

**THE ROLE OF A PASTOR'S WIFE IN A CHANGING URBAN  
SCENARIO WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD**

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## *Dedication*

*This research is dedicated to my mother, Mrs. Delma Dharni because of whose prayers I am in the ministry today, my sisters Ruhie and Sanjana for their love and my husband Samuel without whom I would not have reached thus far.*

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## INTRODUCTION

A Pastor's wife who recently moved into a new parish told the researcher that there was no clearly assigned role for her. She went on to describe that the members of her church expected her to be involved in every department of the church and how it was becoming increasingly difficult to cope with their expectations. This set the researcher thinking about the numerous challenges faced by Pastor's wives as they attempt to support their husbands at home and the church, in a rapidly changing urban context.

While collecting material on the subject the researcher went through the research of S. Kumari, an alumnus of Southern Asia Bible College. Her research which was submitted in 2001 was entitled: 'Role of a Pastor's wife in Ministry'. Ms. Kumari focused on the rural setup and the problems of ignorance, societal pressures, prejudice and illiteracy. This research has looked at the challenges faced by the urban Pastor's wife who is educated and in some cases even theologically trained.

In this research the researcher has endeavoured to shed light on some related issues like - the rapidly evolving urban scenario, the influences of these changes on the urban church, the existing mindset of church leaders and members on the role of a Pastor's wife, the different ways that a Pastor's wife can contribute and some solutions to the urban challenges.

The researcher has combined both the empirical and the library method of research. The sources of collecting data are from the libraries of Southern Asia Bible College and South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, as well as the internet. The researcher has also

interviewed the wives of a few key leaders in the Assemblies of God to gain their perspective to the urban challenge of ministry.

In the first chapter the researcher has looked at the changing urban scenario. She has looked at the negative as well as the positive influence of urbanization. In the second chapter she has focused on the challenges faced by Pastor's wives. This has been done with the help of interviews. The third chapter deals with the Pastor's wife finding fulfillment. This chapter includes various recommendations of Pastor's wives who have been in ministry for many years; some of whom are Pastors themselves.

As time was a major constraint the researcher limited her interviews to the Assemblies of God. However, most of these insights are invaluable nuggets that could be used in any urban context irrespective of denomination. It is the researcher's prayer that the findings of this research would minister to all who would later step into these ladies shoes.



# **1. INFLUENCE OF THE CHANGING URBAN SCENARIO AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CHURCH**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Villifane describes urbanization in America when he says, “Our cities are not what they were fifty years ago, twenty-five years ago, or even ten years ago. Our cities are multiethnic, multicultural and increasingly multilingual.”<sup>1</sup> Today this can be easily said of any large Indian city. In India and the world over boundaries have shrunk because of rapid urbanization.

Urbanization has had an impact on the employment, welfare, and living conditions in India. It has enhanced the information technology sector, research and development, healthcare, transport, and even the fashion industry. People now have greater disposable income, better working conditions and greater mobility on the work front causing a drastic leap in the ‘cost of living index’. Most major cities of India have large Multi-National Corporations, Call Centres and Business Processing Units. People are able to afford a better standard of living with increasing blurring between necessity, comfort and luxury. Urbanization has impacted information and entertainment, which is just a ‘remote control’ away thanks to the television, satellite and the news media.

**Along with the constructive influence on industry, urbanization has widened the gap between the rich and the poor, the have and the have-nots. It has caused a social upheaval, elevated stress levels and created consumerism. On the moral plane we see degeneration**

**with increase of corruption and sexual perversion. On the one hand if jobs are increasing among the elite, there is also the insatiable need for jobs among the masses due to the explosive population growth. Crime and violence also seem to be increasing in most cities around the world. The church of God is placed amidst such an anomaly. Kyle comments on the paradoxes that are juxtaposed in any growing city -**

The complexity of the city is that it isn't one city. It is a commercial city. It is an industrial city. It is a nocturnal city. It is a daytime city. It is an ethnic city. It is an international city. It is a migrant city. It is a student city. It is a five star hotel city. It is a derelict city. It is an institutionalized city. People are being packaged in cities. To reach them is to deal with numbers, growth, and complexity.<sup>2</sup>

## **1.2 The negative impact of urbanization**

Urbanization on the one hand offers remarkable opportunities but on the other also poses its own challenges. Listed below are some of the negative impacts of rapid urbanization -

### **1.2.1. Unemployment**

This is one of the main challenges faced due to rapid urbanization. People from the rural areas often congregate in the cities to seek employment giving rise to unemployment. As world over the population is rapidly increasing, the number of job opportunities seems to be on the

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<sup>1</sup> Eldin Villafane, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 1995), 77.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Kyle, *Urban Mission: God's Concern for the City* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1988), 73.

decline. This has resulted in what sociologists call a ‘culture of poverty’.<sup>3</sup> Unemployment brings down the living condition as there is a strain on the bread earner and an additional burden to the church.

#### 1.2.2. Breakdown of marriages

Divorce rates are on the increase. The society around does not consider marriage as a sacred institution any longer, and hence live-in relationships are being popularized. Economic and emotional incompatibility is being cited for this incongruity. Today the urban woman is educated and often employed. Sometimes there are even instances where the woman is the bread earner and there is a reversal of roles. Pressures of chasing a career along with taking care of a household are often causes for breakdown in marriages.

#### 1.2.3. Substance abuse

This is another evil that urbanization throws up which the church has to combat. Clairbaett cites substance abuse as one of the urban challenges when he says, “Addiction rates are high, as the power of peer culture and its favourable view of drug involvement, provides an optimum psychological setting of getting hooked.”<sup>4</sup> It is today considered the ‘in thing’ among the youth to smoke pot, marijuana, grass and other forms of addictives. Celebrity endorsement coupled with subtle media propaganda has influenced an entire generation of young people.

#### 1.2.4. Sexual promiscuity and pornography

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Ellison, *The Urban Mission: Essay on the Building of a Comprehensive Model for Evangelical Urban Ministry* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 13.

<sup>4</sup> David Clairbaett, *Urban Ministry* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 116.

One of the challenges of urbanization is sexual promiscuity. Pornography is an example of this permissiveness. The moral degeneration of values and availability of sexual intimacy via the net, phones, and video are shaking the foundations of morality. Sleaze is accepted and the media promotes it because it is lucrative. Today it is being hotly debated whether homosexuality has something to do with genes or preference. India where mention of sex was taboo has suddenly seen an increase of people coming out in the open. Gay marriages are gaining acceptability and even the church finds itself embroiled in this controversy. The exposure to sexual permissiveness propounded by the media and increase in dysfunctional families, have caused an increase in people prepared to experiment with anything. This moral degeneration has also affected the urban church where public denunciation of immorality is not appreciated.

#### 1.2.5. Media controlled culture

The urban culture is entirely controlled by the media. The mantra of today's philosophy is that 'if it feels good' it is right and acceptable. The media has convinced an entire generation of young people of this fallacy. Due to easy availability of movies and music videos with youth icons draped in clothes that leave nothing to the imagination, youth of today are deeply influenced by a different mindset. Young minds are constantly bombarded by vulgarity in the guise of modernity. Music and lifestyles by pop divas like Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Ricky Martin, Madonna and others are making a lasting impression on the urban youth. As a result modesty is being replaced by provocative dressing. The erosion of values has deeply affected the youth of today causing many of them to feel that the church is old fashioned and irrelevant.

### 1.2.6. Ethical dilemmas

With promiscuity levels being much higher than ever before, owning responsibility to ones actions has been replaced by a Bohemian spirit and a carefree attitude. The phenomenal increase in abortion is an example of this pervading mindset. People today prefer to talk in shades of grey and hence talking in terms of black and white is considered archaic. This gives rise to numerous ethical dilemmas, as what was earlier propounded as right or wrong is questioned today. Other issues that demand a response by the urban church today are cloning, surrogate motherhood, euthanasia (mercy killing), caste discrimination and dowry. The church has to grapple with these realities and make a suitable response.

Looking at some of these facts that are becoming more and more a reality, we are compelled to look at the challenges that urban ministry entails. Ellison points this out when he says,

Urban ministry is usually not comfortable or convenient. It requires the best of God's people. It demands a deep, sustained, personal walk with Christ, and a willingness to take risks and to live with uncertainty, to confront evil and its destructive influences in the lives of people and to incarnate the good news.<sup>5</sup>

The church's mandate is to be the salt and light in such a context. 1 Peter 2:9 (N.I.V.) "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*" The church is to declare God's light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom we are called to shine as lights (Philippians 2:15).

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<sup>5</sup> Craig Ellison, *The Urban Mission*, 15.

### 1.3 Positive influence of urbanization on the church

While on one hand urbanization has a negative impact, on the other we also see its positive influence. There is an increase in availability of resources, facilities and personnel that come as a result of urbanization. This has its effect on the urban church and hence there are changes that are taking place in the urban church all over the world. Given below are some of the positive influences of urbanization on the church at large.

#### 1.3.1. Communications

The advance made in the field of communication is breathtaking. Internet, Satellite Television, Radio and Print Media are able to reach and influence a lot of people simultaneously. Media gives the Church tools to communicate the gospel to hundreds of people at the same time. People have the option of viewing Christian programs on channels like Miracle Net, God Television and many other Christian channels. Kilbourn speaks of the need to use the media of television when he says, "Television has influenced the values and behaviour of societies in dramatic ways. Television must work in conjunction with the local church. The church can be promoted in the community."<sup>6</sup> Movies like 'The Passion of Christ' and 'Cross and the Switchblade' have the potential to communicate the gospel in a very comprehensive way to the people. Computers with variety of software and overhead projectors are being used to augment what is being communicated from the pulpit.

#### 1.3.2. Multiplication of home cells

There was a time when people were always invited to the church as most of its programs were geared in such a way. Urbanization also has provided the option of taking the church to the

home. Many city folks have the facilities to host a care cell or in some cases start home churches. This coupled with the greater disposable income of city dwellers gives fillip to the spreading of the gospel. There is also a blurring between clergy and laity as many today realize the importance of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1: 6). Tillapaugh speaking on the involvement of laity says, “It is a mobilized congregation that makes the church move away from the Sunday based mentality.”<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3.3. Music

Urbanization also has its way of influencing the music one hears. Worship music is now crossing geographical barriers, as more and more people are able to access music that was not available earlier. As city folks have more access to resources it is not uncommon today to find people listening to Hill Songs of Australia or singers like Ron Kenoly and Don Moen (who are part of Integrity Music) of the United States. Urbanization brings these resources to the church that was earlier inaccessible.

### 1.3.4. Increase in theological education and Christian education

There are a lot of correspondence courses, part time courses, short-term courses, and e-courses available today. These options were not possible in India about a decade or two ago. Today we find an increase in the knowledge of the urban pews as vast numbers of people have the options of choosing from Christian books and magazines. The internet also opens up avenues to people to read and discover different perspectives to doctrinal issues.

### 1.3.5. Breakdown of cultural barriers

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<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Kilbourn, *Children in Crisis: A New Commitment* (California: MARC, 1978), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Tillapaugh, *Unleashing the Church* (California: Regal Books, 1979), 48.

Urbanization brings multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural people together. Dr. Billy Graham once said that racial discrimination would be the single problem he would eradicate if he could. Today racial barriers are being rapidly broken and cross-cultural marriages are rapidly increasing. The differences between communities and people groups are narrowing down as people build bridges across communities. This in its own way serves to fortify the urban church.

#### 1.3.6. Education and medical work

With the growth of churches more mission agencies are entering the field of education and medicine. Many evangelical churches have been starting Christian schools and colleges, once considered the domain of the Roman Catholic Church. Medical work is also viewed as a potent tool for evangelism. Areas that were earlier shut to the Gospel are opening up as churches are getting involved in medical mission. Urbanization makes it possible for the church to be involved in holistic mission as it can tap into more and more resources in terms of people, time and money.

### 1.4 Conclusion

We can see God as One who is concerned for cities (Jonah 4: 11). The church is meant to be God's agent to touch the world. Changes are rapidly taking place in urban India as well as cities all over the world. The church has to rise to the occasion if it desires to make a lasting impact in reaching the world around it. Preliz drives home this point when he says, "God is the sovereign Lord of history. His hand will be in many changes. To apply Biblical principles to a rapidly changing world is a difficult and demanding task, but one, which we can scarcely



avoid.”<sup>8</sup> Ignoring the reality of the changing urban face of the world around would prove detrimental for the church’s growth. Many of these changes can be used to further the cause of the gospel. However it is also important to realize that urbanization throws up its own unique and distinct challenges, something that those who are called to minister cannot overlook!

## 2. THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A PASTOR’S WIFE IN SUCH A SCENARIO

### 2.1 Introduction

Jo Gray humorously points out what a regular advertisement for a Pastors' wife would look like

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Wanted: An adult female to serve without pay. She must be able to function without any complaint as secretary, music director, women's fellowship leader, nursery worker, janitor, auxiliary president and fund-raiser. On call 24 hours a day. Cooking abilities a plus. Good sense of humor helpful.<sup>9</sup>

This description beautifully captures the challenges of being a Pastor’s wife in an urban setting and trying to fit in her multi-faceted role. In many churches, this is the unpublished job description of the Pastor’s wife – perhaps the only profession that has no real job description but is deemed vital to her husband's success!

Lisa Newton, a Pastor’s wife for fourteen years said she would never forget the time she was asked by a member of a small congregation if she played the piano or sang. When she told the

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Preliz, ‘The Church in the Changing Urban Scenario’, *Urban Missions* 14 (1997), 48.

<sup>9</sup> Jo Gary, ‘Pastor’s wives know joy and pain’, Accessed on February 16, 2005; Available at [http://www.baptiststandard.com/2003/5\\_19/pages/wives.html](http://www.baptiststandard.com/2003/5_19/pages/wives.html); internet.

inquirer she did neither, she was then asked, “What do you do?”<sup>10</sup> I believe that one of the greatest challenges of being a Pastors wife is the conflict of meeting the perceived expectations of the people and of simply being a wife. Most wives in ministry face this dilemma at one point of time in their life of ministry.

Another wife of a Pastor on the condition of anonymity said that being in ministry automatically put one in a ‘fish bowl’. One would always be under scrutiny as people would always be looking for a fault. The expectations of a Pastors wife are many and often hard to break. Often Pastor's wives see themselves without a title, job description and at times identity.

## **2.2 Some challenges faced by urban Pastor’s wives**

The challenges faced by the Pastor’s wives are multifaceted as often their role is unspecified and does not have a clear job description in most instances. As urban ministry is characterized by constant change the Pastor’s wife is expected to adapt to the numerous challenges that come her way. Listed below are some of those challenges as described by a few experienced Pastors’ wives in the Assemblies of God (which have been gleaned from the personal interviews). While describing some of the challenges they proposed various ways and means to deal with them.

### **2.2.1. Expectations verbal and non-verbal**

The struggles of a pastor’s wife could range from being expected to be involved in the ministry of the church on every level – music, Bible studies, house visits, women and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

children's ministries, hospitality and treasurer and working full time in the home. Mrs. Faith Higgins, wife of the senior Pastor of Assemblies of God, Kolkata, points out –

Church members definitely have expectations of Pastors wives. When you become a Pastor's wife, you accept the fact that there will always be expectations and you should not have resentment or bitter feelings about that. I believe the wife has to be open to the expectations and try to fulfill some of them if possible. However, since every church member is different and will see things differently, it is impossible to meet everyone's expectations.<sup>11</sup>

Expectations thus are part of the package deal of being a Pastor's wife. Mrs. Amenla Cunningham observes that many times the Pastors wives would be forced to withdraw into a shell because of the heavy expectations.<sup>12</sup> These expectations if taken too seriously can at times have a debilitating effect. If the expectation is unreasonable it is wiser to ignore it than being constrained because of it.

It is also important with regard to expectations that the husbands recognize the unique call of their wives and encourage them in the areas of their gifting. Tom Mullins, Pastor of Christ Fellowship Church of Palm Beach Gardens points out, "I think it is important for a Pastor to understand his wife's role and respect that role".<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Sheila Satyavrata reiterates this when she says, "The husband should know his wife, and his support on the issues pertaining to these expectations is a must."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Faith Higgins, Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Amenla Cunningham, First Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Ginny Mc.Cabe, 'Pastors Wives face Challenges, Embrace Opportunities', Accessed on February 16, 2005; Available at [http://www.cross\\_walk.com/faith/pastors](http://www.cross_walk.com/faith/pastors); internet.

<sup>14</sup> Sheila Satyavrata, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2005).

Sometimes these expectations are expectations that one has for oneself. Pastor Sheba Thangiah of Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, states a phase where she struggled to keep pace with her husband's growth spiritually, till the Lord set her free by teaching her that she was to emulate the Lord, and not her husband in everything.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.2. Physical and spiritual exhaustion

Ministry demands that you give out constantly and urban ministry makes that demand relentlessly, both spiritually and physically. But one cannot give others what they do not have themselves. The only way to cope with this problem of feeling exhausted is spending time alone with the Lord. Due to the multiplicity of chores and constant giving out, a Pastor's wife may experience deadness within the soul. She would often struggle to take the time out of her demanding schedule to spend time alone with God. Mrs. Amenla Cunningham candidly states of how sometimes it is a challenge to take out the time to maintain personal devotion.<sup>16</sup> In the book *Urban Face of Mission*, the authors point this out when they say, "If you are not replenishing yourself in order to continue the spiritual warfare of the city, then you are exposing yourself to defeat, burnout and spiritual exhaustion."<sup>17</sup>

### 2.2.3. Discouragement and feeling of being unappreciated

Wenzel who did an extensive survey came out with a staggering conclusion. She said upward of eighty percent of Pastors' wives feel somewhat left out by their mate and unappreciated by

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<sup>15</sup> Sheba Thangiah, Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Amenla Cunningham, First Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Harrie M.Conn, et. al, *The Urban face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2002), 78.

the church. They often feel over worked, unloved and underpaid.<sup>18</sup> Very few ministry wives are involved in the decision making process of the church, yet they are expected to lead many activities. They often feel unqualified, weary and discouraged. Mrs. Faith Higgins offers a remedy for this by stating that a Pastor's wife should be a student of the Word of God privately to avoid being discouraged.<sup>19</sup>

#### 2.2.4. The need to be heard uncritically

Many pastors' wives simply yearn for an uncritical, listening ear, someone they can pour out their feelings to with no fear of condemnation or reprisal. They long for grace-based members in the body of Christ to reach out to them. They long for a safe place to vent their frustrations and feel accepted the way they are. Often Pastor's try to counsel them as they were a church member, rather than deal with love as a husband. Lorna Dobson suggests, "When I am upset, depressed, jealous, or angry, don't point out that those feelings may be wrong. I already know that I am."<sup>20</sup> These ladies need to be heard as just wives and sometimes they don't want their husband to have all the answers. They need to sort it out by themselves. At other times they may not get heard, since their husbands who are too tired of hearing other peoples problems, do not want to hear or discuss another problem in the house.

#### 2.2.5. Unjustified criticism

Pastor's wives often face a barrage of criticism. They are expected to smile through this. A Pastors wife is criticized for her dress sense, her mood swings (if any), and her lack of being

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<sup>18</sup> Kathy Wenzel, 'Pastor's Wives – Fatigue and Burnout', Accessed on April 25, 2005; Available at [http://www.allaboutgod.com/pastors\\_wives.htm](http://www.allaboutgod.com/pastors_wives.htm); internet.

<sup>19</sup> Faith Higgins., Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Lorna Dobson, *I'm more than Pastor's wife* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 109.

prepared to entertain at a moments notice. Even rearing her children could be her fault if they are not examples as per the congregation. It is like living in a glass house where one is constantly being watched. Ruth Senter observes, “There is always a stereotype role of a Pastor's wife in the congregation mindset. If she falls short may the Lord help her!”<sup>21</sup>

Many times her family too is criticized. At times she becomes the dumping ground for grievances against her husband, the Pastor. Mrs. Leelamma George reminds that at times when she or her husband is criticized unfairly she remembers the admonition by our Lord “to rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Matthew 5:12).<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Nalini Shinde suggests that the best thing to do when faced with criticism is to be quiet and to leave it in God’s hands.<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.2.6. The onus of rearing children

Another area of concern for the Pastor’s wife is rearing the children. Dr. Beth Grant observes that though scripturally the responsibility of raising children is equal between both parents, there are occasions where the onus falls more on the wife. She points out that she spent more time with them while her husband invested his time more qualitatively.<sup>24</sup> Pastor Sheba Thangiah adds her insight on rearing children when she says, “In fact in ministry Pastors wives have to take hundred percent onus. I have a museum of memories with my children”<sup>25</sup>. Mrs. Faith Higgins on the other hand feels that this problem is not confined to Pastor’s wives but wives in general. She suggests, “The pressure of rearing children is most often on the wife and

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<sup>21</sup> Ruth Senter, ‘The Pastor’s Wife’, Accessed on February 16, 2005; Available at [http://www.tiu.edu/bridge/voices/pastors\\_wife\\_\(sum-83\).htm](http://www.tiu.edu/bridge/voices/pastors_wife_(sum-83).htm); internet.

<sup>22</sup> Leelamma George, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Nalini Shinde, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Beth Grant, Assemblies of God, Eurasia, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Sheba Thangiah, Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2005).

this is not only for pastors wives but all wives... This is seen throughout history”.<sup>26</sup> Her solution to this challenge is that from the very beginning pastors should draw up guidelines on how to make time to be with the family.<sup>27</sup>

#### 2.2.7. Managing time alone with the husband

Pastors are often constrained for time. They weary themselves in the church and as a result often do not get time to spend with their wives. Spending this time is vital to any ministerial success. Mrs. Leelamma George sees her main ministerial role as supporting, encouraging and understanding her husband.<sup>28</sup> This encouraging, supporting and understanding her husband is never possible till she manages to spend time alone with him. In the words of Vonette Bright wife of late Dr. Bill Bright, Campus Crusade for Christ, “The communication between husband and wife makes the role clear and the wife an added asset.”<sup>29</sup> Neglect in this area can deeply affect the ministerial success, particularly in an urban context where demands can often pull couples apart.

#### 2.2.8. Economic Constraints

An important part of an urban setting is the continual economic demand of the family. Sometimes a Pastor’s wife may have to work in the secular world to support her husband’s ministry. The researcher surveyed to see whether it is good for a Pastor’s wife to work to support the family when faced with economic constraints. She also inquired if working outside

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<sup>26</sup> Faith Higgins, Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Leelamma George, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Ginny Mc.Cabe, ‘Pastors Wives face Challenges, Embrace Opportunities’, Accessed on February 16, 2005; Available at <http://www.freetosoar.org>; internet.

in a secular job to support the family, modeled a lack of faith. There were two distinct views that emerged in the interviews.

Pastor Sheba Thangiah responded to this query by saying how when at a crossroad, God miraculously provided for them and that there after she never sought employment. She wisely suggests “I personally feel that on the question of faith that it should be practiced. One should live by faith. It should not be made into a doctrine or made mandatory, but this is what applied to me.”<sup>30</sup>

Some other Pastor’s wives took a different standpoint. Mrs. Felicia Pravin Kumar opines, “Living by faith does not mean one sits idle at home. May be one could work to touch lives and not for the money. On the other hand, a Pastors wife could work to support the family if required”.<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Leelamma George points out that there are times when the husband may need his wife’s time; at other times he may need her money (to work and support the family). She suggests that the husband and wife are a team and whatever the case should share a common goal.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Amenla Cunningham felt that working for economic reasons does not model a lack of faith. She pointed that the Apostle Paul would make tents to support himself.<sup>33</sup>

## **2.3 Conclusion**

Dr. Beth Grant, who shoulders many responsibilities as a Pastor’s wife, gives words of wisdom,

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<sup>30</sup> Sheba Thangiah, Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Felicia Pravin Kumar, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Leelamma George, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Amenla Cunningham, First Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).



As women we are reared to be people pleasers. That's not healthy. We need to come to an understanding as to who we are in Christ. God has created us and we have a responsibility to God and His call. If I were not careful, I would live my life in stress. I need to serve in ways to the best of my ability. There would always be needs. I need to focus. For I should know that all my responsibilities would flow out from knowing what God wants of me.<sup>34</sup>

This aptly sums how to respond to the challenges faced in the ministry, for it all boils down to knowing what God requires from the individual rather than trying to come up with a quick fix solution. It is about being surrendered to God and being ready to be a channel through which God can work, despite the many challenges faced in the ministry.

### **3. THE PASTOR'S WIFE FINDING FULFILLMENT**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

David the Psalmist refers to the two-fold ministry of women – publishing the Word and ministering in the home. *“The Lord giveth the word: the women that publish the tidings are a great host, kings of armies flee, they flee; and she that tarrieth at home divided the spoil”*. (Psalms 68:11-12, ASV). Though Pastor's wives have the pressure to enter 'active ministry', they can choose to remain as homemakers if that is what God calls them to. True liberty involves responsibility; God sets us free to do what we ought to do. Maxwell and Dearing reiterate this when they say -

A women's true liberty allows her to be what God meant her to be and to do what God wills her to do. Some women publish the tidings abroad; others serve mainly in the home; then there are those who fill both roles. Certain ladies seem to be especially endowed for public service, while others 'stay by the stuff' (I Sam 30:24). Obviously

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<sup>34</sup> Beth Grant, Assemblies of God, Eurasia, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

God calls some to public ministry, but at the same time blesses those who stay at home in His will.<sup>35</sup>

Either way, whether she ‘actively’ serves the Lord or if she just takes care of her family she is serving God. Some are called to one area, others to the other and some even to both. As these women encounter everyday life as well as ministry, they must invoke the grace of God. It is only through the grace of God and the spirit of joy that they would find real fulfillment, to tackle all that comes their way at home and in the church.

### 3.2 Finding Fulfillment

As the researcher interviewed various Pastors wives on how they could find fulfillment in their family and ministry, she got an amazing array of answers which she has compiled in this chapter. Most of these women of God have been in ministry for many years, and graciously shared their experiences and gave valuable insights from their own lives. Some of these principles may sound fundamental, but nonetheless are pertinent. Others are timeless and need not be confined to the urban pastor’s wife, but are excellent guidelines for any one called into the ministry.

#### 3.2.1. Ability to love people unconditionally

The secret to success according to many women of God is the ability to love unconditionally. Kemp emphasizes this when she says, “Through the true love of Christ comes the willingness to tolerate and forgive, overlooking differences in personality and opinion. Through the love of

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<sup>35</sup> L.E.Maxwell and Ruth C Dearing, *Women in ministry: A Historical and Biblical look at the Role of Women in Christian Leadership* (Illinois: Victor Books, 1987), 146.

Christ comes the desire to accept one another unconditionally as He has accepted us.”<sup>36</sup> This may not seem easy particularly when they are battered with unjustified criticism. Mrs. Higgins shares something very insightful when she says that there is always going to be criticism in ministry, that this is to be expected. She elucidates that when a Pastors' wife realizes this, she has won half the battle. It is better to ask the Lord to defend and take on the battle.<sup>37</sup> We are called to love people with God’s love even when they are unkind. This is possible only through the help of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Beth Grant reminds the need to make forgiveness one’s lifestyle.<sup>38</sup> This is the bottom line of ministry, to love God and love people.

### 3.2.2. Flexibility and gracious tolerance

These are virtues that should be a part of her personality and nature as she will have to juggle between her responsibilities at home as well as the ministry. There may be occasions when she is torn between these two responsibilities. Kemp points this out when she says, “It is a delicate balance between the demands of our children and the demands of the church because the parishioners are like the Pastor’s children, too. Patience is demanded of our entire family, and if we keep the mission ever in mind, we can maintain a normal family life.”<sup>39</sup> Thus she will be required to fulfill her responsibility with the family and with her greater family the church that her husband pastors. Gayle Haggard also stresses on the importance of being gracious, “Know that your leadership will be received most effectively if you are gracious and kind in the way

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<sup>36</sup> Lynette Kemp, ‘Life as a Pastor’s Wife’, Accessed on February16, 2005; Available at <http://www.ctsfw.edu/admission/pa/wife.php>; internet.

<sup>37</sup> Faith Higgins, Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Beth Grant, Assemblies of God, Eurasia, (Interview,9<sup>th</sup> June 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Lynette Kemp, ‘Life as a Pastor’s Wife’, Accessed on February16, 2005; Available at <http://www.ctsfw.edu/admission/pa/wife.php>; internet.

you relate to people.”<sup>40</sup> There may be times when the demands are strenuous and patience runs thin. It is in those instances where she must learn to be gracious.

The Pastor’s wife should also be willing in the ministry to wear several hats at the same time. This can be challenging at times but is a good attitude to develop. Pastor Sheba Thangiah, whose husband pastors the largest church in Bangalore says, “In Full Gospel Assemblies of God Church I am expected to be in every department. I do as the spirit leads and try to meet the expectations of the people.”<sup>41</sup> Dr. Beth Grant agrees with the veracity of the same when she says that her prayer is, “I am willing Lord to take a back seat and be used as you would like me to be used, in any capacity.”<sup>42</sup> The more she is willing to surrender the greater are the ways that she can be used by the Lord to touch lives.

### 3.2.3. Willingness to sacrifice personal privacy

Many times personal time with family will be affected because of the larger family, the church. The Pastor’s wife should be prepared to sacrifice her personal privacy if she desires to be effective. Mrs. Marcia Lednicky states that by laying down personal ambitions and desires at the foot of the cross would make us more effective in God’s work.<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Higgins proposes a solution to this problem when she says, “Another challenge is to avoid feeling jealous or bitter about the church especially church members taking more of your husbands' time than you get. The best way to avoid this feeling is to be involved as much as you can with your husbands

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<sup>40</sup> Gayle Haggard, *A life Embraced: A Hopeful Guide for a Pastor's Wife* (Colorado: Water Brook Press, 2004), 100.

<sup>41</sup> Sheba Thangiah, Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Beth Grant, Assemblies of God, Eurasia, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Marcia Lednicky, Assemblies of God, World Missions, (Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2005)

ministry and believe that you are partner in it.”<sup>44</sup> The Pastor’s wife should share in this together as she is also her husband’s partner in it.

#### 3.2.4. Investing in her marriage

A Pastor's wife needs to recognize the fact that she has a great influence on the Pastor either positively or negatively. A Pastor can never minister beyond the harmony at home. She needs to ensure that her relationship is growing and he is not taken for granted. Stephanie Wolfe points out that working on the physical part of the relationship with the husband is also an extremely important aspect to marital harmony.<sup>45</sup> A Pastor's wife needs to give her husband top priority. Nancy Wilson proposes that her first ministry is to him and secondly to their children.<sup>46</sup>

A Pastors' wife should be humble, teachable and respectful to her husband. By her conduct she should never let him down. Familiarity to her husband can easily lower the Pastor’s image in the congregation. In the words of Mrs. Sheila Satyavrata,

Loyalty to husband is very important – one should not lower the husband's image. A woman can make a man or break a man. It is how she reacts that is important – she needs humility, grace and maturity. Many times because of lack of tact and wisdom, the wife gives away information which can lead to unjustified criticism.<sup>47</sup>

The way she treats and respects her husband would set the standard and determine how others would treat him. One cannot respect a Pastor who is disrespected by his own spouse!

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<sup>44</sup> Faith Higgins, Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Stephanie Wolfe, ‘Ministering to the Minister’, Accessed on April 25, 2005; Available at <http://www.family.org/pastor/married/a0015703.cfm>; internet.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy Wilson, ‘The Pastor’s Wife’, Accessed on April 25, 2005; Available at [http://www.credenda.org/issues/12-2\\_femina.php](http://www.credenda.org/issues/12-2_femina.php); internet.

### 3.2.5. Making children a priority

Often we try to differentiate between ministry and family. It is a good practice to see the family as part of the ministry given by God. The Pastor's wife must understand the fact that being a great mother is an extremely important ministry. Mrs. Leelamma George reiterates this truth when she says taking care of the family is ministry. She reminds that bringing up children in the fear of the Lord is an important aspect of the ministry.<sup>48</sup>

Dr. Beth Grant talks of integrating family with ministry. She captures it beautifully by saying, "The two cannot be separated. My family is my ministry; a seamless whole. Our daughters are a part of our ministry. To me ministry needs to be integrated into the family."<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Higgins also emphasizes the need to minister to the family and exemplify a lifestyle to the congregation. She suggests that as we minister by our life and example, and as people see our love and care for our family, we do the greatest work in promoting God's Kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.2.6. Being cheerfully hospitable

A Pastor's wife must be hospitable at all times; despite the problems she faces. It is possible to be hospitable but to do it grudgingly. It may be sometimes difficult but it is important to be cheerful while being hospitable. God expects us to be cheerful when we give. Evelyn Peterson opines, "I will deliberately set out to show cheerful friendliness to everyone I meet. Throughout my years in ministry it has helped me."<sup>51</sup> Thus it is important to lay emphasis on the pleasant

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<sup>47</sup> Sheila Satyavrata, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Leelamma George, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Beth Grant, Assemblies of God, Eurasia, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Faith Higgins, Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Evelyn R. Peterson and J. Allan Peterson (eds.), *For Women only: The fine Art of being a Woman* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1974), 32.

things that each day brings as a solution to the much strain that ministry can sometimes bring. Mrs. Nalini Shinde speaks of the need of the Pastor's wife to have a good relationship with members of her church if she wants to be effective and bring changes.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.2.7. Dressing modestly

Every vocation or profession has its own dress code and the calling to be a Pastor's wife is no different! A Pastor's wife must be modest in her dressing. This aspect was emphasized unanimously by all the Pastor's wives who were interviewed. Not being appropriately dressed can invite criticism. Mrs. Sheba Thangiah stressed on the fact that a Pastors wife represents the church at all times so should be dressed appropriately.<sup>53</sup> Mrs. Faith Higgins captures this aspect beautifully when she says, "The Pastor's wife should always be neat and modest in her dress. I believe she should find a good balance of what the ladies in the congregation wear. She should not have the latest most expensive clothes nor look unkempt or ragged."<sup>54</sup>

### 3.2.8. Enjoying friendships with other women

A Pastor's wife would need to build friendships both outside ministry and within ministry. There will be times when she needs a shoulder (besides her husband) to cry on. Mrs. Sheila Satyavrata reiterates this when she says, "At times she would need a friend – someone who is outside the ministry – so that she has a shoulder to cry over."<sup>55</sup> Barbara Milioni in her article on Pastors' wives also stresses the need for a pastors' wife to have friends 'outside the ministry'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Nalini Shinde, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Sheba Thangiah, Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Faith Higgins, Assemblies of God, Kolkata, (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Sheila Satyavrata, Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore, (Interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Milioni, 'When Pastor's Wives Wished their Husbands Knew about Them', Accessed on April 25, 2005; Available at <http://www.family.org/pastor/pfmarried/a0017151.cfm>; internet.

This will enable her to get an objective opinion as she shares some of her struggles with them and gains different perspectives to the various problems that she grapples with.

### 3.2.9. Realizing her limitations

Contrary to popular belief and huge expectations, Pastor's wives are not auditioning for the role of a super woman! They should learn to say no to tasks for which they do not have the gifting. God would in course of time supply the right person. Mrs. Higgins shares words of wisdom of not letting expectations force you to do what is not your gifting. She says, “As the wife become known to the church members and they see her love for them and the gifts God has given her, then I believe, their expectations will change and they will accept her and the ministry God has given her.”<sup>57</sup>

### 3.2.10. Learning to be a prayer support

A praying wife is like a pillar, whose importance is known by the fact that the building collapses without it. A pastor can face the greatest of obstacles and walk through victorious when he knows that his wife is behind him praying. Stormie Omartian in her book speaks of women in general, when she says that a woman must have a praying spirit.<sup>58</sup> How much more one who is in the ministry? Mrs. Marcia Lednicky who has been in the ministry for a couple of decades points out that ministry is spiritual warfare and that there will always be attacks of the enemy in one form or the other<sup>59</sup>. If that be the case the Pastor's wife cannot take her duty to pray lightly and should be vigilant in prayer. Pastor Sheba Thangiah stresses the importance of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Stormie Omartian, *A Praying Wife* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2003), 47.

<sup>59</sup> Marcia Lednicky, Assemblies of God, World Missions, (Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2005).



prayer when she says that even before doing something mundane as making an announcement she prays.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusion

It is important to realize that ministerial life is not easy and that difficulties are part of the bargain. But fulfillment is in knowing that we are doing is what God has called us to do. This is far more important than merely feeling comfortable. Nancy Pannell a Pastor's wife of 35 years says, "A minister's wife can wear jeans and go barefoot! The important thing is that she needs to discover and be the person God wants her to be."<sup>61</sup> It all boils down to finding God's will for ones life and doing it. It is only there can a Pastor's wife discover true fulfillment.

## CONCLUSION

As the researcher explored to find out more about the role of a Pastor's wife in a changing urban scenario, she realized that it is the grace of God that sustains these unsung heroes. The many adjustments made through each season and phase of their ministerial life comes with a strength that can only come from knowing and walking with the Lord. Someone rightly suggested that the ministry of the Pastor's wife is like John the Baptist. Her service and support paves the way and is crucial for her husband's ministry. She also discovered that most effective minister's wives had an inborn passion to give and share of themselves and their families for the Lord's work. Henri Nouwen in his book aptly sums this, "each of us is called to

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<sup>60</sup> Sheba Thangiah, Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore, (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Nancy Pannell, *Being a ministers wife and being yourself* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 9.

be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”<sup>62</sup>

One fact that came out crystal clear while doing this research was that though we always do not realize it, problems are part of God’s plan for anyone who is to be used of God. With God on our side our life could develop into a rich hued tapestry, hand woven to near perfection, but not without the blemishes, which like the threads on the underside continue to look like a mess, but in turn give us the whole picture. It's how one handles these problems that make a difference. Briscoe points out that this involves walking a step at a time in obedience to God's call and finding that the power is there for that one step.<sup>63</sup> As the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV) “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflecting the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*”. Being a Pastors' wife is merely a way for Him to work through us as a reflection of His glory!

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<sup>62</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Double Day, 1972), 82.

<sup>63</sup> Jill Briscoe, *Renewal on the Run* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw, 1992), 63.

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## Appendix

### **A BRIEF PROFILE OF THE PASTOR'S WIVES WHO WERE INTERVIEWED**

**Dr. Beth Grant is the wife of Dr. David Grant, the Area Director of the Assemblies of God, Eurasia. She is a renowned speaker at women's conferences all over the world as well as a Christian educator who teaches at various theological institutions.**

**Mrs. Faith Higgins** is the wife of Dr. John Higgins, the Senior Pastor of The Assemblies of God Church, Kolkata who is also the Chairman of the Board of Southern Asia Bible College. Mrs. Higgins is the director of music and has rich ministerial experience as a missionary in India.

**Mrs. Marcia Lednicky** is the wife of Dr. Maurice H. Lednicky, the former President of Central Bible College, Springfield, U.S.A. She is an accomplished singer and has several albums to her credit. She along with her husband have also pastored churches for many years in the United States.

**Pastor Sheba Thangiah** is the wife of Rev. Paul Thangiah, Senior Pastor of the largest church in Bangalore, India. She is an accomplished preacher of the Word and speaks at various women's conferences and is also a pastor herself.

**Pastor Amenla Cunningham** is the wife of Rev. Gavin Cunningham, the Senior Pastor of the First Assemblies of God Church, Bangalore. She is actively involved in the women's ministry and has taught at Bible Colleges in Bangalore.

**Mrs. Nalini Shinde** is the wife of late Dr. Benjamin Shinde, the first national Pastor of the First Assemblies of God Church, Bangalore. She currently serves as an elder of the church and is also involved in ministry at Southern Asia Bible College.

**Mrs. Leelamma George** is the wife of Dr. A.C. George, the former President of Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore. She along with her husband was involved in pioneering the Bethel Assemblies of God Church, which has grown into a very large church.

**Mrs. Sheila Satyavrata** is the wife of Dr. Ivan Satyavrata, the President of Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore. She teaches at Southern Asia Bible College and is actively involved in the ministry at the Full Gospel Assemblies of God Church.

**Mrs. Felicia Pravin Kumar** is the wife of Rev. Pravin Kumar Israel, the Academic Dean of Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore. She has been involved in the ministry at Southern Asia Bible College along with her husband.