

ABSTRACT

The Moravian Church and Women's Roles in Post-emancipation Jamaica 1838 - 1865

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Over the last decade, the historical study of women and the roles they have played in the different sectors of society has intensified. The work and worth of the women of the past are now being recognized by the wider society.

In the church, the work of women has largely been understood as phenomenal, especially in the areas of service and education. Currently, the issue of debate in the Established Churches, is the lack of participation of females in the ordained ministry. Christianity, inherently patriarchal, has throughout the ages, barred women from the role of the administration of its rites and sacraments within the churches.

The Moravian Church in Jamaica, for the first time in 1982, made the allowance for women to enter into training for the ordained order. The first female minister will assume duties in August 1987.

The Provincial Elders' Conference, the decision-making body of the church, is yet to appoint a female among its officers.

A quick glance at the history of the Moravian Church in Jamaica would seem to reflect a favourable view of women and their roles. It pioneered female teacher education in Jamaica, beginning with the Bethabara Training School in 1859, later to be relocated at Malvern, St. Elizabeth, and renamed The Bethlehem Teacher Training College.

In researching the topic - The Moravian Church and Women's Roles in Post-emancipation Jamaica - the objective is to come to an understanding of the historical context that has created today's phenomenon. What was the church's conception of women's roles in Jamaica 1838 - 1865, and how did the women react to these role concepts?

For the purpose of this study, the working definition of the term "role", is that given by Turner in the International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences. That is, "the actual behavior of an individual." Actual behavior encompasses two aspects firstly, expected or conceived behavior, and secondly, role behavior as enactment.