

# WOMEN IN GOD'S KINGDOM WORK

World Assembly 2023 Conversatorio

The story of woman runs through the biblical text and that of all humanity. Political and religious events throughout history are peppered with the names of great women.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Old Testament presents women in various situations:

Status: maiden, woman, wife, widow, mother

Occupation: prophetess, judge, queen, homemaker, politician, princess, slave, etc.

### In the Old Testament

**Deborah:** Wife of Lappidoth; she was a judge in Israel, where she agreed to go into battle alongside Barak, the army commander and fight the enemy. She stands alongside the men and is victorious (Judges 4 and 5). The Bible presents Deborah as a wife, a woman, a judge – namely, a woman who held high political and military office.

Rebekah, Huldah, Esther, Rahab, etc., show us how women with vastly different backgrounds and occupations, from many regions, were active in the biblical story and played a significant role in serving the Lord.

### In The New Testament

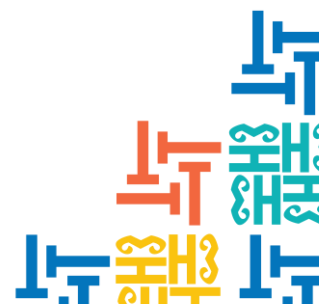
The New Testament starts by telling us of strong women such as Elizabeth, who was upright and blameless in God's sight. Her circle of acquaintances includes Mary, who also found favour in the Lord's eyes. She accepts obedience to God's will and bears the pregnancy of the saviour of the world (Luke 1).

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he worked and interacted with many women. In particular, Luke 8:1-3 describes women supporting his ministry. Women were also the first to announce Jesus' resurrection. Alongside the apostles, they served as deaconesses, practised discipleship (Priscilla), were educators (2 Tim. 1:5) like Lois and Eunice, and church elders (Kyria).

Through their examples of commitment, biblical women inspire the struggles and female leadership we see in the church and IFES today.

### In Church History

Women have also marked their place on every part of church history, from early times until today. In French-speaking Africa, churches have more women than men. We have a crowd of women who contribute significantly to God's work and embody those values.



## Women within GBUAF

The stories of women who have served in GBUAF show us their great skills and significant impact on the movement in French-speaking Africa. They have not worked to supplant men, rather they have highlighted their own talents. This has been especially true of:

- Anne Maouyo, who revolutionised a love for the study of God's Word by training others and writing many Bible study guides. It is impossible to speak of Bible studies today without mentioning Anne Maouyo.
- Chantal Téhé, the Travelling Secretary in Congo Brazza (Central Africa and the Islands), who had a significant impact in the Congolese movement.

In addition, we note that five women have held the position of general secretary:

- ✓ Linda Chung, from Mauritius, worked many years in ministry
- ✓ Da Sylva from Senegal, Josiane Carvalho (transition)
- ✓ Rosine Agrippa
- ✓ Régina from Rwanda who served around 2 years

These women had a considerable impact on the ministry of GBU.

In terms of board chairs, we have the former Chair of the Benin Board, sister Fatou, Josiane Carvalho who combined this role with the one above, and Vice President Mrs Takoré Augustine.

- Among the staff:

Women have served as Travelling Secretaries: Rosine Agrippa and Mariam Camara among them.

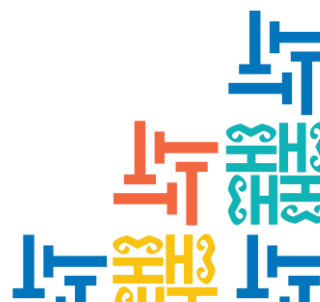
- The wives of the general secretaries have served and continue to serve the Lord alongside their spouses.

Each of the women named above (married, single, mother) has worked and still works to advance the Kingdom of God in French-speaking Africa. To be practical, we are going to discover together the lives of three women (Chantal Téhé, Rosine Agrippa, and Josiane Carvalho) who have served GBU, and learn about their call, their joys, and their challenges, then conclude with some avenues for further reflection.

## CALL, IMPACT, AND CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF GBU

### Call and Impact

**Chantal Téhé:** A single Ivorian woman, after graduating, she started teaching modern literature in secondary schools. As she embarked on her professional career, the Lord called her to serve him full-time. After reflecting and seeking advice, she surrendered everything in service to the Lord. She trained at All Nations in England before being sent to Congo Brazza during the war, where she served for over 10 years. She successfully revitalised the GBU movement in that country and the whole region. She is still a resource and a blessing for GBU and the church.



**Rosine Agrippa:** Togolese and single when she started to serve, she was already employed as a member of the GBU staff when the Secretary left. She was nominated to replace the outgoing GS and worked four years in that role. She also worked full-time. She was able to revitalise the GBU movement in Togo and was a blessing for GBU in Togo and the whole of French-speaking Africa.

**Josiane Carvalho:** A Congolese national, Josiane studied in Senegal where she got involved in the GBU movement upon arrival and was put forward by Mr Kabou, the former Board Chair, to be Associate General Secretary for three years. She decided to stay in Senegal and, by the grace of God, married a Senegalese man. At the start of her married life, she took some time out and was once again nominated to lead the group of friends and then to chair the board. While serving in this role, the current Secretary resigned, leaving her in a combined role of Board Chair and General Secretary until the new GS was recruited in 2022. She is still the Chair of the Board of GBU in Senegal.

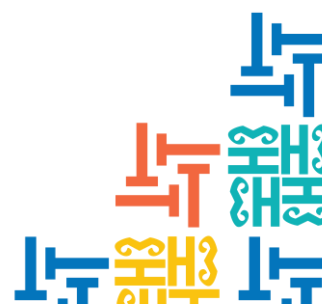
These three women have been asked to express their joys and challenges during their years of service.

#### Joys and impact

- The joy of feeling useful in the Lord's hands and seeing students transformed for life.
- The joy of seeing a dynamic movement across the whole nation, and its impact on students and schoolchildren, seeing young people flourish within the movement, grow in the Lord and get involved in GBU and their respective churches.
- To have trained young people who are devoted, competent, and humble, and who continue to be role models for their generation.
- The joy of seeing students commit to serving the Lord full-time.
- The joy of seeing yesterday's students become today's friends who support the ministry and stay connected with the movement.
- The fact that these friends continue to believe in us despite everything brings us joy.
- Being able to walk alongside students and help them get up after a fall, finish their studies, work, and build stable families gives us joy.

#### Challenges Encountered

- ✓ Socio-cultural and denominational factors: the non-recognition of female ministry in some churches means that working full-time becomes difficult after leaving GBU.
- ✓ The social status of woman in ministry: being single and leading men in a context where singledom is considered a curse.
- ✓ Being a woman and serving as a leader to men.
- ✓ The challenge of serving as a lone woman, single amongst married men.



- ✓ The challenge of overstretching: women are busy in professional life, within GBU, the church, and at home.
- ✓ The challenge of working for GBU whilst also being involved in church to raise awareness of our ministry – it is exhausting.
- ✓ Divergent temperaments and feminine emotions often create conflicts between us and staff members. *“When you have a lively temperament, it is difficult to leave tasks undone, it's hard to deal with others who are slower. Or feminine perfectionism often frustrates other, male collaborators.”*
- ✓ The rare involvement of women in French-speaking Africa seems to result from the lack of financial support offered to women in ministry. One woman highlighted this aspect: *“GBU does not offer us any certainty for the future. Like others, we have studied, and we also want to have a career; people want to have a job that gives them comfort, better well-being, because the spiritual side isn't the only thing – you also need financial means to live and take care of yourself and others. Why would a woman get involved if it means losing out in material terms? It's difficult. You need a certain maturity, a certain vision, you need to have understood something, to have received a special call to enter ministry. The work of GBU is fieldwork and involves many risks; you need a good deal of courage to get involved in this ministry as a woman.”*

In essence, these challenges can be explained by the fact that very little responsibility is given to women in national and regional bodies and meetings. These challenges give us avenues for further reflection on the sustainable involvement of women.

#### Avenues for further reflection

- ✓ Many girls/women take on leadership within student groups during their studies but tend to leave the system after starting work and/or getting married. To keep them in leadership, we need to coach them intentionally. We need to empower them at the highest level during their studies and as they transition from their university days to starting work, thus empowering them to make the life choice to continue working within GBU.
- ✓ Our movements should offer a social safety net to women who do get involved, in order to perpetuate their commitment: social security, care, remuneration, women's housing. This can guarantee that women who want to serve will finish their days without regretting that they have served in GBU.
- ✓ Include training or Bible studies that encourage women to get involved in GBU ministry.
- ✓ Encourage couples to get involved so women can be involved more.

In conclusion, each girl/woman is called to work out her salvation, to volunteer just as much as anyone else, to work, save, and lead the people of God to the heavenly city. We too must dare to give ourselves to God's work.

*Geneviève Guei*

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