The month of March is celebrated as Women’s Month. The International Women’s Day is on March 8, 2012. The issue of women in the clergy as priests and pastors is still hotly debated until now. In the early church as recorded in Acts 2, the Pentecost experience can also be seen as a significant event for the liberation of women from the patriarchal worldview.

Peter stood and explained to the bewildered crowd the significance of what was taking place. He reminded them that this event was fulfilling the prophecy in Joel 2:28-29 that “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” The passage speaks about Spirit of God is for all people and not only to Jews, and that both men and women would prophesy.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the birth of the Christian church. Not only were women present, they were specifically mentioned as recipients of the gift of prophecy alongside the men. There is no implication of hierarchy here – all are equally gifted to speak God’s truth. This reality can be seen in the practice of the early church. Luke records in Acts 21:9 that the four daughters of Philip were well known for exercising their gift of prophecy.

The denomination in which I am part of, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, waited for 80 years since the arrival of the Baptist faith in the Philippines to ordain its first Filipina Pastor. Before, the women pastors were called “Bible Women” or “Missionary.” They were doing pastoral work but they were not deemed worthy of the title “Pastor” and “Reverend.” This changed in 1978 when the organization of Baptist pastors, the Convention Baptist Ministers Association, approved the resolution to ordain women pastors. This started a controversial debate. The laypeople during the national assembly did not approve it. One year of biblical studies, deliberation and reflection passed by. On May 4, 1979 the assembly approved to ordain qualified women pastors in Bakyas Evangelical Church. The year after, in March 22, 1980, the first woman pastor, Rev. Angelina B. Buensuceso, was ordained at the same church. In the latest book of Baptist historian D. Leslie Hill entitled “Faithful and Free, Baptist Beliefs Through the Years” one of pictures in the front cover is that of Rev. Angelina B. Buensuceso alongside with prominent Baptist personalities like Martin Luther King, Jr., William Carey, John Bunyan, Ann Judson and others.

We hope and pray that more people will be enlightened on the role of women in church and society.

May God bless us all!

Sincerely,

Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on