

Spring 5-2018

21st Century Trends in Conversation Concerning Women's Roles in the Stone-Campbell Movement: 2000–2017

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the trends in conversation concerning women's roles within two streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement, the Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, within the twenty-first century. In addition, it explored possible answers to the emerging questions from the study through thoughtful analysis, comparison, and observation of the present trends in conversation. The data were accumulated, organized, charted, and analyzed by researching every article and issue of the primary publication of each stream, *The Christian Chronicle* and *The Christian Standard*, to gauge the intensity and attention given to the issue. While there were no significant answers provided to the raised questions generated from the trends, the analysis of the trends yields powerful results and helps guide the direction of future studies on this topic.

21st Century Trends in Conversation Concerning Women's Roles
in the Stone-Campbell Movement: 2000–2017

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in History and Theology

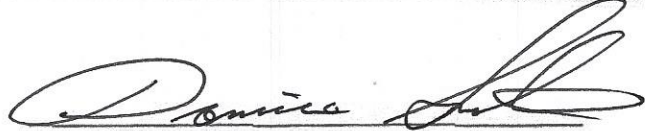
By

Wesley Collin Racca

May 2018

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

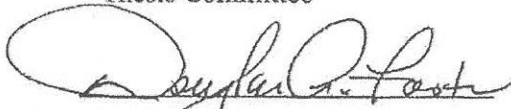


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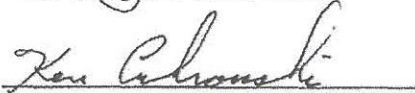
Date

5-17-18

Thesis Committee



Dr. Douglas Foster, Chair



Dr. Ken Cukrowski



Dr. Kelly Elliott

This thesis is dedicated to my son, Henry; my wife, Holly; and the many voices dedicated to the ongoing conversation concerning women's roles within the Stone-Campbell Movement. May God's love always shine, and may we always seek to find truth through love and understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For starters, I would like to thank my amazing wife, Holly, for her support, inspiration, love, and dedication to this project and me. Without her, this would never have been accomplished. In addition, I would like to express gratitude to my family, friends, and church family for supporting me spiritually and emotionally through writing this thesis.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee for their patience and support in overcoming numerous obstacles I faced through my research and the many years dedicated to this project. Furthermore, I would like to specifically thank the chair of my committee, Dr. Douglas Foster, for his unwavering support and high expectations in the development of this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iii
I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Overview of Study	1
Focus	1
Study Parameters	2
Methodology	2
The Significance of the Study	2
The Scope/Delimitations of the Study	3
The Limitations of the Study	6
Definition of Terms	7
Organization of the Study	11
II. CONVERSATIONS IN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST	12
How Churches of Christ Talk About Women’s Roles	12
<i>The Christian Chronicle</i>	12
<i>The Christian Chronicle</i> of the 21 st Century	13
Trend Observations in <i>The Christian Chronicle</i>	24
III. THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES/CHURCHES OF CHRIST RESPONSE	28
How Christian Churches/Churches of Christ Talk About Women’s Roles	28
<i>The Christian Standard</i>	28

	<i>The Christian Standard of the 21st Century</i>	29
	Trend Observations in <i>The Christian Standard</i>	46
IV.	STUDY CONCLUSION	49
	Comparison, Application, Conclusion	49
	How Do the Publications Compare/Contrast	49
	Trend Comparison Analysis	49
	Trend Contrast Analysis	52
	Questions Generated	57
	Notes and Clarifications	68
	Application and Conclusion	68
	REFERENCES	70

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Articles on Women's Roles in <i>The Christian Chronicle</i>	24
Figure 2: Nature of Articles in <i>The Christian Chronicle</i>	26
Figure 3: Articles on Women's Roles in <i>The Christian Standard</i>	46
Figure 4: Nature of Articles in <i>The Christian Standard</i>	48
Figure 5: Side by Side Comparison of Conversation.....	49
Figure 6: Linear Representation of Conversation.....	53
Figure 7: Conservative Nature of Articles	55
Figure 8: Progressive Nature of Articles	56

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview of Study

Focus

The conversation on women's roles in the church has been ongoing for a long time.¹ This issue, however, has not yet been explored in a thorough, academic manner for the early twenty-first century within the Stone-Campbell Church streams. The conversation and its study are complicated by rapid changes in the settings in which the conversation is found—possibly moving from print academic journals and publications to conversations within individual churches, online publications, and across multimedia outlets. As the settings have changed, the conversation seems to have been given new life. This metamorphosis, and the fact that the topic is still a vital ongoing conversation, is a significant phenomenon that needs to be observed, critiqued, and addressed from within the Stone-Campbell tradition. This study will trace major trends in the women's roles conversation in twenty-first century Stone-Campbell publications, both academic and popular, to document the present state of the conversation and to provide observations on how the discussion seems to be moving.

1. For a thorough tracing of the conversation over the last hundred years or so see Michael C. Armour, "Women in Leadership in Churches of Christ" *Mid-Stream*, October 2001, 65–71; Susan G. Higgins, "Women and Leadership in the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ," *Mid-Stream*, October 2001, 77-86; and John Mark Hicks, "Quiet Please: Churches of Christ in the Early Twentieth Century and the 'Woman Question'," *Discipliana*, September 2009, 7-24.

Study Parameters

The purpose of this study is to analyze and study trends in the conversation concerning women's roles in the church to ascertain a picture of the current state of the conversation among Stone-Campbell churches as well as identify variant visions within the churches concerning the church's developing understandings and practices. The study will do this by addressing differences between two of the Movement's streams—Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ—comparing and analyzing historic and current trends, suggesting reasons for those trends, and noting any modern venues from which the current conversation might be thriving.

Methodology

I will begin by examining materials published in the twenty-first century that relate to women's roles in the church in the most widely-read journals from two of the three major streams of the Stone-Campbell Movements (Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ). This examination will include both print and online materials, and will trace the frequency and the substance of the conversation. I will then map the data to show how the conversation increased or decreased and how the specific focus in the materials changed over time. Finally, I will analyze the information to discern specific trends in each stream, compare and contrast the ideas and directions in each, and hypothesize reasons for changes.

The Significance of the Study

This study is the first extensive analysis of the current state of conversations and positions on women's roles within the Stone-Campbell Movement in the larger context of the conversation. It is also the first to identify trends on this issue within these two major

streams of the North American Stone-Campbell Movement. One intention is to help leaders in these churches see a clearer picture of how they came to the positions held today, and where the conversation appears to be going.

The Scope/Delimitations of the Study

First, this study will focus on publications from the twenty-first century (post 2000) in the most widely read journals of the two streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement. The reason for this focus is two-fold. (1) When researching the trends in conversation for this study, it soon became apparent that there existed a largely untapped, yet highly significant trend in the conversation during this time period. In Fall 1995, Roger Burns-Watson wrote a similar piece on trends in this discussion from the beginning of the Stone-Campbell Movement to the early nineties.² This well-written and well-organized publication does the history of conversation on women's roles in the church great justice. However, this study will continue the work of Burns Watson and track the conversation in the twenty-first century. Careful observation and intentional focus were needed to bring this information to light. (2) At the turn of the century, the conversation seems to have become a common issue of serious discussion among these churches. In fact, according to a survey conducted by Stephen Johnson and Lynette Sharp Penya, of the churches they surveyed and identified as gender inclusive, a small number of congregations (11.4%) began exploring gender equality in the 1960s and 1970s. The majority of congregations (45.5%) started examining this issue in the 1990s" and "the next largest group of congregations (40.9%) began exploring this issue within the past

2. Roger Burns-Watson, "The Role of Women: A Study of Stone Campbell Movement Journals," *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 30 no 3, Fall 1995, 171-192.

decade, that is, in the early twenty-first century.”³ Their study reveals a steep increase in conversation over the last fifty years, but an even steeper one since the 1990s and into the 2000s. It is apparent from their research that this topic has become a widely discussed issue and deserves some attention.

Second, though it will set the current conversation into its larger historical context, this study does not include an exhaustive history of the conversation among the Stone-Campbell Movement streams.⁴ This is primarily because to launch such an effort would require considerably more research, study, and analysis than is warranted for an MA thesis, and this study primarily focuses on the current trends in conversation with some projection of future trends.

Third, I have limited the study to two of the three major streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement—Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. The reason for this is five-fold. (1) The magnitude of a study that exhaustively observes and critiques the trends of the conversation on women’s roles among all three of the major streams of the Movement is beyond the limitations of one paper. (2) The two streams analyzed here are most relevant to my situation and my history, as I was raised in a Christian Church/Church of Christ and later attended the Churches of Christ. (3) There has been unique growth in conversation about the subject in the twenty-first century

3. Stephen C. Johnson and Lynette Sharp Penya, “What the Other Half is Doing: an Analysis of Gender Inclusivity in Church of Christ Congregations,” *Restoration Quarterly*, 53 no 4, 2011, 225.

4. This paper will not seek to conduct an exhaustive study on the trends of Stone-Campbell thought on women’s roles since its beginnings. For a quick and easy reference to how the Stone-Campbell streams have been engaged in conversation on women’s roles in America please see John Mark Hicks, “Quiet Please: Churches of Christ in the Early Twentieth Century and the ‘Woman Question.’” *Discipliana*, Fall 2009, 7-24. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, “The Expanding Role of Women in the United States, 1874-1920,” *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MI), 61-75; and Debra B. Hull, Kathy J. Pulley, and Eleanor A. Daniel, “Women in Ministry,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI), 776-781.

within these two streams of the Stone-Campbell movement. (4) The underlying ecclesiological structure of these two streams greatly differs from that of the Disciples of Christ. Disciples of Christ have a structure that intentionally networks and serves congregations in regions throughout the United States and Canada. The General Assembly provides a central forum for discussing beliefs and doctrine, though Disciples remain congregational in decision-making. Disciples in general moved to gender inclusive positions long before Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ began serious consideration of such a move. Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ lack a central body to influence or even engage in discussion over issues. Therefore, these two streams have found other ways to discuss ecclesiological matters, i.e., through “schools, . . . national lectureships, and . . . journals”.⁵ Holloway and Foster recognize the value of journals and magazines to the discussion of ecclesiological matters, stating, “Religious papers also provided unity (and sometimes disunity) to the movement, serving as the forum to discuss ideas and issues.”⁶

Fourth, I have limited the analysis of articles only to those given significant space in the publication and those that generate a large number of responses.⁷ Hopefully, this limited study can be the springboard for further investigation and analysis of the conversation on a larger scale.

5. Douglas Foster, *Will the Cycle be Unbroken?*, Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1994, 67.

6. Gary Holloway and Douglas Foster, *Renewing God's People: A Concise History of the Churches of Christ*, (Abilene: ACU Press, 2006), 66-67.

7. Some articles may be considered heavier or stronger in their discussion of women's roles than others, like a book review as opposed to an opinion piece. This was hard to quantify, and realizing the complexity of trying to label the connotations of articles, this was excluded from the final data analysis in the charts. However, some attention is drawn to it in the conclusion.

In the early years of the Stone-Campbell movement, the primary forms of discussion, leadership, and thought-shaping were journals, magazines, and other public publications, such as the *Millennial Harbinger*, *Gospel Advocate*, *The Christian Standard*, *The Christian*, and many others. These journals helped identify the common doctrine, beliefs, and viewpoints of the members of the Stone-Campbell tradition as well as provided a sense of unity among its members. Through journals, leaders of the movement were able to state their beliefs on issues, inform the members of certain events and movements, and provide a voice for members to speak their minds on issues.⁸ The importance of these publications to the framework of the Stone-Campbell Movement is hyperbolic. That is why it is so important to look at these journals to determine a general consensus on the views of the people of the movement. For this study, I have chosen to look at two different publications representing each of the two streams being studied—*The Christian Standard* [representing the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ] and *The Christian Chronicle* [representing the Churches of Christ]. I recognize that these two journals are not official representatives; however, since they are the most widespread and highly publicized journals of each stream, I have identified these as adequate sources to measure the current state of the discussion among these churches regarding women's roles in the church.⁹

The Limitations of the Study

Crucial limitations to this study include the fact that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, many publications have largely moved from a print edition to a web edition. This

8. Robert L. Friedly, "Journalism," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 434-38.

9. One aspect to consider in further investigation might be the specific demographics to which these two publications appeal—e.g., older, younger, male, female, geographically southern, etc. This is omitted in this study.

change sometimes presents transitional issues such as missing and deleted articles that did not make it through the process or were lost over time. Furthermore, while there is a positive aspect to the transition to an online electronic format—it opens the conversation to a much wider group of participants—that very advantage also allows anyone, regardless of insight, experience, and/or education to be involved in the form of online comments to published articles. The sheer volume of comments and even debates that can arise from some of the articles is remarkable and almost impossible to deal with adequately. Another limitation of this study is the weightiness of the topic. Most members of the churches come to this topic with preconceived assumptions and stances that make it hard to remain open to new or enlightening data. This complication sometimes results in less-than-academic approaches and responses in publications. Another limitation of this study is that, while the most widely circulated publications have been chosen for this study, they fail to represent all of the conversation and trends in conversation taking place in these two streams of the Stone-Campbell movement.

Definition of Terms

Churches of Christ

“Churches of Christ” identifies the “denomination” that was identified separately from the Disciples of Christ in the 1906 Census of Religious Bodies.¹⁰ The view of women’s roles within Churches of Christ is diverse, yet most still see a limited role for women in public leadership. While “discussion of the role of women in the life of the church in the 1990s has resulted in women playing larger roles in teaching youth, coordinating youth programs, and serving as college ministers . . . not many churches

10. Eds. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO), 81-82.

have yet involved women in public worship leadership.”¹¹ This term will be used for all those who self-identify with the Churches of Christ. This same approach will be used for Christians Churches/Churches of Christ.

Christian Churches/Churches of Christ

“Christian Churches/Churches of Christ” identifies the “denomination” that was officially identified separately from the Disciples of Christ in the 1971 *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*.¹² These are often also called Independent Christian Churches, or Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Historically, within this group, “women’s role in leadership [has been] limited”—traditionally barring women from serving as preachers, senior pastors, or elders.¹³ However, the “ministry role of women in the life of these churches has slowly increased in recent decades.”¹⁴ As with the previous definition, this term will be used for those who self-identify with the Christian Churches tradition.

The Christian Standard

The Christian Standard is the most popular and widely distributed publication within Christian Churches. It is the “principal magazine *connecting* these congregations in the far-flung, nondenominational fellowship whose congregations are usually known

11. Thomas H. Olbricht. “Churches of Christ.” *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 2004, 219.

12. L.B. Whitman. *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN: 1971.

13. Henry E. Webb. “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.” *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 2004, 188.

14. Ibid.

as Christian Churches or Churches of Christ.”¹⁵ Its popularity and approval rating among Christian Church members help make this an accurate representation of the Christian Churches.

The Christian Chronicle

The Christian Chronicle is the most popular and widely distributed publication within Churches of Christ.¹⁶ It strongly touts 260,000 monthly print readers and numerous digital or online readers as well.¹⁷ According to its editors, it is a newspaper committed to the highest standards of journalistic excellence and seeks to *inform, inspire, and unite* churches of Christ worldwide.”¹⁸ Though this publication is credited as “not a teaching or doctrinal publication,” but instead a “newspaper with news and opinion content in sections clearly labeled,” it clearly represents views in Churches of Christ and engages in conversation concerning doctrinal issues like women’s roles due to its popularity, widespread readership, and general approval.¹⁹

Trends

The term “trends” in this paper is used to describe the patterns or changing shape of the conversation on women’s roles. When studying this term, we ask questions such as: What is changing in the conversation over time? Is the conversation becoming more

15. Mark Taylor, Jim Niemen, and Diane Jones, eds., “About Us,” *The Christian Standard*, Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/about-2/>. Italics added for emphasis.

16. Douglas Foster, *Will the Cycle be Unbroken?*, Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 82-83.

17. Staff Reports, “*Christian Chronicle* Named Top Newspaper by Associated Church Press – Again,” *The Christian Chronicle*, Accessed March 24, 2018, <https://christianchronicle.org/best-in-class-again/>.

18. Eric Tryggestad, ed. “About *The Christian Chronicle*,” *The Christian Chronicle*, November 2011. accessed February 25, 2017, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/about-the-christian-chronicle>; Italics added for emphasis.

19. Eric Tryggestad, ed., “About *The Christian Chronicle*,” *The Christian Chronicle*, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/about-us>.

heated, more emotional, and/or more intellectual? Is the amount of space dedicated to this topic growing or diminishing within this publication? Why might these changes be taking place?

Conversation

The term “conversation” as used in this study refers to the production of written material that reveals an author(s) or group’s opinion and the willingness for response and communication between editors, writers, and readers. Conversation denotes not only the presentation of one person or group’s opinion, but offers the chance for rebuttal and defense.

Women’s Roles

“Women’s roles” refers to the roles, positions, services, and acts conducted by or “allowed” for women in the church based on their gender and perceived traditional, cultural, and scriptural understandings. When discussing current doctrinal issues among members of the Stone-Campbell Movement, women’s roles in the church will inevitably arise, provoking curiosity, anger, sorrow, tension, or confusion. This issue has been one of the longest running conversations in Stone-Campbell history—dating back even to the roots of the Stone-Campbell Movement in the nineteenth century.

However, there seems to have been a surge in conversation about the issue among the streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement within the twenty-first century. Whatever the cause of the sudden increased interest in women’s roles, it is apparent that this topic is one that an increasing number of members believe should be resolved by church leaders soon. This hot-button issue has the potential to cause churches to divide theologically, socially, or physically. In fact, Douglas Foster, in a survey of major

publications, notes the divisive nature of issues such as this one, stating that women's roles is an issue that is "important enough to be [a] matter of fellowship for some."²⁰ Furthermore, this topic is very complex and grave as it could have some strong theological repercussions in the promotion of love and grace to those involved.

To some women, this is a very disturbing and emotional issue. This topic can be seen as oppressive and manipulative to them. To others, the promotion of women's equality in roles is a forsaking of scriptural authority and a destructive blending of the church and the secular world. The complexity and gravity of this issue should stimulate discussion among church leaders to promote unity within Christianity and to protect the faith of those involved. This is the background and inspiration for this study of the recent conversation on women's roles among Stone-Campbell tradition churches. Hopefully this study will provide some insight into the current discussion and potentially help suggest the future of the conversation among Stone-Campbell churches.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into four chapters. The first chapter will introduce the topic of this thesis and set the structure of the study. It will also stress the importance of journal publications to the Stone-Campbell movement in discussing controversial topics such as women's roles in the church. The second chapter will focus on the conversation on women's roles in Churches of Christ seen through the publication, *The Christian Chronicle*. The third chapter of this study will focus on the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ stream's conversation on women's roles in the church through their publication, *The Christian Standard*. The fourth chapter will compare, analyze, and critique the trends in the conversation on women's roles across the streams of the movement. This analysis

20. Douglas Foster, *Will the Cycle be Unbroken?*, Abilene, TX: ACU Press. 77-79.

will be done first by comparing and contrasting the trends in the two streams. I will then present theories to explain both similarities and differences in the trends. This section will ask questions such as: Is the conversation dying out or starting to flourish? Is the conversation moving to another venue and if so, to what venues might the conversation be moving? Why might the conversation be shifting? It will also conclude the study by discussing implications of the results and seeking to provide insight into the future of the conversation on women's roles within the Stone-Campbell Movement.

CHAPTER II
CONVERSATIONS IN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST
How Churches of Christ Talk About Women’s Roles

The Christian Chronicle

“Founded in 1943, *The Christian Chronicle* is a newspaper committed to the highest standards of journalistic excellence and seeks to inform, inspire and unite Churches of Christ worldwide.”¹ Though this publication is “not a teaching or doctrinal publication” but a “newspaper with news and opinion content in sections clearly labeled,” as stated in *The Christian Chronicle* biographical webpage, it is clearly a representation of the Churches of Christ that engages in conversation concerning doctrinal issues like women’s roles. In fact, Scott LaMascus states: “The Christian Chronicle is by far the most-read paper in Churches of Christ and exercises an influence for cohesiveness in this part of the Stone-Campbell Movement.”² Furthermore, as stated by Olan Hicks, founder of *The Christian Chronicle*, the purpose of this publication is “to objectively report what’s happening in Churches of Christ.”³ Its popularity and purpose are what allow this publication to be considered an accurate representation of conversation on women’s roles in these churches.

1. Eric Tryggestad, ed., “About *The Christian Chronicle*,” *The Christian Chronicle*, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/about-us>.

2. R. Scott LaMascus. “*Christian Chronicle*, The,” *The Encyclopedia of the Stone Campbell Movement*. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI. 2004, 176-177.

3. Eds. “Finding Truth in a World of ‘Spin’”. *The Christian Chronicle*. September 2004. Accessed April 8, 2017, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/finding-truth-in-a-world-of-spin?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4457271&ObjectID=4366795&ObjectType=35>

In the next section, I will detail the history of conversation in *The Christian Chronicle* during the twenty-first century. To do this, I will break up the eighteen years into five separate periods in order to better analyze the trends of conversation.

The Christian Chronicle of the 21st Century

2000–2001

The first two years of the twenty-first century were a time of active engagement in conversation concerning women's roles in the church. *The Christian Chronicle* began its conversation on women's roles in a special article dedicated to the conversation in November 2000.⁴ This article was one of a collection of special features dedicated to the Churches of Christ in the twenty-first century. This four-page report sought to tell the stories of several women who had served in the past and were currently serving in ministerial roles as well as to ask some pivotal questions regarding the future of women's roles. This article gave a chance for many women in the Churches of Christ to speak their voice into the future of the conversation on women's roles and seemed to state that women's roles was an issue that *The Christian Chronicle* wanted to engage.

This significant article was to have lasting implications, as the very next year, an article was published in *The Christian Chronicle* conveying how one reader was encouraged by the views presented. The reader welcomed the views stated in *the Christian Chronicle*, stating that “it is high time that women begin hearing messages of empowerment in the will of God rather than messages that imply the only gift God has

4. Lindy Adams, “Challenges and Realities: Concerning Women,” *The Christian Chronicle*, November 2000. 17-21.

given us is that of preparing the potluck dinner.”⁵ This served only as the beginning of the conversation in *The Christian Chronicle*.

A continued response took form that same year in the review of a controversial book written on the issue, “Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal.” The first of the two reviews, by Scott LaMascus, was concise and straightforward.⁶ This two-paragraph review provided the basic details like cost, edition number, publication information, etc. Then, LaMascus briefly provided a summary of the focus of the book and primary argument in a few sentences. LaMascus gave no direct opinion in the review for either side of the debate. However, it should be mentioned that the fact the book was given any attention at all serves as an indirect opinion in support of at least encouraging the readers to use the book as a reference for further inquiry. The brevity and shallow nature of the review article sparked a comment from one of their readers in August.⁷ Donna Miller, a reader and respondent from Maine, expressed her feelings towards the lack of stronger review. Within a couple of months, *The Christian Chronicle* published her comment in their publication. She stated, “I was so dismayed to read your review of this book and see that somehow it received a one-star rating and very little critiquing by you.” She expressed how frustrated she was with the fact that “the issue of how to view women” keeps getting “placed on the back burner over and over again by the male members who

5. Emilie Shepherd, “Reader Encouraged by November Views of Women,” *The Christian Chronicle*, March 2001, Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/reader-encouraged-by-november-views-of-women?>

6. Scott LaMascus. “Women in the Church Reclaiming the Ideal?” *The Christian Chronicle*, May 2001. Accessed April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/women-in-the-church-reclaiming-the-ideal?>

7. Donna Miller. “Reader Concerned about Neglect of Osburn’s Women in the Church.” *The Christian Chronicle*, August 2001. Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/reader-concerned-about-neglect-of-osburn-s-women-in-chu?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4586203&ObjectID=4368905&ObjectType=35>

are ‘in charge.’” In addition, the respondent went on to state how meaningful the book was to her as a female in the church. She concluded with a plea that if more men were aware of this book they would take the time to read it. The comment seemed to be quite effective, as we will see in the coming months of publication. It is worth noting here that *The Christian Chronicle* didn’t have to publish this comment that expressed dismay towards their attention on a subject. Instead, they published the comment to encourage the conversation to continue.

In addition, *The Christian Chronicle* published a second review by Everett Ferguson, most likely in response to the comment, the following month.⁸ This ten-paragraph review was lengthy and detailed and analyzed the primary arguments and conclusions generated by the book. This review, however, took a decidedly negative approach. Ferguson stated “there is much of value in the book” in that “the summaries of various positions and critiques of different interpretations are useful and will prevent the discussion of the topic from pursuing incorrect arguments.” However, Ferguson went on to state that his review would focus less on the strengths of the book, but rather to “call attention to some problem areas.” From here on Ferguson generated a pattern of presenting an argument or point by Osburn then refuting it. In conclusion, he stated that Osborn insists “he does not have a feminist agenda but that he was forced to his position by his exegetical conclusions.” In contrast, Ferguson stated that he “finds other exegetical conclusions more persuasive.” Though Ferguson found himself on a different stance than Osburn, he concluded with a powerful statement that both Osburn and Ferguson are “committed to the authority of scripture, to its historical literary interpretation, and to this

8. Everett Ferguson. “What About Women in the Church?” *The Christian Chronicle*, August 2001. Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/what-about-women-in-the-church?>

issue not becoming one that breaks fellowship.” Though considerably more opinionated than the last review published by *The Christian Chronicle*, this review served to be greatly beneficial in the continuation of discussion on the issue. In response to Ferguson’s review in *The Christian Chronicle*, a brief comment was published a month later by a Robert H. Rowland, reader and commentator.⁹ Rowland found the review to be more of a critique of Osburn’s book and questioned Ferguson’s argumentation against Osburn. While this comment seems to serve as the last words to be said on Osburn’s book in 2001, it is apparent from the future conversation that this series of reviews and comments served to advance the conversation at large.

2002

In 2002, the conversation continued with an interview with a prominent female leader in Churches of Christ, Dr. Jeanene Reese. Similar to the November 2000 publication on the stories of women in ministry, this interview gave Dr. Reese the ability to show the work she had been doing in the academic world toward preparing women to be leaders in the church through the Center for Women in Christian Service and to express her views regarding gender roles in *The Christian Chronicle*.¹⁰ While promoting the Center for Women in Christian Service’s drive to prepare women for ministry in a variety of ways, Dr. Reese took a traditional viewpoint on the issue, stating that offering a women’s track in ministry at Abilene Christian University would be inadvisable since it doesn’t fit “the biblical model of how men and women worked together as the church was established.” However, Dr. Reese adamantly hoped that conversation would continue

9. Robert H. Rowland. “Reaction to Ferguson’s Review of Osburn.” *The Christian Chronicle*, September 2001. Accessed May 2016. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/letters-36?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4587053&ObjectID=4367585&ObjectType=35>

10. Lindy Adams. “A Conversation with Jeanene Reese” *The Christian Chronicle*, January 2002 Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/a-conversation-with-jeanene-reese?>

about controversial topics such as women's roles "openly and in love" since there is a "danger of losing people on both sides of the (women's issue)."¹¹

Later, a response to recent conversation on women's roles, Osburn's book, and the often-noted preacher shortage in Churches of Christ was published in the April edition of *The Christian Chronicle*. In this response, Ann Evankovich, a respondent from Maryland, described her frustration with being a woman who has had "to bury [her] talents" and "quench [her] spirit's fire."¹² This emotional appeal ended with a quip that "perhaps if half of the membership weren't barred from this service, there wouldn't be a shortage." This comment seemed to serve as the first emotional and personal statement in the twenty-first century sparking continued discussion over the topic in the future.

Additionally, a pair of complementary articles appeared in *The Christian Chronicle*, which furthered the conversation on gender roles. The first of these was a review of another book containing essays by nineteen women of varying ages and experiences in Churches of Christ about their stories, gifts, and service—"Trusting Women" edited by Billie Silvey.¹³ Camille Dean, like the other book reviewers mentioned above, used this opportunity to declare her own beliefs on the issue. She encouraged the continued conversation concerning women's roles among the Churches of Christ, stating, "Churches must certainly come to grips with the greater educational and

11. Ibid.

12. Ann Evankovich. "Women in the Church/Preacher Shortage." *The Christian Chronicle*, April 2002. 31.

13. Ed. Billie Silvey, *Trusting Women*, Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers. 2002.

career advancement now available to women and raise the level of ‘conversation’ in women’s activities.”¹⁴

Paired with this plea for continued conversation, Bailey McBride, an editor for *The Christian Chronicle*, published an article tackling the need for books on the subject stating that the publication itself doesn’t endorse opinion in the books, encouraging sensitivity when engaging in conversation over women’s roles, and stressing the need for conversation to continue on the subject.¹⁵ At this point in the twenty-first century, however, we primarily only heard from those encouraging conversation and those who support an increase in women’s roles in the church. The opposing side had yet to take a strong stance in the publication until the year 2003.

2003–2005

In 2003, editor Scott LaMascus continued the conversation concerning women’s roles and showed support of growing roles for women in the church. Furthermore, he stated that if church members were not willing to make that leap, that they should at least engage in “a language seasoned with love and humility” and call for the churches’ “conversation [to] be more civil and more Christ-like than the cultural warriors, who too often use hatred and guilt as their weapons.”¹⁶

14. Camille Dean. “Women Explore Ministry in New Book.” *The Christian Chronicle*, December 2002. Accessed April 10, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/women-explore-ministry-in-new-book>.

15. Bailey McBride. “Role Discussion Requires Sensitivity.” *The Christian Chronicle*, November 2002. Accessed April 10, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/role-discussion-requires-sensitivity>.

16. Scott Lamascus. “On Gender War, Tub Cleansers, and 2015.” *The Christian Chronicle*, November 2003. Accessed on March 28, 2016. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/on-gender-war-tub-cleansers-and-2015?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442807&ObjectID=4368547&ObjectType=35>

In 2004, Lindy Adams interviewed another woman in ministry and touched on the subject of women's roles in the church. In the interview Lindy Adams asked Helen Young (editor of *Power of Today*, founder of the Associated Women for Pepperdine, and prominent Church of Christ speaker) what her hopes about the role of women in the future were. Young responded that she's "never considered women inferior in service or gifts" and that she has been advocating for elders to "find opportunities for women to minister" for a while.¹⁷

The conversation on gender roles seems to expand even further as Lindy Adams published an article depicting the two sides of the conversation. This lengthy article, published in October 2004, listed several prominent preachers' and leaders' views on the subject. As a result, letters, comments, and emails engaging the conversation began to pour in.¹⁸

The letters to the editor vary in response and contain powerful and passionate language. One example from the progressive¹⁹ side stated, "'Churches of Christ were on the wrong side of history' . . . on the issue of slavery and racial segregation, and were the last to acknowledge that both were wrong, we are on the wrong side of history on the women's issue."²⁰ An example from the conservative side stated, "women have no

17. Lindy Adams, "A Conversation with Helen Young," *The Christian Chronicle*, March 2004. 20.

18. Lindy Adams, "Churches' Study of Women's Issue Evokes Varying Conclusions, Practice," *The Christian Chronicle*. September 2004. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/womens-issue-evokes-varying-conclusions>.

19. In this essay I use the words progressive and conservative to describe the two different sides of the issue of women's roles. I define progressive as one who sees the benefit in having women serve in broader roles than what tradition has assigned them. I define conservative as one who adheres to more traditional views of women submitting to men and with limited roles.

20. Floyd Rose, "Letter to the Editor." *The Christian Chronicle*, November 2004. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/letters-30>.

Biblical authority to be over men in any area of life. Her subjection role to man was given at creation and has never been changed . . . the more I study God's Word the more I am convinced that my position is the correct one."²¹ This period, riddled with engaging and thought-provoking conversation, seemed to draw to a close with a simple and short article (only four sentences in length) detailing a conference held at Pepperdine University that was "described as the first for women in professional ministry or preparing for such ministry in Churches of Christ."²² This conference created by the Women in Ministry Network became an annual conference gathering at various universities to the present.²³

2006–2010

The conversation over the course of the next five years seemed to be sporadic and minor, yet yielded some strong responses by the readers. In 2006, Bobby Ross Jr. published an article describing the life and ministry of a church that openly embraced the progressive approach toward women's roles in the church.²⁴ This article seemed to strengthen the conversation that had almost disappeared, causing a stir among those who took a more conservative approach to the discussion. A month later, the *Chronicle*

21. Tony Demonbreun, "Letter to the Editor," *The Christian Chronicle*, November 2004. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/letters-30>.

22. Eds. "Conference Offered for Women in Ministry." *The Christian Chronicle*. June 2005. Accessed on March 28, 2016. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/conference-offered-for-women-in-ministry?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442821&ObjectID=4366276&ObjectType=35>

23. "The Ministry Component," Pepperdine.edu. Accessed on December 5, 2017. <https://www.pepperdine.edu/voyage/ministry/>

24. Bobby Ross Jr., "Exodus Connecticut: Stamford Church Celebrates Heritage While Forging Own Path." *The Christian Chronicle*, June 2006. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/exodus-connecticut-stamford-church-celebrates-heritage-while-forging-own-path>

published three letters to the editor responding to Ross's article in different ways and furthering the conversation.²⁵

The conversation continued the following year in another one of Bobby Ross Jr.'s articles. In this article, Ross asked leaders in Churches of Christ to explain what separates them from mainstream believers.²⁶ For the most part, the responses to what distinguishes them from other denominations included conservative responses to the topic of women's roles, claiming their disinterest in opening up women's roles and even going so far as to say that they "could not work with those who use the instrument or who use women in public roles."²⁷

In 2010, the *Chronicle* published two articles pertaining to women's roles in Nigeria. These two articles, written by one of the editors of the publication, praised the efforts of a Nigerian Church of Christ forum that actively sought to include women in leadership positions in their churches.²⁸ These two articles appear to be the last bit of conversation concerning women's roles in *The Christian Chronicle* for several years.

2011–2017

After 2010, the conversation on women's roles in *The Christian Chronicle* seems to fall out completely, with the exception of a few articles that appeared in June 2016.

25. Various authors, "Letters to the Editor." *The Christian Chronicle*, July 2006. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/letters-to-the-editor-july-2006>

26. "Mainstream believers" in this context applies to the mainstream believers in Christianity generally.

27. Bobby Ross Jr., "Who Are We: Expanded Interviews with Sources from Non-Mainstream Churches." *The Christian Chronicle*, March 2007. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/who-are-we-expanded-interviews-with-sources-from-non-mainstream-churches?>

28. Eric Tryggestad, "Nigerian Christian Honored for Empowering Women," *The Christian Chronicle*. September 30. Accessed on April 8, 2017. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/nigerian-christian-honored-for-empowering-women?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442821&ObjectID=4371120&ObjectType=35>

The first of these articles simply detailed the content of a debate that occurred at the Lads to Leaders Convention: Should women preach in mixed-gender worship?²⁹ The article itself does not seem to do much to encourage conversation on women's roles in the church except through its inclusion in a time of very little discourse on the subject. The article was informative in nature, yet concluded with a statement that all those in participation of the event reached the conservative consensus that women should remain silent in mixed-gender worship. This is not surprising, given that Lads to Leaders is largely supported by conservative churches. In fact, disagreements over doctrine, like the fact that "Lads does not allow men in the room when girls read Scripture," even resulted in the splitting off of another group designed to challenge young church members known as LTC (Leadership Training for Christ).³⁰

This article appeared to instigate a question from the editors of *The Christian Chronicle*, however, as they also published in the same issue an article titled "What Do We Tell Our Daughters about the Proper Role of Women in the Church?"³¹ This question was posed to readers, and the *Chronicle* published the initial question with several readers' responses. The eight published responses vary drastically in what the authors tell their daughters about women's roles in the church, with three strongly promoting extended roles for women in the church and five promoting submission and obedience to

29. Eric Tryggstad, "Should Women Preach in Mixed-Gender Worship," *The Christian Chronicle*. June 2016. Accessed on April 8, 2017. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/should-women-preach-in-mixed-gender-worship?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442807&ObjectID=4997750&ObjectType=35>

30. Bobby Ross, Jr., "Training to Lead: Lads vs. LTC," *The Christian Chronicle*, June 2012, Accessed on December 5, 2017. <https://christianchronicle.org/training-to-lead-lads-vs-ltc/>

31. Bobby Ross Jr, "What Do We Tell Our Daughters About the Proper Role of Women in the Church?" *The Christian Chronicle*, June 2016, Accessed on April 8, 2017. <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/what-do-we-tell-our-daughters-about-the-proper-role-of-women-in-church?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442807&ObjectID=4998444&ObjectType=35>

God, men, and traditional roles. The numerous responses published in the article sparked a series of comments on their website from other readers who wanted to respond both to the question and to some of the published responses. These responses were just as varied as the eight published in the article, demonstrating a wide range of emotions, logic, and theology.

Lastly, a third article, titled “As Good Stewards of God’s Varied Grace,” was published in the June 2016 issue of *The Christian Chronicle*.³² This article, in an attempt to encourage conversation and open-mindedness, avoided directly tackling the conversation on women’s roles and decided instead to be a testimony of one woman’s (Joy McMillan, administrative assistant for *The Christian Chronicle*) journey as a woman in the Churches of Christ. Even though McMillan maintained that she wants to “leave that [women’s roles] controversial, complex discussion for other forums,” she closes her article by asking churches to think about “what women could do” rather than “what they can’t do” and to “encourage and energize women in the mission of Christ in your congregation.”³³ While this year of *The Christian Chronicle* seems to be filled with articles encouraging conversation on women’s roles, it is in contrast to the last several years, which were generally lacking in any form of conversation on the issue. Furthermore, the conversation once again dissipated the following year.

32. Joy McMillan, “As Good Stewards of God’s Varied Grace,” *The Christian Chronicle*, June 2016, Accessed on April 8, 2017, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/as-good-stewards-of-god-s-varied-grace>

33. Ibid.

Trend Observations in *The Christian Chronicle*Figure 1: Articles on Women's Roles in *The Christian Chronicle*

Figure 1, above, illustrates the attention to the conversation on women’s roles in *The Christian Chronicle*. It is from this chart that we can begin to notice the trends that exist in the conversation. The first item to notice about the frequency of articles on women’s roles is that it is not steady. The conversation is sporadic and resembles a rollercoaster—full of ups and downs. An article is published supporting one side, and then several years later the other side is published. This “coming and going” conversation might seem to be unfulfilling and ineffective. However, one must note that there do seem to be some critical blips in the conversation, such as key articles and responses found in the years 2001–2002, 2004, 2010, and 2016. The second trend to observe is the overarching decline in conversation, ultimately resulting in the total silence from 2011 to 2015 and once again in 2017. The complete lack of conversation on the issue between 2011 and 2015 is quite a significant trend. In these five years, there were a total of sixty

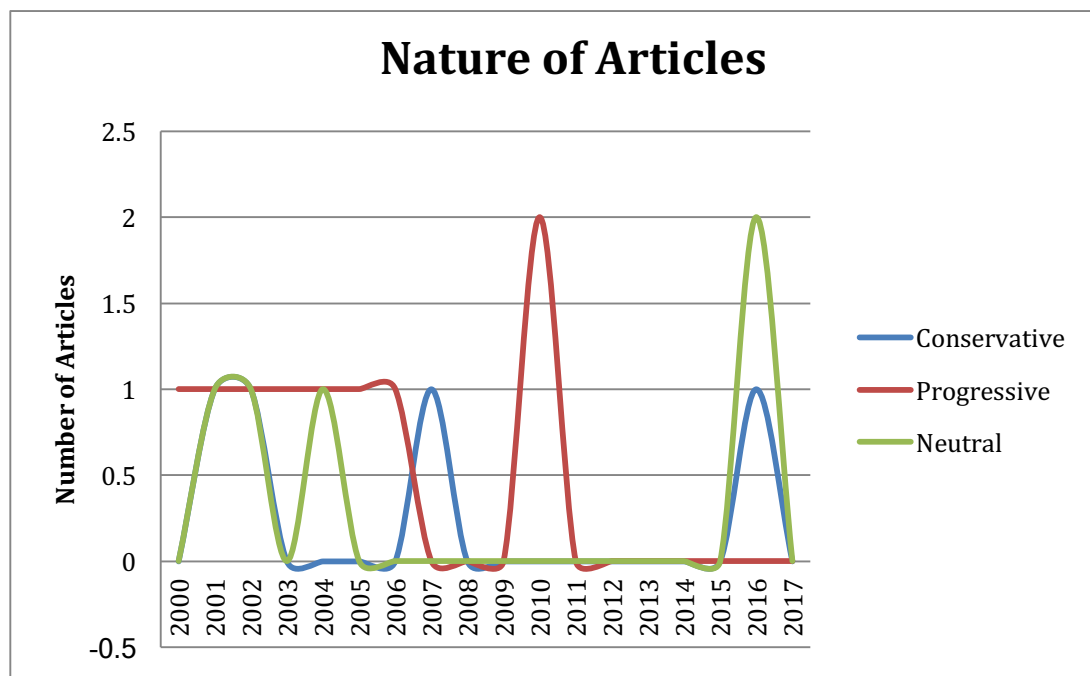
publications with possible opportunities to bring up the issue, yet the publication remained silent. Despite the efforts by the editors and book reviewers, the conversation on women's roles seems to dissipate for several years at a time and, furthermore, denotes a strong decline in conversation as years go on. This could be the result of a variety of reasons that will be wrestled with in later chapters. The third trend is that many of the earlier articles on women's roles were not opinions or letters, but rather reviews of books that the publication itself did not openly endorse one way or the other.³⁴ There could be a variety of reasons as to why this was the case. One might be that, to avoid conflict from readers, the editors chose the safer path of reviewing books rather than publishing direct opinions. It is also possible that the editors felt the discussion was not as hotly debated as it had been in the past. Instead, of publishing opinion pieces they would simply promote books on the issue. Whatever the reason, it is apparent through the lack of opinion pieces that the editors did not encourage further conversation. Even when the opinion articles and letters started to pick up in 2006, the conversation does not seem to become steady or very engaging.

The next trends to observe require one to analyze the nature of the articles published in *The Christian Chronicle*. Are they progressively pushing for extended roles or open-mindedness in the issue? Are they conservatively pressing for traditional or submissive roles for women? Are they just pushing for further conversation while not taking a side on the issue? Figure 2, below, illustrates the "nature" of each article

34. Scott LaMascus, "Women in the Church Reclaiming the Ideal?" *The Christian Chronicle*, May 2001, Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/women-in-the-church-reclaiming-the-ideal?>; Everett Ferguson, "What About Women in the Church?" *The Christian Chronicle*, August 2001, Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/what-about-women-in-the-church?>; and Camille Dean, "Women Explore Ministry in New Book." *The Christian Chronicle*, December 2002, Accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/women-explore-ministry-in-new-book>.

presented in *The Christian Chronicle*. From the chart, one can reach several conclusions. First, the three “natures” of conversation seem to all be reasonably well represented until 2007. Even though, there are not many articles concerning the issue in these years, all three sides are represented. Second, there are peaks of conversation that happen after 2007. This seems to indicate that every four to six years after 2007, the conversation seems to increase within the publication. Third, while the progressive side seems well-represented before 2006 and for a short time in 2010, it is not represented at all from 2007–2009 and again from 2011–2017. The progressive side completely drops out in 2011, while the neutral and conservative sides make regular appearances. This could possibly indicate a shift in the viewpoints and leanings of the Churches of Christ as a whole or just the editors of *The Christian Chronicle*.

Figure 2: Nature of Articles in *The Christian Chronicle*



The final trend is simply the low number of articles pertaining to women’s roles in this period. This publication never has more than three articles concerned with the

topic within a single year of publication. This significant trend will be wrestled with in later chapters, but it is important for the reader to begin to acknowledge this primary trend— the conversation is not thriving, but simply maintaining a presence in this time period. Whatever the reason may be for the decline of conversation over the last eighteen years, it is apparent that conversations on women’s roles do not seem to be gaining much ground in this publication. Instead, the conversation seems to be slowly diminishing.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES/CHURCHES OF CHRIST RESPONSE

How Christian Churches/Churches of Christ Talk About Women's Roles

The Christian Standard

The Christian Standard was first published in 1866 to provide resources for Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. It is the “principal magazine connecting these congregations in the far-flung, nondenominational fellowship whose congregations are usually known as Christian Churches or Churches of Christ.”¹ For the purpose of this study, *The Christian Standard* will serve as representative of discussion in Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. This is primarily due to its popularity and accessibility for the majority of those who claim to be a member of the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. In fact, it remains the major journal of this fellowship, providing communication and guidance to the more than 5,000 congregations that have no organizational connection other than the (non-delegate) North American Christian Convention—meaning that *The Christian Standard* provides much-needed cohesion and networking among Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.²

The Christian Standard has had a remarkable history of pushing the conversation on women's roles. Between 1974 and 1976, the editors published a series of debates on

1. Mark Taylor, Jim Niemen, and Diane Jones, eds., “About Us,” *The Christian Standard*, Accessed April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/about-2/>.

2. Henry E. Webb, “Christian Standard,” *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Eerdmans publishing company, Grand Rapids, MI: 2004, 198.

the role of women. Roger Burns-Watson claims that even though the editors claimed “that they were not endorsing an expanded role for women in the church,” the fact that the editors included this series in their publication is an indication of the growing progression of the editor’s stance on women’s roles and, I would add, a shift in the acceptance of conversation on the issue of women’s roles.³ *The Christian Standard* seemed to pioneer the reemerging conversation on women’s roles in in Christian Churches/Churches of Christ during the twentieth century. However, that conversation did not end in the 1970s, but continued in the twenty-first century. In the next section, I will detail the history of conversation in *The Christian Standard* in the twenty-first century. To do this, I will break up the eighteen years into four separate periods in order to better analyze the trends of conversation.

The Christian Standard of the 21st Century

2000–2002

For *The Christian Standard*, conversation in the twenty-first century seemed to be pretty steady and ongoing. From 2000 to 2003 the conversation was consistently represented, though it was primarily stimulated by comments from readers. For example, in April 2000, Robert F. Hull wrote a comment lamenting the lack of “accomplished and able women speakers” at the North American Christian Convention.⁴ Later, in August of that year, a brief mention of the issue was brought up by Rick Stedman, pastor and lesson writer for *The Christian Standard*. In this article, he mentioned that he was approached with the question “if [his] church believed in women in leadership.” He simply responded

3. Roger Burns-Watson, “The Role of Women: A Study of Stone-Campbell Movement Journals,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly*, 174.

4. Robert F. Hull, “What about the Women?” *The Christian Standard*, April 23, 2000, 13.

that women served in leadership roles in the Bible. He went on to make an argument that throughout Scripture, a woman would step up and lead God's people whenever men "fail[ed] to lead." This article, while seemingly conversing about women's roles, was actually geared toward encouraging men to lead in the church so that women don't have to fill that role.⁵

In 2001, a simple editorial response to a letter appeared in March. In this article, the editors of the *Christian Standard* were asked if women could serve communion in church. The editors seemed to avoid the question by stating, "scripture really has nothing to say that [they] know of" and by calling the church to decide for themselves in situations where Scripture is silent.⁶ The conversation was once again stimulated by comments when this article was soon followed by a comment in the April edition by John D. Davis. In his comment, Davis claimed that to allow women to serve communion in the church "is a definite leaning of churches toward permitting women leaders in the church, which [he] firmly believes is wrong."⁷ Davis concluded his comment by presenting his argument against having women serve in any leadership roles within the church.

In 2002, an essay titled "Let's Reach the Men" was published in the *Christian Standard*. This essay, focused on how to get men more involved in the church, began with the statement "You build a church with men" and "when women take on leadership functions in most churches, the men retreat or withdraw."⁸ This article was important to

5. Rick Stedman, "Deborah," *The Christian Standard*. August 27, 2000, 22.

6. Sam E. Stone, "What about Women Serving Communion?" *The Christian Standard*, March 4, 2001. 3.

7. John D. Davis, "Don't Jump on the Bandwagon," *The Christian Standard*, April 29, 2001. 16.

8. Don Wilson, "Let's Reach the Men," *The Christian Standard*, March 24, 2002, 4-5.

the discussion on women's roles in that Robert F. Hull commented again on the subject of women's roles in the church. In response to this essay, Hull suggested that instead of not allowing women to serve in leadership roles "for fear the men will 'retreat or withdraw'," they should "eagerly welcome into leadership all who are gifted and called to serve, male and female."⁹ Another comment regarding Don Wilson's email was published in June by Betty Aldridge, a respondent from Indiana. Aldridge expressed her disappointment and outrage over Wilson's thoughts, claiming that his view was "very degrading" and "insults [her] abilities that God gave [her]."¹⁰

2003–2005

However, in 2003, *The Christian Standard* initiated its engagement in conversation concerning the issue. First, in May, Paul E. Boatman, a professor at Lincoln Christian Seminary, wrote an article that noted six changing trends in the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. In this article, Boatman mentioned the growing number of women in leadership positions. He concluded the section on women leaders calling for more dialogue on women's roles in the church by stating, "the issue of women in ministry deserves to be debated."¹¹ While primarily neutral in nature, this article revealed a growing trend in Christian Churches/Churches of Christ that would spark much conversation later this year. In October, the editors dedicated a whole issue to the conversation of women's roles within the church.¹² This issue contained several articles appealing for more conversation, more research and investigation into scriptures to

9. Robert F. Hull, "Do Women Matter?" *The Christian Standard*, May 19, 2002, 7.

10. Betty Aldridge, "Degrading." *The Christian Standard*, June 30, 2002, 16.

11. Paul E. Boatman, "50 Years of Changes," *The Christian Standard*. May 18, 2003, 4-7.

12. Mark Taylor, ed., "Women in Ministry: Two Views Among Many," *The Christian Standard*, October 2003. 1-16.

defend one's beliefs, and sensitivity when discussing the issues and sharing stories and beliefs of individuals in the conversation. Mark A. Taylor, editor for the *Christian Standard*, encouraged conversation and open-mindedness by beginning this edition with a call to readers to think about what children could learn by seeing "whole families pass Communion emblems . . . followed by husband-and-wife teams . . . and converts [being] baptized by their friends or family members, regardless of gender." Taylor's article seemed to lead readers to be open-minded to more progressive views on women's roles. This article was quickly followed by an in-depth study of social and biblical argumentation in opposition to increased roles for women by Tom Lawson, professor at Ozark Christian College; an article focused on how to treat women already in ministry across the nation and the promotion of expanding women's roles in the future by Eleanor Daniel, professor at Emmanuel School of Religion; a review of a book, "Men and Women in the Church" by Sarah Sumner, dedicated to discussing the issue; and a testimony from Paul S. Williams, a preacher, about his experience witnessing a woman "masterfully present the gospel from behind the pulpit."¹³ This issue was crucial in the kick starting of conversation on women's roles in the twenty-first century.

A couple of months later, in February 2004, the conversation continued with another article concerning gender roles by Gayle Gresham.¹⁴ In this article, Gresham illustrated her story as a woman who felt called to teach men. Her church welcomed her calling and gave her the role of leading a class with men in it. However, Gresham relayed in the article that she sometimes feels tension about whether or not she should be teaching men. She ended the article with a plea for leaders to value women and to be

13. Ibid.

14. Gayle Gresham, "Women Teaching Men," *The Christian Standard*, February 2004, 8-9.

sensitive in the conversation about women's roles. This article launched a series of responses throughout the year in support and in rejection of Gresham's view and role in her church.¹⁵ In addition, Bob Wood, a respondent from Oregon, commented on the ever-increasing conversation on women's roles in the *Christian Standard* stating that, as much as he appreciated the conversation, he felt that this was "a subject we have beaten to death without being able to come to a unifying conclusion."¹⁶

In January 2005, Alan LaRue wrote an article titled "How Can They Hear Without a Preacher?" This article offered no insight into the conversation of women's roles, instead focusing on the growing need for more preaching ministers. However, this article was commented on by Robert Hull, a regular at this point when it came to bringing light to expanding women's roles in the church within *The Christian Standard*. Hull proposed that one possible solution to the lack of preachers could be "the many committed, trained, and gifted women who would preach if they had an opportunity."¹⁷ The first five years of the twenty-first century, though slow to bring attention to the issue, seemed to make giant steps in the discussion of women's roles in *The Christian Standard*. However, these steps were soon to be overshadowed by an even greater leap to take place in the following five years.

2006–2010

The next five years for *The Christian Standard* was full of conversation on the subject of gender roles. In May 2006, *The Christian Standard* published another whole

15. David H. Waser, "Further Discussion Is Needed," *The Christian Standard*, April 18, 2004, 13; Bill Littrell, "Embrace the Wisdom of God," *The Christian Standard*, April 18, 2004, 13; and Virgil White, "Very Important Principle Overlooked," *The Christian Standard*, May 30, 2004, 12.

16. Bob Wood, "A Time for Silence, A Time for Boldness," *The Christian Standard*, February 8, 2004, 12.

17. Robert Hull, "Who Is Ready to Open the Door?" *The Christian Standard*, May 8, 2005, 13.

edition dedicated to the conversation of women's roles in the church. Mark A. Taylor initiated the conversation with an article titled "What We Can Do If We Can't Agree."¹⁸ Taylor's primary goal in this article is to promote "respect for God's word, respect for women's gifts and their call to serve God, [and] respect for the person . . . whom Scripture directs me to consider more highly than my own opinions."¹⁸ In that same edition, a short series titled "3 Women in Ministry" was included.¹⁹ These articles presented the diverse origins and ministries of three women. The women share their stories, their struggles as women in ministry, and their desires for the future of their ministries. *The Christian Standard* encouraged conversation by providing this series of articles.

The following year, however, proved to be almost completely void of articles on women's roles, with the exception of a brief mention in an interview conducted with Eleanor Daniel on her role as a Bible professor. The short interview included a series of questions concerning women's roles and whether or not she advocated for a broader view of those roles in the church.²⁰ Daniel claims in this article "that many, many churches would profit a great deal by allowing some of their very capable women to utilize their talents in many ways" and notes that things are trending positively for women in

18. Mark A. Taylor, "What We Can Do If We Can't Agree," *The Christian Standard*, May 14, 2006, 3.

19. Debbie Jones, "3 WOMEN IN MINISTRY: 'There's Nothing I'd Rather Do!'" *The Christian Standard*, May 2006, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2006/05/cs_article-297/; Linda Ahlgrim, "3 WOMEN IN MINISTRY: 'I Couldn't Be More Thrilled'," *The Christian Standard*, May 2006, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2006/05/cs_article-296/; Debbie Jones, "3 WOMEN IN MINISTRY: 'I'm Glad I'm a Megachurch Pastor's Wife'," *The Christian Standard*, May 2006, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2006/05/cs_article-298/.

20. Brad Dupray, "Interview with Eleanor Daniel." *The Christian Standard*, June 2007, Accessed on April 9, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2007/06/interview-with-eleanor-daniel/>

leadership.²¹ Aside from this small blip in the entire year's worth of articles, *The Christian Standard* seemed to avoid the issue altogether. However, it could easily be said that this was just the calm before the storm that took place the year after.

In 2008, *The Christian Standard* exploded with conversation concerning women's roles in the church. This year vastly increased the conversation on women's roles through interviews that stressed the need for discussion among leaders on women's roles,²² an announcement of the first installment of the North American Christian Convention: Women's Conference,²³ and another two back-to-back issues dedicated solely to the conversation on gender roles in the church.

The August edition of *The Christian Standard* contained numerous articles, opinions, interviews, and letters concerning the subject of women's roles in the church. Mark A. Taylor introduced this edition with a call to be open-minded to all sides of the issue and by affirming the fact that *The Christian Standard* does not take a side in the issue, but rather seeks to provide both sides ample support and encourage conversation between the two, claiming that:

All our feature articles in these issues address the question of women in church leadership. All of them examine Scripture, some of them the same Scriptures. These writers all believe the Bible and agree it should drive our decisions. All of them are immersed believers, members of Christian churches or churches of Christ.²⁴

21. Ibid.

22. Brad Dupray, "Interview with Lynn Anderson," *The Christian Standard*, January 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2008/01/interview-with-lynn-anderson/>.

23. Julie Gariss, "2008 NACC Women's Conference: The Best Part Is in the Middle," *The Christian Standard*, February 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2008/02/cs_article-802/.

24. Mark Taylor, "Both Sides and a Strong Conclusion," *The Christian Standard*, August 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2008/08/both-sides-and-a-strong-conclusion-mark-a-taylor/>.

Following Taylor’s introduction, Lana West presented the egalitarian view.²⁵ This article was one of two—presenting two different views on women’s roles in the church—that *The Christian Standard* decided to publish. In this article, Lana West presented her egalitarian view that women should be allowed to fulfill their calling in whatever role they are in.²⁶ She used argumentation from scripture and a well-developed philosophy to defend her side of the conversation. She broke her argumentation into five major categories—Creation Design, Old Testament Illustrations, The Ministry of Jesus, Early Church Examples, and Paul’s Teachings. Then, she simply responded to each category, refuting arguments against women in leadership roles and promoting others as she wrestled with this topic. She concluded with the statement: “If evangelical Christians are not willing to accept women in leadership roles, then they continue to limit the ministry opportunities for which women are being prepared in our Christian colleges and seminaries to fulfill Jesus’ command to go, teach, baptize, and disciple the world.”²⁷ This article also sparked a series of letters and responses throughout the year both in support and rejection of West’s opinion. In the same edition, Joe Harvey presented the complementarian viewpoint (the belief that “women have a different role in the life of the

25. Lana West, “Two Views: Egalitarian—Allow Women to Fulfill Their Calling,” *The Christian Standard*, August 2005, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2005/08/cs_article-969/.

26. It is worth noting here that traditionally there are three primary viewpoints on women’s roles in the church—the traditional viewpoint, the complementarian viewpoint, and the egalitarian viewpoint. For further insight into the traditional viewpoint see Jack Cottrell, *Gender Roles & the Bible* (Joplin: College Press, 1994). For further insight into the complementarian viewpoint see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991). Finally, for further insight into the egalitarian viewpoint see Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

27. Lana West, “Two Views: Egalitarian—Allow Women to Fulfill Their Calling,” *The Christian Standard*, August 2005, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2005/08/cs_article-969/.

church than do men” and that the two sexes should complement each other) with evidence from Scripture, philosophy, and stories similar to those told by Lana West.²⁸ In fact, Harvey used the same five categories (Creation Design, Old Testament Illustrations, The Ministry of Jesus, Early Church Examples, and Paul’s Teachings) to discuss his viewpoint on the issue. Harvey began with the statement: “Women should not serve in ministry leadership roles because they are not to exercise authority over men. This principle is established through God’s creation design, illustrated in the Old Testament, reinforced in the ministry of Jesus, and stipulated in the teachings of Paul.”²⁹ After going through each of the categories, citing textual evidence in support of the complementarian view, Harvey concluded with his stance that “for those of us who are compelled to let the Scriptures sit in judgment of our thinking and guide us to God’s perspective” (aka Christians), there is a countercultural call that must be followed. That calling is to recognize that men and women are not equal in all respects. He indicated that some roles are to be reserved specifically for men (authority positions such as teaching, leading, or preaching) while others are held specifically for women (though he did not state which ones). This provided the second piece to the puzzle or the other side to the coin of discussion on woman’s roles, sparked further conversation in comments to be published later, and, alongside West’s article, set up readers for the next issue dedicated solely to women’s roles in the church.

The second edition dedicated to women’s roles was introduced by Steve Edgington, elder and vice-president of academic affairs at Hope International University.

28. Joe Harvey, “Two Views: Complementarian—Men Are Authoritative Teachers,” *The Christian Standard*, August 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2008/08/cs_article-968/.

29. Ibid.

Edgington illustrated his own church's, Anaheim First Christian Church, theological processing, growing inclusion of women in leadership positions, and overwhelming success as a result of that inclusion.³⁰ Jeff Miller, an associate professor of Bible at Milligan College, also weighed in on the issue by correcting often misused and inaccurate argumentation for passages that are “frequently cited to demonstrate that Paul does not have in mind only the women of Corinth.” This article served to clarify any false supports and encouraged people to pay “careful attention to the details of translated biblical texts . . . for fruitful discussions in the church.”³¹ Kevin Jones, professor of theology and biblical studies at Nebraska Christian College, also weighed in on the issue by taking a more complementarian viewpoint. Jones argued from biological and behavioral differences to confirm the “biblical teaching concerning the complementary nature of men and women, and of God’s design and calling of men to Christlike leadership in the home and in the church.”³² These three articles by esteemed scholars furthered the conversation in *The Christian Standard* and served as the focus of many comments to come.

The year 2008 was monumental for the conversation of women’s roles in *The Christian Standard*. In fact, in a November issue the editors noted that they could not publish the high number of letters to the editor in response to the two issues on women’s roles. They did, however, include four letters within this issue. The fiery nature of the letters can be clearly identified even through the titles: “We tend to Bypass . . .,”

30. Steve Edgington, “Elders, Leadership, and Women,” *The Christian Standard*, August 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2008/08/cs_article-973/.

31. Jeff Miller, “Especially in Bible Translation . . . Close Only Counts . . .,” *The Christian Standard*, August 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2008/08/cs_article-974/.

32. Kelvin Jones, “Masculinity, Femininity, and Church Leadership,” *The Christian Standard*, August 2008, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2008/08/cs_article-975/.

“‘Biologically unsuited’? Please!,” “Deplorable,” and “Highly Offended.”³³ Furthermore, the ripples of conversation continued to take place even up to April of the following year, when *The Christian Standard* published an article concerning the flood of letters they had received. In this article, Paul Williams, an editor for *The Christian Standard*, responded to the overwhelming number of angry letters that they had received in response to the “point-counterpoint” August 2008 issue. Williams stated: “Contrary to what some might think, it is not our intention to anger our readers. We do, however, want people to think about important issues of faith in ways they might not were they to taste only one particular perspective.”³⁴ He went on to say, “What surprised us were those writing from both sides who were angry we had presented the other side at all!”³⁵ However, as Williams later pointed out, this (the presentation of only one side) goes against the very nature of the publication and their mission to encourage conversation. Williams finished his response in the April of 2009 issue by stating that *The Christian Standard* “will continue to publish articles designed to encourage readers to think. To do any less would violate the memory of those who have gone before, who devoted their lives to ‘New Testament Christianity, its doctrines, its ordinances, and its fruits.’”³⁶

The editors of *The Christian Standard* had achieved their goal of encouraging conversation among its readers on the topic of women’s roles in the church. However,

33. Rick Willis, “We Tend to Bypass ...” *The Christian Standard*, November 2, 2017, 14; Pat Magness, “‘Biologically Unsuitable,’” *The Christian Standard*, November 2, 2017, 14-15; Michael Bray, “Deplorable,” *The Christian Standard*, November 2, 2017, 15, and Stephen Frantz, “Highly Offended,” *The Christian Standard*, November 2, 2017, 15.

34. Paul Williams, “We Get Letters,” *The Christian Standard*, March 2009, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2009/03/we-get-letters-by-paul-s-williams/>.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

this was not the end of the conversation. Later that year, Douglas Foster published an article using a biblical argument to tackle the issue and encourage conversation about women's roles.³⁷ Foster's main focus was to break down 2 Corinthian 5:17–20 in the hopes of “reconciling male and female.” Through a thorough analysis of this passage, Dr. Foster concluded with the plea that the church, “the one place on earth where the kingdom ought to be most clearly seen,” should “reflect on God's intention to break down” the walls of separation and discrimination, including those of gender.³⁸ After this article, however, the conversation began to quiet down until 2011.

2011–2014

The next several years of conversation on women's roles seemed to be a rollercoaster of conversation—some periods of incredibly rich conversation and some of very little. However, it appeared that the conversation seemed to rise again slowly as the years go by. 2011 was a year of pleas to understand and provide a voice for the women serving in ministry. Three articles published throughout the year were designed to ask questions, relay testimonies of women in the trenches of ministry, and survey the churches' views on the issue.³⁹ The articles encouraged an open mind to women in ministerial roles and illustrated the changing views of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ towards a more open stance on the issue. This year seemed to show a leaning

37. Douglas Foster, “The Point of Christianity 4: Reconciling Male and Female,” *The Christian Standard*, December 2009, Accessed on April 9, 2015, http://christianstandard.com/2009/12/cs_article-1370/.

38. Ibid.

39. Paul Williams, “An Inborn Gift with No Outlet?” *The Christian Standard*, January 2011, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2011/01/an-inborn-gift-with-no-outlet/>; Darrel Rowland, “Reaching Their Potential?” *The Christian Standard*, May 2011, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2011/05/reaching-their-potential/>; and Darrel Rowland, “Women's Ministry: Changing Views,” *The Christian Standard*, May 2011, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2011/05/womens-ministry-changing-views/>.

toward the progressive side of the conversation as very few statements of the conservative side were published. This was followed by a year of silence concerning the matter.

However, 2013 appeared to be another year of reckoning as articles were published that contained some of the most passionate pleas seen and some of the most emotional responses thus far. In 2013, Bryan Mavis published an article titled “Women Preaching.” In this article, Mavis detailed the stories of Jodi Hickerson, Hannah Randolph, and Rhesa Storms—all woman preachers/teachers from the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ.⁴⁰ It relayed their struggles navigating a ministerial role in a world that is not always so open to them serving in that manner. The article itself was passionate and encouraging for the progressives or those who viewed the expansion of women’s roles as beneficial. However, what was really significant was the sheer number of emotional and sometimes aggressive responses from both the progressive side and from the conservative side revolving around this article on women preaching. If the editors’ goal was to start a feud, then they certainly achieved it with this article.

The other article that exhibited a great amount of passion this year was an article by Betty Aldridge. In this article, Betty told her story of being a woman called to preach but never given the opportunity, remembering the statement that she heard when she was younger, “What a shame . . . God didn’t make you a boy.”⁴¹ The level of discussion concerning women’s roles in the church exploded in 2013, encouraging responses full of life, passion, and often scholarship. In fact, it was even mentioned that “the April 2013

40. Bryan Mavis, “Women Preaching,” *The Christian Standard*, April 2013, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2013/04/women-preaching/>.

41. Betty Aldridge, “‘What a Shame . . . God Didn’t Make You a Boy,’” *The Christian Standard*, October 2013, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2013/10/what-a-shame-god-didnt-make-you-a-boy/>.

article ‘Women Preaching’ generated more comments on *The Christian Standard’s* website than any other article last year.”⁴²

This interest in dialogue continued the following year. In 2014, Matt Proctor published an article titled “Should Women Preach? (The Story of One Bible College Faculty’s Quest for An Answer).”⁴³ In this article, Proctor seemed to shift the conversation more to the more conservative, complementarian side on the issue of women preaching in the church. Proctor conducted an academic study of Scripture to determine that women should not be able to preach except under extreme situations. Proctor concluded with the following statement concerning women in leadership roles within the church: “women are also gifted and called to serve in many significant ways in the church’s life that are not ‘up-front’ ministry.”⁴⁴ This article elicited another series of emotional responses from both sides of the issue, encouraging the conversation even more and fueling the ongoing debate over the roles allotted to women in the church. While the editors of *The Christian Standard* have shown interest in encouraging the conversation over the last several years by including such hotly debated conversations within their publication, the editors themselves have been predominately quiet in the conversation so far.

2015–2017

However, 2015, was a very unique year for the editors of *The Christian Standard*. It is in this year that the editors left the quietness of their editing and chose to speak on

42. Matt Proctor, “Should Women Preach? (The Story of One Bible College Faculty’s Quest for an Answer),” *The Christian Standard*, March 2014. Accessed on April 9, 2015. <http://christianstandard.com/2014/03/should-women-preach-the-story-of-one-bible-college-facultys-quest-for-an-answer/>.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

the issue of women's roles. In 2015, Mark Taylor, head editor of *The Christian Standard*, published three articles on the topic promoting further conversation. He stated, "It's time to broaden our discussion about women's roles in the church," encouraging sensitivity in the discussion, and upholding an appeal for love and care for women already in ministry, stating, "It would be a shame to invite women to the table without giving them a voice once they're there."⁴⁵ Furthermore, showing a shift in the overall consensus of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, *The Christian Standard* published an article detailing the speakers of the 2015 North American Christian Convention, which included Jodi Hickerson.⁴⁶ The publication followed up this article with a series of interviews pertaining to the selection of Mrs. Hickerson as a speaker at the NACC and the overall discussion on women's roles within the church. The first was an exclusive interview with Mrs. Hickerson herself, in which they discuss her experience and thoughts on women's roles in the church. In the interview, the interviewer/editor revealed being "inspired" by Mrs. Hickerson speaking from the big stage as a woman from the Restoration Movement and providing an "audible voice" and "visible role."⁴⁷ This interview displays a strong progressive view in the discussion on women's roles in the church.

45. Mark Taylor, "It's Not Just a Woman's Issue," *The Christian Standard*, January 2015, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2015/01/its-not-just-a-womans-issue/>; Mark Taylor, "A Voice at the Table," *The Christian Standard*, February 2015, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2015/02/a-voice-at-the-table/>; Mark Taylor, "Your Church: a Boys Club?" *The Christian Standard*, February 2015, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2015/02/your-church-a-boys-club/>.

46. Mike Baker, "We Speak: Previewing the 2015 NACC," *The Christian Standard*, February 2015, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2015/02/we-speak-previewing-the-2015-nacc/>.

47. Mike Baker, "A Conversation with Jodi Hickerson," *The Christian Standard*, July 2015, Accessed on March 16, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2015/07/a-conversation-with-jodi-hickerson/>.

A few months later, *The Christian Standard* published another interview with the director of the NACC concerning the decision to have Jodi Hickerson speak.⁴⁸ This interview, although predominantly progressive in nature, as the director starkly defends his stance on women's roles in the church and his promotion of Mrs. Hickerson speaking, created quite a stir of emotions from both progressives and conservatives in the comment section of *The Christian Standard*. The interviews in 2015 seemed to create quite a stir among the readers as they actively start to debate and discuss the issue at hand in a very emotional and lengthy series of comments. Conversation concerning women's roles in the church was active and thriving in an almost overwhelming manner.

The conversation continued in 2016, albeit to a lesser degree. In the December issue, women's roles came to the forefront as three separate editors provided articles pertaining to how God has worked through women throughout history. These articles all fed into the primary article concerning women's roles in the church today written by Taylor.⁴⁹ In his article, Taylor expressed gratitude for the many ways that women have and continue to do God's work in the church. By bringing attention to the many roles that women are currently involved in in the church, Taylor seemed to be highlighting their gifts and ability to use them in a variety of church roles, including public leadership.

Another of the articles published was an opinion piece that called for people to wrestle with questions concerning women's roles as leaders in the church by rephrasing the questions to center on whether women should have the ability to use their gifts in the

48. Darrel Rowland, "Baker Knew Speaker Choice Was Unconventional," *The Christian Standard*, September 2015, Accessed on March 16, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2015/09/baker-knew-speaker-choice-was-unconventional/>.

49. Mark A. Taylor, "What Women Can Do," *The Christian Standard*, December 2016, Accessed April 8, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2016/12/what-women-can-do/>.

church whatever they may be.⁵⁰ The second article continued to drive conversation in a more progressive tone by including an interview with another woman Bible professor who trains women to serve in churches.⁵¹ These two articles together serve as a means for carrying the conversation through the end of 2016.

The year 2017 seemed to show great promise for continued conversation on women's roles. In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, the author of one article, Tim Harlow, noticed a grave toll that was taken on the value of women culturally in the United States of America but also in the church. Harlow called the reader to place high value on women instead of marginalizing or silencing them. Although the writer quickly revealed his position to increase the roles granted to women in the church, he does not "lobby for any church to change its theological position."⁵² Instead, he urged churches to have healthy conversations and studies on the issue while demonstrating the high value that women have for the church. It is apparent from the last several years of articles published in *The Christian Standard* that the conversation will not only continue, but also continue to increase in frequency and passion.

50. Susan Lawrence, "Working Women/Women's Work: A View from the Heartland," *The Christian Standard*, December 2016, Accessed on April 9, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2016/12/working-womenwomens-work-a-view-from-the-heartland/>.

51. T. R. Robinson, "Training the Next Generation of Women in Ministry: An Interview with Anne Menear," *The Christian Standard*, December 2016, Accessed on April 9, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2016/12/training-the-next-generation-of-women-in-ministry-an-interview-with-anne-menear/>.

52. Tim Harlow, "A Woman's Place," *The Christian Standard*, March 2017, Accessed April 9, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2017/03/a-womans-place/>.

Trend Observations in *The Christian Standard*Figure 3: Articles on Women's Roles in *The Christian Standard*

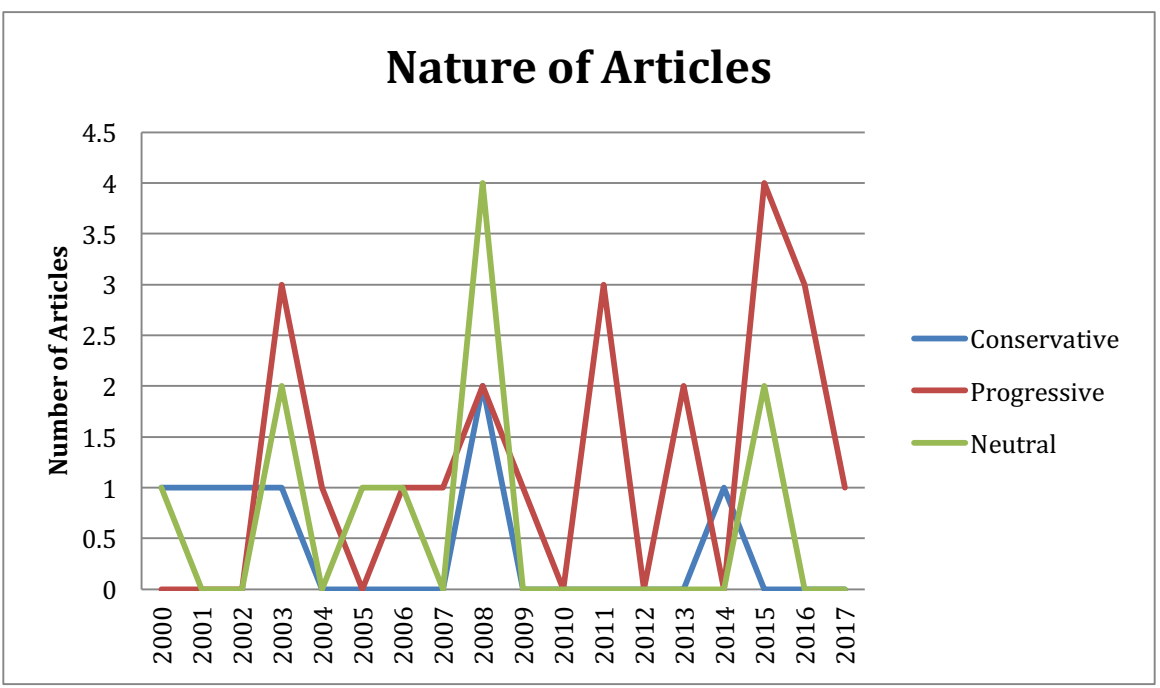
The chart above illustrates the attention given to the conversation on women's roles within *The Christian Standard*. It is from this chart that we can begin to notice the trends that exist in the conversation. The first trend is the sheer instability of conversation. The conversation seems to come in short bursts every couple of years then, just as suddenly, withdraw. The second trend is that, while the amount of conversation has varied, for the most part there has been a relatively consistent existence of conversation with the exception of 2010 and 2012. There is no conversation present in these two years, an absence made even more significant by the fact that in 2010 there were a total of fifty-two different opportunities and in 2012 a total of thirty-six different opportunities to include the issue. The third trend is that *The Christian Standard* has really high peaks of conversation every couple of years. In these periods, the language is highly emotional and passionate, and the conversation is raging like a fire. Comments,

rebuttal articles, editorial clarifications, and opinion pieces concerning women's roles are rapidly joining the conversation. The fourth trend to observe from the above graph is that in the last several years of our time period the conversation does not fully drop out as previous years have done. Instead, while it does have a slight decrease in 2014 and again in 2016, the conversation still remains, and the chart indicates that the conversation is steadily continuing to build. The fifth trend to observe is that the high peaks of conversation every couple of years seem to be directly related to the strong attention given to the issue by the editors. In 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2015, the editors of *The Christian Standard* dedicated whole publications to discuss the issue. Each of these publications resulted in numerous comments and continued conversation. The editors, primarily Mark Taylor, acting chief editor at the time, strongly encouraged the ongoing conversation over the issue by dedicating so much time and space for the discussion to take place. The final trends to observe require one to analyze the nature of the articles published in *The Christian Standard*. Are they progressively pushing for extended roles or open-mindedness in the issue? Are they conservatively pressing for traditional or submissive roles for women? Are they just pushing for further conversation while not taking a side on the issue? Figure 4, below, illustrates the "nature" of each article presented in *The Christian Standard*.⁵³ From the chart, one can reach several conclusions. First, the three "natures" of conversation seem to peak around the same years—2003, 2008, and 2014/2015. This seems to indicate that every four to six years the conversation seems to increase within the publication. Second, there seems to be a reversal of the most popular "nature" in 2002. *The Christian Standard* seemed to have a more conservative

53. The word "nature" is used to define the stance or leaning that the article seems to take on the issue, be it conservative, progressive, or neutral.

leaning until this year. After 2002, the progressive nature of articles was more common in the publication. Furthermore, after 2008, the progressive “nature” seemed to almost completely take over *The Christian Standard*, with the exception of one small conservative article in 2014. This trend seems to indicate a shift in stance on the issue within the publication, thereby indicating a possible shift in stance in the general mentality of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ or the positions of *The Christian Standard*'s editors, or simply a stronger push from the more progressive writers on the issue.

Figure 4: Nature of Articles in *The Christian Standard*



CHAPTER IV

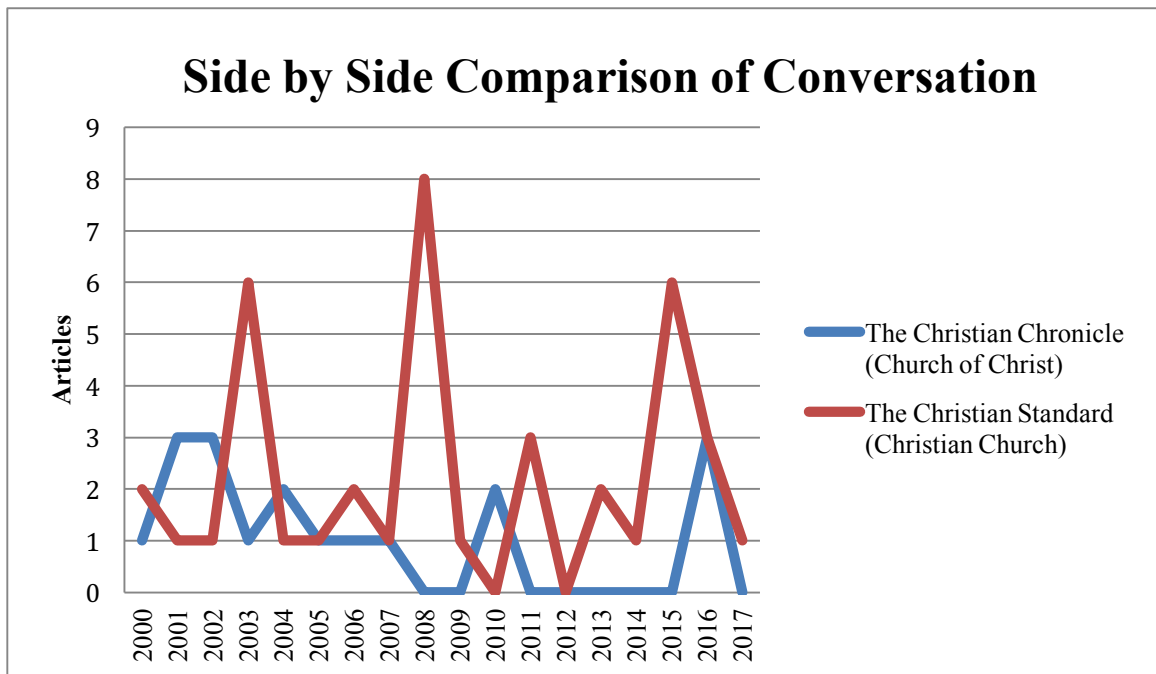
STUDY CONCLUSION

Comparison, Application, Conclusion

How Do the Publications Compare/Contrast?

A close comparison of the trends in these two publications provides valuable insight into the current state of conversation on women's roles in these movements. Yet it also provides a significant number of questions with which we must wrestle. In Figure 5, I have overlaid the data to contrast trends in conversation between the two streams.

Figure 5: Side-by-Side Comparison of Conversation



Trend Comparison Analysis

Before we can thoroughly analyze the differences, we must first identify underlying commonalities between the two journals. First, both *The Christian Chronicle* and *The Christian Standard* seem to encourage the need for conversation pertaining to women's roles in the church. Both deem it necessary to wrestle with this question indicated by their inclusion of multiple views and stances in the publications. Second, like good "unbiased" media sources, both publications try not to take a side on the issue. They both strive to present the best case for each position, allowing readers to make their own judgments based on the information provided in their articles. Both constantly affirm that they do not intend to take a side and both receive significant backlash from readers claiming they are in fact taking sides by including what the respondent would identify as a divergent viewpoint. Lastly, and, I believe most importantly, both *The Christian Chronicle* and *The Christian Standard* encourage sensitivity in the conversation regardless of which side the reader may take. They acknowledge the value of respecting and loving other human beings. Furthermore, they recognize that to have good conversation, mutual respect must be maintained between both sides.¹

There also seem to be some shared qualities that seem less positive. I find it surprising that both publications, though they see the issue as important to their respective audiences, fail to remain consistent in the ongoing conversation. Some years,

1. Paul S. Williams, "We Get Letters," *The Christian Standard*, March 2009, Accessed on April 23, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2009/03/we-get-letters-by-paul-s-williams/>; Mark A. Taylor, "Both Sides and a Strong Conclusion," *The Christian Standard*, August 2008, Accessed on April 23, 2017, <http://www.christianstandard.com/2008/08/both-sides-and-a-strong-conclusion-mark-a-taylor/>; Lindy Adams, "Women's Issue Evoking Varying Conclusions," September 2004, Accessed on April 23, 2017, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/womens-issue-evokes-varying-conclusions>; and Bobby Ross, Jr., "What Do We Tell Our Daughters About the Proper Role of Women in the Church," June 2016, Accessed on April 23, 2017, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/what-do-we-tell-our-daughters-about-the-proper-role-of-women-in-church?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442807&ObjectID=4998444&ObjectType=35>.

like 2008 and 2015 for *The Christian Standard* and 2000 and 2002 for *The Christian Chronicle*, contained numerous articles on the matter, while other years remained completely silent. The lack of consistency doesn't seem to reflect their beliefs that conversation on this issue is truly important. If the publications truly wanted to impact the dialogue on this issue, one would think that it would have a more consistent presence in the publications. This would allow more voices to be heard, more points to be made, and present weightiness to the topic. The conversation never completely dies out in either publication, however. Just when you think the conversation might have died out for good, another series of articles and responses appears.

Second, overall the number of articles pertaining to women's roles is low. As indicated in a 2007 article by Editor Bobby Ross Jr. in *The Christian Chronicle*, one of the greatest items that separates Stone-Campbell movement churches from mainstream churches, according to Stone-Campbell leaders, is their conservative stances on women's roles, instrumental music, and other issues.² If it is such an "identifiable" issue, why is it not given much attention? There were only 39 articles in *The Christian Standard* and about 18 articles in *The Christian Chronicle* pertaining to women's roles within the last eighteen years. To put that into perspective, we must also realize the sheer number of issues released by these publications over the course of 18 years—726 issues (6,900–10,200 articles) from *The Christian Standard* and 216 issues (5,400–7,600 articles) from

2. Bobby Ross Jr., "Who Are We: Expanded Interviews with Sources from Non-Mainstream Churches," *The Christian Chronicle*, March 2007, Accessed on April 9, 2015, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/who-are-we-expanded-interviews-with-sources-from-non-mainstream-churches>.

The Christian Chronicle.³ When put in this perspective, the overall attention given to this issue is incredibly low—0.38%–0.57% in *The Christian Standard* and 0.24–0.33% in *The Christian Chronicle*.

Trend Contrast Analysis

Furthermore, *The Christian Chronicle* and *The Christian Standard* also contain significant differences that should be noted in the understanding of trends in conversation. For starters, despite the fact there is a low number of articles overall, there is a significant difference in the number of articles concerning women's roles between the publications. While *The Christian Chronicle* outweighed *The Christian Standard* in the first three years of publication in the 2000s, *The Christian Standard* greatly surpassed *The Christian Chronicle* in women's roles related articles to the present. There were some years in which *The Christian Standard* published close to three times the number of articles on the topic as *The Christian Chronicle*.

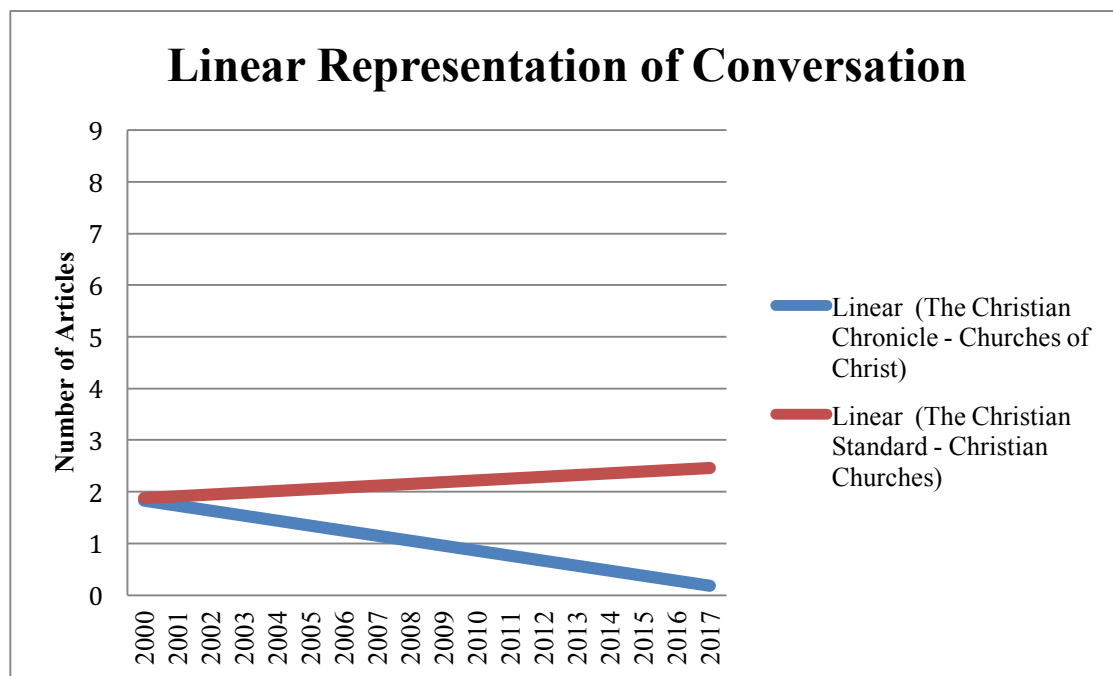
Two items must be addressed before we go any further in our analysis and understanding of the difference in the number of articles present. First, it should be noted here that *The Christian Standard*, until 2012, was published weekly, indicating that they had many more chances to publish an article detailing this issue. This would be a strong factor to consider except, upon viewing the chart, we can see that the switch to monthly did not alter the presence of women's roles related articles in any significant manner. The average number of articles did not change in any significant way. In fact, even after the switch over to monthly publication, the publication achieved one of their highest peaks in conversation (2015). This denotes a positive shift in the number of articles, as the number

3. *The Christian Chronicle* is published monthly, while *The Christian Standard* was published weekly until September 2012 when it became a monthly publication. This switch included a much larger publication (more pages and articles).

remained the same even though the opportunities for publication lessened. Furthermore, when the publication was weekly, the amount of space and number of articles was significantly less. Second, when taking the shift from weekly to monthly issues in consideration, the percentage of conversations present in each publication confirms the lack of any significant alteration. *The Christian Standard* maintains a very dominant presence in number and in percentage (0.38–0.57% as compared to *The Christian Chronicle's* 0.24–0.33%).

Second, the conversation on women's roles in *The Christian Chronicle* seemed to be dying out, while conversation on women's roles in *The Christian Standard* seemed to be strong and possibly increasing. To see a representation of the trends in conversation in each journal, see figure 6 below.⁴

Figure 6: Linear Representation of Conversation



4. This trend line chart is developed by Excel from the number of articles presented (x) across time in years (y).

I find this trend to be quite interesting, yet it also yields many questions. Why is the conversation steadily increasing in *The Christian Standard*? Why is the conversation dropping so drastically in *The Christian Chronicle*? Are these accurate representations of the conversation at large? These questions are not easily answered.

The last major trend to observe from these two publications' attention to women's roles is the nature of the articles. As mentioned in previous chapters, by studying the "nature" of each article, we notice some significant trends. Figure 7 illustrates the presence of articles with a conservative nature within each publication. It seems that the conservative presence comes in very similar waves—peaking in 2000–2003, 2006–2009, and 2013–2016.⁵ The steady appearance of a conservative article or two is similar to a heart at rest in this regard—consistent, ongoing, and comprised of two beats one after another. (The conversation will peak in one journal, and then shortly after peak in the other one, visible in Figure 7 below). Another trend to observe from Figure 7 is the low number of conservative articles that appear in either publication—only one a year with the exception of 2008. This may not seem significant at this point, but when we observe the progressive presence, we will be able to see this more clearly.

5. In this essay I use the words progressive and conservative to describe the two different sides of the issue of women's roles. I define "progressive" as one who sees the benefit in having women serve in broader roles than what tradition has assigned them. I define "conservative" as one who adheres to more traditional views of women submitting to men and with limited roles. "Neutral" is used for articles that do not promote conservative or progressive views, but instead push for more discussion or have little to no bias.

Figure 7: Conservative Nature of Articles

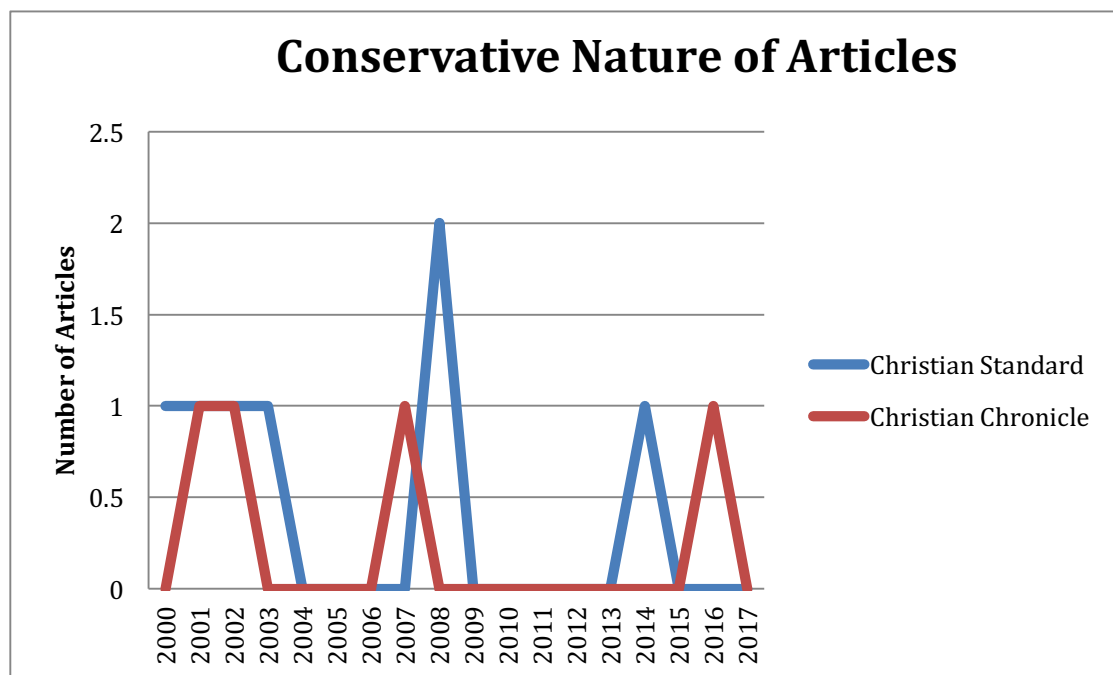
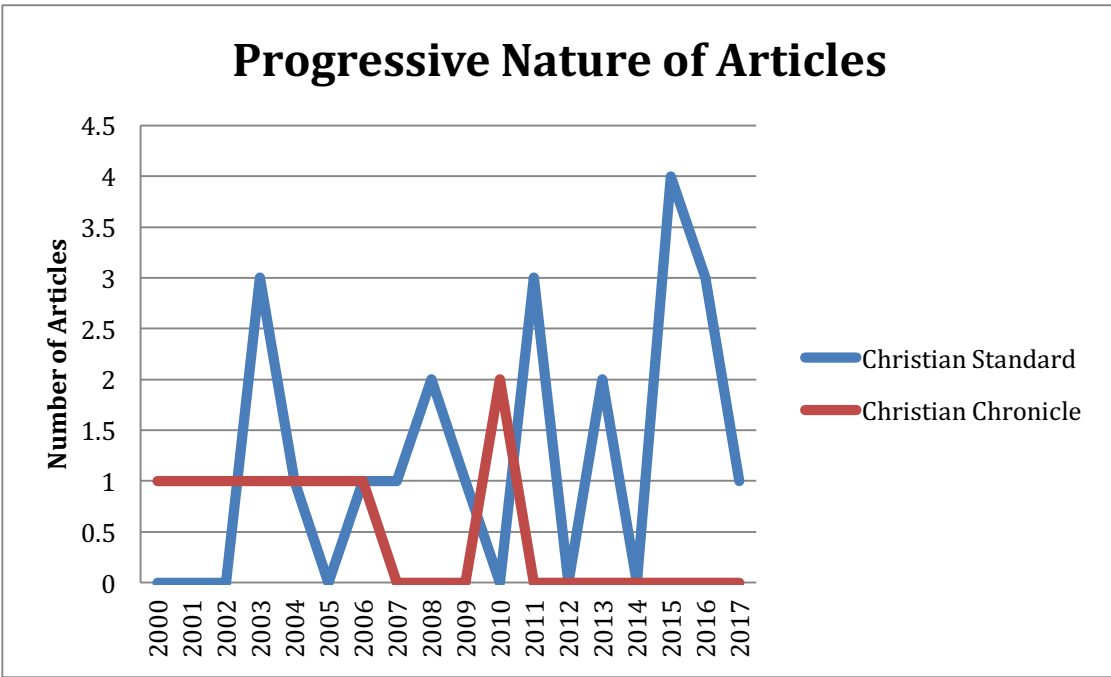


Figure 8 illustrates the progressive presence within each of the two publications. From the chart, we can quickly observe that the progressive presence is less consistent and more sporadic in nature than the conservative presence. If we are to keep to the heartbeat analogy, while the conservative presence is a heart rate at rest, the progressive presence is more like the heart of a runner who had too much coffee that morning. It's vibrant, it's exciting, and it is constant—at least at first glance. When we take time to observe each publication's presence individually, we can begin to notice that this is not the case for *The Christian Chronicle*. In *The Christian Chronicle* the progressive presence was strongly consistent from 2000 all the way to 2006. Then, with the exception of the high peak in 2010, the progressive presence completely drops out of the publication. Whereas, in *The Christian Standard*, the progressive presence experienced high peaks and low valleys practically every other year— especially after 2008.

One final trend to observe is how the number of articles for the various years compares to the number of those identified as taking a conservative stance. As mentioned earlier, the number of conservative articles per year was one or zero, with the exception of one year, which had two. However, the progressive presence had five peaks of more than two progressive articles per year, with the maximum number being four in one year.

The overall number of progressive articles present in both publications is significantly more than that of conservative articles, especially in later years. This could be a result of several factors. First, it might mean that the two streams are moving toward a more progressive view on women’s roles. Second, it might mean that the editors are moving toward a more progressive view on women’s roles. Third, it might mean that the number is so high because progressives are reacting so strongly to the conservative nature of churches normally. A close analysis of the nature of articles present in the two publications yields very interesting trends and even some tricky questions as well.

Figure 8: Progressive Nature of Articles



Questions Generated

From the many observations that we can make about these two publications' attention to women's roles, we are left with a series of difficult questions. Why is the attention to the conversation not more consistent if it is such a pressing matter to the two streams' journal publications? Why is the number of articles pertaining to women's roles so few over the course of over seventeen years? Lastly, why does the conversation seem to be dying out in *The Christian Chronicle*, yet seem to grow steadily within *The Christian Standard*? Each of the questions is nearly impossible to answer definitively. Alas, the "why?" question haunts many a good historian who tries to piece together a complete story with proper analysis. However, to complete this analysis of trends in conversation, we must at least present possible answers to each of the questions.

1. Why is the attention to the conversation not consistent if it is such a pressing matter to the two streams?

Up to this point we have assumed that the women's roles conversation is, in fact, a pressing matter to the two streams in question. We have made this assumption based off of the attention given so regularly to the topic over the course of Stone-Campbell Movement history.⁶ If we are still to recognize its importance to these two streams, we must wrestle with why the conversation is not more consistent over the last eighteen or so years.

One possible internal factor could simply be fluctuating passion or interest. It is possible that readers, editors, and journalists go through cycles of interest, presenting an

6. For a thorough tracing of the conversation over the last hundred years or so, see Michael C. Armour, "Women in Leadership in Churches of Christ" *Mid-Stream*, October 2001, 65-71. ; Susan G. Higgins, "Women and Leadership in the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ," *Mid-Stream*, October 2001, 77-86.; and John Mark Hicks, "Quiet Please: Churches of Christ in the Early Twentieth Century and the 'Woman Question'," *Discipliana*, September 2009, 7-24.

article one year to encourage progression, conversation, or just dialogue; then let it go to the wayside until it is once again on their radar. This idea operates either under the assumption that great theological shifts could be constantly occurring in the streams or that there might be a provocative event that brings the topic to light, e.g., Jodi Hickerson preaching at the NACC. Mark Taylor, editor of the *Christian Standard* during most of the time of this study, wrote that he did “not feel discussion of this issue among Christian Churches is sporadic” but more like a “constant, low-volume drone in the background.” In other words, the conversation is constant, yet subtle, waiting for the moment it is given a platform to be heard.

Another possible internal factor could be a feeling of redundancy. It could be that after participating in this discourse for so many years that many feel the conversation is getting nowhere and has become too common. The problem with this explanation lies in continued passion found in comments posted after one of these articles is published. If members of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches were truly feeling that the conversation was redundant, they would not demonstrate such ferocity and zeal in their dialogue when it does occur.

A third possible internal factor is a concern about creating disunity. It might be, given the Stone-Campbell Movement’s history of splitting into different streams despite its historic focus on unity, that they might avoid a dialogue that could be so polarizing in nature. This is a strong possibility, but it is impossible to accurately measure as the culprit behind this trend. Furthermore, it is a possibility that often the issue is either lumped into other issues of the church or is covered by them. Susan G. Higgins points out

that “often controversies over music have supplanted those over women and leadership.”⁷

The woman’s role issue is either seen as one of a group of “preferential” hot-button issues in the church like instrumental worship, sexuality, membership, and others. She goes on to state that in her study of women in Christian Churches/ Churches of Christ, “by contrast [to articles written about women in leadership], the last three or four years have seen numerous articles and letters to the editor [in *The Christian Standard*] about church music and musical styles in worship.”⁸

Fourth, it is possible that the most significant internal factor is the accuracy of the publications or possible editor interference. While both publications are committed to being an accurate portrayal of their streams, it is possible that the editors, for a variety of reasons, might choose to avoid the controversy. It might be for fear that the issue has been discussed enough already, simple oversight, different priorities, or the feeling that there might need to be a break for awhile—a “cooling off” period. If this is the case, the editors may intentionally omit or maybe innocently neglect to include articles pertaining to the issue.

In a direct correspondence, Mark Taylor, long-time editor for *The Christian Standard*, wrote that the editors recognized that “the role of women in the church’s ministry has been an ongoing concern” and they “decided to address it now and then.” Later, when the magazine became a monthly journal, they “planned an annual theme list” in which they “tried not to repeat many themes every year.” This reflects the idea that, at least for *The Christian Standard*, there was editorial interference in the sense that they

7. Susan G. Higgins, “Women and Leadership in the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ,” *Mid-Stream*, October 2001. 77-86.

8. *Ibid.*

wanted to provide a “cooling off” period to avoid overkill and provide voice to the many other issues they saw facing the church.

Erik Tryggestad, editor of *The Christian Chronicle*, noted the redundancy of the issue stating “there truly is nothing new under the sun.” All of the existing arguments, according to Tryggestad, have been hashed and rehashed in an ongoing loop that does not seem to be original. Tryggestad went on to write, “we don't like to spend a lot of time rehashing debates within our fellowship, especially when the substance of the debate is basically unchanging and there are not very many of what we call "news pegs" with regard to this issue.” This statement reflects the idea that, for *The Christian Chronicle*, there was editorial interference in the avoidance of redundancy and recreating arguments among their fellowship. Any one of these internal factors could be the answer to the question of consistency within the publications or it could possibly be a combination of them. There is, however, still another factor to consider.

It is highly possible that the dialogue consistency is reflective of external societal or political pressures and events. The Stone-Campbell Movement streams have had a history of reacting to political and social changes. A chief example of this is the controversy sparked by the Equal Rights Amendment. The Churches of Christ reacted with “almost universal opposition,” while the amendment served to harden “attitudes concerning women’s leadership” in the Christian Churches.⁹ However, the ERA created much discussion and debate within each of the two streams. It is possible that external factors, social pressures, and political events are helping to spark the interest and push for more dialogue within the publications. As mentioned in previous chapters there is about a

9. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, “Responses to United States Social Change, 1960s–2011,” *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, 216-218.

four- to six-year separation between spikes in conversation within the two publications. One cannot help but to notice that these spikes occur around 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016, all of which were presidential election years. It is possible that the women's roles conversation in the church could rise as a result of political/social conversation in the national sphere. Though one answer might be impossible to identify, it is important to list the possible reasons the issue is not discussed on a more regular basis within the two publications.

2. Why is the number of articles pertaining to women's roles so few over the course of over eighteen years?

Now we must wrestle with the question of why the sheer number of articles focused on women's roles is so few in both publications over the course of eighteen years. As mentioned earlier, combined there were only about sixty articles in close to a thousand issues. Many possible answers for the lack of attention could be the same as for the lack of consistency: societal/political factors such as feminist movements/changes in national policy or internal factors like editor interference, fear of redundancy, fear of disunity, etc. Each of these could easily explain why the quantity of articles dedicated to the issue is so few.

However, there is a unique possibility in regard to the quantity question: First, is it possible that the conversation is relatively small in these journal publications because it is happening in so many other places? And if this proves to be true, what are these other outlets of conversation? The primary outlets that have been wrestling with this issue in the twenty-first century in the Stone-Campbell movement are university-sponsored events and social media. Starting as early as the 1990s, universities began debating social

issues like women's roles. Kathy J. Pulley states: "the 1990s also brought public discussion about women's issues at some church conferences and lectureships at Christian universities. A growing number of congregations are spending extended study time in sermons, classes, special seminars, and forums reexamining their practices concerning women's leadership in worship and congregational governance."¹⁰ They have hosted or contributed to the dialogue in many ways—conferences¹¹, campus groups like the Women in Christian Service at ACU¹², theses/dissertations, book publications¹³, lectures¹⁴, and inter-faith dialogues.¹⁵ Social media has also changed the game when one thinks about how conversation, dialogues, and debates are conducted. At the touch of a button any person could have access to many different viewpoints on issues. This change has also impacted the issue of women's roles through websites/forums/blogs and

10. Kathy J. Pulley, "Women in Ministry," *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Eerdmans's Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 2004, 780.

11. Like the Lads to Leaders Conferences held annually for youth to engage in discussion over ecclesiological and theological issues—Erik Trygestaad, "Should Women Preach in Mixed Gender Worship?" May 2016, Accessed on October 2017, *The Christian Chronicle*.
<http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/should-women-preach-in-mixed-gender-worship?A=SearchResult&SearchID=4442807&ObjectID=4997750&ObjectType=35>.

12. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers. "Responses to United States Social Change, 1960s-2011," *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO, 2013, 217.

13. For a couple of examples, see: Sarah Gaston Barton, *A Woman Called: Piecing Together the Ministry Puzzle*, ACU Press, May 2012.; Carrol Osborn, *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal*, ACU Press, May 2001; and Billie Silvey, *Trusting Women: The Way of Women in Churches of Christ*. Leafwood Publishers, January 2002.

14. See Susan Campbell. "Dating Jesus - the Role of Women in the Church." *Lectureship and Summit Audio Collection*. ACU Digital Commons Library.
[http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/do/search/?q=women&start=0&context=7501618&facet=](http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/do/search/?q=women&start=0&context=7501618&facet=;)); Jarrod Robinson, "Owing Up to Our Baptismal Vow." *Pepperdine Digital Commons Library*.
<http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2318&context=leaven>; Jodi Hickerson, "We Believe Therefore We Speak," *Christian Audio Catalogue*.
<http://catapes.com/viewresults.cfm?cid=306>.

15. See <http://councilonchristianunity.org/stone-campbell-dialogue/>;
<http://councilonchristianunity.org/women-and-leadership-in-the-christian-churches-and-churches-of-christ/>; and <http://councilonchristianunity.org/women-and-leadership-in-churches-of-christ/>.

podcasts.¹⁶ The enormous rise in other venues of conversation in the last eighteen years, as evidenced in footnotes 13–16, could have impacted the conversation within the publications.

The argument that the reason the conversation is happening so seldom in these publications is because it is happening in so many other places could be made using the same explanations as earlier—to avoid redundancy in their publications, to focus on issues that are not getting as much attention in the other outlets, or to avoid the fiery (sometimes overbearing) passion generated in the other outlets. These “venues” of conversation would allow for the publications to ignore, neglect, or opt out of the conversation within their work since others are already tackling them—giving them an “out.” However, the argument could just as easily be made that these other outlets would encourage the publications to increase their articles on women’s roles in the church since they report and discuss present topics within the streams. In fact, these outlets, like books, summits, and conferences, inspired articles that were published in the two sources as we have already seen.

3. Lastly, why does the conversation seem to be dying out in The Christian Chronicle, yet seem to grow steadily within The Christian Standard?

The disparity between the two streams’ attention to the conversation over women’s roles is striking. This trend in conversation yields probably the most difficult and uneasy question yet, “why are they heading in different directions?” Four primary reasons come to mind when wrestling with this question: differences in publication

16. For examples of website/forums/blogs dedicated to the discussion of women’s roles in the church see the “Gender Justice and Churches of Christ” <http://gal328.com/> and the Women in Ministry Network <http://www.woflglobal.com/>. For an example of a podcast dedicated to the discussion, see <https://halfthechurch.wordpress.com/>

organization/structure of publication, differences in priority/interest among church members, historical differences between the two streams, and structural differences between the two streams.

First, the reason the disparity exists could be a result of the differing structure and organization of the two publications. As mentioned earlier, *The Christian Standard* was a weekly magazine that later became a monthly journal. Mark Taylor wrote when they were a weekly magazine there “was no long-term strategy for dealing with the issue of women in the church;” instead, they were “simply trying to respond to what [they] saw happening in the Christian Churches, in the church at large, and in the culture.” Later, when they shifted to the monthly journal, they began to operate topically giving focus to different topics and points of conversation in the Christian Church. He wrote, “when [he] became editor, [they] became a bit more issues oriented and a bit less afraid of controversy.” This shift to a topical organization and rising interest in tackling controversial issues might answer this question at least in regard to the rise in conversation within *The Christian Standard*.

On the other hand, Erik Tryggestad wrote that the possible lack of focus on this conversation in *The Christian Chronicle* could be the result of three things. First, *The Christian Chronicle* is a newspaper that tries to “avoid appearing as the gatekeepers of what doctrines or practices define Churches of Christ” or “be a doctrinal or ‘teaching publication’.” It only publishes and writes, except for the “small opinion section,” events and stories that are occurring in the world that pertain to Churches of Christ. He went on to state that the “debate over women’s roles is important, it’s just that—an ongoing debate. There aren’t any real events or milestones attached to it, and that’s where we tend

to focus.” Second, as a newspaper, often intentionality, motivations, and agendas are a rarity. Stories fall through due to sickness, lack of space, or other practical reasons. He wrote, “I’ve seen readers discuss online the possible motivations and hidden agendas of editors who decided to run this or that . . . when, in fact, the editors’ main ‘agenda’ is filling the space with good, readable content.” The reason that the women’s roles conversation is not given as much focus could be the result of the practical complications of publishing a newspaper. Third, Erik Tryggestad wrote, “although the debate may be intensifying in Churches of Christ, the substance of that debate is pretty much the same as it’s always been.” Taking the stance that “there truly is nothing new under the sun,” Tryggestad says, “I argue that most of the reasoning behind [*The Christian Chronicle*] not covering it more often is the unchanging nature of the debate itself.” The structure and format of *The Christian Chronicle* could impact the lack of conversation found within its pages. The differing structures of the two publications strongly speaks to the consistency and attention given to the conversation on women’s roles in the church; however, it does not fully answer the question of why it is shifting quantifiably.

Second, it is possible that there exists a strong interest or priority disparity between the two streams. One possible argument to be made in this regard is that Christian Churches may just be experiencing a surge of awareness that Churches of Christ are not currently experiencing. Mark Taylor wrote that “the issue has become more prominently discussed among Christian Church leaders in the last decade or two, and many local congregations and parachurch ministries are giving women leadership roles these days they would not have thirty years ago.” This would go hand-in-hand with the theory of consistency being a result of coincidental occasions in the streams. The

Christian Churches' conversation on women's roles seemed to reach a peak when the NACC announced that they would have Jodi Hickerson speak in 2015. This argument could be easily defended by cross-referencing the peaks of conversation with occasions/events of disruption to the traditional views. On the other hand, the conversation may not be happening in Churches of Christ as much because they, in general, could be avoiding the issue, are not currently focused on it, not willing to discuss the matter, or less aware of local controversies. While this is a possibility, the conversation that does exist within *The Christian Chronicle* seems to point otherwise. Furthermore, this idea is not easily defended or quantifiable. How does one judge the motivations, interests, or priorities of a group of people accurately?

Another possible argument to be made is that the historical differences may be a factor in this issue. Each stream's history and formation could have an impact on their hot-button issue focus. For starters, since the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ separated from the Disciples of Christ much later than Churches of Christ it could be argued that they have not had as much time to solidify their united beliefs. In fact, as is pointed out in *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ "developed three significantly different schools of thought that endured and in some cases deepened after the division."¹⁷ These three school of thoughts differ in "convictions about restoration of apostolic Christianity and Christian unity; views on biblical authority; commitments concerning church organization,

17. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, "Responses to United States Social Change, 1960s-2011," *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*. (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO), 216-218.

education, and mission; and loyalty to the Stone-Campbell heritage.”¹⁸ The tension between the three schools of thought and recentness of the identification as a separate stream might suggest that Christian Churches/Churches of Christ would be more apt to engage in dialogue and debate over ecclesiological and theological issues than their counterparts, the Churches of Christ.

A fourth possibility is that the structural differences between the two may be a factor in the difference in attention given. While both streams identify as independent streams with no governing body and yet some manner of unification through journals and universities, there still remains a difference in structural makeup. First, Churches of Christ have had a longer history in which to craft a solid identity as a different stream. Christian Churches/Churches of Christ have struggled to find their identity and their true center.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ find a strong guiding structure in the North American Christian Convention. The mission statement of the NACC is “the North American Christian Convention exists *to provide ideas, inspiration, and identity* to Restoration Movement Churches, ministries, and their leaders.”²⁰ This annual event, which could structurally be at the core of Christian Church/Church of Christ thought, generates much dialogue about various issues within the church. The identity struggle and the strong influence of a dialogue-focused conference on the Christian Church/Church of Christ stream could have a direct influence on the amount of dialogue provided on this hot-button issue, along with many others. Regardless of the fact that no easy or obvious answer can be found, it is important to recognize that readers,

18. Ibid.

19. C. Robert Wetzel, “Christian Churches/Churches of Christ at 2001: In Search of a Theological Center,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* (Winter, 2001): 3-12.

20. <https://www.gotonacc.org/about-nacc/> —emphasis added.

editors, and patrons should begin to wrestle with these questions generated by these two Stone-Campbell publications.

Notes and Clarifications

Before proceeding in our analysis of the data, a couple of points need clarification to avoid any false claims or assertions from this study. Although it may seem to point to the fact that neither Stone-Campbell stream is discussing women's roles all that much and that Churches of Christ are not discussing the matter nearly as much as Christian Churches, this is not necessarily true. As mentioned earlier, complex internal and external influences influence what these two publications publish. Furthermore, the relative scarcity of conversation in these two publications does not mean that the conversation is not happening elsewhere, such as in conferences, blogs, websites, social media, forums, dialogues, and lectureships. In fact, as stated in Johnson and Sharp Peña's study, the conversation across the board is on the rise, particularly within local congregations.²¹ Furthermore, this study primarily serves to gather the data from these two publications, analyze it, draw questions, and point to some possibilities to help explain the data. Knowing its limits and focus, it is apparent that this study is only a small part of a much larger study to be conducted on the current trends in conversation within these streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement.

Application and Conclusion

The question that we must now wrestle with is "what can we do with this information?" Though complex, some answers are more easily provided than others.

First, I hope that this study will foster further study into the current trends in discussion regarding women's roles in the Churches of Christ and Christian

21. Stephen C. Johnson and Lynette Sharp Peña, "What the Other Half Is Doing: an Analysis of Gender Inclusivity in Church of Christ Congregations." *Restoration Quarterly*, 53 no 4 2011. 225

Churches/Churches of Christ. This study only serves as a spoke in the wheel of the overall survey and analysis of data in this area. This study should launch deeper analysis into the demographics of each publication, a survey of more publications in each stream, a measurement of each article's weights within the publications, the inclusion of experiential voices in the discussion, more inquiry into political ramifications on the trends, and further study into the various other venues of conversation and their trends.

Second, I hope that this study will encourage conversation concerning women's roles in the church and in publications like these—whether to spark more interest in the discussion in *The Christian Chronicle* or to continue it in *The Christian Standard*. Similar to the editors of each publication, I too value the ongoing conversation on women's roles in a sensitive and exhaustive effort.

Third, I hope that we can see from this study that conversation, though not always easy or fruit bearing, is beneficial to the unity and growth of a community of believers. Genuine dialogue allows the conversationalists to see others views, understand them, respect them, and in turn grow from the knowledge and love generated.

Fourth, I hope this study will bring to light significant trends in conversation in the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ for the purpose of identifying current viewpoints, focuses, and attention dedicated to women's roles in the church.

Lastly, I hope that we can use this recent history to predict future trends and help guide the future of conversation in a positive, ongoing direction that promotes love and truth above all else.

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