

**Rev. Dr. Vicki Copp**

Interviewed by Katie Hobson in Overland Park, Kansas

06/18/2015

**Abstract:** Oral history interview with Vicki Copp conducted by Katie Hobson on June 18, 2015. This interview features the associate pastor at Overland Park Church of the Nazarene in Overland Park, Kansas. Questions address Vicki's experiences as an ordained woman in ministry in Kansas: how she has been received by Kansas communities, her congregations, male colleagues, challenges she has faced (recognizing/resisting call, negative feedback, gendered expectations/stereotypes) and whether there is still a resistance to women in ministry in Kansas. This interview also includes Vicki's experiences in seminary, as a minister's wife, in ministry at a mission in Kansas City, as a professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO. This interview was conducted for the Religion in Kansas Project as part of a summer fieldwork internship funded by the Friends of the Department of Religious Studies.

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Katie: (1-:28) Rev. Copp, I wonder if you could just--introduce yourself a little to get started and tell us a little about where you're from and how you ended up in Overland Park and--a little about your family.

Vicki: Ok. I've been here five and a half years as an associate pastor with responsibilities in worship, outreach, discipleship and community life. Before that I was on the faculty at Nazarene Theological Seminary for five years working with practical theology and supervised ministry. Prior to that I lived in Arizona where I directed the district school of ministry and taught online for Nazarene Bible College and before that, was an associate pastor at the Mission Church of the Nazarene in San Diego.

My husband is Dan, has been of thirty-eight years, recently and he is also a pastor. We attended Point Loma Nazarene University and got married after graduation. And he was planning to go into law, but felt God was calling him into the ministry, so he became a pastor. After he had been pastoring for probably five or six years, I also felt a call which quite surprised me, and over a period of time got my education to be ordained and then went on staff at the church where he was pastoring. And then he was elected district superintendent for the Church of the Nazarene in Arizona. And so I had to reinvent myself, and eventually became the director of the school of ministry there and worked with our students in the course of study for ordination. And then, both of us had jobs in Kansas City when we came. He's a denominational executive.

He's the education commissioner and clergy development director for the Church of the Nazarene.

We have two daughters, **Mackenzie Wood**, who is a music teacher and **Megan Alba**, who is also a teacher and youth pastor's wife.

Katie: Wow, that's awesome--so did you grow up in San Diego or did you go there for school?

Vicki: My father was a minister and so growing up we lived in Arizona, Southern California, we came briefly to Kansas City so that he could go to seminary, and then I went to high school in Blythe, California, which is right on the border between Arizona and California, in the desert. So, I was raised - and my grandparents and my great grandparents were part of the Church of the Nazarene, so we go way back with the Church of the Nazarene, who has ordained women since its inception.

And there were periods of time in the Church of the Nazarene where thirty percent of its pastors were women and some of the women were the great church planters and missionaries and leaders in the church. But there was another period of time where - there's questions about what exactly happened. Some think it's a backlash to feminism. Others think it was encroaching fundamentalism that came into our church, where the number of women pastors went down to three percent.

Katie: Oh wow-

Vicki: And so, part of - since my own calling, part of my goal is to create an environment where women clergy can flourish. So I've done that, kind of on the side.

Katie: So, do you know at one time it went down to three percent?

Vicki: I could - I have that somewhere, but I don't have it in my mind.

Katie: Maybe around the seventies-

Vicki: It might have been in the sixties or seventies-

Katie: Ok-

Vicki: Yeah-

Katie: --And so, in what ways are you sort of creating that environment that you talked about?

Vicki: Well, I make it a point to mentor women who are called. I have served on the Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy Board of Directors, which is an organization of seven denominations that all have ordained women. I served on their board to create a conference and resources for women who are called. And I also have served on the Nazarene Women Clergy Council, which

is a group that was started by the director of clergy development - mmm, I don't know how many years ago - maybe '98 or 2000. It's been a while. And we began this council of women representing all of the Nazarene regions, which there are nine in North America, and so we gather together and talk about ways that we can make the environment more positive for women who are being called. And then they, in turn, set up councils on their region of women clergy who try and help the different districts in their region. And so, we've been working at it. Things are much better. We've had - we've been given voice to speak to our general leadership, which is really helpful to make them aware of some of the issues that we face and what we've discovered over time is that it's typically not the general or district leadership that are antagonistic toward women clergy. It's at the local leadership - the local church. And, surprisingly we've often discovered that it's the women who are on local church boards who resist women's leadership. There's all kinds of theories about that, but we don't really know why that is.

Katie: (1-7:30) What are the theories?

Vicki: Well, one of them that's intriguing - a little weird, but--often - I should say--I'm trying to think of the right way to say this. It's often thought that women, in a sense, idealize their pastors, and some of that has sexual overtones. I know that with my husband as the pastor, I have seen women do this with him. So, I know it happens. And so the theory is that women are afraid that if they have a woman pastor that their husbands will do the same thing to the woman pastor. So that's an interesting theory. So that's one. and I think another one is we've been really enculturated into this idea that men have to be the leaders, and so for those women who have bought into this idea, and you can find it in the Bible. You can also find the opposite in the Bible. If you read the Bible without any cultural considerations - that is, first century cultural considerations - it's very easy to see. Because the Bible culture is much like the Middle East today. And that's how women were treated in the Bible. But if you read that with the lens of the culture, then you can understand that those things that we read in the Bible are not proscriptive of all time. But they are descriptive of a particular time and place. So--but people who come from traditions who read - who have very flat reading of scripture, who don't understand that we have to--we have to understand the culture in which it was written and how there are some adaptations to the culture as in with the household codes, which you know, wives submit to your husbands, and children, you know - there are several places where those household codes are in scripture. And those are taken directly from that culture, in which the Pauline epistles were written. And so--those were adaptations to culture. Those weren't, this is what it's to be from here on out. And so when you have people who read scripture like that, then it's very natural to say, of course you can't have a woman in the pulpit, because if you do you're going against scripture.

But--another way of reading scripture is to understand that God gifts all of us and if the spirit gifts a woman with the gifts that are needed for pastoring--in my opinion it's a travesty to say to her, "I'm sorry, you have wonderful pastoral gifts but here's what you can do. You can work with children, you can work in the kitchen, and you know, to me it's a waste. And I think that it brings

great sorrow to God to see women treated like that. So, I forget where we started on that question.

Katie: No - that was great--so I guess I have sort of a lot of questions all at once but--maybe to start with--could you talk a little about your calling and what kind of environment you were in, whether you felt support from your family, or friends, or community--or I guess how that was received and maybe also if there was any kind of personal struggle to accept that calling?

Vicki: (1-11:40) Yeah - I remember it distinctly. I was sitting in the congregation, when my husband was preaching. And - (starts to cry) this happens every time I talk about it - he was preaching on Philippians two, and talking about selfish ambition. That was just one part of the sermon, but that was the part that I - that I heard right before I realized that God was calling me. And--it came to me as a call to preach. And--I was overwhelmed, kind of like I am now, but didn't say anything to anybody. When my husband and I got home, I said I think God might be calling me to preach. And he said, well, let's not ride off on this horse until we're sure. And I said, fine with me. I don't know what in the world this would mean and so we waited for about two years before we made it public. And I told a few trusted friends. There was a retired clergy woman in our church and I told her. And I was just trying to discern through the reading of scripture and other books, and it just became so clear to myself and my husband that this was truly what God was doing. So we made it public at a district gathering, and I was so afraid. How are the church leadership going to respond? How are the district leadership going to respond? And I was overwhelmed by their response - so affirming. Yeah so that was wonderful. The only thing is the church people said, what does this mean? Are you gonna go to a different church, or what, you know? and I said, I don't know what it means. I'm just trying to be obedient, step by step, as God opens the doors. So, eventually I became an associate pastor at that church, doing worship, and then leading the Bible study ministry. It was a church of about a thousand, and so we had probably six or seven Bible studies going and so I headed up that, and then (Clip 2) did the worship for the traditional service which was the choir and congregational singing. And then I would do combination services for special occasions with the service that used contemporary music. Anyway, I did that for about five years. Got a masters at Point Loma Nazarene University, and then was ordained in '97.

I found in our district, the ordination process for me was quite easy. My father had been a pastor of that district, so many of them - of the leaders on the district knew me since I was a child. And my husband was on the district, and so they knew him. And so I think they trusted me when I said God's called me. In fact, I remember being put out with them, because I didn't think that they had made the process difficult enough for me. So, yeah, I mean there were things that I wanted to say that they didn't give me a chance to say, because it's like, oh, it's Vicki, forget it. And some of my women clergy friends have been kind of frustrated over how easy it was for me, and how difficult it has been for them. So it's not an equitable system, but I think that's true for the men too. If you know people, if you're connected, it's easier, because people trust you. And that's understandable, but it's too bad that it has to be that way.

And then it's just been finding my place. You know anytime you have a two-career family, whether it's in ministry or some other - it's always a balancing act. And we were so thrilled when we came to Kansas City, because we both had jobs that were very fulfilling. So that was a good thing. And then--coming here - this seminary, like many seminaries underwent a difficult time financially, so my job became part-time, and after doing that for a year I realized it wasn't going to work, so I was open to - and I told them I was going to be open to other opportunities. So the pastor at our church came to me and asked me if I would be interested in a third-time job. So, I was working at an inner-city church as an associate and working part-time at the seminary, and then he wanted me to have a part-time job here. And I told him that I really didn't want to do that, because typically in the church, it's part-time pay and full-time work, and most everybody understands that. So I said I really wasn't interested in another part-time job. So he kinda back-tracked a little and came back and said, what if I could make it a full-time position, would you be interested? And I said, yes, I would consider that. So, he went and gave it some thought and talked to some folks and decided he could combine some positions, and so that's how I came here.

And this has been a wonderful and difficult place. I love to preach, and because we have - our church is located in a place where we have a Nazarene seminary and a Nazarene university. So we have professors from both institutions, and we have students from both institutions who are part of our congregation. So on any given Sunday, if you would count the number of people who could preach, there'd be a dozen or more. So, that's why the opportunities for preaching are limited. So, it's been in my mind, almost from the beginning of my call that at some point I would love to be a lead pastor who had the responsibility for preaching every Sunday, or nearly every Sunday. But God hasn't seen fit to open that door. And so my desire to preach has been expressed at - through preaching of what I have - invitations and preaching on a regular rotation at the Kansas City Rescue Mission, and in this church, three, maybe four times a year, depending on how things turn out.

Katie: And how did you start preaching at the Rescue Mission? Was that the original position you had taken on?

Vicki: (2-4:56) No--when I was at the seminary, my family and I attended the True Light Church of the Nazarene, which is in Midtown, Kansas City - thirty-first and Charlotte. It's a pretty rough area, but we were drawn to that church - the senior pastor is a wonderful godly woman, who's got such heart and passion for the inner city, that we just felt drawn to that place. And so we attended church there for about five years. And she would often invite me to preach, and one time I was preaching and the chaplain at the Kansas City Rescue Mission was in the congregation. And so he came to me and he said if you can preach here, you can preach at the rescue mission. Would you be interested? And I said, yes, I would love to do that, so I've been doing that probably close to ten years now on a rotating basis, and I love it. Sometimes I think, this is crazy. There's this older, white, highly educated woman going to preach to mostly black men and it - but I really enjoy it. And they seem to respond well to me. So I really do love it. And I love to preach and I feel so much freedom when I preach there.

Katie: That's wonderful-

Vicki: Yeah - Yeah, it's been a great opportunity.

Katie: (2-6:25) So are you and your husband at different places most Sundays or does he also attend here?

Vicki: He travels with his job. Since he's education commissioner, he's often at one of our fifty-four, I believe, schools, internationally. And he does board development and is often invited to speak at their commencement or those kinds of things. And so he's gone about sixty percent of the time, and so he's often not here. But when he is here, he'll do anything I need him to do from running sound, to powerpoint, to teaching Sunday School, to serving communion. So he's a great help when he's here.

Katie: (2-7:10) And have you felt the same kind of support from your parents and your grandparents, as far as you being called to ministry, because I know you had talked about that they were at the district level so maybe they were more open?

Vicki: Yeah, my parents were really surprised, but supportive. And my grandparents were already deceased I believe, before it became really public. Yeah, my parents were supportive. I don't think they really understood, but - I mean they understood to a certain extent, but like I said, they were surprised. I actually got to preach my father's funeral. And what a privilege that was. And I just - I mean it was hard, but I thoroughly enjoyed that honor.

Katie: That seems really special.

Vicki: Yeah, it really was.

Katie: Did you do your daughter's wedding as well?

Vicki: (2-8:15) Um, actually we decided that instead of them having to choose between the two of us or having both of us up there, they invited my husband's brother - so Uncle Jerry did their weddings. And we took the typical mother and father roles. But we've married - one of our nieces we married together, and then my husband has married another niece. And we've married some of our children's teachers at school. I married one - I shouldn't say married - I officiated at their marriage - at another teacher's wedding. In the past we've done that a lot, but not so much anymore. Because they're all past that age now.

Katie: So, when you started in ministry--ok, well actually I'm gonna take a step back. Can you talk about seminary a little and--what was it like being a woman in seminary? And were there lots of other women at that time, or was that part of your desire to work on creating this environment where women could feel more comfortable?

Vicki: (2-9:29) Yeah, I started out doing a Masters at Point Loma. My undergrad was music education. And then I did a Masters. And of course I was twenty years older than most of the students there, so that was really more of a big deal than the gender difference. I did find in some classes like Greek, I was one of the few females in the class. And the other classes there might be two or three in a class of say twenty, but because I was twenty years older, I didn't feel any issues with that.

When I decided to do a doctor of ministry, one of the requirements is a Master of Divinity, so I had to take eighteen to nineteen units at Nazarene Seminary before I could enter the D-Min program. Those classes were very much a mixture of men and women. And--I felt very supported in both settings as I was studying. In fact, I felt like the professors were really happy to have me in class. I felt like they were supportive of me personally, but they were personally happy to be able to be a professor for me. So that was encouraging. And many of them were my contemporaries, so some of them even younger than me as they loved to point out. (laughs)

Katie: (2-11:05) So had you - you had already had your children then when you went to seminary-

Vicki: Yes, and one of the stories I love to tell is, the first class I took was Greek, because I had done a women's bible study that did Greek word studies. And so it really got me excited about all the things that you can find in the Greek that are missing in the English. And so, I wanted to take Greek. So I took two years of Greek to start with, and my girls were in either preschool or kindergarten - that age. So, the class was twenty minutes away from us at seven thirty in the morning. So I would get up and go to school and my husband would get the girls up, feed them, dress them, get them off to school on those three mornings a week. So that was a gift to me that he was willing to do that. I know some people would say, well why wouldn't he be willing to do that because he's their father? But in my generation that was still a unique kind of thing. In my daughters' generation, that's becoming more and more commonplace - the shared parenting.

My generation was kind of a transition one from my parents in the fifties where mom stayed home with the kids - dad worked to my children's generation where shared parenting, shared work-kind of thing. I feel like our generation was kind of a - that transitional generation where, you know, we valued what our parents did, but at the same time there was a part of me that said I don't - I got more to offer than just staying home all the time. So we had to work through that. But part of it was when he stayed home with the girls so that I could take Greek. And then I realized, in the back of the Greek book was a song - the Greek alphabet put to the song shortening bread. So I taught it to my toddlers and to this day they can sing the Greek alphabet. In fact when my eldest was in fourth grade they did a study of Greece and she told her teacher, I can sing the Greek alphabet. And her teacher says no you can't. And she said yes I can, and sung it for her. So every year she got invited back to that class to sing for them. (Laughs) So, yeah - they can still sing it. All I have to do is start singing it and they'll jump right in.

Katie: That's excellent.

Vicki: Yeah. They have definitely been a part of this whole journey. And it's been fun. In fact, my eldest daughter--(Clip 3) is responding now to what may be a call to ministry as a worship leader. And the youngest - my youngest daughter is very much a part of the youth ministry, for which her husband is hired.

Katie: (3-:18) --Well maybe this would be a good time to sort of talk about--how do you go about changing the culture or changing the environment at the local level for women or helping women not be their own resistance, I guess?

Vicki: I've always maintained that the best way to meet that resistance is to just go in and do a good job. And many of us have to come in at a position or a level that is not what we aspire to, but is open to us at the time. So you take what you can, what you're given and you excel and you demonstrate the fruit of the spirit and you demonstrate the leadership that God has given you and the gifts for leadership that God has given you, and doors will open. I've seen that happen in my own life. I've been astounded, actually, at some of the things that have happened that I wouldn't ever have dreamed of, but the faithfulness often will do that. Now, granted, I know women who are faithful and are gifted and doors have not opened for them, so it's not a, you know, always-happens-kind-of-thing. But I think it's a general rule, that if you go in with humility, and responsibility, and all of those - the good work ethic and all of the things that make you a good pastor that people will take notice.

When we went to Arizona for my husband to be district superintendent, there was a pastor on our district who came from a Baptist background. We were there five years. I served with him on the Board of Ministry and he taught for the School of Ministry that I directed, and I knew where he stood on all of this. But I don't remember ever really talking about it. I think he kinda told me sheepishly once that well, this is where I come from, you probably should know that. But when we left five years later, he made an appointment with me and came into the district office and he said, I just have to tell you - that you've convinced me that this is truly what God has for women. And so, it can happen.

And I've got many friends who have stories just like this, where people were resistant. They went in - they proved themselves - and people have changed their minds.

Katie: (3-3:11) Wow, that's a really powerful story.

Vicki: Yeah, it's wonderful when it happens like that. I've had other people don't even give you a chance. I was preaching once in Arizona and some guy in the back of the church, as soon as I was introduced, got up and walked out - and found out later that he didn't approve of me being in the pulpit. So, he didn't even give me a chance to say anything. He just - you know, this is what I believe, so I'm not even gonna listen to you.

Katie: Do you find that other expectations come with being a woman in the pulpit versus if you are a man? I guess I've just sorta come across some stories of women who get a lot of comments about their appearance.

Vicki: (3-3:52) Oh, yeah. Yeah, (laughs) I recently - I had a man come up to me and I think I had preached. And this was a man I greatly respected, and so when he came up to me, I was hoping he had some words of wisdom, or, you know, encouragement for me, and instead he said, "I really like that you matched the pairments for this Sunday. You know, that shirt you had on really looked nice with the platform." And I just walked away from that conversation going, oh Lord, help me. So, you know, those things happen, but they do it to the men too.

My husband had a man come up to him once with a tie gift box and he said, I want to give you this tie, but only if you give me that one you're wearing, because he thought my husband wore that tie too many times. I agreed with him. I actually had told my husband he wore the tie too many times. But, you know, it happens with both men and women. Yeah, it's just part of being up in front. People notice what you've got on.

I've not had anyone criticize me for being provocative before, but I try really hard not to be that way. I don't want to look frumpy, but at the same time I have to be aware that in a highly sexualized culture like we have, that something to you looks just normal, to somebody else can - and I mean you can take that way too far, but I just think women have to be careful about that, because you don't want it to be a distraction. And then you have to weigh your freedom over your effectiveness, you know. If you just say, I'm going to wear this - I don't give a hoot about what these guys are thinking, you know, that's not the attitude that's going to effectively cause the Gospel to be heard. Yeah, but it is definitely an issue.

Katie: (3-6:01) Do you--do you ever find yourself preaching on gender or egalitarian ideology?

Vicki: Not as a topic. However, when it's there I point it out. For instance, if you take Luke fifteen, you have the three stories - the prodigal son, the shepherd with the sheep, and the woman with the coin. So when I preach that sermon, I point out that God is represented by the father, God is represented by the shepherd, and god is represented by the woman. And, I might even pause, and raise my eyebrows, or even say, how about that, you know. And I've had reaction from the congregation when I've done that. I've heard people go - (makes sound). You know, those kind of reactions (laughs). But, oh well.

Another one is--when Jesus commissions Mary of Magdalene to tell the disciples that he's been raised from the dead. I mean, we read over that like it's no big deal, but oh my goodness, you think about what that woman was in that culture, and the importance of this news, and the fact that he would ask her to give that news to the disciples is huge. And so I want women to know that. And I want men to know it too.

Another one is, you know, we make a really big deal out of Peter's confession of the Christ. But Martha does the same thing, in John, chapter eleven, when Jesus arrives after waiting two days, when Lazarus is dead. And then Martha says, I know that you are the Christ, and hardly anyone talks about her confession of the Christ, but it's, in my mind, very similar to Peter's. So, I like to point those things out. And, generally they're received pretty well.

In the old testament there's some wonderful metaphors used for God, that talk about God's womb, God's mothering, and those sorts of things. So, I think that those are really helpful too, but I think there's some people who that just kind of makes them sick to their stomach, but it's there. And so, I think we should talk about it when we have the opportunity.

Katie: Do you find yourself using different kinds of pronouns or words to describe God -

Vicki: What I try to do - particularly when I'm in an academic setting, and I know that people are really listening for that is instead of using a pronoun, I'll just use the word God. It's difficult, because of my background, to use the word "she," and I think that so much is read into that from listeners that as a Pastor I feel like I need to stay away from that. However, I think that I - I would want to take opportunities to tell people that God isn't assigned a gender, like we're assigned a gender. And I think that the way that our world is now, where gender is less (gestures) this and this, and more along a continuum, that it's going to be easier for people to see God as not strictly male. I mean, we see Jesus as strictly male, because when he took on flesh that's who he was. But God - I don't think we have to assign a gender to God. Although, Jesus seems to when He calls God, "Father." But, you know, there are ways of thinking about that too. But in terms of being a pastor, I usually try to use the word "God" instead of "he" or "she." I mean, there are so many things that are more important than a pronoun that is assigned to God, that I - you choose your battles. And that's just not one I'm willing to die for, and I've got friends who would die on that - die for that battle. But most of them are in academia. As a pastor, I'm just not gonna go there. I mean, at some point, maybe, down the road that could be something that might be something that I would be willing to explore more. But at this point, it's pretty low on the priority list.

Katie: (3-10:50) Do you--so I know that you said that you go and preach at the mission church and you've had experiences with seminary - it seems like you're fairly well connected, maybe even on a national level - do you find yourself working with a lot of local pastors on any sort of projects?

Vicki: On the district here, I've been elected to the advisory board and to the trustees at the university, so those put me in contact with other pastors. I'm also - I chair the True Light Family Resource Center, which is a compassionate ministry site connected to the church I referenced earlier, and I've been on that board for six years and been the chair of the board for five years. So in connection with that, I have some connection to church pastors other than Nazarene. And at the seminary I directed supervised ministry, and so there were - our students attended churches all across the area, so I worked with their pastors in training them and getting them ready to be supervisors.

Katie: (3-12:10) And do you find--do you find it easy to work with a lot of pastors from other denominations or are there ever any moments, maybe like with the Baptist pastor that you had described, that cause some sort of tension?

Vicki: No, I've not been challenged by anybody here in Kansas City or really anywhere I've been. Yeah, I think - I mean, there might be some pastors who would challenge you, but it's - I'm a pastor because the Church of the Nazarene put their stamp on me. They recognized my call. They examined me. And then they laid hands on me and ordained me. So, I don't have to prove myself to anybody. I just say - I'm a Nazarene, maybe you're not, but I am, and the Church of the Nazarene put their stamp of approval on me, so I don't really care what you think.

Katie: That's how we roll.

Vicki: Yeah, that's how we roll. That's right.

Katie: So what kinds of encouragement do you offer for women that maybe have a more difficult experience than what you've been able to-

Vicki: Well, I try to walk alongside them and listen. I try to open the way for them when I can. I have a friend on the district who was looking at a position that was opening and wondering if she should apply. (Clip 4) I had talked to the pastor previously about her giftedness and encouraged her to apply and she got the job. I've sent references for women clergy who've asked me to do that. So I'll go to bat for them if they ask me to. I'll let them cry on my shoulder when - I mean there've been some horrible stories - things that people have done to my friends that have broken my heart. so I think most, any of my contemporaries who are women clergy, because of what we've seen and been through, we, to a person, make ourselves available to those coming up.

What I find sometimes, and especially when I was teaching at the seminary is these young women who have come through - they might have a supportive local congregation, they have been through an educational institution that was very supportive, and they've come to a seminary that was very supportive, and I know what's coming next. So they have this kind of idealism - I mean this is probably true in other areas besides ministry, but they have this unrealistic idealism about how the way is going to open before them, and it often doesn't do that. I have one friend who--I'm trying to think when she - she was part of the seminary, and when she graduated, she sent out resumes to every Nazarene district in North America and got one response. And that was in Canada. So, she pastored up there for awhile, but because of physical condition couldn't stay - was offered another church in the south, and was trying to get back closer to home and no churches opened up. And she finally joined the United Methodists Church and was able to find, actually, two charges that she works with. I have some other friends who've done the same thing. Probably a half a dozen of my friends have, because they could not find a position or encountered some kind of difficulty, have left the Church of the Nazarene, and gone to United Methodist. That breaks my heart that they've had to do that. They don't want to. Many of them would really like to be in the Church of the Nazarene. That's where their roots are. That's where their family is. But, they have a call, and in order to be obedient, they've had to go another direction.

Katie: (4-3:01) --Do you know--so the way that the hiring process works in the Nazarene Church - is it sort of like a mix appointment-hiring process-

Vicki: Generally, for a lead pastor position, the congregation is the one that makes the decision. The district superintendent can bring names, can encourage them to consider a person, but the congregation, the board of the congregation determines who they will interview, and then the whole congregation votes on that person.

One of my friends came highly recommended by the district superintendent to this congregation. The board voted, and it was a positive vote - it might have been unanimous, I can't remember, but when the church voted, she was just one vote shy of the required number. And so, it was devastating. It was devastating. In that particular situation, the district superintendent took that moment to appoint someone who was bi-vocational, a man. And then that man, and I'm not sure of all the behind-the-scenes things, but that man then hired this woman as his administrative assistant pastor, or some such title. So because he was bi-vocational and traveled quite a bit, she ended up doing a lot of things. So people got a chance to see how capable she was, and so when that man resigned, then they elected her. So that is such a great story, but it's - there's just so much hurt and pain in the midst of all of it. And it's not been an easy go, but it's been a progressive success story.

So there are times when a church is quite small or has particular issues, where a pastor can be appointed. And our district superintendent here has taken that occasion to put women in place. But it's not like the United Methodists where they appoint someone to a congregation and nobody has anything to say about it. It just happens, at least that's my understanding. So that's the challenge - is getting the congregation - and I have, for awhile, explored the possibility of being open to that kind of an assignment, cause like I said before, I'd really like to preach regularly, but there hasn't been any interest expressed, so, I don't really know what to make of that, especially given that the leadership positions that have opened up for me - it's quite confusing to me. So I've - the place I've come out is this is where God has me at this point in my life and I love our people. I enjoy working here. I mean, pastoral ministry is hard no matter where you are, but--so I've just said from the beginning - it's been my position that Lord, You called me, and You can do with me what You will. I'm not going to insist on certain things. It's counterproductive. And so when God opens a door, and says this is for you, that's where I go.

Katie: (4-7:16) --Do you have a favorite character in the Bible or--just generally some mentors that you look to for when you need encouragement?

Vicki: Yeah, I've had several mentors. Not anyone that's been like, meet with me every month or something like that. But throughout my journey, as I've been different places, God has always put someone there to be a prayer partner or to walk alongside me. Early in my call, I already mentioned the woman who was a retired clergy woman, and she was really encouraging to me. I found out after I made my call public that someone had seen early on, pastoral gifts in me that I had been unaware of until that time. I was at a retirement dinner for a professor at Point Loma and ran into a friend whose mother was a retired clergy person who'd been in my church when I

was a teenager. And I really didn't - the fact that she was a clergy woman and the things that she had done in her life had never really connected with me as a kid, a teenager. I just didn't - it was kind of lost on me. Well, when I told him that I had gone back to school - I was in school and I was planning to be a pastor and he just looked at me with this strange look, and I said what? And he said, my mother, his mother was this clergy woman in my church, my mother told me when you were a teenager, that you had - that God was going to call you to be a pastor. And I said, no she didn't. And he said, yeah, she sure did. (4-9:11). So that was a huge affirmation to me that this woman who had - I mean her life wasn't perfect, but she at one time had a church with the longest Sunday school attendance in the Church of the Nazarene. Probably, oh I'm going to say in the fifties, maybe the forties. I could look it up, but it was in the southeast. But that was really really confirmation. And along the journey there have been those kinds of people who have come to me and said things that kept me going when I was discouraged. And there was a time when I was introduced to feminism and all the inequities, and I can get on a soap box now and then. And I was fired up and my husband sat me down after hearing me go off about a couple of things. And he said, now listen, you can either be labeled or you can mellow out. Those are your options. He said that's the way the church works. If you want to be labeled that's fine, you can do that. But if you really want to be used in the church, you're going to have to mellow out. And so I had to learn where and when I could go off on my frustrations with the inequity. And I know there are people who think I'm not outspoken enough, but I took his words to heart and I think to a great extent those words put me on a good path and one that I encourage women to go on. You just can't always be whining about how bad things are and how tough things are for you and how other people get opportunities and you don't. If you become a whiner then people write you off. They might listen to you for a little while, but then they write you off. So you have to make lemonade with your lemons. It's not - you know, it's not easy, and it's frustrating when your parishioners talk more about how you look than what you said, or when someone comes up to you and says, I just want you to know, I don't believe in woman pastors, so if you ever became our pastor I would leave. Someone told me that my very first Sunday here.

Katie: Oh my goodness -

Vicki: Yeah, so I mean you get that stuff, and it's frustrating. There are times when I've shared those things and somebody will look at me like what's the big deal. And maybe that one instance when somebody said something wasn't a big deal. But the cumulative effect of those things being - they're compounded when those kind of comments are made (4-12:27). One time I was making a hospital call and it was a wife who was in the hospital. Her husband was there. And the doctor walked in. The husband introduced his wife and then he said, and this is my girlfriend. Yeah. Boy I was mad. I was mad. But, you know, those are the kind of things that you get. And you just have to consider the source and know that they don't - there was no ill will in that, in any of these things really. I am loved by all those people that I used as examples. I'm loved by them. I know I am. They don't understand how hurtful they're being and how belittling it is to be looked at from that standpoint. There's an older lady that I visit in a care home and she's very gregarious and introduces me to people that come by. And she says this is our women's ministries pastor. And so I keep thinking - do I tell her I'm an associate pastor or you know, in

her mind, since I'm a woman, I can only minister to women. And so you have that thing – do I (Clip 5) correct everybody or just take it on the chin? So, you know, it's hard, and it's wonderful to have women that understand that. So that when we get together, we can talk about these things and laugh and encourage one another. I've always had groups of other clergywomen where I've been, but the women that I hurt for are the ones who are in isolated places – small rural towns where they don't have – you know, they may be the only Wesleyan Holiness Church in the area. So they may have pastors who don't believe in women clergy in their little town and so they have to drive a distance to find someone to encourage them. But we always have social media, which – and I'm in several groups of women clergy on social media that we post articles, we encourage one another, we help each other find positions. So that's been a great thing that's happened for women clergy too. And the other thing – I told my male students when I was teaching – we really need you to be our advocates. And some of them have really taken that to heart. And they will go to bat for their women clergy colleagues consistently. In fact, I work for one like that. When they stand up for us, it says something (5-1:42).

Katie: --I guess that was sort of going to be my next question – was what can men and women, both, do who are not called to be pastors, but they're part of congregations. What kinds of things can they do to change the culture or to make this a more welcoming environment for everyone.

Vicki: Well, I think one of the things we have to do – just a second – is to help our children and our children and our teens to have that – to see that possibility for themselves, as leaders. And so, instead of always having a young man pray(5-2:43) in the church or a young man read scripture, invite the young women to read scripture too. –Same thing with children. If we can from the earliest days in their lives help them to see themselves as equal--and I mean that in the sense of their capacity for ministry, then that will help them. You know, I grew up in a church where I had never heard a woman preach. I think it's interesting that in my father's church was this retired clergy woman, but he never invited her to preach. And I didn't think about that until he was gone, but I would love to say, why didn't you? You know, maybe she was too old by that time. I don't know. I heard a missionary woman - and it's always kinda been ok to be a missionary--cause that's out there, but to be a pastor is a little different. But I didn't hear a woman preach until I went to college, and so I thought I was supposed to be a missionary, because I related to that. I related to what she was doing, but I didn't quite understand what God was - what God had for me. So--part of what we have to do is have women in front of them.

We have a church here in the Kansas City area that is one of the major Nazarene churches and they didn't have a woman on staff. They even had a male children's pastor. And so they've rectified that now. And so I say for the sake of their teenage girls and their children, that's a huge, a huge step. And every church ought to have at least - especially if you've got multiple staff - ought to have at least one woman on your staff - one token, so that the women and the girls in your church realize that if God's calling them, they're more apt to say yes if they've seen it, rather than to buck the system. Now I've known some who've been raised in some very oppressive churches, where they're told consistently this isn't what God has for you, who have just by the strength of their own will and their understanding of the call come out of that and say yes, this is what God has for me. But those are really rare. It's hard to swim against the stream

for any length of time. And so we need to make it - we need to be very visible to these young women. And even the - I mean I was middle-aged when God called me. I think I was in my late thirties. And so--to see someone upfront - to see them is to open the way for me to be obedient. So camp speakers--college chapels, all those places - they need to make a concerted effort at having women speakers so that it will open up the door.

And then, we need to keep encouraging the pastors to model for the congregation that inclusion that is so healthy. And it's not just so that people will be called, but it's also what women have to offer. We see life so differently than men do, and to conduct church business without the input of fifty percent of the church - without their input is - to me that's just silly. And I know in the past the way that's been done is the wife tells the husband and the husband tells the group. It's kind of an indirect kind of input. But--women need to be taught to speak for themselves. And I think the kingdom will be better for it.

Katie (5-6:52) Well, as we're wrapping up, do you have any final thoughts that you would like to share on women in ministry or I guess women in any profession that is--trying to fill a role that has traditionally been filled just by one gender.

Vicki: I just think we need to support each other. I have felt from some women who have reached a certain level of leadership that their attitude is "I'm up here with the big guys and you're not up here." You know, I've kind of felt this (gestures with hand) from them, rather than "I'm up here. Now I'm gonna make the way for you to be up here. So sometimes we can be as competitive as we've felt the guys have been all along. Instead of saying, ok I'm in a position where I have a little bit of power and influence, so I'm gonna open the way for you by talking to this colleague about what I've seen in you, or about telling you about this position that was open, or all kinds of ways that we can open the way.

So I think those of us who are already there need to do that. And then I think that women who are on their way have to have courage. My daughter who's on the front end of this was reading a book on worship. And she was reading it, gleaning so much wonderful stuff from this book, and then she saw this asterisk somewhere in the book. And so she looked back to it and it said - the author says, "I do not believe that women should be in the pulpit or that women should be worship leaders. And so she called me and said I can't believe this. I'm reading all of this stuff, thinking this is such a wonderful book and then I'm totally - I'm totally negated (laughs). I said yes, welcome to my world. This is the way it is. It's hard. It's very hard, and like I said, especially when you've come up through a system that's very encouraging. The real world can be devastating to these young women. So, they have to be, they have to be strong. They have to be willing to take it on the chin and to not get defensive, and to not make it all about them. It can't be about that. It has to be about proclaiming the gospel. So, I think I've said all I can say (laughs).

Katie: (5-9:34) Thank you so much for sharing.

Vicki: You're welcome.