

# WOMEN LEADERSHIP, THE SCRIPTURES, AND EMPOWERMENT: HOW TRAINING IN LEADERSHIP CAN SHAPE THE DESTINY OF WOMEN IN CHURCH MINISTRY.

## Authors:

1. **Mbayo Debbie Maloba** – BA in Human Biology, MPH, PhD in Leadership (On-going) Adventist University of Africa.
2. **Prof. Nyakora, Musa O.** - PhD, GIODN, IOD, MKIM, MIHRM, AMKISM, MSHRM. Director MA & PhD in Leadership at the Adventist University of Africa.

## Abstract

This study examines ways that can offer solutions to challenges facing women participation in the mission and outreach. The study has explored dimensions of the role of women ministries' mission and outreach in church. Numerically women seem to be more than men and yet balance growth is lacking in terms of roles women play in the church. The study discusses challenges such as cultural practices and beliefs, poor education, leadership positions on women and lack of general empowerment among others, highlighting contextual examples in East and Central Africa. The study offers viable solutions and recommendations which aim at empowering women roles towards attaining mission and outreach in the church through gender inclusivity, proper Biblical interpretation and practice. Hypothetically, holistic church mission and outreach is not just about numbers therefore the women roles and challenges need to be highlighted, planned and determination made on how to include all in church activities. The study used descriptive survey design. In data collection method, primary and secondary data were collected which provided the opportunity to examine the impact of women leadership, the scriptures, and empowerment on how training in leadership can shape the destiny of women in church ministry. Simple random sampling and purposive technique was utilized in selecting respondents comprising of 50 women who are involved in women ministry in the church. The data collection instruments used in this study was interview schedules and questionnaires. And finally systematic analysis and interpretation of the interim reports.

**Key Words:** Leadership, Church Ministry, Outreach, Mission, Cultural Practices, Empowerment, Women Participation, Destiny, Scriptures.

## 1.1 Introduction

Women ministry is involved in mission and outreach by establishing a support system for women and creating a forum to address topics and issues that affect women in and out of the church. The church promotes programs to mentor young women and support their academic achievements through a scholarship program. The six primary areas of concern that guide the church's mission and outreach to women are health, abuse, poverty, women's workloads, and lack of leadership training, education and illiteracy. The Church strives to nurture women in the church and in the community while empowering them to become stronger women of God in the areas of Bible study, prayer, personal growth and community outreach. Christ's ministry lifted women up, and in turn, the church empowers women to lift Him up (Adventist Women Ministries General Conference 2015).

The Survey of the Church Members Conducted for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada by the Center for Creative Ministry (2011) reveals that 64% of members who attend church service are women as compared to 36% for men. The study alludes that women have an impact in the church therefore the numbers can be turned to results in soul touching. The church of Christ Worldwide has been growing and is seen to be growing because numbers have been increasing, people getting saved; buildings have been constructed for worship and church businesses (Marjorie and Bernard 1976, and Dubose, 1978). However, this form of growth has not been evenly with regard to gender inclusion (Belew, 1971). A lot has been written about women's role, reasons for their challenges, based on the Bible, social constructions, gendered roles, nature of ministry which favors men (Bwire, 2016, Kanyoro, 1996, & Gill 1990).

Globally there is increasing pressure and realization for gender inclusivity in religious institutions especially those affiliated to Christianity. In Africa, the struggle has been to include women in church matters (Ango, 2016, Bwire, 2016 & Rutoro, 2016). Africa has its unique challenges, context and opportunities for church growth compared with the church in America and Europe (Belew, 1971, Sheerattan, 2010 & Mbiti, 1975). Based on the important role of women in church ministry highlighted forms the basis why this study was conducted.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Lack of inclusion of Adventist women in church roles and few being ordained in the ministry affect women maturity in faith in the society and increase in numbers of believers with knowledge of the word of God. Challenges that women face are but not limited to cultural beliefs and practices, theological background, lack of women education and leadership training. The inclusion of women is important because they have a role to play and should not be marginalized. It is the women who nurture the future believers, the children at family level and even in Sabbath School and yet they are not theologically well equipped.

In Africa, church mission and outreach is done by men (Semenya, 2016). The study shows that Men are the priests who occupy most church leadership positions, make decision while women sit to listen and obey. The study by Mwaniki (2016) concurs and states that the Anglican Church, lay leaders and evangelists in Kenya are women with no training serving under highly trained clergymen.

Based on the discrimination of women in church ministry work it was important to conduct the study to establish women leadership, the scriptures, and empowerment: how training in leadership can shape the destiny of women in church ministry. The study focused on: the challenges in women leadership, the scriptures, and empowerment through training in leadership, in shaping the destiny of women in church ministry. The general objective of the study was to examine the impact of women leadership, the scriptures, and empowerment: how training in leadership can shape the destiny of women in church ministry.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

To identify the role of women in church mission and outreach

To examine challenges women experience in their roles in church mission and outreach

To explore ways in influencing destiny of women ministry in church mission and outreach.

### **1.4 Research questions**

What is the role of women in church mission and outreach?

Why is women role in church mission and outreach difficult?

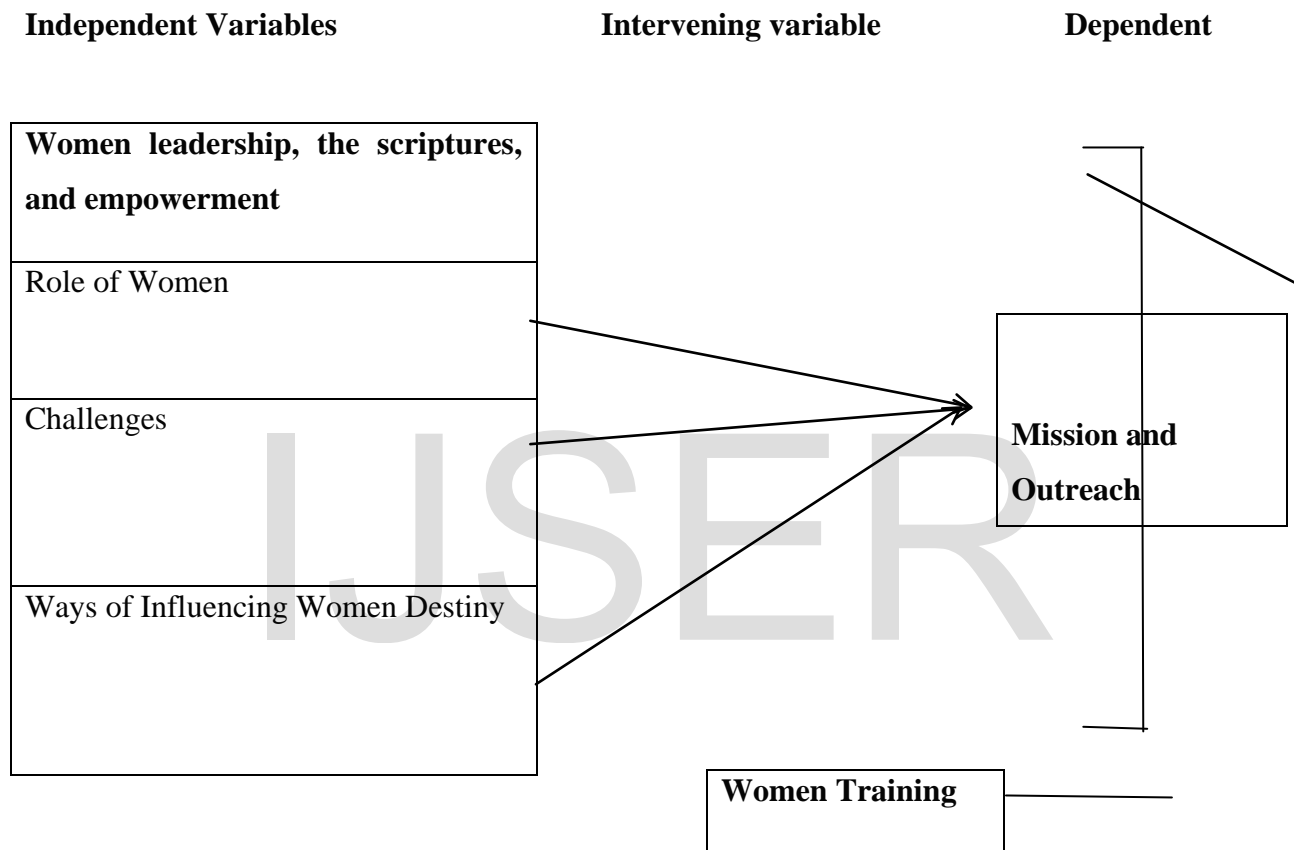
How is destiny of women ministry in mission and outreach influenced?

### **1.5 Theoretical framework**

The study adopted feminist sociological theory by Chafetz, (1997). All church ministries are structured around reasonably stable patterns that establish how social interaction will be carried out. One of the important church ministry structures that organize social interaction is status, the position a person occupies that is a significant determinant of how an individual will be defined and treated. Individuals whose status sets are comprised of low-ranked ascribed statuses more than high-ranked achieved statuses are near the bottom of the social stratification system and vulnerable to social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Though there is no known church in which the status of female is consistently ranked higher than that of male. By implication gender inequality, weak legislature, traditional and religious practices and poverty have contributed to discrimination against the women, thus enhancing women discrimination in mission and outreach.

### **1.6 Conceptual framework**

A conceptual framework was utilized to explain the cyclical relationship between challenges in women leadership, the scriptures, and women empowerment through training in leadership in shaping the destiny of women in ministry. Challenges in women leadership, the scripture add to cultural beliefs and practices, interpretation of God's gender, rites of passage, lack of education, leadership, and training among others. Education is the only key to breaking such cycles. Women will experience discrimination and rejection in mission and outreach with corresponding illiteracy and less empowerment in women ministry.



Source: *Feminist sociological theory* by Chafetz, (1997)

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Role of Women in the church

All who work for God should have the Martha and the Mary attributes blended willingness to minister and a sincere love for the truth. Self and selfishness must be put aside. God calls for earnest women workers, workers who are prudent, warmhearted, tender, and true to principle.

He calls for persevering women who will take their minds from self and will center them on Christ, speaking words of truth, praying with the person, to whom they can obtain access, laboring for the conversion of souls (Testimony Treasures, Vol. 2, p. 405). It also affirms that Women can be instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus if there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth. Therefore the refining, softening influence of Christian women is needed in the great work of preaching the truth (Evangelism, pp. 471, 472). It also alludes that The Lord has a work for women as well as men to do. They must not only bear the name of Christ, but possess His Spirit. They must walk even as He walked, purifying their souls from everything that defiles. Then they will be able to benefit others by presenting the all sufficiency of Jesus (Testimony Treasures, Vol. 2, p. 404).

In the Bible during Jesus' ministry on earth, He valued the contributions of women and elevated their status. For instance, He initiated a deep conversation with a Samaritan (outcast) woman who subsequently evangelized her whole town (John 4). He protected the woman caught in adultery and challenged her to begin a new life (John 8). He defended the mothers who brought their children to Him (Mark 10). During His last moments on the cross, He made arrangements for His own mother's care (John 19). When a sinful woman poured expensive perfume on His feet, He stopped the onlookers' criticism and declared: "Wherever this Good News is preached in the entire world, this woman will be remembered for what she has done." (Matthew 26:13, NLV).

The Africans' understanding of the role of women in ministry cannot be developed outside their sociocultural understanding and beliefs on the role distinctions between the genders. This is not just an African phenomenon because it exists, to an extent, in almost every culture of the world. The United States, for example, has never had a female president or vice president since its independence in 1776, and Switzerland, lying in the heart of Europe, only introduced women's suffrage at the federal level for the first time in February 1971. In general, girls have only recently begun to have equal opportunities as boys in terms of access to education and the professions or careers they can pursue. We have women working in underground mining and some of them even drive and operate huge mining equipment (Rosado, 1995).

While we may come to God's Word as sincere seekers, we do not come alone. We come with all the sociocultural baggage that imperceptibly is ours. Within this baggage are the various cultural influences or social maps in our lives that give direction to our beliefs and guide our behavior. These include our culture, our gender, our race or ethnicity, our socioeconomic status, and most importantly, the way we have been socialized to see the world, each other, the opposite gender, and even the Word of God (Rosado, 2012).

These social maps influence the spiritual and social routes we take, the heavenly and human sights we see along the way in our life course. These maps or value systems shape all our attitudes and actions, for they serve as a pre-theoretical framework for the development of a worldview, a set of priorities, a paradigm, and a mind-set. They serve as a structural scaffold for deep-level thinking at the bottom-line the threshold of no negotiation. We cannot maintain wholeness if we talk and walk differently than we see and our level of consciousness. And our attitude about others and our behavior toward them has to be congruent with this level of consciousness and the way we see others, and the way we view life, God and His Word (2 Corinthians 5:7 and Ephesians 2:10).

In the Adventist church the issue of women is handled as Principle, Policy and Practice. An issue of principle is one which is directly connected to the theology or fundamental belief of the community of faith, for example, the true and biblical Sabbath. This matter is settled directly from the Bible, which is God's revelation to humanity and there is no compromise on the church's position on such a matter. Policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. Policies are there to ensure the smooth and effective functioning of the church in its mission. Policy however should not compromise principle. Practice is often a matter of pragmatism and sometimes just convenience. Since it is a matter of practice there are some places where Sabbath School starts at 8.30am or 10am, depending on the local and prevailing conditions (Adventist Women ministry General Conference 2015).

The classical roles of women in the African church have usually been in the Dorcas Society as Sabbath School superintendents, in Children's Ministries or as Deaconesses. There were hardly any females, for example, teaching adult Sabbath School classes made up of male and female participants since the teaching function would have been perceived a male responsibility. And

some attempted to justify this by using Timothy 2:12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over man (Women ministry General Conference 2015).

There are also some women who have gone through theology or pastoral training in the Adventist institutions but for various reasons never served as pastors or served briefly and then left. The reasons for their departure from pastoral ministry are varied but the most obvious one would be the general challenges a female would face as there is no path to ordination, not getting the full respect of some congregations and members.

The General Conference Annual Council in 1974 resolved that women may be ordained as elders, and in November 1993 Executive Committee voted to affirm the accepted practice that lay female elders may be ordained but church boards and business meetings be consulted in the process. There are indeed some local churches that have been appointing and ordaining female elders, while there are others which do not. It is estimated that females form between 10-15% of all ordained elders currently serving in the churches (Women ministry Adventist General Conference 2015).

Historically the Adventist church has only ordained males as pastors, elders or deacons. Female church officers were not ordained although there is evidence that there were some ordination of deaconesses in the Adventist church around 1895. As already indicated, the General Conference Executive Committee took a decision in 1974 that female local elders may be ordained. Although the question of the ordination of female pastors appears to have first come up at the General Conference 1881 Session, the General Conference 1990 Session resolved that female pastors should not be ordained. However the General Conference Session in 2010 resolved to establish the Theology of Ordination Study Committee and requested the world divisions to conduct studies on the matter. This was a golden opportunity presented to the world church family to make a contribution to the process which in the past had often been viewed as a North American and European process. (Women ministry General Conference 2015).

## **2.2 Challenges**

The challenges include: cultural beliefs and practices, interpretation of God's gender, rites of passage, lack of education, leadership, training and ordination among others. They are unique to



Africa because most of them are contextual in nature though similar to other continents in some ways.

### **2.2.1 Cultural practices**

Culture refers to the way of thinking and behavior shared by a substantial grouping which gives them identity in relation to others and it consists of the beliefs and practices of a community that have been transmitted from generation to generation (Gibbs 1981).

All people are influenced by their cultures, thus some cultural traits are collectively manifested. Culture embraces everything which contributes to the survival of human beings both material things and non-material interests which include: Dance, Music Diets, Politics, Economics, Ethics Aesthetics and Metaphysics among others. Culture is dynamic, it keeps changing, it affects the way women and men relate to each other and to their environment. Cultural beliefs also affect gender roles and the question of power not only in the society but also in the church.

In Africa belief in God is widespread and all the people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being and as the center of religion in African communities. Belief in God is taken for granted, thus Africans do not question the existence of God. The Supreme Being is the originator and sustainer of all things and Africans have used various images to describe God. Thus images are referred to as anthropomorphism and some of these have been used as if they portray the actual nature of God. This is especially true for the parental images of God, that have been used to describe God, hence there are African communities who View God as a Father, while others view God as a Mother. Others visualize God as a couple and as gender free (Cunningham, 2000 and Sheraton 2010).

### **2.2.2 Rites of Passage**

Rites or ritual refers to the accepted order or procedures of performing customary or religious observances. There are three types of rituals. They are sub-divided according to the functions they perform for the believing community. Cox (1998) identifies three types of rituals as follows:

- Life cycle rituals,
- Confinement of the mother
- Formal Education.

### **2.2.3 Biological obstacles**

In many African societies, the potency of menstruation still looms, therefore, there are many taboos limiting women's activities during their menses and at least forty days after the birth of a child (Mbiti 1975). Thus, in many communities, menstruating women may not cook ritual meals, they may not even go for worship in some African Independent Churches and Muslim women will not enter the mosque during such times. It is believed that menstrual blood has power to annul all prayer and render all ritual ineffective.

These instructions are unfair as they imply that one is unclean by virtue of being a woman, which means all women are unclean because of a normal body function, created by God for purposes of procreation. Masheti (1997) argues that this is a patriarchal gimmick which is meant to ensure the secondary status of women in relation to men in the society. Societies hold beliefs about the nature and role of women; these serve a purpose in ensuring women's secondary status in relation to men in the society. These beliefs are communicated in proverbs, sayings, riddles and other oral forms of communication, they create a negative image of women and since they are modes of socialization, they paint a negative image of who women are and what they can do in the minds of the people from one generation to another.

### **2.2.4 Women Leadership challenges**

Traditionally, each gender received adequate training that enabled them to perform the roles assigned to them and occupy their positions in the society. Thus, boys, who are destined to leadership, were trained in decision making, responsibility and obedience while girls learned wifely duties (Mbiti 1975). When it comes to the role of women and men in religion, socialization implies that men are more prepared than women in taking up leadership positions. This is because, socialization prepares them for such roles and society expects this from them. On the other hand, women are better prepared in wifely duties such as cooking, taking care of children and are ready to occupy a subordinate position in relation to men.

### **2.2.5 Theological Education**

Most Christian churches in Africa have not allowed women into theological institutions for training because the practice was that theological institutions and seminaries were for men. The study by Mwaniki (2016) states that in an Anglican Church in Nairobi, Kenya Diocese out of a total of 69 ordained clergy only 9 were women by 2015. Since ordination has been reserved for men alone for a long time, women were excluded from theological education; because it was argued that they did not need this education as the churches could neither ordain them nor employ those (Bennaars, 1995). A few churches such as the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Anglican and a number of Pentecostal churches now ordain women, however the number of women trained and ordained are very few. In this regard, Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church has reserved priesthood for men since the very beginning, this they argue is in line with the example set by God. God sent Jesus to fulfill his mission on earth, and in turn Jesus chose twelve disciples who were all men to continue with his ministry (Kanyorao 1996).

The role of women in these churches differs significantly because they do not speak with one voice based on biblical policies but on traditions. In some, women's role and participation is limited to those duties that are related to those assigned to women in the domestic sphere. Examples of such roles include: teaching children, cleaning, decorating the church, washing church linen and ushering worshipers among others.

It is argued that in some churches only men may celebrate sacraments such as the Eucharist as the priest acts as Christ and he has to be a male. Romans 8:29 however, teaches that all baptized persons are called to conform to their lives to the image of Christ; in addition women theologians such as (Ruether, 1998 and Sheerattan 2010) have argued that the roles of ordained ministers are neither too many nor too difficult for women to perform. Thus given the right training and opportunity, women can serve as ministers, this has already been demonstrated by the role of women in those churches that already ordain women. The church continues to lose the talents and gifts of women who are called to priesthood by denying Women ordination.

A woman preaching during Sabbath divine service is contentious in some Adventist churches in Africa although the Adventist church has always had women preaching, even at camp meetings. Ellen White used to preach very often and even at General Conference sessions. The opposition to women preachers even leads to some weird situations where it would not be surprising to find

men preaching even on Sabbaths that are dedicated to Women's Ministries. There are even cases where men preach at Women's Conventions, although there are definitely women that could have been identified and invited to preach (Adventist Women General Conference 2015).

### **2.3 Destiny of women ministry**

There is need to provide a platform to bring both women and men in the ministry, articulate women's experiences, and share knowledge through publications (Gill 1990). The study affirms that the ways through which women could be empowered in the ministry include: women fellowship to unite women in prayer and women training.

According to Jewett (1980), woman, as a man's equal should share with him in all aspects of the church's life and mission, full access to privileges and responsibilities of the Christian ministry. The study asserts that Women like everyone else can play both priestly roles: sacramental, pastoral and other church services. The study by Grady (2006), gives ten points the church tells women to keep them in spiritual bondage and these points portray how the Bible has been abused such as: God created women as inferior beings and women are not equipped to assume leadership roles in the church.

From the biblical point of view, this is incorrect because Jesus believed that women could lead in (Luke, 8:1-3), Acts 2:17. In the New Testament 1 Timothy, 2:12, "Women must not teach or preach to men in a church setting, need interpretation of what the writer was contextually addressing. And Paul also said these words; a woman should view her husband as the priest of the home, which implies that women can't be fulfilled without a husband and children. Sheeratan (2010) has advocated for men as partners with women because they are all created in God's image. The church ministry should be done by both the clergy and laity to attain holistic in mission and outreach (McGravran 1988). The study states that most women are part of the laity hence should be given a chance as part of the segment of the society.

### **3.0 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS**

The use of primary and secondary data provided opportunity to examine the impact of women leadership, the scriptures, and empowerment on how training in leadership can shape the destiny of women in church ministry. Primary data were sourced through in-depth interviews and field research carried out in the area of study. Secondary data and quantitative data were sourced from survey of literature in books and journal articles, theses, government official publication and reports as well as church records. According to Blessing (2009), research methodology is the approach as well as the set of supporting guidelines and methods to be utilized as a blueprint for carrying out research design. Simple random sampling and purposive technique was utilized in selecting respondents comprising of 50 women who are involved in women ministry in the church. The data collection instruments used in this study was interview schedules and questionnaires. Qualitative information was organized following key thematic areas. The second step involved description of the responses to produce interim reports; areas that required additional information were identified and the requisite data sourced. The third step involved systematic analysis and interpretation of the interim reports. Quantitative data were processed, verified and tabulated using SPSS.

#### **4.0 STUDY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings form profound analysis with social scientific implications giving way to relevant suggestions on inclusivity of women in entire mission and outreach church growth and development. The study investigated the educational level of the respondents. The data revealed that (10%) out of the 50 women had no education at all, (70%) had primary education, (15%) had secondary education while (5%) had post-secondary education. The implication of inadequacy of education is that, women have not enough knowledge of right to consent their own decisions and have little experience in articulating concepts.

#### **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Challenges against women participation in church mission and outreach have been explored and this section offers possible suggestions that can help address these challenges and include women as a way to influence their roles.

### **5.1 Women Empowerment recommendations**

Empowerment of women means enabling women to respect and value themselves which implies, enabling them to feel justified and able to demand their rights through training, further education and sensitization. Empowering women therefore, entails ensuring that women are treated justly through correcting cultural stereotypes and negative attitudes towards women's calling and ability. The power that women need is not from outside but from within them to seek, demand and take that which is justly theirs (Sheerattan, 2010).

### **5.2 Discrimination recommendations**

Despite women's diverse social, economic, religious and political backgrounds, by belonging to the female gender, women constitute an oppressed social group. Therefore, they suffer violence in various spheres namely cultural, economic, social, and religious, among others. Discrimination is one of the mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position in relation to men in society.

To eradicate all forms of cultural discrimination the church as the foundation of faith and equity and the government which has law enforcement agencies should provide a legal framework for dealing with traditional structures and systems that perpetuate inequality even in the church. The sexual offences Act 2006 is one such legal framework. This may involve appropriating laws that can address rape inequality both in the society and by extension in the church.

Christianity should address the negative attitudes towards women by men, towards the liberation of women and the restoration of their dignity as human beings according to Jesus model in the search for the solution to the problem of abuse of women (cf. John 8:3ff, John 4:7ff). Proper biblical interpretation and exegesis by the church can reduce negative images and church structures about women, where men lead and others follow through planned theological training of both men and women.

### **5.3 The Scriptures recommendations**

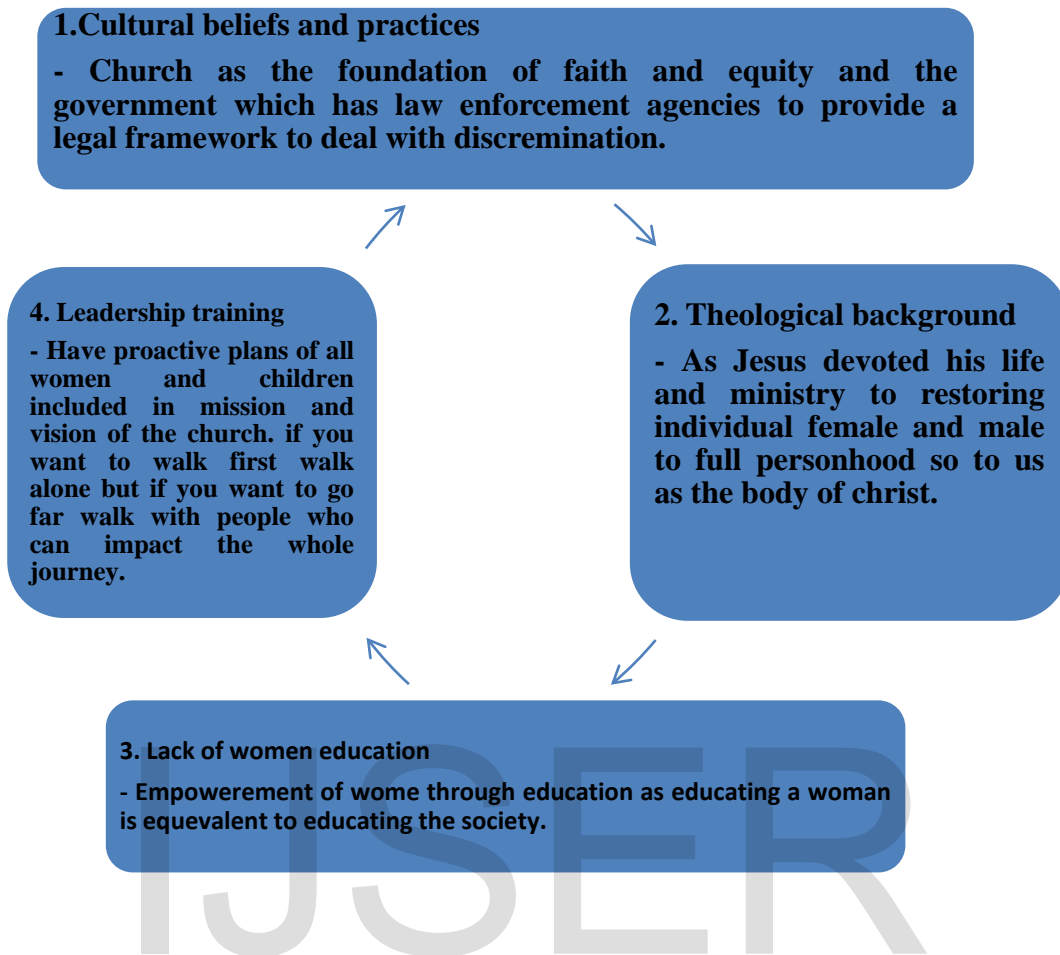
In The New Testament it records that Jesus chose twelve disciples all men and charged them with the responsibility of spreading the gospel. Jesus had to choose these twelve men because there had to be continuity between the Old covenant and the new covenant that he represented. These were not the only disciples that Jesus had nor did they exercise all final authority in the church (Lk. 10:1), but Jesus mission is to liberate all the oppressed, women included (Lk. 4:18). Jesus devoted his life and ministry to restoring individual female and male to full personhood. Below are some examples, (John 4:7 – 42) Jesus and the Samaritan woman, (John 8:1 – 11) the woman caught in adultery. These examples demonstrate Jesus's positive attitude towards women regardless of his cultural background (Stinton, 2004).

#### **5.4 Church leadership strategies recommendations**

The church as an institution must have a deliberate plan in its structures and her vision and mission to include all, at all levels of its activities: children, youth, women and men. Proactive leadership is inclusive of all, in participation, in systems, structures, education, exposure, and sensitization can lead to challenging of oppressive structures and systems of leadership in the church where Gods power is invoked.

#### **5. 5 Model to deal with how training in leadership can shape the destiny of women in church ministry**

To end lack of inclusion of Adventist women in church roles and few being ordained in the ministry which affect women maturity in faith in the society and hence lower numbers of believers with knowledge of the word of God, there should be training on how to deal with the challenges that women face which includes: cultural beliefs and practices, theological background, lack of women education and leadership training. The social ecological model serves a dual purpose in this regard, as each level in the model represents a dimension where both risks and opportunities for prevention co-exist.



## 6.0 CONCLUSION

From the findings it is concluded that women still lack equal and focused role in the church mission and outreach. There are several obstacles as noted in the discussions. This means that without one gender included in the church activities, growth is not complete. In order to influence women in mission and outreach, these obstacles must be alleviated to enable equal participation of men and women in the church mission and outreach. This is possible by exercising Jesus' model of liberating all and accepting all despite cultural constraints. Jesus therefore did away with cultural and racial prejudice, and gender segregation in a bid to perform his ministry work. The Bible indicates that women were not only associates with the apostles, but also underlines that women were supporting Jesus' ministry. The story of Jesus' passion makes it clear that the support of the women was embodied in a deeper fidelity. It was established that inadequate education attainment has an effect on women in mission and outreach.



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