

## Women Who Shaped Adventism: Eight Who Cracked the Glass Ceiling

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### Introduction:<sup>1</sup>

#### Legacy of a Glass Ceiling

“The sisters would be quite out of place in meetings of general church business.”<sup>2</sup> It was 1857 when James White inked those words. His wife, Ellen had been preaching for twelve years and, ironically, he tucked this sentence into a theological defense of women preaching. In the piece, he contended that women could preach but conceded they would be “quite out of place in meetings of general church business”.

Why did James sideline the administrative gifts of women like his wife Ellen? She would later guide the shape and growth of a global church. Perhaps James could not envision that future Ellen when, at the time of writing, she was immersed in the domestic chores of mothering three sons—ages ten, eight, and three.

In truth, James knew better. Other women, such as Annie Smith, showed business skills. Annie was his ‘right hand man’ at the Review for the first half of the 1850s, leading the whole operation<sup>3</sup> during his travels.

What was James thinking? Perhaps he was lifting an olive branch to his reserved New England culture. The public ministry of Ellen and other women pressed him to defend their preaching, which he did while trying not to sound too extreme. His implicit messaging might have been, ‘We support our women preaching but we are not going to do something crazy like let them run the church’.

Whatever his motives, this anecdote captures a tension over gender in leadership that has plagued Adventist women since Ellen White’s time. From the early days of Adventism, the glass ceiling stayed at administration—or “general church business”.

#### Ordination Credentials

During Ellen White’s lifetime, most female ministers never received the ordination credentials linked to administrative leadership, even when they served such roles. Female

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<sup>1</sup> Primary source documents used in this paper are provided by Office of Archives, Research, and Statistics at General Conference of SDA ([documents.adventistarchives.org](http://documents.adventistarchives.org)), Heritage Research Center at Loma Linda University ([library.llu.edu/heritage-research-center](http://library.llu.edu/heritage-research-center)), Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University ([centerforadventistresearch.org](http://centerforadventistresearch.org)), White Estate Archives ([ellenwhite.org](http://ellenwhite.org)), and Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research at University of California Riverside ([cdnc.ucr.edu](http://cdnc.ucr.edu)).

<sup>2</sup> James White, “Paul Says So,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 10, no. 19 (1857): 152.

<sup>3</sup> Ron Graybill, “Annie Smith, Her Life and Love,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (April 1, 1976): 5.

leaders received a “license,” which was a step toward the ordination “credentials” for their male counterparts, but most women never advanced to that next stage of certification.<sup>4</sup>

The topic of women in administration was, however, of interest during the early days of the Advent Movement. In 1861, Uriah Smith republished a defense of women preaching, adding that, while the “writer applies the prophecy of Joel—‘Your daughters shall prophesy’ . . . to female preaching . . . this we think is but half of its meaning”.<sup>5</sup>

A decade later, on February 14, 1871, the Michigan Conference voted Ellen White ordination credentials<sup>6</sup> and she held that certification until her death forty-four years later. This was known and noteworthy enough to draw attention in the secular press. For instance, in 1905, the *Los Angeles Herald* called her “an ordained elder of the church”<sup>7</sup> and, seven years later, “the only woman ordained to the ministry in the denomination”.<sup>8</sup>

In late 1878, Joseph Waggoner stirred a flurry of articles<sup>9</sup> in *Signs*<sup>10</sup> and *Review*<sup>11</sup> advocating for women in leadership. In apparent response, a motion to break the glass ceiling for all female ministers came to the floor of the General Conference Session on December 20, 1881. It read, “Resolved, that females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry”. *Review* said the resolution went to committee<sup>12</sup> and, sixteen days later, *Signs* reported it “adopted”.<sup>13</sup>

Even with these hopeful moments, the glass ceiling remained at administration—at least in terms of licensing and credentialing. Women besides Ellen White had been licensed for pastoral and evangelistic ministry as early as 1869, when Sarah Hallock Lindsey received her ministerial license from the New York and Pennsylvania Conference,<sup>14</sup> but most did not advance from “license” to “credentials”.

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<sup>4</sup> This pattern of a license being a step toward a credential is observable through a survey of male credentialing in yearbook listings during this period.

<sup>5</sup> Uriah Smith, “Women as Preachers and Lecturers,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 19, no. 9 (1861); 65.

<sup>6</sup> “Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 37, no. 9 (1871); 69.

<sup>7</sup> “Adventists Prepare to Break Their Camp,” *Los Angeles Herald*, August 20, 1905.

<sup>8</sup> “Tells How Children Should Be Raised: Woman Preacher, in Address to Adventists, Says Early Teaching Is Essential” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 18, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Waggoner, “Woman’s Place in the Gospel,” *Signs of the Times* 4, no. 48 (1878); 380.

<sup>10</sup> John Andrews, “Women in the Bible,” *Signs of the Times* 5, no. 41 (1879); 324.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen White, “Address and Appeal, Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 53, no. 1 (1879); 1; James White, “Women in the Church,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 53, no. 22 (1879); 172.

<sup>12</sup> “General Conference Business Proceedings,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 58, no. 25 (1881); 392.

<sup>13</sup> “General Conference,” *Signs of the Times*, 8, no. 1 (1882); 8.

<sup>14</sup> “Report of the N. Y. and P. A. Conference,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 34, no. 16 (1869); 126.

## Female Leaders in Early Adventism:

### Five Arenas of Adventist Ministry

In the first few decades after the Seventh-day Adventist Church organized, between 1860 and 1863,<sup>15</sup> all major branches of the emerging structure had women at the lead—scores of them. Although their certification did not reflect it, they were capable administrators in all five ministry arenas—churches, conferences, publishing, healthcare, and education. Keep in mind that those five arenas comprised the Adventist organization, and all five had women at the helm.

### Eight Who Cracked the Glass Ceiling

Following are snapshots of eight women from Ellen White's lifetime. Their stories illustrate the roles many served and reveal the barriers that threatened to prevent them from sharing their talents with the cause.

**Maud Sisley Boyd (1851-1937).**<sup>16</sup> The 1922 crowd rose to its feet to honor a household name in Adventism.<sup>17</sup> She had been there from the start—the start of many things. At eleven, she watched the pioneers organize the movement. She joined the cause herself as a press worker in Battle Creek and, while there, helped start the first tract society and the first S. D. A. camp meeting. After a decade of being 'the help,' she left to blaze her own path in Ohio. There, Maud Sisley and Elsie Gates were the "first two ladies among Seventh-day Adventists to enter the work of house to house visitation with . . . tracts and periodicals".<sup>18</sup> Their success won Maud a call to Switzerland,<sup>19</sup> where John Andrews struggled to get a press started. When she had stabilized publishing in Basel, John Loughborough called her to England to steady the cause there.<sup>20</sup> "Maud Sisley Boyd . . . during almost seventy years of service . . . [led] the beginnings of work in America, Europe, Africa, and Australia."<sup>21</sup>

**Hetty Hurd Haskell (1857-1919).**<sup>22</sup> Hetty was a popular, well-paid teacher in a large California school that had asked her to "teach that school for life,"<sup>23</sup> but with her conversion to Adventism went her immense talents. Hetty Hurd became a teacher of teachers in a string of Bible worker training schools she helped start and lead, first in San Francisco and then around the globe—across the United States, England, South Africa, and Australia.<sup>24</sup> In 1902,

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<sup>15</sup> "Fifth Session," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 16, no. 23 (1860); 179; "Michigan General Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 18, no. 19 (1861); 148-149; "Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21, no. 26 (1863); 204-206.

<sup>16</sup> Maud Sisley Boyd, "Life Experiences," *Australasian Record*, 41, no. 23 (1937); 1-3.

<sup>17</sup> "Sabbath Afternoon's Service: A Symposium," *The General Conference Bulletin*, 9, no. 15 (1922); 371.

<sup>18</sup> "Personal," *Union Conference Record*, 4, no. 3 (1901); 15.

<sup>19</sup> J. H. Waggoner, "Special Notice," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 50, no. 6 (1877); 199.

<sup>20</sup> J. N. Loughborough to W. C. White, March 30, 1879.

<sup>21</sup> Erwin E. Roenfelt, "Australasian Union Conference Secretary's Report," *Australasian Record*, 42, no. 39 (1938); 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Giddings, "Life Sketch of Mrs. S. N. Haskell," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 96, no. 47 (1919); 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> F. C. Gilbert, "Obituary of Sister Haskell," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, 18, no. 44 (1919); 6-7.

she published a magazine called *The Bible Training School*,<sup>25</sup> to extend the reach of her ministerial training, and she kept it up for the remaining seventeen years of her life.<sup>26</sup> In time, she married Stephen Haskell, but did not get lost in his shadow. The same could not be said for Stephen. It was hard to compete with Hetty's skills in evangelism, writing, editing, teaching, and administration.

**Flora Fait Plummer (1862-1945).**<sup>27</sup> As a well-trained teacher, Flora found a natural home in the Sabbath School work. Her administrative skills stood out. After six years as President of the Iowa Sabbath School Association and three years as Iowa Conference Executive Secretary, she served as acting President of the Iowa Conference in 1900 and 1901.<sup>28</sup> Next, the General Conference invited her to lead in the Sabbath School Department, first as Correspondence Secretary and then as Director. Flora led Sabbath school in a new direction, developing regular curricula for all ages, creating training programs for Sabbath School teachers, making Sabbath School a center of home missionary work, and turning it into a major force for funding world missions.<sup>29</sup> She spent more than two decades as the only woman on the General Conference Executive Committee.

**Georgia Burrus Burgess (1866-1948).**<sup>30</sup> Georgia was a single woman training Bible workers in Oakland, CA<sup>31</sup> when Stephen Haskell asked her to pioneer Adventism in India. When her companion got sick and then her supervisor delayed a year, "Miss Georgia Burrus . . . ventured alone to . . . India . . . without regular support" from the church.<sup>32</sup> She learned Bengali and began three and a half decades of ministry among the Indian people.<sup>33</sup> Soon, she won the first Indian converts to Adventism and organized the first school.<sup>34</sup> Georgia and her future husband, Luther Burgess, would play key roles in organizing the Adventist work across the subcontinent as more churches and schools emerged from their work. Fifty years after she arrived, Lal Gopal Mookerjee called her "the heroine of the advent movement in India" and said, "As Indian people we owe a great debt of gratitude to her for her heroic deed" of starting the Indian mission alone.<sup>35</sup>

**Sarah Peck (1868-1968).**<sup>36</sup> Sarah was a driven woman. When the Church wanted to start a high school in Minnesota, they called the young English major from Battle Creek College.<sup>37</sup> She and two others founded what is now Maplewood Academy.<sup>38</sup> Her skills were

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<sup>25</sup> *Bible Training School*, 1, no. 2 (1902).

<sup>26</sup> *Bible Training School*, 18, no. 3 (1919).

<sup>27</sup> R. A. Anderson, "L. Flora Plummer," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 122, no. 21 (1945); 19.

<sup>28</sup> Eric E. Richter, "Women Conference Presidents: A Forgotten History," *Advent Record*, December 17, 2020. Retrieved from <https://record.adventistchurch.com/2020/12/17/women-conference-presidents-a-forgotten-history>.

<sup>29</sup> "A Most Fruitful Life Closes," *Australasian Record*, 49, no. 35 (1945); 7.

<sup>30</sup> L. G. Mookerjee, "Mrs. Georgia Burgess Pioneer Missionary to India," *Eastern Tidings*, 43, no. 20 (1948); 6.

<sup>31</sup> "Obituaries: Burgess," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 48, no. 12 (1948); 11.

<sup>32</sup> L. G. Mookerjee, "Early Days in the Northeast," *Eastern Tidings*, 40, no. 18 (1945); 1.

<sup>33</sup> Mookerjee, "Mrs. Georgia Burgess".

<sup>34</sup> "First Indian Convert Dies," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 125, no. 16 (1948); 24.

<sup>35</sup> Mookerjee, "Early Days in the Northeast".

<sup>36</sup> Willeta Raley Bolinger, "Denomination's First Woman Missionary Reaches 100," *Review and Herald*, 145, no. 17 (1968); 15-16.

<sup>37</sup> "Closing College Exercises," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 65, no. 26 (1888); 416.

<sup>38</sup> "A Conference School in Minnesota," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 65, no. 39 (1888); 618.

apparent, so the brethren sent her to South Africa to start a college<sup>39</sup>—now Helderburg. Ellen White, after two failed attempts,<sup>40</sup> lured her to Australia to help with the college there<sup>41</sup> (now Avondale University). Besides teaching, Sarah did editorial and organizational work for Ellen White.<sup>42</sup> She built the early Ellen White Index, still used today.<sup>43</sup> Most histories remember her for this short stint as Ellen’s assistant but her truly impressive career was in education. Among other roles, she served as Education Superintendent for the west coast and, later, the General Conference. She wrote twenty books for the Seventh-day Adventist curriculum.<sup>44</sup> She also taught in the Education Department at Union College for ten years, as Chair of the Department. While there, the strength of her personality showed when a federal grand jury indicted Sarah for refusing to give her age or marital status to a male census-taker.<sup>45</sup> The judge, apparently amused, let her off with a small fine.<sup>46</sup> By the same tenacity that drove her to accomplish so much good, she vowed to live for a century and she did.

**Minnie Day Sype (1869-1956).**<sup>47</sup> Minnie married an Adventist<sup>48</sup> and determined not to be one, but she had a change of heart. She also did not like women preachers, and did not want to be one,<sup>49</sup> but was soon one of the best<sup>50</sup>—with, what one newspaper called, “a strong, clear voice and pleasing style of delivery”.<sup>51</sup> When Minnie caught the vision for the Adventist message and mission, it consumed her life.<sup>52</sup> She turned the Sype family rides to church into weekly evangelistic visitation, adding passengers to the wagon as they went. She stored up extra food, so they could take in houseguests and evangelize them.<sup>53</sup> When her husband, Logan, took a mining job in a new town, she planted a church among the miners. Afterward, she wrote to the Iowa Conference asking them to recognize the new church. They replied with a check for past services and gave her a job as an evangelist.<sup>54</sup> Minnie still had not come to terms with being a “woman preacher” but was soon making a public case for it.<sup>55</sup> Before her career had finished, Minnie was an evangelist,<sup>56</sup> Conference departmental director,<sup>57</sup> missionary,<sup>58</sup> and district pastor.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> A. T. Robinson, “South Africa,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 69, no. 39 (1892); 618.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah E. Peck, “Personal Reminiscences of Ellen G. White,” *Review and Herald*, 141, no. 12 (1964); 7.

<sup>41</sup> S. E. Peck to E. G. White, January 15, 1897.

<sup>42</sup> “Centenarian Honored as ‘Alumna of Alumni,’” *Lake Union Herald*, 60, no. 25 (1968); 16.

<sup>43</sup> J. R. Ferren, “Second Centennial in 1968 Celebrated,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, 67, no. 41 (1968); 3.

<sup>44</sup> Everett E. Beddoe, “A Pioneer Rests,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, 68, no. 4 (1968); 7.

<sup>45</sup> “Schoolma’am Would Go to Jail Rather than Tell Her Age,” *Lompoc Journal*, June 4, 1910.

<sup>46</sup> “She Simply Would Not,” *Santa Cruz Evening News*, June 3, 1910.

<sup>47</sup> Minnie Sype, *Life Sketches and Experiences in Missionary Work* (Hutchinson, MN: Seminary Press, 1912).

<sup>48</sup> “Obituaries: Logan P. Sype,” *Southwestern Union Record*, 24, no. 52 (1925); 4.

<sup>49</sup> Sype, 73.

<sup>50</sup> “Study of the Bible,” *Oskaloosa Herald*, January 11, 1917.

<sup>51</sup> “Adventist Church,” *Audubon Republican*, March 19, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> “Obituaries: Minnie Day-Sype,” *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, 51, no. 31 (1956); 7.

<sup>53</sup> Sype, 46-52.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, 70-71.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, 74-75.

<sup>56</sup> “Adventist Church,” *Audubon Republican*, March 19, 1914.

<sup>57</sup> “Missionary Convention,” *Audubon County Journal*, May 8, 1919.

<sup>58</sup> M. E. Kern, “Missionary Recruits for 1931,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 109, no. 6 (1931); 124.

<sup>59</sup> “Seventh-day Adventist Notice,” *Kennewick Courier-Reporter*, October 30, 1931.

**Ana Carlson Stahl (1870-1968).**<sup>60</sup> Ana's storied career as a missionary nurse in South America almost did not happen. She and her husband moved to Battle Creek College to train as nurses, but the school refused Ana admission. She was married and had a child, so they thought it would be a waste of time to train her. A kindly matron argued her case and the school let her in.<sup>61</sup> In time, she and her husband Ferdinand transformed the Lake Titicaca region of Peru and Bolivia, through indigenous partners and the powerful friends Ana made in her medical work.<sup>62</sup> They helped bring roads, bridges, markets, schools, and medical clinics to the region—building the infrastructure of a thriving economy—to empower the indigenous people for success.<sup>63</sup> Secular sources in an array of academic disciplines point to the work of the Stahls as a turning point for the region.<sup>64</sup> Hospitals and schools in the area still bear Ana's name a century later.

**Jennie Ireland (1971-1961).**<sup>65</sup> Ugly tears made rivers on Jennie's pretty face, as the five-year-old girl stood by her daddy's grave.<sup>66</sup> She would never again hear his British accent<sup>67</sup> speak her name. She, her big brothers, her little sister, and their mom needed hope. Later that year, rookie evangelists Jesse Rice and Andrew Brorsen preached the Advent hope in her hometown of Pacheco, California.<sup>68</sup> It caught in their hearts and swept their lives in a new direction.<sup>69</sup> Much could be told of her mother Louisa, sister Fannie, and brother John—each of whom became leaders in the Advent Movement—but Jennie warrants special attention. At age fifteen, she started work at the Pacific Press and stayed in the cause for seventy-five years.<sup>70</sup> She became a fixture in the Southern California Conference office, holding every departmental position except Education Superintendent—many of them concurrently.<sup>71</sup> Aside from departmental work and Conference-wide ministry training, she planted and pastored two churches among Black Americans in southern California,<sup>72</sup> training every member of her churches to be an evangelist.<sup>73</sup> Pioneering leaders like Owen Troy Sr., Arna Bontemps, Ruth Temple, and others emerged from her mentorship.

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<sup>60</sup> Barbara Westphal, *Ana Stahl of the Andes and Amazon* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1960).

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> F. A. Stahl, "Pioneering in the Amazon of Peru," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 127, no. 22 (1950); 16-17; F. A. Stahl, "Pioneering in the Amazon of Peru (Concluded)," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 127, no. 23 (1950); 15-16.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Teel, "Missionaries, Visionaries, and Revolutionaries: Logging a Passage in Search of Fernando and Ana Stahl," *Adventist Heritage*, 12, no. 2 (1988); 3-14.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Teel, "Revolutionary Missionaries in Peru: Fernando and Ana Stahl," *Spectrum*, 18, no. 3 (1988); 50-52.

<sup>65</sup> Ernest Lloyd, "Full of Years and Good Works: Jennie Ireland," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 135, no. 16 (April 17 1958); 5.

<sup>66</sup> "Died," *Sacramento Daily Union*, February 19, 1877.

<sup>67</sup> 1860 U.S. census, City of Terre Haute, Vigo, IN, p. 62, col. 10, line 6-7, William Jefferson Ireland.

<sup>68</sup> "Pacific Coast," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 50, no. 8 (1877); 63.

<sup>69</sup> William C. White, "Obituary: Mrs. Louise Howell Ireland," *Pacific Union Recorder* 19, no. 25 (January 29 1920): 7.

<sup>70</sup> "In Remembrance: Ireland, Jennie L.," *Review and Herald*, 138, no. 31 (August 3 1961); 25.

<sup>71</sup> Jennie Ireland, "Memories of Ellen G. White. Reminiscent Experiences," Ellen G. White Estate Loma Linda Branch Office.

<sup>72</sup> Owen A. Troy, "Colored Department," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 46, no. 28 (1947); 9-10.

<sup>73</sup> E. E. Andross, "Southern California," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 10, no. 2 (1910); 2.

## Conclusions:

### Five Arenas of Church Leadership

This small sampling of female ministers from Ellen White's day shows that women led in every structure of the Advent Movement. Minnie Day Sype pastored local churches. Flora Fait Plummer guided the cause from the Conference office. Maud Sisley Boyd led in publishing. Ana Carlson Stahl served mission through healthcare. Sarah Peck shaped education. Of course, all of these women served in multiple arenas during their careers. None of the main five arenas of Adventist mission excluded female leaders, but a glass ceiling remained.

### Gender Barriers in Ministry

In that harsher light, these biographies expose gender barriers that weaken our pursuit of wholeness. They show that early Adventism's comparatively progressive approach to women in leadership left gender barriers in place. Please consider eight obstacles that these biographies expose.

1. **Dual credentialing.** Women of Ellen White's day started on the path to ordination but never advanced. The form of distinction has changed, but separate tracks for men and women remain.
2. **Organizational norms.** Leaders like Maud Sisley had to leave the organized sphere and start her own ministry before the church hired her to lead. Such was the backstory of most female ministers in early Adventism.
3. **Free labor.** Jennie Ireland once had to testify in court that she was "satisfied" with her low wage job at Pacific Press<sup>74</sup> and later grimaced as her Conference President boasted of saving money by giving her extra jobs.<sup>75</sup>
4. **Marriage.** Maud Sisley married and was afterward, in mission reports, reduced to Charles L. Boyd "and wife".<sup>76</sup> The widowed Minnie Day Sype made the mistake of remarrying, prompting the Conference to serve her with retirement papers.<sup>77</sup>
5. **Honorary man dynamic.** Sarah Peck had her identity absorbed into the 'honorary man' of Adventism, being best remembered as 'one of Ellen White's literary assistants,' even though she started schools, wrote a huge part of the Adventist school curriculum, was Education Superintendent for both the west coast and the General Conference, chaired the Union College Education Department for a decade, and more.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "A Thousand EMS: Commissioner Tobin Finds Out how Much a Printer Can Set," *Oakland Tribune*, March 7, 1888.

<sup>75</sup> Jennie Ireland. *Memories of Ellen G. White. Reminiscent Experiences.* Ellen G. White Estate Loma Linda Branch Office.

<sup>76</sup> "General Conference Proceedings," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 63, no. 47 (1886): 744.

<sup>77</sup> Josephine Benton, *Called By God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2002), 44.

<sup>78</sup> Ferren.

6. **Parenting.** Battle Creek College first denied Ana Carlson Stahl training as a missionary nurse on the basis that she was married with a child.<sup>79</sup> The practical demands of parenthood appear to have reduced engagement with ministry for most married women.
7. **Internal inhibitions.** Minnie Day Sype warmed slowly to professional ministry because, in her own words, she “never admired a woman preacher” and it “was a great trial” to be called one.<sup>80</sup>
8. **Culture shift.** Whatever the complex of factors creating it, there was a distinct culture shift away from women in church leadership around the time of Ellen White’s death. Flora Fait Plummer’s two decades as the only woman on the General Conference Executive Committee spotlights this shift.

### Mediating Wholeness in Reference to Gender Equity

We see that, during the early days of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, women led in each arena of the cause. However, those who rose to prominence grappled with gender barriers, which continue to challenge female leaders today.

Gender equality in Adventist leadership is about more than attempts to satiate cultural scruples. The original sin was a matter of authority, with the serpent’s inducement to “be like God” (Genesis 3:5) giving rise to “your man . . . will rule over you” (v. 16).

If God’s church aspires to wholeness, healing the damage of sin—and not deepening it—must be our purpose. We must take the social implications of salvation seriously, answering the gender hierarchy sin introduced with the salvific resolve that, in Christ, “there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). The remedy should meet the disease where it began, when usurped authority damaged gender equality.

This means that we must sideline the political caution that hindered James White in 1857 and dismantle the barriers that still prevent gender equality in Adventist ministry. It is past time to shatter the glass ceiling.

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<sup>79</sup> Westphal, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Sype, 72.