



Jumuga Journal of Education,  
Oral Studies, and Human Sciences (JJEOSHS)  
editor@jumugajournal.org  
<http://www.jumugajournal.org>  
Volume 8, Issue 1, 2025  
<https://doi.org/10.35544/jjeoshs.v8i1.110>

## **Women Clergy in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa:**

Exploring the leadership Question in Light of Patriarchal Challenge

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### **Abstract**

This article sets out to explore the influence of patriarchy on women clergy in the top leadership of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Admittedly, patriarchy is a complex issue that has garnered increased attention in recent years. Patriarchal norms and power structures often hinder women from ascending to leadership positions and fully exercising their ministerial roles thus creating a ceiling beyond which no one can break. This is due to deeply ingrained beliefs and practices that prioritize male leadership and limit women's opportunities for advancement. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, *hereafter* PCEA, has been in existence for over 133 years. The top National leadership includes four main posts: The Moderator, the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and the Honorary Treasurer. The year 2022 was very significant in the PCEA because the Church celebrated 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the ordination of the first woman Clergy. For about forty years, however, none of the Women Clergy has ever been elected in any of the top most offices. Therefore, this article examines how patriarchy has limited women's participation in Church leadership. The key question is: How is patriarchy influencing the exclusion of women Clergy from the top leadership yet PCEA holds on the priesthood of all believers and claims to be an inclusive ecclesiastical entity?

**Key words:** Feminism, General Assembly offices, Patriarchy, Women Clergy

### **Introduction**

In April 2024, the Presbyterian Church conducted the National elections to install the top most leadership of the upcoming 24<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, *hereafter* PCEA, has been in existence for over 133 years. The top national leadership includes the four main posts: The Moderator, the secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and the Honorary Treasurer. Significantly, 2023 was momentous in the PCEA, as the Church celebrated her 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the ordination of the first woman clergy. However, for all the forty years, none of the women clergy has been elected and installed in any of the top most offices. This begs the question: How is patriarchy influencing the exclusion of women clergy in top leadership positions, yet PCEA holds on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers; and further claims to be an inclusive church? This article explores the effects of patriarchy on the involvement of women in PCEA General Assembly's top leadership from a feminist theologian's perspective. It examines how patriarchy has limited women's participation in church leadership and the implications of this state of things for African women.

## Definitions

Patriarchy is a system of societal organization in which men hold primary power and dominate over women. This system has been deeply entrenched in various cultures and has had significant effects on the lives of women. According to Russell & Clarkson (1996), Patriarchy refers to the 'rule of the father.' It denotes the systems of legal, social, economic, and political relations that validate and enforce the sovereignty of male heads of families over dependent persons in the household. In classical patriarchal systems, such as those which were found in Hebrew, Greek, and Roman societies, dependent persons included wives, unmarried daughters, dependent sons, and slaves, male and female. In Roman law, the term *familia* referred to all persons and things ruled by the *paterfamilias*, including animals and land. In patriarchy, men predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property (Russell & Clarkson 1996, p.205, Christ 2016, p.215).

In Susan Frank Parsons' (2004) book, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Feminist theology is viewed as a branch of theology that seeks to understand and critique the ways in which religion and theology have been used to justify and perpetuate patriarchal systems. Feminist theologians argue that patriarchy is not only harmful to women but also to men, as it limits the full expression of human potential and relationships. The approach seeks to challenge and dismantle patriarchal structures within Christianity, including those present in African societies (Parsons 2004, p.3). Thus Parsons (2004) states that:

Feminism is a critical stance that challenges the patriarchal gender paradigm that associates males with human characteristics defined as superior and dominant (rationality, power) and females with those defined as inferior and auxiliary (intuition, passivity). Most feminists reconstruct the gender paradigm in order to include women in full and equal humanity... Feminist theology takes feminist critique and reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm. They question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination, such as exclusive male language for God, the view that males are more like God than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church and society, or that women are created by God to be subordinate to males and thus sin by rejecting this subordination (Parsons 2004, p.3).

In African societies, patriarchy is particularly pervasive, often dictating the roles and responsibilities of men and women within the family and generally the community. In the context of African Christianity, patriarchy also has profound impact on the involvement of women in church leadership. The system has been deeply ingrained in African societies for centuries, shaping the way in which men and women interact and the roles they play in society. Therefore portraying the narrative of patriarchy in Africa, as a product of colonialism, undermines the fact that patriarchy was a reality in pre-colonial Africa. This means that male dominance was the rule in most kingdoms before the Europeans walked on our African continent. In as much as there could be myths that shows the rule of the matriarchy, which were easily overthrown by men (Nympha and Ngozi 2023, p.1138), patriarchy has had more impact than the former. In the context of the PCEA Church, patriarchy has had a significant impact on the involvement of African women in leadership positions. On this, Kairu et al (2020) argues that the concept of an elder-*muthuri* among the *Agĩkũyũ* and the PCEA church leadership which has had prolonged traditional ascriptions of an elder to a man. This notion (of an elder connoting man, and not a woman) got its ways not only into other social institutions but is equally felt in the church. Further, since the PCEA has, from its inception, got her roots among the larger *Agĩkũyũ* community, the patriarchal influence was transferred to the church. *Agĩkũyũ* Council of elders, were also equated with wisdom, and since women were not included in such patriarchal structures this negated their wisdom; and a similar problem persist in the PCEA where women are underrepresented in the top leadership today (Kairu et al 2020, p.527).

## Feminist Theology: as a methodological conceptual Framework

This article applies the feminist methodological framework in addressing the challenges of patriarchy. In this, feminist theologians seeks to challenge traditional theological perspectives by centering on women's experiences, voices, and perspectives as a key starting point for theological reflection and inquiry. The framework critiques patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and teachings, seeking to uncover and challenge the ways in which patriarchy has influenced and shaped religious traditions and practices. This is how Oduyoye (2000) states, as the core of feminism:

Feminism has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women's experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human. It highlights the woman's world and her worldview as she struggles side by side with the man to realize her full potential as a human being... Feminism then emphasizes the wholeness of the community as made up of male and female beings. It seeks to express what is not so obvious, that is, that male-humanity is a partner with female-humanity and that the both expressions of humanity are needed to shape a balanced community within which the each will experience a fullness of Be-ing. Feminism calls for the incorporation of the women into the community of interpretation of what it means to be human (Oduyoye 2000, p.121).

In this argument, the feminist theologians emphasizes the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of identity, recognizing the importance of intersectionality in understanding and addressing issues of oppression and inequality. Further, Wainaina (2015) argues that contrary perception creates a belief in male superiority and a masculine system in which female values, experiences, and behaviors are viewed as inferior. This leads to a patriarchal system that has resulted in an androcentric world where men and not women occupy a majority of administrative church leadership. This lens marginalizes women, making the female experience of administrative leadership invisible and locating women on the margins of the human society (Wainaina 2015, p.29).

In so doing, the feminist theologians' advocates for the liberation and empowerment of women and marginalized groups, seeking to create more inclusive and just religious and social structures that value and affirm the full dignity and worth of all individuals. This conceptual methodological framework employs interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on insights from fields such as sociology, psychology, history, and literature to deepen its analysis of the ways in which gender and power intersect in religious contexts. It promotes a vision of spirituality that is grounded in relationships of mutuality, equality, and love, challenging hierarchical and authoritarian modes of religious practice in favor of more collaborative and inclusive models of community and worship. Feminist theologians are committed to social activism and advocacy for gender equality and social justice, working towards the transformation of religious institutions and practices to be more responsive to the needs and concerns of women and marginalized communities.

This is a search for suitable hermeneutics which aim to bring balance between men and women in all spheres of society. If the theology being introduced by African women theologians is not fully embraced, patriarchal fundamentalist views will remain a serious challenge and obstacle towards the realization of women's freedom. A church that fails to embrace women as humans with rights and dignity accelerates androcentrism and the culture of masculinity into its own space. It creates pain in the lives of women, which also makes this a serious concern to the meaning of the church as a body of believers united in Christ (Baloyi 2022, p.3).

Feminist theologians critique Patriarchy for silencing alternative and dissenting voices of those who face discrimination and exclusion within traditional religious spaces. They call for a more inclusive and affirming approach to theology that acknowledges and celebrates the full diversity of human expression and experience.

### **Historical context of patriarchy in Africa**

Patriarchy, as a social system, has been present in human societies for thousands of years and traces back to ancient civilizations where men held primary power and authority over women and children. Historically, patriarchy was reinforced through laws, religious teachings, and cultural norms that codified male dominance and female subordination in various aspects of life, including family, politics, economics, and religion (Nympha and Ngozi 2023, p.1143). However, the Industrial Revolution and modernization processes in the 19th and 20th centuries led to shifts in gender roles leading to women's participation in the public sphere, challenging traditional patriarchal structures. This was because modernization influenced the males and females education resulting to females being also preferred for higher education which had further influence on the traditional gender roles thus changing and going beyond the traditional gender roles (Alamdard et al 2015, p.21). Different cultures have unique manifestations of patriarchy, with some societies exhibiting more rigid and strict gender roles, while others have more fluid and flexible understandings of gender and power dynamics. Colonialism and imperialism played a significant role in the spread and reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies, as Western notions of male dominance and female subordination were imposed on colonized peoples and cultures.

However, Patriarchy in Africa has deep historical roots, dating back to pre-colonial times when traditional African societies were organized around patriarchal structures. Men were seen as the heads of households and communities, with women expected to be submissive and obedient to male authority. This system was further reinforced by colonialism, which brought with it European ideas of gender roles and hierarchies (Okuro 2010, p.523). The introduction of Christianity to Africa also played a role in reinforcing patriarchal norms. Missionaries often promoted a patriarchal interpretation of the Bible, emphasizing the submission of women to male authority and the exclusion of women from leadership positions in the church particularly with the Bible often using explicit male imagery to describe God. This has had a lasting impact on the way in which African women are viewed and treated within the church. The effects of African patriarchy on the involvement of African women in PCEA church leadership are manifold. Women are often marginalized and excluded from leadership positions, with men dominating decision-making processes and holding the most powerful roles within the church. This has led to a lack of representation of women's voices and perspectives in church leadership, resulting in a narrow and limited understanding of the gospel (Kairu et al 2020, p.532).

Further, patriarchy perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and expectations, with women being seen as inherently inferior to men and unfit for leadership roles which unfortunately lead to the objectification of women in the church, with women being valued primarily for their physical appearance and perceived femininity. This creates a hostile and unsafe environment and for this reason, feminist movement of the 20th century have been instrumental in challenging and deconstructing patriarchal beliefs and practices, advocating for gender equality, women's rights, and the dismantling of oppressive structures that perpetuate inequality. The PCEA must challenge the tenets of these traditions and oppressive cultures with the liberating power of the Gospel instead of tapping from them (Wainaina 2015, p.169). Importantly, patriarchy is not solely about men's domination over women, but also about the ways in which it enforces rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity, limiting the autonomy and freedom of individuals to express themselves beyond traditional gender norms. Some Cultural traditions and religious beliefs often play a role in perpetuating patriarchal values and practices, shaping societal attitudes towards gender roles and relationships. The term intersectionality refers to a concept developed to examine how patriarchy intersects with other forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, emphasizing the need to address multiple dimensions of identity and power in understanding and challenging systems of oppression (Carastathis 2014, p.306). Therefore, proper understanding of patriarchy from historical and cultural perspectives requires a critical analysis of how power structures, gender norms, and social hierarchies have evolved and been maintained over time, as well as recognition of the diverse ways in which individuals and communities experience and resist patriarchal systems.

### **Patriarchy and Women's Involvement in Church Leadership**

According to Njoroge (2000), Patriarchy has been a major barrier to the involvement of African women in church leadership. As noted earlier, in most African cultures, women are socialized to fit into traditional gender roles, which often restrict their participation in spheres of influence outside the home. This is further reinforced by the teachings and practices of the church, which have been influenced by patriarchal beliefs and values. As a result, women are relegated to submissive and supportive roles, and their leadership abilities and potential are often overlooked and thus excluded from participation in all levels of the ministry (Njoroge 2000, p.84). One of the renowned African Feminist theologians Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2002) argues that patriarchal norms and structures limit the full participation of women in the church, including their leadership roles. Women and power are like oil and water in the patriarchal structures thus she argues that women often face institutionalised discrimination in the church, which hinders their ability to fully express their gifts and talents. This exclusion from church leadership opportunities not only limits women's spiritual growth but also perpetuates the cycle of patriarchy, reinforcing the belief that women are inferior and not fit for leadership. Furthermore, patriarchy in Africa also reinforces the notion that women's primary role is to be a caregiver and nurturer, thus downplaying the importance of their involvement in church leadership. This leads to the marginalization of women in church decision-making processes and the perpetuation of male-dominated structures even while the available data clearly shows that women are more than men in the churches. This not only denies women their rightful place in the church but also hinders the church's ability to fully

represent the diverse voices and experiences of all its members (Oduyoye in Njoroge & Dube 2001, p.225). On this she further states that;

Women's power should be the capacity to serve, to live for others and even importantly to do something for themselves: it is the power that transforms pain into pleasure, the threat of death into the state of life and hatred into love. As long as women wield power that produces this sort of transformation they are hailed as good women. But society needs other forms of transformation before it can appropriate to what Jesus presents to us as the ethos of the household of God whose stones are living stones and in which all have the opportunity and the capacity to participate: this is the household in which there is sharing and healing, a welcoming place of peace (Oduyoye in Njoroge & Dube 2001, p.225).

One of the most significant impacts of patriarchy on women's involvement in church leadership is the restriction of their access to the general education and more specifically theological training. In many African societies, education is often prioritized for boys, leaving girls with limited opportunities for formal education. This has a direct impact on women's ability to pursue leadership roles within the church. Without proper education and training, women are often seen as lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to lead, further perpetuating the belief that women are not fit for leadership. These discriminations lead to promotion of economic use of women talents creating a feeling of low self-esteem and the sense of worthlessness (Njoroge 2000, p.96). Moreover, patriarchal structures and beliefs have also contributed to the persistence of harmful traditional practices that limit women's involvement in church leadership. These practices, such as female genital mutilation and small girls (children) marriage, not only violate women's rights but also hinder their ability to take on leadership roles in the church. The notion that women are inferior and should be subservient to men is often used to justify these practices, which continue to affect the lives of countless African women (Njoroge 2000, p.30).

### **Patriarchy and women exclusion**

The exclusion of women from church leadership has significant implications for African women. Firstly, it denies them the opportunity to fully express their God-given gifts and talents, hindering their personal and spiritual growth. This also results in the loss of valuable perspectives and insights that women could bring to the table, limiting the church's ability to effectively address the needs of its members. Further, this reinforces traditional gender norms and stereotypes as noted elsewhere that define women as subordinate and inferior to men, leading to discrimination and exclusion of women from the table and the decision-making processes and leadership positions within the church (Oduyoye in Katongole 2002, p.174).

Further Oduyoye (2002) argues that the exclusion of women on the decision making table in the church perpetuates the oppression and marginalization of women in African societies. By reinforcing patriarchal beliefs and structures, the Church becomes complicit in perpetuating the discrimination and inequalities faced by women. This not only hinders progress towards gender equality but also goes against the teachings of Christianity, which calls for justice and equality for all. Thirdly, lack of female representation in church leadership also hinders the church's ability to fully represent and serve its female members. Without women in leadership positions, the church may struggle to address the unique challenges faced by women, such as gender-based violence and discrimination. This can also lead to a disconnection between female members and the church, as they may not feel adequately represented or understood. The effects of this are limited opportunities for women to hold positions of power and authority within religious institutions, with leadership roles traditionally reserved for men. On this she continue to argue on how the women have always survived at the bottom of the patriarchal pyramid or hierarchy. (Oduyoye in Katongole 2002, p.181).

Therefore, to Oduyoye (2002) the hierarchical structure of Patriarchy in African churches communities often disempowers women, limiting their ability to contribute fully to the spiritual and organizational life of the church, and preventing them from exercising their gifts and talents in leadership roles. The implication for African women in church leadership is that they continue facing resistance, opposition, and discrimination when seeking to challenge traditional gender roles and assumptions within the church, as well as when advocating for gender equality and social justice issues. To this end she advocates for women to begin breaking the ceiling on the domination by patriarchally controlled structures to gain self-valuation and self-validation (Oduyoye in Katongole 2002, p.182).

As earlier pointed out, patriarchy leads to the perpetuation of harmful practices such as gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual abuse, within African church communities, as women may be expected to submit to male authority figures without question which further contributes to lack of proper representation of women's voices and perspectives in theological discourse and decision-making processes within the church. In such societies Kanyoro argues that men owns not only their physical properties but also women and their reproductive powers as well (Kanyoro in Njoroge and Dube (ed) 2001, p.173).

### **Patriarchal ceiling on women Clergy: Presbyterian Church of East Africa Leadership**

Traditional gender roles and expectations within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa often prioritize male leadership, making it difficult for women to break into top leadership positions. Following this the patriarchal attitudes and beliefs leads to discrimination against women clergy, limiting their opportunities for advancement within the church hierarchy. Similarly, male-dominated decision-making processes exclude women clergy from key leadership positions, perpetuating a cycle of male dominance in top leadership roles. The reason being that the patriarchal structures within the church causes limitation to women clergy's accessing resources, networks, and mentorship opportunities that are crucial for career advancement. This is what Kairu et al 2020 question as they states that;

The male gender dominance is realized in church leadership and governance despite female persons being majority in the church. The cause to the dominance and how it contributes to the women minority in church leadership is closely attributed to the understanding of masculine images to God which raises a concern in this study. Women subordination in leadership raises unending hot debates every now and then with questions on why superiority and inferiority in the gender created in one image and likeness (Kairu et al 2020, p.518).

Further, gender bias and stereotypes leads to women clergy being underestimated or undervalued in their leadership abilities, hindering their chances of reaching top leadership positions. This is as a result of the patriarchal norms which discourages women clergy from speaking up or asserting themselves in leadership roles, leading to their voices being marginalized or silenced within the church. The male clergy are more likely to receive support and encouragement for career advancement within the church, while women clergy may face greater resistance or opposition from their male counterparts. These patriarchal power dynamics within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa ends up creating a hostile or unwelcoming environment for women clergy, making it difficult for them to thrive and succeed in top leadership roles. Kariuki (2024) affirms this by stating that;

The ordination of women remains complex, just as the denominations themselves are complex. The twenty-first century is not spared from the debate on the ordination of women. Efforts must be deliberately made by any church that intends to ordain women. This is because many handles stand in the way of ordaining women (Kariuki 2024, p.1).

Further, Kariuki (2024) narrates how the interviews for the entry to the holy ministry and subsequent process of ordination is male dominated thus the perpetuation of the glass ceiling that hinders women progress within the church leadership.

In addition, interview panels for the holy ministry are dominated by male clergy who deny some women opportunities simply because they have small babies. Worse, in the interview panel, women are asked if their husbands have allowed them to serve... This can be considered to intimidate women and also remind them of their position in society and that they should be submissive to their husbands. On the other hand, in the interview panels, women turned out only thirty percent compared to their male counterparts. Probably, there is an ingrained patriarchal mindset that needs to be conquered in the minds of women (Kariuki 2024, p.3).

We must call it for what it is; for such gender discrimination and inequality within the church will continue limiting women clergy's opportunities for professional development and training, hindering their ability to compete for top leadership positions. Thus the earlier stated patriarchal norms and practices within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa continuing to reinforce the idea that women are inherently less capable or qualified for top leadership roles, perpetuating a glass ceiling that hinders their advancement within the church.

### **A Call for Deconstruction of patriarchal structures**

Admittedly the Presbyterian church of east Africa is endowed with great women clergy who have continued to competently perform and excel in many different areas including running international forums and taking part in different institutions of higher learning. The challenge comes particularly when it come to the season of the national elections that we retreat and start drawing the patriarchal card and at that time we politically dirty which obscures our objectivity on the whole process. In the course of the process terms like 'flower girls' 'maids' are used to taint the images of the female clergy and portray them as incompetent. For this reason both Men and Women clergy should actively challenge and confront patriarchal attitudes and beliefs within the church by advocating for gender equality and inclusion in leadership positions. Kairu et al (2020) strongly criticize the male dominance as they state;

Most theologians from women circle have criticized the game where men dominate and the image for God closely associated with masculinity. They argue that such use of masculine approach reinforces hierarchical patterns of relationships that cause the church to emulate the same practice in their leadership patterns. Women theologians therefore have sought to revisit the culture put forward and inherited by patriarchy system that has shown a great weakness (Kairu et al 2020, p.524).

According to Wainaina (2015), for the patriarchal structure that hinders women progression to be broken this can happen through building strong networks and alliances with supportive male clergy and church members which can help women clergy navigate and overcome patriarchal barriers to top leadership positions. Further, Women clergy can seek out mentorship and guidance from successful female leaders within the church who have broken through patriarchal structures to reach top leadership roles in the society and possibly navigate using similar models to the leadership positions in the church. We must be intentional on developing strong leadership skills, expertise, and qualifications in order to support women clergy demonstrate their capabilities and competence for top leadership positions, challenging stereotypes and biases. We must seek to demonstrate that Women clergy can actively participate in decision-making processes within the church, assert their voices, and advocate for their perspectives to be heard and valued in leadership discussions (Wainaina 2015, p.24). "Women like men have an equal participation chance. Women can perform all duties in the church administration provided they qualify. Women like men are full members with the same rights, duties and roles" (Wainaina 2015, p.24).

This calls for creation of opportunities for women clergy to demonstrate their talents, skills, and contributions within the church and help break down barriers and challenge patriarchal norms that limit their advancement. Women clergy can engage in ongoing education and training to enhance their professional development and leadership abilities, positioning themselves as strong candidates for top leadership roles. Through formation of support groups and networks with other women clergy we can provide a sense of community, solidarity, and empowerment in navigating patriarchal structures and pursuing top leadership positions. It is on this note that we applaud the formation of the Circle of concerned African women theologians which plays great role in mentorship through creating a safe place for women theologians to speak out and work on deconstructing the existing patriarchal structures. This is how Kanyoro puts it;

In 1989 we founded our African women's theological community, the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians...We have never gone back to sleep again we are writing, speaking, preaching and studying the Bible and meeting to reject the dehumanization of African women (Kanyoro in Njoroge and Dube 2001,p.170).

Structurally we need affirmative action in order to advocate for policy changes and institutional reforms within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa to promote gender equality in leadership which can help create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women clergy. Both men and women must embrace a mindset of resilience, determination, and perseverance in order to help women clergy overcome obstacles and challenges in their pursuit of top leadership positions, ultimately breaking through patriarchal structures and achieving success in the church. While admitting that it is truly challenging for men to work on deconstructing what has been 'benefiting' to them for generations we must accept the fact that the exclusion of female clergy in the top leadership should a concern for all and should not be treated as issues of concern only to women clergy. Male clergy need to actively listen to and amplify the voices and perspectives of their female colleagues, ensuring that their contributions are valued and recognized in decision-making processes within the church. We must remain focused on providing support to women clergy for us to navigate patriarchal structures and overcome barriers to top leadership positions. As noted earlier, we must keep advocating for gender equality and inclusion in leadership roles

within the church and create a more supportive and equitable environment for women clergy to thrive and succeed. This is what Oduyoye in Njoroge (1997) argues as she urges African Christianity to do a "two-winged" theology through which both women and men could communicate with God (Njoroge 1997, p.77). Male clergy must keep challenging and confronting patriarchal attitudes and behaviors within the church and create a culture of respect, equality, and diversity that empowers women clergy to break through barriers and access top leadership positions.

These calls for collaboration within both male and female clergy on initiatives, and leadership opportunities which can help build strong partnerships and alliances that promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles within the church. In so doing we will be providing opportunities for women clergy to showcase their talents, skills, and leadership abilities which in the end will help demonstrate their capabilities and qualifications for top leadership positions, breaking down stereotypes and biases. We must loudly call patriarchy which is the cause of this exclusion of women clergy. Men must keep advocating for policy changes and institutional reforms within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and promote gender equality and diversity in leadership which will help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women clergy. There is need to continue engaging in ongoing education and training on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in order to help male clergy better understand and address the challenges faced by their female colleagues in breaking through patriarchal structures.

## Conclusion

This article has explored the way patriarchy has negatively influenced the involvement women in church leadership, particularly in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Reflecting deeply we arrive at a conclusion that despite these challenges, African women in church leadership have been advocating for gender equality, empowerment, and social justice within the church, challenging Patriarchy and working towards greater inclusivity, diversity, and representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making roles. For this reason we need to continue creating a culture of accountability and transparency within the church for us to ensure that women clergy are treated fairly and equitably in their pursuit of top leadership positions, with male clergy actively challenging any instances of discrimination or bias. We need to embrace a mindset of solidarity, and partnership with women clergy to help male clergy become effective advocates and supporters in breaking patriarchal structures and promoting gender equality in leadership within the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Patriarchy in Africa has had a profound impact on the involvement of women in church leadership. The patriarchal beliefs and structures present in African cultures and churches have limited women's participation in leadership roles, denying them the opportunity to fully express their gifts and talents and creating leadership ceiling. This exclusion has significant implications for African women, including hindering their personal and spiritual growth and perpetuating their oppression and marginalization. As feminist theologians have argued, it is crucial for the church to challenge and dismantle patriarchal systems to create an inclusive and just environment for all its members, regardless of gender for full participation in the church leadership and other significant positions of influence creating a "two-winged" ecclesial theology in Church leadership.

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**Acknowledgement:**

The author appreciates the valuable and swift inputs from article peer reviewers and the editorial team whose efforts saw the successful publication of this article.

**Ethical pledge:**

The researcher confirms that the data collected was responsibly handled and accurately documented without manipulation of any kind or bias.

**Competing interest:**

The author affirms that the publication of this article was not influenced by financial, or personal interests.

**Author's contribution:**

The researcher is the sole author of this article.

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