" is also maybe not helpful either. And so where is the truth in the midst of that? And as you're trying to find the truth, what do you do or not do? And do you ever know what the truth is? It's hard waters to navigate.

Knowing what is expected of them, or how others address certain concepts, and this search for what is normal was addressed by all of the participants. There seems to be a lack of communication felt, particularly regarding the stance of the Church on topics pertaining to today's secular culture. One of the biggest discrepancies seems to be pertaining to sex, with most participants having an unclear understanding of what the Church's perspective is about sex. One participant, despite spending a good chunk of our time talking about sex stated that "I think even talking about it makes me uncomfortable, because I don't know what the church's position is, because I'm worried about judgement, because I worry about where God stands on it." Being unsure of the church's stance, and even being unsure of her own stance, was not unique to this participant.

There was discussion that, although standards may be shifting for laypeople, clergy are held to a different standard. In the Roman Catholic Church, which has seemingly carried over into many people's interpretations of Protestant clergy, priests remain celibate, and the "priesthood has not infrequently been treated as a sort of third sex or intersex. It has been assigned gender roles that mix or confuse ordinary gender

expectations."<sup>12</sup> One participant noted that "I think there's been more development in the church's perspective on sex, certainly at a lay level than maybe clergy or upper hierarchy of the church are aware of, so I think it's maybe becoming more normalized than we might think." Another participant commented "I know we're held to a higher moral standard, but I can't figure out what that higher moral standard is," which caused her to struggle and feel conflicted. Another participant commented that "there is that kind of sense of clergy being removed from the sexual field, obviously we all know once we get married, you know, people have kids, but there is a sense that for clergy, sex is a necessary thing to have kids, rather than as a way of pleasure, as a way of connecting intimately with someone you love very much." This idea of being held to different standards is frustrating, and perpetuate the idea of clergy being elevated on a pedestal.

Besides perceiving clergy to be held to a different standard, several issues seemed particular to this demographic, with one participant noting that there may be differences faced by different age groups, as "many clergy I know are sexually active and are supportive of that, or a lot of people I know don't have that issue because they don't get ordained until they're fifty-something years old and they're already married." Another issue that arose is that of living with someone before marriage, a practice that is quite common now in the secular world. One participant spoke to this desire, stating "I wish I could get to know what a person's like even more by living with them. Which might not be the typical way of the past, but...I've lived with other people, as roommates, and know the challenges that come with that." This challenge of fitting into both worlds as a young clergywoman was summed up well in the statement that "[t]here's stuff I wish the church

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Jordan, "God's Body," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, edited by Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 286.

was more lenient on, and then also there's stuff that I wish men in general are more lenient on." This desire for a respectful amalgamation of the two came through in most of the interviews.

Many of the beliefs about the church's expectations regarding clergy sexual conduct come from biblical and historical contexts. In the honour/shame society of the ancient Middle East, a woman who did not adhere to these sexual ethics would risk dishonouring her family. The Church regulated, and in some cases continues to regulate, these practices as a maintenance of their societal control and as a precautionary measure. Some have taken this to mean that marriage is meant to supersede singlehood, as the fulfilment and completion of a person's life. For others, celibacy is seen to be the ultimate option, as we hear in First Corinthians, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (I Cor. 7:8-9) For some, either option is unpalatable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, hence the search for a new norm.

### **Evaluation and Implications for Pastoral Theology and Ministry**

One of the biggest things I have observed through this study is that there is a significant lack of space for singleness in the church. There is quite a bit of pressure on single clergy to get married. Each of the participants reported examples of times when comments had been made about "when they were going to settle down," or with whom they should settle down, or that their "clock was ticking", or that their congregants simply wanted them to "be happy and settle down". This implies that ministers are incomplete if they are unmarried, or that there is something lacking in their life. This, combined with a person's fear of loneliness or being alone, can lead people to jump into hasty

relationships. This carries over into the realm of laypeople as well, with a strong emphasis placed on marriage and family ties.

Particularly for women, there has been a strong emphasis placed on the importance of reproduction, or producing heirs, and therefore on marriage. A woman's worth and honour was often seen as inextricably linked to not only herself, her actions or her heritage, but also to her marriage, and her ability to produce children. Although social expectations for women have changed to a certain degree since biblical times, this mindset continues to impact the choices and decisions of many. The traditional Christian view is that priority is given to "the family within which women should assume their God-given role as wives and mothers."<sup>13</sup> Although this view is not prevalent among all Christians, it does give pause for thought, particularly in the context of women who have intentionally sought work as ordained leaders in the church.

For the participants interviewed, this period of singleness seems to be a waiting game or a holding space. It is not a choice, nor is it necessarily the desired outcome for their life. This is not unique to clergy, as being a single person in the Church is typically given little notice. Programming and groups tend to end with high school, and do not begin again until a person reaches marriage or parenthood. There is little room in either the Church or society for single people, and they often become or are treated as invisible members; they are given no "potential for wholeness as singles," and "[t]he Church may not call single people lepers but it often treats them as though they were unnatural and therefore incapable of serving God in key leadership positions."<sup>14</sup> This extends into the

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<sup>13</sup> Linda Woodhead, "Sex and Secularization," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 234.

<sup>14</sup> Kate Coleman, "Woman, Single, Christian," in *Sisters with Power* (London: Continuum, 2000), 14.

Church as a whole, as was indicated by a 2011 study conducted by the Pew Research Centre which indicated that 49% of American adults are single, yet “most churches have relatively few single adults in their congregations.”<sup>15</sup> It is worth remembering that a person’s significance does not stem from their status as a significant other, and that space needs to be made in all aspects of church life for single people; additionally the term “‘family’ must be redefined.”<sup>16</sup> Space needs to be made within the context of the Church to allow for singleness to be an accepted state of being, and for that singleness to be celebrated instead of questioned.

Singleness and celibacy have typically gone hand-in-hand for Christians for many years. Celibacy is an intentional choice and is a gift, not necessarily one that all people possess. Singleness can also be an intentional choice, but is not always a choice, and in the case of these participants, did not appear to be a choice they were actively making. Many people today, both those who participated in this research and those in the wider community, are questioning what singlehood means today, and in what ways they can honour Christian teachings while living in the twenty-first century.

By normalizing many of these experiences, or speaking openly about many of these topics, the Church may be able to better equip future clergywomen, and may allow for more comfort in their roles and identities. Although not a requirement in any person’s life, romantic relationships, or lack thereof, have an impact on the ways in which a person interacts with others – including within the life of a clergyperson and a congregation.

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<sup>15</sup> Stephanie Williams, "Single. Female. Pastor.," *Mutuality* 21, no. 3 (2014): 12, accessed October 13, 2016, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.astheology.ns.ca:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1439ca4d-4c25-48bc-85b5-4b5dd5724fb6%40sessionmgr106&vid=8&hid=107>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

While navigating the challenges and blessings of ministry, it may be worthwhile for young, single clergywomen to consider the theological implications of their personal choices and circumstances, as well as the effect current and historical theological trends have had on the vocational world in which they operate.

Some questions come to mind at the conclusion of this research. What might it look like to truly accept people as they are, and perhaps even see their singleness as a gift, rather than something that needs to be “fixed”? How can the church provide space for single people, whether lay or ordained? Can we redefine the idea of “community” in the church, to allow space for single people to grow and flourish in healthy relation to others? How can we best support young, single clergywomen, and young, single people in general, while still maintaining appropriate boundaries? These responses will differ case by case, however what is clear is that more discussion is needed on these topics, and an openness around discussing loneliness and isolation is important. Consideration of a young, single clergywoman for the capable adult that she is, regardless of her marital status, sounds obvious, but is often forgotten. Opening up venues for dialogue about these challenging topics is one of the best things that can be done, while providing support, not pity, for young, single clergywomen, and accepting them for who they are and as they are in this moment.

† The “All the Single Ladies, All the Single Ladies” portion of this project’s title comes from Beyoncé Knowles’ 2008 hit song “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It).”

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**Name of Student Investigator: Cate Ratcliffe**

**(Working) Title of Research Project: All the Single Ladies, All the Single Ladies: The Young, Single, Female Clergy Experience**

### Summary of Proposed Research

<b>Description</b>
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This study is intended to examine the experience of young, single, female clergy in the Anglican Church of Canada.

The world of dating has changed significantly within the last few decades. With the increasing prevalence of technology in society has come a shift in the dating scene in general; online dating has become less taboo and a place where people meet long-term partners and spouses. Many people engage in long-distance relationships through media such as texting, Skype, and a variety of social media sources. Particularly in the demographic of emerging adults and young adults, there is a societal movement toward “hookup culture”, or “uncommitted sexual encounters” that “often transpire without any promise of, or desire for, a more traditional romantic relationship”.<sup>17</sup> This has led to a shift in the world of dating for many in today’s culture, particularly among young adults. Simultaneously, the Church suggests that people follow the traditional dating procedures, holding its followers to a standard that often differs from that of society.

Since the beginning of the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Canada in the 1970s, the expectations of female clergy have been high. At times, parishes “expect their female clergy to do everything they would expect their male clergy to do plus that of the traditional clergy wife,” or the expectation of filling two roles at once.<sup>18</sup> This can cause added difficulties in the achieving a healthy work-life balance. Add to that the challenges of finding a partner, as per the expectations of many for clergy, and it makes for a weighty situation for young clergywomen.

There has been research conducted both into the dating patterns of the current generation of young adults as well as articles written about young clergywomen, but there is minimal research of the two coinciding.

The goal of this research is to understand, as much as possible, the experience of young, single, female clergy, in order to better support them in their ministry and in their

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<sup>17</sup> Justin R. Garcia, Chris Reiber, Sean G. Massey, and Ann M. Merriwether, “Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review,” *Review of General Psychology : Journal of Division 1, of the American Psychological Association*, 16 (2012): 161, accessed September 27, 2016. doi: 10.1037/a0027911.

<sup>18</sup> Major The Rev. Catherine Askew in “Young Women Priests Face Issues of Age and Gender,” *Anglican Journal*, January 31, 2014, accessed September 29, 2016. <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/articles/young-women-priests-face-issues-of-age-and-gender>

own journeys. Through appropriate support and understanding, it may be that the mental health and well-being of young, single, female clergy can be given the attention needed to nourish these leaders to continue to work effectively with their parishes.

### **Proposed Research Field Sites**

I propose conducting individual interviews with four young (thirty years of age or under), single, female clergy ordained in the Anglican Church of Canada. These interviews will be conducted either in person or via Skype, depending on geographical location.

### **Principle Research Consultants**

The Rev. Kristin MacKenzie

The Rev. MacKenzie is rector of the parish of Liscomb-Port Bickerton in rural Nova Scotia. She is recently ordained, and is under 30 years of age. As such, she has connections to younger clergy, and has attended conferences for young clergy across Canada. She will be able to assist in recommending clergy to interview, as well as acting as a source of information for this study. The Rev. MacKenzie is known to me as she was a student in her final year of seminary when I was in my first year, and served as an informative and guiding presence at that time.

The Rev. Nicole Uzans

The Rev. Uzans is the rector of the parish of Northumberland in Nova Scotia. She has served there for several years, and although over the age of 30, is considered to be in the category of young clergy. Similar to the Rev. MacKenzie, the Rev. Uzans has connections to young clergy across Canada, and will act as a source of both information and recommendations throughout this process. The Rev. Uzans is known to me as she served as my supervisor for my summer 2016 student ministry placement.

The Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke

The Rev. Dr. Clarke has many years' experience in parish ministry, psychology, and academics. As a professor at the Atlantic School of Theology, the Rev. Dr. Clarke has connections to recent graduates and young clergy, and will have recommendations and information to provide throughout the process. The Rev. Dr. Clarke is known to me as a professor and has taught me throughout my academic career at the Atlantic School of Theology, including this Graduate Research Project. The Rev. Dr. Clarke has also taught sexuality, and therefore has knowledge in that area, which will be useful for this project.

### **Methodology**

Based on the proposed topic, the best-suited methodology would be one of phenomenology, specifically hermeneutical phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses on studying the subjective experience of those who have undergone a particular phenomenon, through the process of interviewing several individuals about their

experience and then compiling data to try and comprehend the essence of the experience, or develop a “grasp of the very nature of the thing”.<sup>19</sup>

The method of collecting data will be individual interviews with 4 participants that will last approximately one hour each. The interviews will take place either in person or via Skype, dependent on geographical location. Notes will be taken during these interviews, and they will also be video and audio recorded. Key portions of these interviews will be transcribed to text. These recordings, notes and transcripts will compose the data for this study.

Please see Appendix A for a list of proposed interview questions. In addition to these listed questions, additional questions of procedural consent (eg. “Can I ask you about that?” or “Can you tell me more about that?”) may be required to suss out the participant’s experience.

The participants being sought for this study will be young, single, female clergy that have been ordained in the Anglican Church of Canada. I will be seeking four participants that meet this description.

Through consultation with my Research Consultants, I will identify individuals who fit the aforementioned categories. I intend to extend a personal invitation to said individuals via a letter (see Appendix B). Should this not provide sufficient participants, notices will be posted on private and pertinent Facebook groups with the aid of my research consultants, such as the “Canadian Anglican/Lutheran Clergy Born in 1973 or Later” group or “The Young Women Clergy Project” group (see Appendix B2 for this notice).

I do not intend to work with minors or other vulnerable persons, and as such will not need to obtain permission from parents or guardians.

Interviews will either take place online, with the researcher sitting in a confidential area, or in a place agreed upon by both the researcher and the participant, if geographically feasible. In the case of an in-person interview, a location will be selected that is convenient for the participant. It will be semi-public, yet a location in which the interview cannot be overheard.

Participants will be offered a copy of the final research report, and will be invited to the public presentation which will take place in March 2017. For the wider community, a public presentation will take place, and an electronic copy of the final study report could be made available upon request.

Please see Appendix D for the proposed letter of appreciation for my participants.

### **Potential Benefits from Study**

This research will provide participants with an opportunity to reflect upon and articulate their experiences of being a young, single clergywoman and the world of dating. This may be something they have thought of and discussed prior to this interview, or this may provide an opportunity for them to explore a dimension of their lives that may well possess meaning and importance.

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<sup>19</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, ON: The University of Western Ontario, 1990), 177.

For the wider community, this study will improve understanding of the experience of young, single clergywomen, which hopefully will lead to a consideration of these factors when working with and supporting young, single clergywomen.

### **Potential Risks from Study**

The subject matter of this research may involve emotional and potentially explicit content (relationships, dating, loneliness, etc), which runs the risk of emotional stress for participants. The level of stress associated with this risk will depend on the level of emotion connected to the topic at hand. The research may result in discomfort for the participant, depending on their experiences relating to the questions asked.

It is my intention to remain aware of these possible stressors, and pay attention to potential clues such as body language or verbal cues. I will ensure that participants are aware before they begin that they may stop or choose not to answer questions at any point. I will also confer with my project consultants, particularly the Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke, should any issues arise.

### **Process for Obtaining Informed Consent**

Once participants have indicated interest in participating in this research, they will be provided with a letter of invitation (see Appendix B). This letter will contain information pertaining to the project, and the potential risks and benefits of participating. Once they have agreed to participate, we will arrange an interview, and I will provide a consent form (see Appendix C) for their perusal prior to the interview. At the beginning of our meeting prior to the commencement of the interview, I will go over the consent form, ask them to sign it, and will highlight that they may refrain from answering a question, end the interview, or withdraw from the research at any point.

### **Process for Protecting Identity of Participants and Confidentiality of Data**

Interviews will take place in locations in which the participant feels comfortable with the level of privacy. Participants and any identifying information provided will not be used in the public presentation or final report. Participants will be asked to select a pseudonym to be used in place of their own name. All data will be stored in a secure location and electronic resources on a password-protected computer. Upon completion of the final written report, all hard copies and electronic copies of data will be given to the Graduate Research Project supervisor, the Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke. Any electronic files will be removed from the researcher's computer. The data will be stored securely in Rev. Dr. Jody Clarke's office for one year, and then will be securely destroyed.

## **Appendix A: Proposed Interview Questions**

1. What is your experience of dating as a parish priest?
2. How do you experience the church's perception of you as a single, female clergyperson?
3. In the twenty-first century, much of our communication takes place through technology, such as texting, social media, online dating, and video chats. How has technology impacted your relationships?
4. The increase of technology and social media is cited as leading toward an increase in what is known as "hookup culture", or casual sexual encounters that often take place outside of a traditional monogamous romantic relationship. How do you experience society's leanings toward a hookup culture compared to the church's attitude toward premarital sex?
5. Sex and intimacy are a part of the dating agenda. What is your experience of navigating these realities as a young, single priest?
6. How does your experience of being a single, female clergy compare with what you thought it would be before ordination?
7. As a woman, are there pressures that you experience?
8. Is there anything about your experience you would like to add?

## **Appendix B: Invitation to Participate**

Cate Ratcliffe (M. Div. Student)  
Atlantic School of Theology  
660 Francklyn Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 3B5  
Email: cate.ratcliffe@astheology.ns.ca  
Phone: (902) 292-8747

Dear (name of participant),

Thank you for indicating interest in participating in my research study about the experience of young, single, female clergy in the Anglican Church of Canada. I am a third year M. Div. student at the Atlantic School of Theology, and this research is being conducted as part of a required course. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology.

I will be interviewing 4 young, single clergywomen who are ordained in the Anglican Church of Canada. You have been identified as someone who fits within this category. Your participation will involve a one-on-one interview at a time and place that is convenient for you, between November 2016 and January 2017. This interview will last approximately one hour.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free at any point to choose not to answer a question, to end the interview, or to withdraw from the research entirely.

It is hoped that this research will help the wider community to better understand the experience of young, single, female clergy. It will also provide an opportunity for you to discuss your experiences in a confidential and non-judgmental setting. As such, the questions may address subjects of an emotional nature for you. You only need to answer as you are willing, and are permitted to refrain at any point.

Everything that is shared in the interview will be kept entirely confidential. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to select a pseudonym, and this name will be used in all of the material that is shared with the public. The interview will be video recorded, and will later be transcribed by me so that I may better understand the information shared. All data will be kept in a secure and protected location for up to one year after the project is completed, after which it will be securely destroyed.

Please feel free to contact me for further information, or if you have questions. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Jody Clarke, jclarke@astheology.ns.ca, if you have any concerns about the study.

Thank you for your time,

Cate Ratcliffe

## **Appendix B2: Facebook Private Group Post, to be posted by consultants**

Are you a young, single, female clergy ordained in the Anglican Church of Canada? If so, Cate Ratcliffe would like to hear from you. She is in her final year of her M.Div. at the Atlantic School of Theology and is doing a graduate research project on the young, single, female clergy dating experience. She is seeking volunteers to participate in a one-on-one interview at their convenience between November 2016 and January 2017. If you are interested, please email [cate.ratcliffe@astheology.ns.ca](mailto:cate.ratcliffe@astheology.ns.ca) for more information. Please note that expressions of interest are greatly appreciated, but only those that are contacted will be interviewed.

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

Cate Ratcliffe (M. Div. Student)

Atlantic School of Theology

660 Francklyn Street

Halifax, NS B3H 3B5

Email: [cate.ratcliffe@astheology.ns.ca](mailto:cate.ratcliffe@astheology.ns.ca), Phone: (902) 292-8747

I am a third year M. Div. student at the Atlantic School of Theology, and as part of my coursework, I am conducting a research project on the experience of young, single, female clergy in the Anglican Church of Canada. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jody Clarke. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. The gathering of data for this project will take place in the form of one-on-one interviews. This interviews will be kept strictly confidential. I will take notes during our conversation, and will also video record it. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to select a pseudonym, and this name will be used in all of the material that is shared with the public. Any data collected, including but not limited to notes, tapes, and transcripts, will be stored in a secure and protected location for up to one year after the project is completed, after which it will be securely destroyed.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please read the following statements and sign your name at the bottom of this page to indicate your willingness:

I acknowledge that the research objectives, methods, and procedures have been clearly outlined to me. Any questions I have had regarding these procedures have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can contact the researcher at any point, should further questions arise. I am aware that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may refuse to answer a question, stop the interview, or am free to withdraw at any point. I am assured that all data and personal information pertaining to this study will be kept confidential and anonymous.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand and agree with the information listed above, and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Thank you letter to Participants**

Dear [participant],

I want to extend my sincere thanks for your assistance with and participation in my research. Your contribution of time and your insights were greatly helpful in furthering my research about the experience of young, single clergywomen in the Anglican Church of Canada. Your participation was very valuable and I appreciate the time, thought, and effort you devoted to participating in this study. Without your willingness to share your experiences and your stories, this study would not have been possible. It is my hope that the data gathered, when shared with the wider community, will help people to consider their treatment of young, single, female clergy.

Should you desire a copy of my findings, please let me know and I will ensure that you receive one when it becomes available. I will also send you a link to the public presentation after it has been uploaded online. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Yours truly,

Cate Ratcliffe (M. Div. Student)  
Atlantic School of Theology  
660 Francklyn Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 3B5  
Email: cate.ratcliffe@astheology.ns.ca  
Phone: (902) 292-8747

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## APPENDIX 2 – Literature Review

In the course of my research, I have discovered many personal accounts and experiences, however there has been limited academic study completed on the topic of young, single female clergy and their dating experience. One of the earliest accounts was an article written in 1986, entitled “Confessions of a Single Pastor.” In this article, Lucille Ayres Kness explores her experience with being a single pastor, bringing forward themes of isolation and loneliness, themes which consistently emerged from my review of the literature. Carolyn A. Crawford states that “for many singles who are in ministry the fact of ‘being alone’ leads to loneliness,” and that some clergy will overwork themselves in order to avoid this.<sup>20</sup> Kness does not directly address the dating experience in this article, viewing the single life as an aspect, though not a hindrance, of her ministry.

The themes of loneliness and isolation were explored further by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, with the addition of “overworked” and “impoverished” to the list of experiences of single clergywomen. The authors remark that over sixty percent of single clergywomen believe that being ordained negatively impacts their intimate relationships for a variety of reasons, including that “men are threatened by the thought of dating an ordained woman,” and the overwhelming demands on their time as clergy.<sup>21</sup> The authors’ research reveals that these challenges

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<sup>20</sup> Carolyn A. Crawford, “Ministry from a Single Perspective: Assets and Liabilities,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 42, no .2 (1988): 121, accessed October 13, 2016, doi: 10.1177/002234098804200203.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, "A Complex Life," in *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 35.

increase for clergywomen placed in rural parishes – a reality for many young clergywomen which can create a fishbowl effect in many communities.<sup>22</sup>

Riley added another dimension to the experience of single clergy, discussing the independence, freedom, and liberation granted to single women. This is juxtaposed with the reminder that “[w]hether we like it or not, there is a difference between a single woman cutting loose and a married woman cutting loose,” but “we all need space to have these wild-child moments, so...it is important to allow yourself a safe place to cut loose every once in a while.”<sup>23</sup>

Most of the literature I consulted was concerned with the burden that congregations place on single clergywomen. Kness states that her first congregation expected her to be “available 24 hours a day,” and believed that, because she was single, she “did not need the salary [she] was making.”<sup>24</sup> Riley discusses this as well, including that single clergy “will not have as many obvious excuses, but...have just as much right to take time away from work as everyone else.”<sup>25</sup> Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang echo the difficulty of establishing boundaries as a single clergywoman, particularly “if they do not have much personal or social life outside of their work setting,” which, consequently, may lessen one’s motivation to establish clear boundaries.<sup>26</sup> Several of the authors outline steps to take charge of one’s life, such as Kness who elaborates on learning to say no and taking time for silence and privacy in her life, while empowering members of her

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>23</sup> Amanda Adams Riley, “Fight for Your Right to Party: Sassy and Single in Ministry,” in *The Girlfriends' Clergy Companion: Surviving and Thriving in Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2011), 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> Kness, Lucille Ayres. "Confessions of a single pastor." *The Christian Ministry* 17, no. 1 (1986): 8.

<sup>25</sup> Riley, “Fight for Your Right to Party,” 66.

<sup>26</sup> Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, "A Complex Life," 35.

congregation to function on their own. Riley emphasizes the importance of prioritizing time for oneself, and reminds readers that “there will always be more to do, and sometimes you will just have to walk away.”<sup>27</sup> Several texts incorporated the idea of the atypical hours clergy are expected to keep in the modern world. DeRosia, Grano, Morgan, and Riley address the idea that it is “difficult to go out on a Saturday night...when you know you have to bring your A-game to church on Sunday morning.”<sup>28</sup>

Another emergent theme in the literature was the social pressure exerted on single people, particularly to get married. Kate Coleman notes that there is little room in either the Church or society for single people, and that they often become or are treated as invisible members; they are given no "potential for wholeness as singles, " and "[t]he Church may not call single people lepers but it often treats them as though they were unnatural and therefore incapable of serving God in key leadership positions.”<sup>29</sup> Crawford echoes this sentiment, specifically in the context of marriage preparation and counselling, in which some believe that, as a single clergywoman, she is missing a key component and does not "bring to that ministry what some would purport to be a sense of 'being whole'.”<sup>30</sup> This can lead to people wondering what is ‘wrong’ with such individuals to remain unmarried. Coleman takes note of the numerous occasions she has witnessed when these attitudes led people to rush into relationships that were mistakes which "might otherwise have been avoided if they had felt more able to value their singleness.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Riley, “Fight for Your Right to Party,” 67.

<sup>28</sup> Melissa Lynn DeRosia, Marianne J. Grano, Amy Morgan, and Amanda Adams Riley, “Preface,” in *The Girlfriends' Clergy Companion: Surviving and Thriving in Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2011), xiv.

<sup>29</sup> Kate Coleman, "Woman, Single, Christian," in *Sisters with Power* (London: Continuum, 2000), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Crawford, “Ministry from a Single Perspective,” 118.

<sup>31</sup> Coleman, "Woman, Single, Christian," 16.

Stephanie Williams concurs, stating that “failure to empower male and female single leaders of all ages...is severely crippling the church,” and extends it beyond the realm of clergy, referencing the relative minority of single congregants in churches; she highlights a 2011 study conducted by “Pew Research” which indicated that 49% of American adults are single, yet “most churches have relatively few single adults in their congregations.”<sup>32</sup> Williams notes that a person’s significance does not stem from their status as a significant other, and that space needs to be made in all aspects of church life for single people; additionally the term “‘family’ must be redefined.”<sup>33</sup> Although Williams and others were primarily referring to members of a congregation, it is important to also extend this reconsideration of values to single clergywomen.

Several authors introduce the idea that, should a single clergywoman choose to date, it may be beneficial to “keep things quiet until the relationship has progressed to a point where you are seriously looking toward marriage.”<sup>34</sup> Congregation members often like to feel involved with their clergy and therefore try to help by setting them up with their family or friends, becoming invested in potential partners, and maybe even becoming emotionally attached to these partners. This raises questions of professional boundaries and can cause challenges, particularly if the relationship does not succeed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Stephanie Williams, "Single. Female. Pastor.," *Mutuality* 21, no. 3 (2014): 12, accessed October 13, 2016, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.astheology.ns.ca:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=1439ca4d-4c25-48bc-85b5-4b5dd5724fb6%40sessionmgr106&vid=8&hid=107>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Riley, “Fight for Your Right to Party,” 73.

<sup>35</sup> Ashley-Anne Masters and Stacy Smith. “Romancing the Reverend: Singleness, Sex, Divorce, and Dating.” In *Bless Her Heart: Life as a Young Clergy Woman*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011. [https://books.google.ca/books?id=gJxika93YIsC&pg=PT34&lpg=PT34&dq=bless+her+heart:+single+ministers&source=bl&ots=YrDJ8qmlB&sig=3JD4IiWB8YAi8R4Z1YyC9I3\\_SnI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit5MPOxvTPAhWL14MKHVcoBUcQ6AEIODAI#v=onepage&q=congregation&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?id=gJxika93YIsC&pg=PT34&lpg=PT34&dq=bless+her+heart:+single+ministers&source=bl&ots=YrDJ8qmlB&sig=3JD4IiWB8YAi8R4Z1YyC9I3_SnI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwit5MPOxvTPAhWL14MKHVcoBUcQ6AEIODAI#v=onepage&q=congregation&f=false).

Crawford notes that when she brings a companion to events, the reaction of congregants involves “[t]he rumour mill,” which typically “has me either engaged to the person or at least offers questions about who ‘he’ is.”<sup>36</sup>

Dating in the twenty-first century has challenges of its own, particularly for young, female clergy. Ashley-Anne Masters and Stacy Smith are some of the only authors to address this, elaborating on potential obstacles worthy of consideration, including “the intricacies of explaining your job to the hottie at the bar, the terrible trials of online dating, and the almost inevitable question that is ‘You’re a minister? So can you ever have sex?’”<sup>37</sup> The world of online dating can result in its own challenges, such as “if you claim to be a Christian and say that faith is important to you, you are lumped into a conservative group and paired with this type of man,” which can “result in heated debates about whether women should be in ministry at all.”<sup>38</sup> One single, female clergy person reported feeling like “the chaplain of Match.com” because of all of the pastoral care that resulted when potential matches found out she was a minister.<sup>39</sup>

Few of the sources I encountered dealt with the reality of sex or sexual identity of single clergywomen, a topic that is often seen as taboo. Some clergy choose to remain celibate in their singlehood, viewing their sexuality as their gift to God, “allowing us to use our passion in God's service.”<sup>40</sup> Masters and Smith explained that, depending on the denomination, “views on our sexuality can range from denial and rage to tolerance and enthusiasm,” but that regardless of what a person chooses to do or not do, the aim is “to

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<sup>36</sup> Crawford, “Ministry from a Single Perspective,” 118.

<sup>37</sup> Masters and Smith, “Romancing the Reverend.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Coleman, “Woman, Single, Christian,” 21.

celebrate God’s love for us and care for creation through the celebration and honoring of our bodies.”<sup>41</sup> Many in North American society today, particularly young people, engage in ‘hookup culture,’ or “sexual encounters between strangers or brief acquaintances, in which there is no anticipation of a continued relationship.”<sup>42</sup> Penhollow, Young, and Bailey speculate that “attitudes regarding premarital sex have become more permissive over time,” and that this may be connected “to a decline in religious values.”<sup>43</sup> Steven E. Rhoads notes that hookup culture has become more of a norm among young people today because “[w]omen who participate in casual sex make it harder for the majority of women to get dates and committed sex.”<sup>44</sup> It has become somewhat of a societal expectation, and can therefore be challenging for those who do not wish to engage in premarital sexual encounters to ‘date’ in the same way as their peers.

Minimal research has been undertaken to examine the phenomenon of hookup culture in religious contexts, nor was its impact on single, young, female clergy discussed in any research I could find. Research has predominantly been undertaken in the context of undergraduate college campuses, with people aged 25 and under. One consequence of the hookup culture phenomenon noted by most researchers is that of emotional pain. This emotional experience varies between the sexes and individuals as a whole, but Rhoads notes that “college men who sleep around the most are the least likely to report symptoms of depression whereas female college students who engage in casual sex the most are the

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<sup>41</sup> Masters and Smith, “Romancing the Reverend.”

<sup>42</sup> Tina Penhollow, Michael Young, and William Bailey, "Relationship Between Religiosity and ‘Hooking Up’ Behavior," *American Journal of Health Education* 38, no. 6 (2007): 338, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795608.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>44</sup> Steven E. Rhoads, "Hookup Culture: The High Costs of a Low 'Price' for Sex," *Society* 49, no. 6 (2012): 519, accessed October 6, 2016, doi: 10.1007/s12115-012-9595-z.

most likely to report depression.”<sup>45</sup> It is possible that these emotional stressors may be found in clergywomen who participate in hookup culture, although this is a phenomenon that does not appear to have been studied. Although not a requirement in any person’s life, romantic relationships have an impact on the ways in which a person interacts with others – including within the life of a clergyperson and a congregation. As such, they are important aspects of life for young clergywomen and it may yet be revealed that they have an impact on their overall mental health and well-being as well as on their ministry and parish.

The limited phenomenological discussion regarding the dating process and experience of young clergywomen indicates that more research in this field is required. My research project seeks to develop this glaring and overlooked omission/gap in the current/recent literature; through further research and discussion, it is hoped that more information on this topic can be accrued.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 516.

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### APPENDIX 3 – Theological Essay

From the beginning, Christian scripture has highlighted the importance of man and woman coming together in marriage. Beginning with Eve's creation from the rib of Adam (Gen. 2:22), in order that he might have a companion, a helper, someone to work with him and support him in his life on earth, this emphasis on couples continues to be a prominent theme throughout both the Old and the New Testaments.<sup>46</sup> We hear of married women who long to have children, and of other women who are dishonoured or shamed because of their marital status. The Messiah himself came into the world born of a young, single woman, and is believed by many to have remained single himself throughout his life. Building upon biblical example, the Church's perspective, and therefore the perspective of many Christians, has been that sex is to take place solely within the context of marriage, with the intention of producing heirs, and that marriage, modelled on the union of Adam and Eve, is meant to supersede singlehood, as the fulfilment and completion of a person's life, ensuring too that they have a companion into their old age. It remains to be seen whether this perspective is shared by single, young, female clergy, and what place is given within their theological framework to sexuality, sexual activity outside of marriage, producing children, loneliness, and intimacy or closeness. Regardless, these realities impact the clergyperson and their parish, and, when understood as theological issues, result in an enriched, more holistic faith, personal life, and life of the parish.

Biblical society placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of reproduction, or producing heirs, and therefore on marriage. A woman's worth and honour was often seen

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<sup>46</sup> All scriptural references have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

as inextricably linked to not only herself, her actions or her heritage, but also to her marriage, and her ability to produce children. Sarah, Rebecca, and Hannah are all women who were barren and desired to have children, in order to fulfil their societal role.<sup>47</sup> These women had a sense that their lives were incomplete, and often their societal role or social status was questioned, yet they exercised initiative to the best of their ability.<sup>48</sup> Although social expectations for women have changed to a certain degree since biblical times, this mind-set continues to impact the choices and decisions of many. Some have a sense of their ‘biological clock ticking,’ and seek to fulfil this role before it is too late for them. The traditional Christian view is that priority is given to “the family within which women should assume their God-given role as wives and mothers.”<sup>49</sup> Although this view is not prevalent among all Christians, it does give pause for thought, particularly in the context of women who have intentionally sought work as ordained leaders in the church.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, may be one of the most powerful biblical examples for women. She was a young woman who responded to God’s call and willingly fulfilled the daunting role of the mother of Jesus. She “was willing to accept the costly discipleship” of doing the will of God and humbly accepted it as a miracle despite what most people in her community would have thought of her as an unmarried, pregnant woman.<sup>50</sup> Accepting this calling would have caused shame in her society, and could even have been the cause of her death, yet she accepted it as the will of God.<sup>51</sup> She is saintly in this acceptance,

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<sup>47</sup> Coogan, Michael David. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 236.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>49</sup> Linda Woodhead, “Sex and Secularization,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 234.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 41.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

demonstrating intelligence, boldness, and courage.<sup>52</sup> She is a model of discipleship; through suffering and despite the potentiality of death she bravely continues to do the will of God.<sup>53</sup> This model can give strength to some, in that sometimes the will of God can be challenging, yet from it can come things more miraculous than one can imagine.

Hildegard of Bingen, renowned as the first great and well-known female theologians in Christian history, was an abbess and mystic with a particular view pertaining to virginity and marriage.<sup>54</sup> Although believing that “married women must be subject to their husbands” and preserve their modesty, which included not wearing adornments without the permission of their husband, she developed a theology of virginity, which included the idea that “virgins need suffer no such restrictions” and “could celebrate their beauty.”<sup>55</sup> As many medieval theologians did, Hildegard focused much of her work on the moral life, vices, and ways to remedy these vices.<sup>56</sup> In accordance with her era and the beliefs within it, Hildegard’s works often reinforced the patriarchal ideas of her time, such as “referring to women as ‘weak’,” and “positing virginity as the highest level of spirituality.”<sup>57</sup> Simultaneously, however, she expresses ideas that would have been unique at the time, including her predominantly positive views on heterosexual relations and expressed belief that both women and men are created in God's image.<sup>58</sup> Although her views focus on virginity and celibacy as the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>54</sup> William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 60.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>57</sup> Sara Reihani, “Adventures in Feministory: Hildegard von Bingen.” *Bitchmedia*, March 29, 2010, accessed November 23, 2016, <https://bitchmedia.org/post/adventures-in-feministory-hildegard-von-bingen>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

highest form of spirituality, and therefore may not be as connected to the modern, secular perspective, she did posit some theories that were advanced for her time.

This understanding of marriage and purity emphasizes their interconnection, with the expectation that singleness is to be a time of celibacy and virtue.<sup>59</sup> In a society heavily influenced by honour and shame, a woman's virtue was of great importance, and actions that contradicted this virtue could bring shame upon both the woman and her family. In biblical times, women were unable to support themselves and needed a man to care for them, which is speculated to be why there are so many regulations surrounding marriage throughout the Bible. The Sermon on the Mount addresses the idea of divorce, a topic that is challenging for many today, and emphasizes Jesus' "understanding of the carelessness with which men were leaving their wives destitute and alone," which is speculated to have been the sin in this situation, the "sin of callousness and oppression."<sup>60</sup> In the nineteenth-century, female piety depicted in art "fell into two main categories: the idealized wife and mother...and the pure and innocent nun," both of which are entirely sexless in their depiction, confined to the private realm, and further entrench the cultural image of women as meek and submissive.<sup>61</sup> A woman's place was, and for some continues to be, in the home; the public sphere was seen as the male realm and the private sphere of the home was the female realm.<sup>62</sup> Some of these ideas have continued into the

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<sup>59</sup> Bromleigh McCleneghan, *Good Christian Sex: Why Chastity Isn't the Only Option--and Other Things the Bible Says about Sex* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 90.

<sup>60</sup> Dianna E. Anderson, *Damaged Goods: New Perspectives on Christian Purity* (New York: Jericho Books, 2015), 30.

<sup>61</sup> Linda Woodhead, "Sex and Secularization," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 237.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

modern world, with many believing that singleness necessitates celibacy for the sake of purity, an idea that contrasts heavily with much of the modern, secular world.

Much of the biblical discourse surrounding sex is negative and corrective, a condemnation of sexual activity outside of marriage and an attempt to keep women pure and holy. One exception is in the Song of Songs, which is noticeably carnal and even erotic. It is affirming of the woman as a figure of daunting beauty, strength, and power, without resorting to condescension nor referring to women as “the weaker sex,” as often happens in biblical texts.<sup>63</sup> Also unlike many other biblical texts, the Song of Songs does not make mention of fertility or children, rather it speaks of love as non-utilitarian, and does not consider it to be a means to an end.<sup>64</sup> The Church has rarely incorporated this perspective into their teachings and doctrine, focusing instead on the biblical perspectives that cater to the patriarchal society in which they were created. Such perspectives, as interpreted and favoured by the Church, often diminish or devalue women focusing once more on progeny and child-rearing.

Some speculate that the Church’s strong stance on the control of sexuality in modern times pertains to “their struggle to retain social power in a situation where such power is under increasing threat.”<sup>65</sup> This focus on controlling the domestic sphere allows control of “the context in which the next generation is both born and formed,” and creates a more forceful impact on the treatment and control of women than on men.<sup>66</sup> In a return to the constraints of honour and shame, a woman who ‘loses control’ sexually would

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<sup>63</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 247.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>65</sup> Linda Woodhead, “Sex and Secularization,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 230.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

“endanger every aspect of her femininity and, indeed, her salvation,” and could, in fact ruin her whole family by dishonouring them.<sup>67</sup> Therefore the Church regulated, and in some cases continues to regulate, these practices as a maintenance of their societal control and as a precautionary measure.

Particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sex was seen as part of the “natural and/or God-given order of things,” and as such was considered orderly, and therefore acceptable and appropriate, when it took place within the context of a married relationship.<sup>68</sup> This belief continues to be held by many, though others have begun to redefine its boundaries, by suggesting that a disordered sex life does not necessarily refer to “one in which sex happens before wedding vows, but rather one in which sex takes on importance in one’s life to the point of blocking out all other considerations.”<sup>69</sup> For some, especially those that have left the Church, Christianity is “about repression and ‘covering up’ sex and sexuality,” which has led to a view of the Church as hypocritical, and even a dissociation with ‘moral womanhood,’ or behaving as a ‘proper Christian woman,’ as an identity.<sup>70</sup> This can result in a challenging juxtaposition for those who try to keep one foot within the polity of the Church and one in modern, secular society.

Some look to Jesus as a “role model for single adults,” and as someone “who challenged most of the assumptions about how adult men were supposed to settle down” in his time.<sup>71</sup> Despite this, few of the patristic fathers were willing to use Jesus as an

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 232-3.

<sup>69</sup> Dianna E. Anderson, *Damaged Goods: New Perspectives on Christian Purity* (New York: Jericho Books, 2015), 40.

<sup>70</sup> Linda Woodhead, “Sex and Secularization,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 241.

<sup>71</sup> Bromleigh McCleneghan, *Good Christian Sex: Why Chastity Isn't the Only Option--and Other Things the Bible Says about Sex* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 92.

example of celibacy, choosing to name other Christians as models for virginity and celibacy, such as Mary.<sup>72</sup> That being said, Jesus was “a figure of ambiguous sexuality,” and we do not truly know anything about his sexuality or relationships, whether platonic or otherwise.<sup>73</sup> It has been noted by many that the gospels do not make mention of Jesus being married or having a family, leaving many to interpret this as proof that Jesus was single or celibate. The fact that Jesus’ relationship status is not explicitly mentioned in the Gospels leaves questions for many; if nothing else, it indicates that it was not a primary focus or important aspect of his ministry, something that those in the modern Church might benefit from taking into account.

One of the recurrent themes that came up in almost all of the literature consulted about single, young clergywomen to this point was that of loneliness in ministry. This can impact both the well-being of the individual, and the well-being of their parish as a whole; “for many singles who are in ministry the fact of ‘being alone’ leads to loneliness,” which can lead to a host of unwanted coping mechanisms to avoid this sentiment.<sup>74</sup> Jesus implicitly addressed this loneliness in commissioning his disciples to go out in pairs (Mar. 6:7, Luk. 10:1); perhaps this was to guard against the inevitability of being alone in such emotionally taxing work as ministry.

Although some find comfort in the idea of God as the Divine Provider, and therefore the one who will provide a partner for them, this can be grating for “those for whom life is not going as they had hoped,” particularly those who want to have a partner

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<sup>72</sup> Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 98.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> Carolyn A. Crawford, “Ministry from a Single Perspective: Assets and Liabilities,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 42, no .2 (1988): 121, accessed October 13, 2016, doi: 10.1177/002234098804200203.

but do not.<sup>75</sup> This idea of God as a matchmaker, although it may appeal to some, actually “miscategorizes the work of God and misunderstands the way humans are called to respond to that work.”<sup>76</sup> Rather than “a god whose plan trumps those of everyone else,” which “is not really the Christian God,” we have a God who invites people into new places and experiences.<sup>77</sup> Understanding God and God’s will or plan in this way allows those longing for a relationship to approach the reality of their singleness or their life circumstance differently and possibly even find greater comfort therein.

Being a young, single clergywoman is not common these days. As such, the Church, society, and perhaps even the clergywomen themselves may struggle to understand their role in the world, and how to go about living their vocation within it. Although biblically and historically marriage and reproduction have been a large part of societal norms and expectations for women, modern Western culture is experiencing a shift, and it is within these confines that young and single clergywomen find themselves. While navigating the challenges and blessings of ministry, it may be worthwhile for young, single clergywomen to consider the theological implications of their personal choices and circumstances, as well as the effect current and historical theological trends have had on the vocational world in which they operate.

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<sup>75</sup> Bromleigh McCleneghan, *Good Christian Sex: Why Chastity Isn't the Only Option--and Other Things the Bible Says about Sex* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 93.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

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