

# Project Violet Report

## Marital Status and Ministry

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### **Contents**

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Call to Ministry: Results, quotes and comments | page 2  |
| MRC and Training: Results, quotes and comments | page 4  |
| Settlement: Results, quotes and comments       | page 6  |
| Ongoing Ministry: Results, quotes and comments | page 9  |
| Possible Action Points                         | page 12 |

### **Please note;**

Accredited women ministers in London and female Regional Ministers were set one of four questionnaires in May 2022 and given the option of completing the other three by requesting the links.

Questions are in **purple**, direct quotes are in **green**.

Do not share any quotes beyond this group.

## Call to Ministry

Nine women responded to the survey.

**Was your sending church and leadership supportive and was your marital status ever talked about? Please include both helpful and unhelpful experiences.**

Six had supportive churches; only one had a very unsupportive church, this was due to gender.

There were no big issues regarding marital status. Some positive conversations and sensible questions. One person had assumptions made regarding her husband:

There was a lot of presumptions about my husband which were not helpful. Churches presumed it was a package deal which it definitely wasn't.

**Were there particular individuals who encouraged you, if so how did they do this?**

The responses indicate the importance of a supportive minister, particularly at the early stage of call. Others highlighted church members and friends.

My minister, who first highlighted the gifts and asked me whether I thought God might be calling me – praying with me and met regularly to discuss and discern the call. Other friends did similar, and church members who I was not so close to encouraged me in my ministry gifting, by speaking to me about them specifically and sharing why they thought I was called.

**Did your marital status affect your own thinking about your call?**

For those who were married, the support of their husband was very important. Two of the divorcees who had both been married to ministers wrestled with whether they could do the job alone. The single women were concerned as to whether being a minister would make dating more difficult:

It did make me think a couple of years ago, should I come out of ministry for a while to see if I could get married, but the call is very strong.

I knew that my being single would likely be a barrier to finding a husband/attract weirdos, which was true. I believed that ministry meant marriage was all the more unlikely.

## **Are there changes that could be made so that others are well supported?**

Many of the respondents said promoting good practice and giving guidelines would be helpful. Ministers want the conversations, but people need to be aware of their language and inappropriate questions:

I once sat in a conference which was working hard to affirm women's ministry, yet prayed specifically for pastor's 'wives and families'.

I'm divorced now and that was very difficult even though it was on Biblical grounds of adultery. Some of the church leaders wanted to meet with my ex to discuss it to ensure what I was saying was correct.

Single ministers would appreciate role models and links to other single women. There was also a suggestion that mentors could stay with the minister as they transition from MIT to NAM.

### **Any other comments?**

The importance of a clear route into ministry for women in non-affirming churches was highlighted.

Some women need support to explore a calling (maybe some 'women only' Exploring Ministry days).

## **MRC and Training**

Ten women responded to the survey.

### **Was your marital status raised at MRC and was this done helpfully?**

For the women where marital status was raised, half say this was done in a helpful or relevant way; allowing them to highlight their husband's support or talk about family situation. For others it was done unhelpfully.

### **Did college address issues such as dating, parenting, support for spouses in the context of ministry? Would this have been helpful?**

Seven women would have liked these issues raised in a fuller way. They said there was some discussion on a balanced life, a session on being married and information about counselling but most would have preferred more. They also highlighted some unhelpful comments:

No conversations took place formally or informally. Only a comment about how difficult it would be for me to get married and a suggestion from a tutor that I may have to make a decision about either having a husband or being a minister!

### **Was college a safe space to raise issues and challenge unhelpful practices or comments?**

Whilst most found college and their pastoral group safe spaces, three of the single women did not express this view. For one this issue was an assumption that they were looking to be married; for another, being young, single and interested in dating made the setting feel unsafe. For a single mother the issue was lack of support from the staff facilitating the group:

One member of the group brought a book and talked about the ideas of churches needing to go back to proper 'Biblical understanding', and what that means... he proceeded to talk more about the facts of single parents and their children being involved in criminal activities, drugs, crime etc. He proceeded to talk factually about lack of education and/or lack of jobs and prospects. All of this was said twice, once initially and then after being challenged by me politely. The staff member (who knew my situation – single parent of 2) said nothing. I got quite upset and then left. I did not feel safe and so did not attend another session with this member of staff leading but explained to another member of staff what had happened and why I was withdrawing.

## **Are there changes that could be made so that others are well supported?**

Lots of helpful ideas:

Appropriately trained and experienced staff – especially pastoral group leaders. More emphasis / time spent with each student to develop trust and understanding – so that they can be helped/enabled to access any available support. Pastoral Tutors need to take more of an interest in Ministerial students' lives and marriages during the formation process in order to ensure that the formation process is wholesome and enables all round consistency before candidates are ordained.

I believe all staff involved in pastoral care and/or support in the colleges should be trained and supported in their own providing of pastoral support to others. This should therefore be overseen and occasionally observed and reflected on somehow with others.

Perhaps a forum within the association where people feel that their issues are heard, and challenge may come.

An understanding that people are single for a variety of reasons and some people feel it is a calling – this was area was never addressed.

Getting female ministers who have dated, married, and had children in ministry to talk about it.

I would also suggest that all students of our Baptist colleges are given some form of pastoral supervision on a 1:1 level, either to a point where it is not required, or throughout the course.

Speaking about the ethics of relationship in ways which allow for honest reflections.

Practical support or advice for single people (divorced or otherwise) entering ministry.

## **Any other comments?**

Most of these are included in other sections apart from the comment below.

Not assuming heterosexuality would be progress.

## Settlement

Ten women responded to the survey.

### **Do you think your marital status affected whether churches considered your profile; if so, how?**

For six of the women this was not an issue. For the others; two felt their singleness was an issue; in one case the churches wanted a married person, in the other the concerns were varied:

I was single and this caused the church I settled in some concern. Would I be OK on my own? I can't know how many disregarded me as a prospect because 'single young women are a threat to married men'.

One of the married women said, as she was married, the church didn't think she would need a full stipend. For another woman the ethnicity of her husband was seen as a positive thing!

### **Was your marital status raised in conversations, and was this done helpfully? Please give examples.**

In three cases it was not raised at all, in two cases it was raised in a supportive and helpful way:

I was invited to share a little about my husband and the things we enjoyed doing together like going to the theatre, but nothing more.

It was just a natural part of the conversation, a kind of 'getting to know you'.

For other women their marital status was raised in an unhelpful way. For the single women this included questions about whether they wanted a husband, were they pursuing, when would they get married. For another woman it was her college tutor, rather than her, who was asked.

### **If you have a spouse, were they included in conversations and were expectations placed on them?**

Spouses were either not included in conversations or only included once the woman was 'preaching with a view'. No-one expressed concerns about expectations being placed on their husbands.

## **Do you feel that conversations around contracts and salary were affected by your marital status and gender?**

For half the women this was not an issue. Two of the single women and one of the married women said that churches assumed they had less financial need. One woman is being paid less than her predecessor despite her level of experience. She believes this is related to her gender.

## **Are there changes that could be made so that others are well supported?**

There were a range of helpful suggestions:

A review of marital influences on hiring and stipend is a good idea and support for female ministers, particularly from regional teams, to seek out what they are worth, as I certainly received. At college I was aware of some female ministers who were either offered less or accepted none at all because they had a spouse to support them. Whether by choice or desperation for a placement this is an outrageous practice that sets a precedent that women are not of equal worth. I was not aware of any male ministers with the same restricted stipends based on their spouse's income, in fact the opposite may even be true that married male ministers may be sought out or paid more because of the 'two for one' view of spouse support in ministry.

More robust language around what is expected in the terms of appointment and with housing. Regional Ministers should not support the narrative of a single person needs less (in my experience they too believe that single people can be treated differently).

It will be helpful to encourage Church Leadership Teams to learn about Gender Justice and Equality.

Treat female ministers equally and pay the same stipend and package as male ministers.

One day off a week makes seeing family very difficult – this should be considered when drafting contracts, especially for single people.

I feel singleness has much more effect on my experience of ministry than gender although the church may think the other way around. Singleness means a lot of extra pressure in managing pastoral and other burdens healthily, managing workload, looking after property and a garden, being far from family and friends or cut off from them completely in the lockdowns etc. These are areas where I think more support could be offered to those who would appreciate it.

Marital status should not be a part of your profile or early meetings and conversations with a church. Churches should be reminded that they are not calling the spouse.



## Ongoing Ministry

Nine women responded to the survey.

### **Does your marital status affect how 'available' your church expects you to be?**

Over half the women said this is not an issue, though some have church members who think they are available all the time. One highlighted the importance of the precedence set by previous ministers:

On the whole the church are very aware that when I am off I am unavailable, but that I am available on the days I am at church for. In many ways they are very 'professional' in how they view work time and private time. This was the expectation established by previous ministers and I have certainly reaped the benefit of this. I do not think this would change depending on my marital status.

The single women feel they are expected to be more available as they don't have a family.

### **Are unhelpful comments made about your singleness or marriedness?**

Whilst some of the women had not received unhelpful comments, the majority had.

Single women were asked whether they wanted to be married and were they looking. In one church people prayed they would find a husband even though they had not asked for prayer, whilst in another the church sought to find the person a husband. One said people assumed she was not relational because she was single.

Two of the divorcees was asked personal questions regarding their divorce and their ex-husbands:

At interview I was asked about the breakup of my marriage to ensure there weren't any skeletons in the closet. I was asked about the arrangements for my children seeing their father (because their church wouldn't want to put pressure on that relationship).

A single parent was asked unhelpful questions about attending meetings and 'doing all the jobs'.

A woman in ministry with her husband stated that it was assumed that he was the senior pastor.

## **Is your local minister's cluster a helpful space for you?**

For over half the women the clusters are unhelpful spaces. In many cases the rest of the cluster is male. For women who have more positive experience, this is linked to a good co-ordinator, and allies amongst the other ministers. Two women could see progress whilst two others found their clusters a mixed experience due to ministers who held a range of views concerning women:

I would say that some in my cluster are of a particular view of women in general that is not edifying. However, there are also some who are strong supporters of women in general of me in particular, these are close friends and allies who I am purposefully building relationship with, and we are seeking to make changes to the way the cluster operates and builds support for all involved. I am the only female minister in my cluster. For another female in this context it might be a difficult place to be, however I do not feel this, and am seeking instead to challenge and change where I can.

## **Do you have a support network?**

All the women who responded have some sort of support network. They are varied and include: friends, spiritual directors, mentors, women-only ministry Facebook groups, women-in-ministry groups (not all Baptist), clusters, close family, women in similar circumstances. Also groups such as Red-Letter Christians and Fresh Streams. Some women feel this is a work in progress and would like more connection.

## **If you have a spouse have they felt particular pressures being married to a minister? Would they benefit from more support?**

Two spouses felt pressure to 'know everything and attend everything'. Another felt the pressure of how to support without being seen to take over (see below). One spouse struggles with 'Thrive'.

My spouse is very competent and could easily contribute a lot more to the leadership and organisation of the church. The pressure he feels is from standing back to allow me to be the leader, whilst feeling that he could contribute so much more but that this would be unhelpful and might start to establish a different role for him, where he actually wants to stand back and support me, which he does, brilliantly! The church have no expectation of him fulfilling any particular function or role, so no pressure there.

## **If you have children how do they react to your role as minister and how does the church react to them?**

Those who responded said their children were supportive, flexible and secretly proud of their mum but may take on strains that are not theirs to carry. One person expressed it this way:

My eldest sees the tough stuff sometimes, or the impact it has on me. She has concerns about me some days, but also knows that there is support and I try to demonstrate that there are good days and tough days. Her faith is intact, and my youngest left me a note reminding me that God's got this!

There were no problems expressed in the way their children were treated.

## **Are there changes that could be made so that others are well supported?**

One person commented on the importance of raising these issues so people don't feel alone and things are not hidden. Others expressed the need for more counselling options beyond the 12 weeks from the Ministers Counselling Service and for targeted support around contracts and salary negotiations. One person suggested more ongoing support and check-ins when a minister goes to a church where there have been difficulties in the past or if they are the first woman to minister there.

There was a general sense of needing to make it easy for ministers to say when they need specific help.

## **Any other comments?**

One person expressed the importance of supporting LGBTQ+ couples.

One person wished: **we could stop seeing the 'godly man and one good wife' as the biblical standard.**

Three people expressed thanks for these issues being raised.

One person was grateful for their Regional Minister being in regular contact.

# Possible Action Points

## Regional

Set up some Exploring Ministry events aimed at women.

Develop a list of women ministers who are happy to share their experience and give support to those exploring a call or in training.

Regional teams should talk with churches in vacancy about stipends, housing, terms of appointment and make clear that it is unacceptable to offer less to women / single people etc.

Regional and District Ministers must be ready to act as advocates and support to any minister receiving unfair comments or treatment due to gender or marital status. Training may be required.

Regional Ministers to intervene if a cluster is not a safe place for women.

## National

Publicise a clear route for women exploring ministry in a church that does not affirm women in this role.

Expand the **Meeting prospective ministers** section of **Settlement Guidance to Churches** to include:

- Advice on spousal questions and expectations
- What not to ask single people
- What not to ask divorcees
- How to talk about family

Consider expanding the counselling support that is available to ministers.

## Colleges

Work with colleges to include teaching and discussions on singleness, divorce, marriage and parenting in ministry. Bring in female ministers with experiences of the joys and challenges.

Make sure those with pastoral responsibility within colleges (even in small groups) are trained and there are clear routes for calling out any unhelpful or inappropriate comments etc.

# Everyone

Input at ministers' conferences, supervisor training sessions etc about unhelpful language, assumptions etc.

More research on stipends and conditions, to see the influence of gender and marital status.

Link ministers into potential support networks. Set up more safe spaces for ministers to talk about their struggles etc.