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Listening: *A Reflection on Sarah Sentilles' A Church of Her Own: What Happens When A Woman Takes The Pulpit*

By Intern Miranda Joebgen

Sarah Sentilles is one of countless women who have been scorned by and shut out of the church for desiring to pursue leadership and ordination. For Sentilles, the ordination process turned her against herself and caused her to withdraw from church altogether. Rather than drawing her closer to God, the church and the ordination process pushed her away. But Sentilles knew that her experience was not isolated - she watched phenomenally capable women in every denomination experience this same sort of discrimination and oppression. In *A Church of Her Own*, Sentilles interviewed a wide assortment of women from many different denominations with varying roles in the church about their experiences in order to better understand how sexism has and continues to negatively impact the ministry of the Church.

The roots of sexism in the Church - much like racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc. - run deep. Even though the ELCA is celebrating 50 years of ordaining women this year, that does not mean that we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of sexism within our denomination. Sentilles wrote, "Apologizing for a rule against the ordination of women is one thing. Apologizing for institutionally sanctioned sexism that continues even when the rules have changed is another," (306). As we are preparing to enter the season of Lent, this line struck me. During Lent, I tend to think about my own personal brokenness and how I have distanced myself from the God who loves me as I am. However, I wonder if this season we should also spend time thinking about the sins of the Church as a whole - how we have distanced not only ourselves, but others from God by clinging to the sins of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Even if we are able to acknowledge all of these things as sinful and wrong, that doesn't erase how they have permeated our faith in ways of which we aren't even consciously aware.

So how can we go about solving problems that run so deep that we have no hope of finding a singular origin point? Sentilles doesn't offer a magic solution. However, as a woman who was badly burned by the church, she noted that the process of writing this book was healing for her. One of the women Sentilles interviewed told her that for her, "to pray is to listen," (308).

For Sentilles, listening to the stories of these women who have experienced horrendous misogyny and sexism within the Church and yet still persisted in pursuit of their divine calling was a form of prayer, and helped her rediscover a relationship with God.

I believe one of the best ways to begin to atone for the sins of the Church's past is to listen. So this month, I invite you to read *A Church of Her Own* in order to listen to the stories of these brave women so that together we might learn how to create a truly welcoming church for all people in the next 50 years.

In Peace,
Intern Miranda

