
Gendered Leadership in Accord Organizations

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Attention to gendered issues among Christian development organizations is often more likely to address external programming than internal organizational dynamics. In this paper, I examine how Christian development organizations are gendered in their leadership structure. I specifically examine the demographics of leadership in Accord member organizations at three periods in time: 2015, 2018, and 2021. Relying in part on data from tax records, I evaluate board and executive team compositions, the presence of female CEOs, and the wage differential among senior leaders. I find that women are significantly underrepresented in leadership, especially at top levels. Women earn less than men in similar positions. A number of organizations stand out for lacking any female representation on their executive teams and/or boards. The paper ends with some questions for the sector to ask and address moving forward.

Introduction

Across the international development sector, the need to address gendered inequalities as part of a development paradigm is widely recognized. But not all inequalities receive equal attention. For example, many organizations have programs that address gender-based violence and unequal access to economic resources, while less energy is directed to dealing with the ways gendered organizational dynamics shape programming and organizational strategies. Even as attention has increased toward addressing such internal dynamics in the last couple of decades, more effort is still directed toward external programs than internal dynamics.

The Christian development sector is no exception to this, especially when it comes to internal dynamics that pertain to the gendered makeup of leadership teams. As this paper shows, the dominance of male leadership in Christian development organizations is not representative of the sector as a whole, where most program participants and those employed are women. Yet as Birmingham and Simard (2022) persuasively argue, diversity matters both as a theological imperative and for missional effectiveness. As highlighted in the *Principles for Equality in Development Organizations* (2019) preceding this article, increased women's leadership in Christian organizations is critical to accomplishing the overall mission of promoting shalom.

We lack adequate data to diagnose the current state of the whole Christian development sector around these issues, but this paper attempts partially to remedy this data gap by analyzing the gendered demographics of leadership in organizations in the [Accord Network](#) (hereafter simply "Accord"). It also points to where

significant work needs to be done. It begins by reviewing trends in gender and development, as well as the overall state of women's leadership in the nonprofit sector. It then addresses the unique challenges and opportunities around this issue for the Christian development sector. After explaining the methods used to gather and analyze information on the gender breakdown of leadership within Accord organizations, I present the data on the different levels of leadership and discuss the implications.

The State of Women's Leadership in Development Work

Since the 1970s, there have been several initiatives to promote greater use of a gender lens in the international development sector, starting with Women in Development (WID). Early works (e.g., Boserup 1970) called development actors to consider specific needs of women within economic development efforts and address the ways that discrimination and inequality hindered women. This framing shifted with the Gender and Development (GAD) paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s. GAD focused less on women's issues and more on the gendered structures that result in women's marginalization. One piece of this is gender mainstreaming, discussed in the introduction to this journal issue (2025). Gender mainstreaming entails making gender central in all efforts and demands addressing internal structures that shape organizational policies (Eyben and Turquet 2013).

One aspect of gender mainstreaming is seeking gender parity within organizational leadership. Traditionally, this includes paid officers, such as the chief executive officer or executive director, vice-

presidents and other c-suite officers, as well as the board of directors. Women have been making significant gains in leadership representation within the sector and now make up 69% of staff in the nonprofit sector and 62% of CEOs (Clerkin et al. 2024). However, women who do serve in leadership positions are more likely to work in newer organizations with smaller budgets (Gorman 2005; Lennon 2013). Women make up slightly over 50% of nonprofit boards and serve as board chairs in over 50% of organizations surveyed (Board Source 2021; Clerkin 2024). The sector is moving closer to greater parity and tracking more data around various metrics.

Most of the data on gender in the nonprofit sector fails to consider different outcomes based on the intersections of gender and race. Candid launched an effort in 2019 that encouraged nonprofits to report data on diversity and their gendered demographics and tied such reporting to transparency seals.¹ To date, over 62,000 organizations have reported (Clerkin et al. 2024). The CEO level is one measure for which intersectional data have been recorded. Of the 63% of nonprofits led by a female CEO, 29% of those are led by women of color (for a total of 18% of all nonprofit leaders). Yet for both women more generally and women of color, they are more represented in the leadership of smaller vs larger organizations (Clerkin et al. 2024). Some qualitative studies also highlight that women of color face higher challenges in serving in nonprofit leadership (Biu 2019).

The demographics of leadership teams are important for multiple reasons and have multiple impacts. Women's presence on a board or on a leadership team does not automatically translate into greater gender awareness or increased missional effectiveness. Even so, often the strongest efforts to promote gender equality by and within organizations are often linked to women in leadership. Having strong female voices in leadership often furthers organizational efforts towards equality (Wallace 1998). In terms of board impact, although the presence of one woman on a board does not correlate with significant changes in an organization, having a critical number of women (often 3 or more) is associated with better gendered outcomes in an organization (Erkut, Krame, and Koinrad 2009). To take a specific example, the higher the number of women and ethnic/racial minorities serving on a nonprofit board, the greater likelihood that the organization will have whistleblower policies in place (Ostrower 2007).

Even with increased attention to issues of diversity in leadership in the last decade—and increased women's

representation in leadership across sectors—there are concerns that some of this progress may have stalled or reversed. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a reversal of efforts towards gender equality across most professional sectors; within the nonprofit sector, women were often on the frontlines, and experienced higher rates of burnout and increased personal responsibilities (McKinsey 2021; Clary and Rose 2021). In the last few years, a number of organizations distanced themselves more from efforts to increase gender diversity and create more gender inclusive environments (McKinsey 2024). Given the current political administration's antagonism toward Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives (DEI), there will likely be fewer resources in the nonprofit sector directed towards increased gender diversity and inclusion.

The Unique Challenges and Opportunities of the Christian Development Sector

Reasonable estimates suggest that between 30-50% of the nonprofit sector in the United States has consistently been religious from its inception to the present day (McCleary 2009). Of the 100 largest charities in the United States, about one quarter of these are religious, and half of those—or 13 of the 100 largest charities—are religious nonprofits focused on meeting international needs (Forbes 2023).

Marshall (2010) highlights how religious development organizations and non-religious organizations are different in how they approach gender issues. This may include differences in perspectives on family, gender roles, and sexuality. Religious actors may be wary of secular feminist organizations that ignore the importance of religion, and feminist actors may discount religious actors, viewing them mainly as the key drivers of gender inequality. This is not to say (and Marshall does not suggest) that religious actors are more opposed to gender equality than are other actors. For example, among Christian actors, there is a wide range of responses to issues of equity, often driven by understandings of the Christian faith. Religious communities have both contributed to and hindered women's empowerment; in this volume, Jones and Odhiambo (2025) highlight some of the ways this plays out on the ground.

In many Christian traditions, and especially among evangelical Christian traditions, restrictions are often in place on the roles women can hold. This is especially true when it comes to positions of leadership. For many ecumenical evangelical organizations which bring together people of various traditions, there is often a

¹ Candid provides perhaps the most comprehensive data available on the nonprofit sector and was formed in 2019 when GuideStar and the Foundation Center merged. They give nonprofits a “seal of transparency” (bronze, silver, gold, or platinum) based on their transparency and data they make available (Candid 2024).

lack of clear theology around the leadership of women. Senior leaders in Christian nonprofits often disagree on the perspective of their organization around women's leadership (Reynolds and Curry 2016). Scholars have noted that the lack of clear organizational positions around gender is often linked with unclear and conflicting views held by leaders on the desirability of women's leadership (Gallagher 2003; Cochran 2005). Lack of a clear theology, or the presence of conflicting theologies about women, have been connected to broad cultural patterns that are not conducive to women's leadership. In such uncertain situations, women who are hired are unlikely to stay (Ingersoll 2003; Creegan and Pohl 2005; Birmingham and Simard 2022). Women might be asked to lead but then face resistance when they do lead. In environments without clear commitments to women's leadership, many women leaders leave after a short time and sign on with organizations that are more supportive of their gifts (Ingersoll 2003).

Like organizations across the nonprofit world, Christian development organizations are often influenced by the views and policies of donors and supporters. Churches are often key supporters of nonprofits, in terms of both funding and personnel. Many involved in the faith-based social and development sector are motivated by faith and may first encounter or learn about the work of a development organization through their church. Nonprofits then may often be supported by denominations that vary significantly in their official theological stances towards women in leadership. Some are clearly supportive, while others say little about their theologies as they relate to issues of women in leadership. Still others see a hierarchy in men's and women's roles as being ordained by God, and thus a requirement of faithful obedience. This can naturally complicate things for nonprofit organizations that interact with a variety of churches.

Among the churches that officially do support women's leadership in all areas, there are significant differences in their strategies. For example, even among churches or institutions that affirm women's leadership in all areas, some direct intentional efforts towards developing women as leaders, while others invest very little in challenging longstanding male leadership patterns. Gender inequality often persists in evangelical communities even when gender equality is valued, because these communities fail to address systemic issues that marginalize women (Swartz 2022). Moreover, research on some Christian denominations that encourage women in leadership often reveals significant pay and leadership gaps between female and male clergy (Schleifer and Miller 2017).

While Christianity can often be a source of formal and informal gender barriers for women, there are also

ways in which the Christian faith can and does challenge women's inequality in society. In the United States, many early women's movements were led by Christians and Christian organizations (Hassey 1989). For marginalized communities, religious institutions have often stepped forward to encourage people's leadership when it was otherwise limited. To take an example from the Black Church, research finds Christian churches played a key role in developing the leadership skills and providing leadership opportunities for both black women and men (Patillo-McCoy 1998). For many Black Christian female leaders, regardless of whether their church supported them, faith was often a key driver in their persistence despite obstacles around them (Dym and Hutson 2005; Gassman et al. 2011).

Christian Development Organizations and Available Data

Given these challenges, I would expect Christian development organizations to lack gender parity and to lag behind the nonprofit sector more broadly. Most of the research on nonprofits, including some of the research referenced here, often relies on qualitative data, making it hard to test this hypothesis. Looking at the development sector specifically, a review of research from 1980-2014 finds that only 16% of research employs statistical data (Brass et al. 2018), and that which does is often limited in scope. The quantitative data around demographics that are available are often based on self-reported data or responses to optional surveys (Clarkin et al. 2024; Board Source 2021; Lenon 2013; Laponsky and Larkin 2009).

Beyond the general challenges regarding data on the nonprofit sector, there are more specific challenges for those studying the religious nonprofit or religious development sector. Often, religious nonprofits are not considered as a unique subset. While some self-studies exist (such as the 2021 Leading Edge reports on the gender gap in the Jewish nonprofit sector), little macro-level data exist on religious nonprofits. Some of this is due to a lack of recognition of the importance of this subsector, and some may be due to definitions, because scholars disagree on what defines a religious organization (Austin et al. 2022). More macro-level research is needed to map the gendered leadership dynamics in the religious nonprofit sector.

Ma and colleagues highlight some new possibilities for research in the US non-profit sector, and ways to make use of electronic tax data (Ma 2021). Tax forms have the advantage of not relying on organizations' own self-reporting, thus avoiding biased samples. In addition, the metrics are similar across nonprofits. Although some religious organizations can avoid filing as nonprofits through their classification as churches, most Christian nonprofits file these reports annually,

allowing researchers to track organizations through publicly accessible records as well as over time.²

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to assess the gender breakdown of leadership in Christian development organizations. Specifically, I compare numbers of women and men serving in CEO positions, on executive teams, and on boards of directors. I consider how this has changed over time, drawing on data points from 2015, 2018, and 2021.

In investigating the Christian development sector, I choose in this paper to focus on organizations that are members of the Accord Network. Formed originally in 1977 as the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations (AERDO), the aim of the umbrella group was to help Christian development groups collaborate with one another and be in community; such a collaboration also fostered the possibility of small organizations being able collaboratively submit grant requests. Accord is the largest network of Christ-centered relief and development groups in the United States (Offutt and Reynolds 2019). Other international Christian networks include the ACT alliance (connected with the World Council of Churches), Caritas Internationalists (a Catholic network), and Micah Global (an alliance of mostly evangelical organizations engaged in relief, development, advocacy and creation care).³

I focus on Accord organizations in this study for several reasons. There is much debate over what makes an organization “Christian.” Options include organizations with official denominational ties, those with religious histories, those that clearly express their Christian purpose and identity in a mission statement, and those that focus on evangelistic activities (Austin et al. 2022). By choosing to study Accord organizations, we are selecting organizations that self-affiliate with Christian development, which includes organizations across these different categories. Second, from a data perspective, because Accord is based in the US, it allows the use of the same set of published records—US tax records—for all organizations, creating a consistency in data collection.

One challenge is in determining which organizations count as Accord members for this study, because every year new organizations join while others

leave. Much of this churn results from established organizations joining and leaving, but some is due also to the formation of new nonprofits and the closure or reclassification of others. For purposes of this study, I employ a broad definition, including both those that were part of Accord in the years before the focus of this study (2010 and/or 2014), as well as those that are part of Accord at the time of the study in 2024.

Data Collection

In terms of tax records, most organizations that claim a tax-exempt status at the federal level are required to file a Form 990. Exceptions exist for those with budgets under \$200,000 (organizations that file an abbreviated form), or religious institutions like churches. Some primarily mission-related organizations are exempt from filing, as well as groups that reclassified from nonprofits to churches. This analysis tracks organizations that filed in 2015, 2018, and 2021, for a total of 117 former and current Accord organizations. Twelve additional organizations have records for partial years within that period but were excluded from the analysis.⁴ Of these 117 nonprofits, only 44% are both current and past members, 38% are past members, and 18% are new members.

In most cases, I pulled tax records from years ending in 2015, 2018, and 2021. There are a few cases for which an alternative filing was considered (2014 instead of 2015; 2017 instead of 2018) due to gaps in filing or the lack of availability in a particular year. Tax records are usually available between 2-3 years after filing. For the earlier records (2015 and 2018), and with the assistance of student researchers, most of the data were coded by hand based on PDF filings. For 2021 data, new technologies now exist in accessing tax records, and such records were generally downloaded through the Giving Tuesday Data Commons (2024), though they had to be double-checked and cleaned. In a few cases, 2021 PDF files were consulted for information missing from the downloaded database.

From the tax forms, I collected information on the organization’s expenses and revenues, the amount of revenue from government funding and in-kind gifts, and the location of headquarters. For 2021 organizations, there is also information on whether they have a whistleblower policy, which as previously mentioned, has been correlated with women serving in

² Some organizations not required to file may make a “Pro Forma Form 990” available to their audiences for transparency purposes—Catholic Relief Services is one example (Catholic Relief Services 2024).

³ The information referenced comes from the websites of these organizations: ACT Alliance (actalliance.org), Caritas (caritas.org), Micah Global (micahglobal.org).

⁴ The twelve with partial records are mostly organizations that became sizable nonprofits after 2015, as well as two that ceased filing (Compassion International and Masters Touch Global Ministries) due to reclassification away from relief and development organizations.

leadership (Ostrower 2007). In addition to this organizational data, I included information on all individuals listed in Part VII of the 990, which includes officers, highly paid employees,⁵ board members, and other key leaders. The salaries of these individuals—including direct salary, benefits, and salary paid by related organizations—were also collected.

Data Coding

While the tax records do require organizations to note who serves as trustees or officers, the hierarchy of individuals is not listed. Along with student research assistants, I coded individuals into various categories. First, individuals were coded exclusively for this study as board or paid (even though some might occupy both positions). Those noted as trustees and/or directors and who received no salary were coded as board members. In some cases, those receiving a minimal salary (under \$30,000) were also coded as board members when it appeared that was their primary task.⁶ Paid members included those currently working for the organizations and former employees receiving salaries. Paid members were categorized in one of four ways—as tier 1 (those serving as presidents or CEOs), tier 2 (those serving on executive teams, such as those in VP positions, or presidents/directors of regions or countries), former (not currently serving), and non-executive (such as an assistant to the president or controller). In some cases, those listed as presidents and vice-presidents received no salary, and I coded these cases as board members instead of paid executives.

In addition to coding titles, I also coded for gender. There is some room for error with coding, although I used different methods to try and minimize that error. People were coded based on pronouns or organizational data available on websites, LinkedIn profiles, and other web searches. In many cases, names strongly associated with one gender were coded accordingly (e.g. Jonathan or Adrianna).⁷

Data and Analysis

Data Overview

Table 1 provides an overview of the sample being considered in this paper. For 2015, 2018, and 2021, I include the 117 organizations with data for each of these three years. The typical (median) organization had expenses of between \$2.5-\$3 million, even though the average reported is much higher at between \$45-52

million due to the presence of a few very large organizations. The number and percentage of organizations with the smallest budgets (under \$1 million) has declined over time, from 31% to 16%, though the number of organizations with budgets under \$5 million remains similar over time, decreasing slightly from 65% in 2015 to 59% in 2021. The movement in the median over time is between 13-14%, which corresponds to the rate of inflation during this time (BLS 2024).

	2015	2018	2021
Under \$1 million	36 (31%)	28 (24%)	19 (16%)
\$1-2.5 million	22 (19%)	26 (22%)	37 (32%)
\$2.5-5 million	18 (15%)	20 (17%)	13 (11%)
\$5-10 million	6 (5%)	9 (8%)	13 (11%)
\$10-25 million	15 (13%)	13 (11%)	11 (9%)
\$25-50 million	7 (6%)	5 (4%)	9 (8%)
\$50-100million	4 (3%)	6 (5%)	6 (5%)
\$100-250million	3 (3%)	4 (3%)	3 (3%)
\$250-500 million	3 (3%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
\$500 million plus	3 (3%)	4 (3%)	5 (4%)
Mean Expenses	\$44.6 million	\$46.0 million	\$50.6 million
Median Expenses	\$2.51 million	\$2.83 million	\$3.13 million
Total n	117	117	117

Table 1: Budget Size of Accord Members

Table 2 presents a breakdown on the people serving within these organizations. Two different categories are reported—the first is the board of directors, which vary in size, are usually unpaid, and generally govern the organizations and help set priorities. Executive teams, which include the president and CEO and others in senior leadership (sometimes referred to as c-suite) are also included, even though some nonprofits lack paid executive teams. Boards were much larger than executive teams, with at least half of the organizations having nine members or more on their board. Boards were also the place where women were the best represented, although they were still significantly underrepresented. Women have slowly increased their percentages of board positions over time, from 24% in 2015 to 30% in 2021.

⁵ Organizations are required to list the five highest paid employees who make over 100,000 a year.

⁶ Two organizations stood out for having numerous board members being paid between \$20,000-\$30,000: Bethesda Ministries and Convoy of Hope.

⁷ Everyone was coded as female or male, as we did not run into cases of those identifying as non-binary in our overview among those in senior leadership positions.

	2015	2018	2021
Average (mean) Board Size	10	10	11
Median Board Size	9	9	9
Percentage of Females on the Board	24%	26%	30%
Average (mean) Executive Team Size	2.4	2.4	3.0
Organizations with ...			
No Exec Team	10	11	11
1 Leader	60	52	42
2+ Leaders	47	55	65
A Female Exec	38 (32%)	42 (36%)	50 (43%)
Only Male Execs	69 (59%)	64 (55%)	56 (53%)
Number of Female Executives	54 out of 276 (20%)	58 out of 285 (20%)	93 out of 374 (25%)
Organizations with female CEO ⁸	15 out of 106 (14%)	18 out of 103 (17%)	18 out of 101 (18%)
Total n	117	117	117

Table 2: Leadership Overview of Accord Organizations

Comparatively, the mean number of executive team members was 2.4, with almost half of organizations having two or fewer executive members (in 2015 and 2018, half of the organizations had one or zero executive members). Because many teams are so small, I consider which teams had any paid female executives. Only 38 out of the 107 organizations that had a paid executive or executive team in 2015 had a female serving—or 36% of teams. By 2021 that number had increased to 47%, though that still means over half of organizations with paid executives lacked any female executives.

Women’s representation was the lowest for the CEO or top-level position. 14% of the organizations had a female leader in 2015, a number that improves slightly to 17% in 2018 and 18% in 2021. Unlike the other measures, this did not change considerably between 2015 and 2021.

In the sections that follow, I examine each of these three general categories (board, executive teams, and top leaders) separately, looking more deeply into variation among the Accord sample. It is important to highlight that the general lack of women in leadership

⁸ This number is out of organizations that have a paid individual in a tier 1 role.

is not because most of these organizations lack policies that would allow for women in leadership. Based on the recent Accord survey (Offutt and Reynolds 2019), over three-quarters of Accord member organizations rated gender inequality to be a somewhat or very important issue for their organization to address.

The Lack of Critical Levels of Female Representation on Boards

The power that boards hold varies across organizations, with some boards having much more decision-making power than others. Schietle (2010) has noted the varied authority they have in setting goals, supervising leaders, or hiring. Even as their power varies, boards play an important role in shaping how the dollars of nonprofits are spent. As reported in Table 2, the average number of board members per organization was between 10-11, and the average percentage of female board members an organization had was between 24-30%. In other words, among Christian development organizations, there was a ratio of about 1:3 for women to men holding board or trustee level positions. This is **half** of what is reported in the nonprofit sector generally, where the average board is between 52-53% female (Board Source 2021; Clarkin 2024).

	2015	2018	2021
No Female Board Members	19 (16%)	12 (10%)	10 (9%)
Under 33% Female	63 (54%)	66 (56%)	55 (47%)
Between 33%-50% Female	25 (21%)	30 (26%)	34 (29%)
50% Female	5 (4%)	4 (3%)	4 (3%)
Between 50-67% Female	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	9 (8%)
Over 67% Female	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	5(4%)
No Male Board Members	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Average % Board Female	24%	26%	30 %
Total n	117	117	117

Table 3: Boards Categorized by Percentage of Female Members

While women’s overall underrepresentation on boards is important to note, considering only the average can hide the variance among Accord organizations. As previously noted, research suggests that having at least 3 or more women on a board, or about one-third of the board in this case, is the critical number needed for women’s voices to be included

(Erkut, Krame, and Koinrad 2009). Otherwise, it is likely that women may serve as tokens or be pitted against each other. In Table 3 I use this one-third measure as a benchmark; I categorize organizations in part based on whether one-third of their board is female or male. Figure 1 presents a visual of the percentages of organizations in each of these categories.

These numbers are alarming for two reasons. Perhaps the most striking is that 19 organizations in 2015 had no women serving on their board of directors (a number that decreases to 10 by 2021). This bears further investigating as to why women on boards have been absent. It seems likely that in many of these organizations women were actively excluded or discriminated against, if one accepts that appointing a female to one position among ten or eleven possible positions is unlikely to be a challenging task. Table 3 also shows that none of the 117 Accord member organizations lacked a male voice on their board in any of the time periods.

The second noteworthy finding is that **most** Accord organizations lacked a critical concentration of women serving on their boards, although very few lacked a critical mass of men serving. Based on the one-third benchmark, the ideal would normally be to have women and men each represent at least one-third of the board.⁹ Only 28% (or 33 organizations) met this goal in 2015. By 2021, 40% (or 47 organizations) met this goal, a sizable improvement, but which still means that half of organizations failed to meet this wide target.

For logistical regressions including years, expenses, receipt of government funding, and the existence of a whistleblower policy as variables, none is significant in predicting which organizations had no or few women serving. Perhaps future analyses could add controls for theological variables and political commitments, as well as peer networks, to consider if these explain some of the variance.

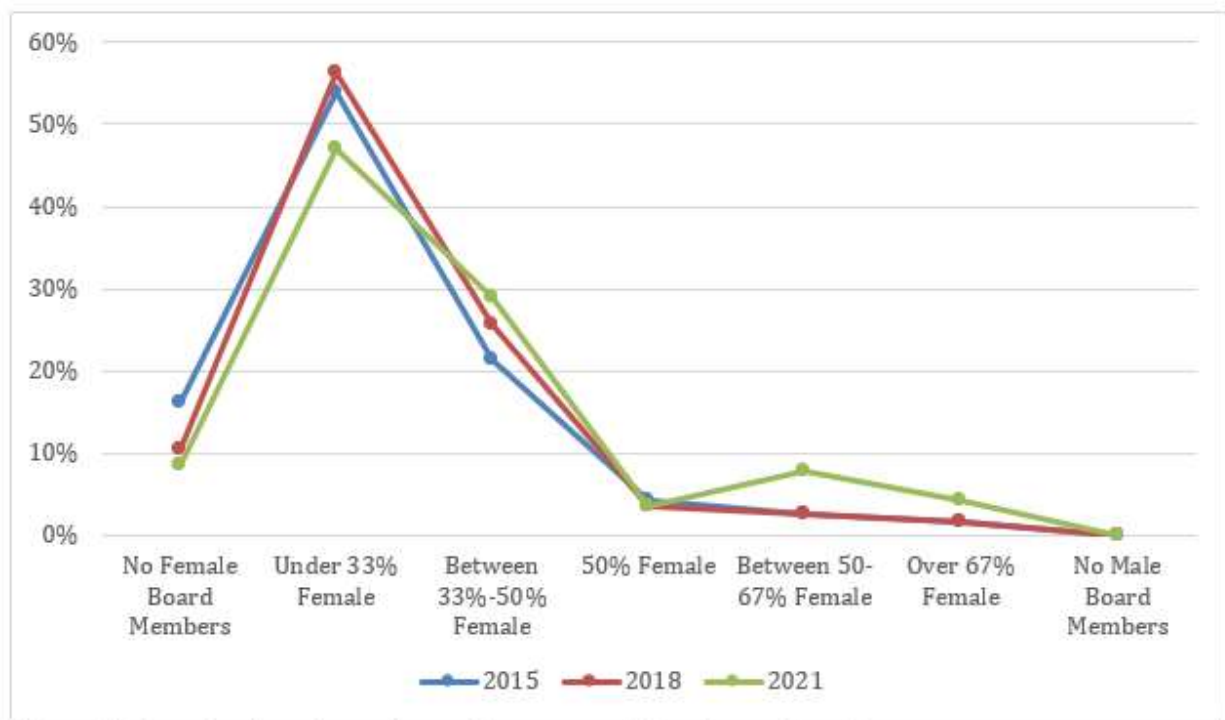


Figure 1: Organizations According to Percentage of Females on Boards

⁹ I acknowledge there could be situations where an all-female or all-male board might be strategic, but this is not the case for most international development organizations that partner with women and men around the world in their programmatic efforts.

Accord Executive Teams Lack Gender Parity

Of the 117 Accord organizations in this sample, 106-107 had paid executive teams during the period of 2015-2021. For those with only one paid leader, it was often someone serving at a CEO or presidential level, although in some cases that paid leader was serving at the second tier to an unpaid president. As noted previously in Table 2, of the 106-107 Accord organizations with paid leadership teams, a significant number had only one paid leader (60 in 2015, 52 in 2018, and 42 in 2021). In this section, I analyze the gender composition of executive teams, and I consider only the 47-64 groups across the years that had executive teams with multiple paid leaders.

Table 4 provides a categorization of organizations based on the levels of women and men serving on executive teams, similar to the levels reported in Table 3 for board members. Figure 2 (next page) likewise portrays the percentages of female executive leaders for the 47-64 organizations each year with executive teams.

	2015	2018	2021
No Female Executives	18 (38%)	25 (46%)	24 (38%)
Under 33% Female	12 (26%)	12 (22%)	14 (22%)
Between 33%-50% Female	9 (19%)	8 (15%)	11 (17%)
50% Female	7 (15%)	9 (17%)	10 (16%)
Between 50-67% Female	1 (2%)	0	4 (6%)
Over 67% Female	0	0	1 (2%)
No Male Executives	0	0	0
n	47	54	64

Table 4: Executive Teams of Two or More Categorized by Percentage of Female Leaders

As noted in Table 2, women made up between 20% (2015) to 25% (2021) of those serving on the executive teams for Accord organizations. Figure 2 (next page) reveals that among the organizations that had executive teams with multiple paid members, women were rarely represented in equitable numbers. In fact, **no** organizations in the sample had only female executive team members listed on their tax forms (when multiple leaders were listed). Yet **over a third** of Accord organizations with paid executive teams had only men serving in such positions.

Using the one-third target, the data reveal that a minority of organizations have executive teams that are

at least one-third female and one-third male. About a third (37%) of organizations in 2015 had teams between 33% and 67% female. This number drops to 30% in 2018, and then rises slightly to 32% in 2021. This number does not seem to improve over time, unlike the board percentages for which positive change had occurred over the six-year period. In 2021, while 98% of organizations with executive teams of two or more were at least one-third male, only 40% of organizations had teams that were at least one-third female. These organizations are thus almost always likely to have men represented in the decision-making (and paid decision-making)—but they are more likely to lack women in this decision-making process.

Another way to compare women’s parity on executive teams is to consider salary and pay equity. Figure 3 (next page) presents a visual of the salaries received by women and men executives in Accord organizations in 2015, 2018, and 2021. It shows the difference in the average amount received by women and men leading organizations. For example, in 2021, men serving in a vice-presidential or other c-suite role averaged \$181 thousand compared to women who averaged \$169 thousand. Figure 4, on the other hand, shows details of what this represents in terms of the total dollars paid to women and men executives leading organizations in the sample of 117 organizations over the three time points.

I ran a regression on salary (not presented here) in which I included the variables of expenses of the organization, year, whether an organization is currently part of Accord, the tier the person occupies, and the person’s gender. I found that gender was statistically significant, and these variables together explain 22% of the variation of pay among leaders. With these controls, being female is associated with **\$20,374 dollars less** a year, a statistic that is significant at a .001 level. This is similar to Candid’s finding that male CEOs received about 27% more on average than their female counterparts (Clerkin 2024).

When one considers the pay disparity and the underrepresentation of women on leadership teams, the financial reality is staggering, as evidenced by Figure 4 (next page). In 2021, for example, \$55.4 million dollars in expenses were spent on the salaries of male Accord leaders, compared to \$19.4 million for female Accord leaders—the most equitable of the years being studied. Another way to think about this is that for every dollar a person contributes towards leadership teams, \$.26 went to women and \$.74 went to men. For 2015, that amount was \$.19 for women out of a dollar. These are numbers that donor communities should be aware of as they consider how they give resources.

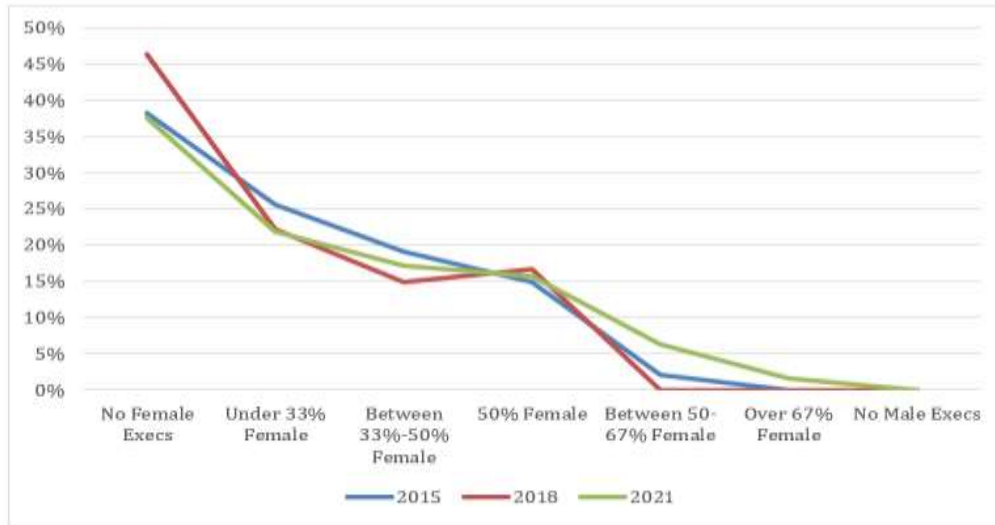


Figure 2: Gender Parity on Executive Teams with Two or More Leaders

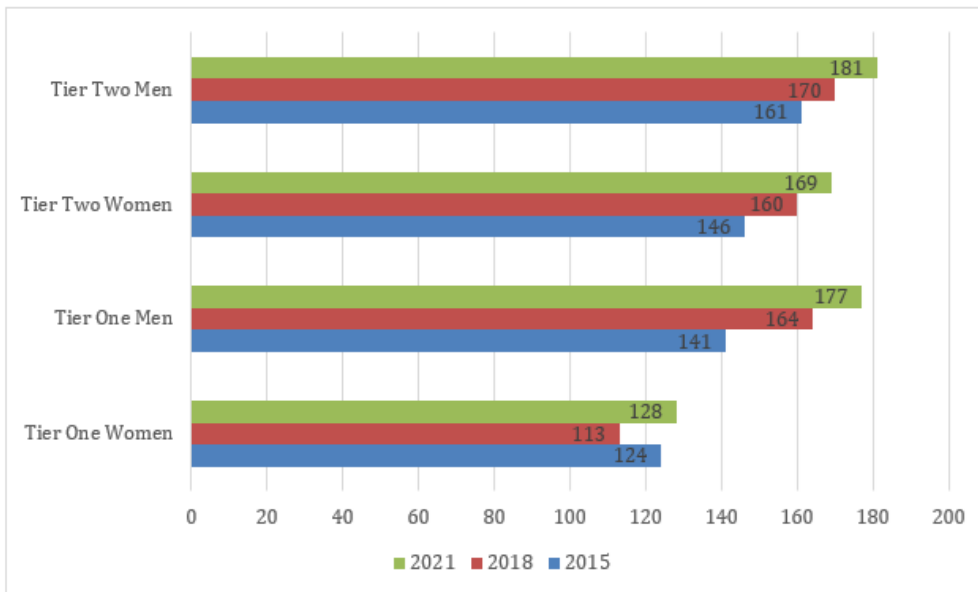


Figure 3: Annual Salary Comparisons by Level and Gender (Thousands of Dollars)

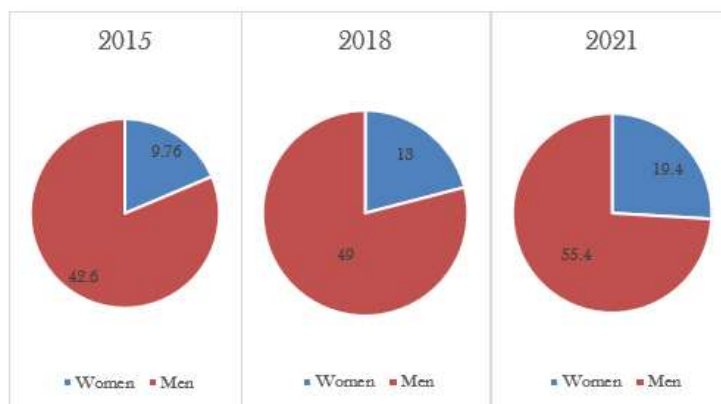


Figure 4: Millions of Accord Organizational Dollars Paid to Women and Men Executives

Only a Few Women CEOs Serve in Accord Organizations

Table 2 on p. 14 shows the number of Accord organizations with women serving as CEOs. This number was 15 (out of 106) organizations in 2015, 18 (out of 103) in 2018, and 18 (out of 101) in 2021. As evidenced in Figure 3 on p. 17, those women also

received significantly less in terms of salary. Female CEOs in Accord organizations averaged \$128 thousand in 2021 compared to \$177 thousand for male CEOs, or 72% of what their male counterparts earned. Some, but not all, of this is likely due to the budget size of organizations. Figure 5 below presents the percentage of organizations with female CEOs grouped by budget size.

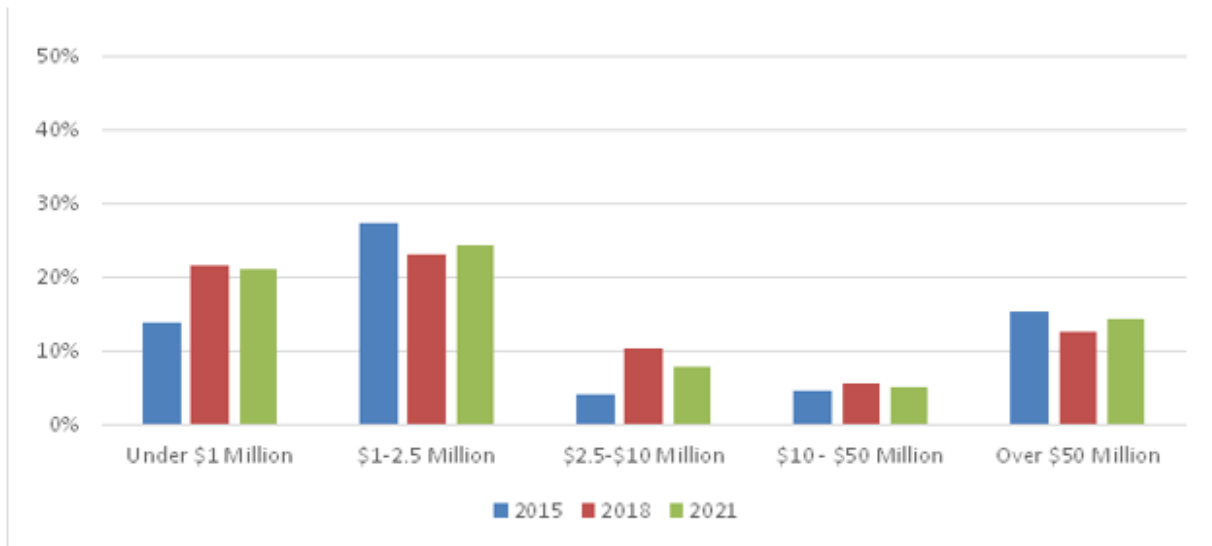


Figure 5: Percentage of Accord Organizations with Women CEOs by Year and Budget Size

Accord organizations look drastically different in terms of the percentage of female CEOs than the nonprofit sector generally. Instead of the 62% figure of women CEOs in the nonprofit sector overall (Clerkin et al. 2024), women in the Accord network made up only 18% of CEOs in 2021. Even in the organizations with small budgets of between \$1-\$2.5 million dollars, women accounted for only about a quarter of those holding the CEO positions. These patterns for Accord organizations also look different than for other nonprofits in the United States, where women’s representation decreases as budgets increase (Lennon 2013; Clerkin et al. 2024). In the Accord Network, women are more likely to serve as CEOs in small organizations and large organizations, but not the mid-range ones. The reasons for this need to be further investigated, but it may be because larger organizations are more likely to engage with secular actors or in networks where women in leadership are more common.

Of note is the fact that there has been little progress over the past 6 years. This stands in contrast to boards and executive teams, for which, on average, women’s representation is increasing. Some Accord organizations appear open to women being on leadership teams, but may still be resistant to women serving as the key leader. Further inquiry into obstacles that exist around this role would be helpful. Past

qualitative research on women leading in evangelical settings (Ingersoll 2003; Creegan and Pohl 2005) suggests that those obstacles may be due to conflicting attitudes many Christians hold around fully supporting women in leadership, or to a lack of commitment and intentionality toward gender equality by the organizations (Reynolds and Curry 2016).

Discussion and Conclusion

Organizations affiliated with the Accord Network have a significant problem when it comes to the role of women in leadership. Not only are women substantially underrepresented when it comes to the CEO position, executive teams and boards, but a significant number of organizations lack female representation entirely on their boards and/or executive teams, a situation that is both startling and concerning. Moreover, the low average overall means that few organizations have the critical number of women in leadership necessary for the real inclusion of women’s voices. These low numbers typically make the climate less hospitable for the few women who are currently serving and leading (Birmingham and Simard 2022).

For organizations in Accord that seek the flourishing and shalom of women and men around the world, and who deal with issues like gender-based

violence and discrimination towards women, all of this seems especially problematic. We must ask why so many Accord organizations lack female leadership. As suggested earlier, part of the explanation may be because of resistance on the part of some organizations to have women serving, perhaps due to cultural or theological perspectives. While it was previously reported that three-quarters of Accord organizations claim gender equity to be a value, this means that almost one-quarter do not. Indeed, they may hold the opposite value. Other organizations say they value it, but do little to make it happen.

It is worth noting here that Accord has eight [principles of Integral Mission](#) to which all members subscribe. Some of these engage the issue of co-laboring with partners, but **none** touches upon the importance of women and men serving together. If having women and men thrive in exercising their talents for the kingdom is indeed a value for Accord, then it is important for them to say it openly and clearly. Currently, a lack of clarity among organizations on their theological commitment is a key factor stunting efforts towards gender equality in Christian organizations (Reynolds and Curry 2016). More clarity by Accord on whether all-male leadership is a theologically or practically sound practice would be very helpful. If gender equity is indeed important for Accord and its work of integral mission, clarity on this issue would likely drive organizations to be more intentional about it. If gender discrimination is considered appropriate or permissible in only some instances, that should also be clearly stated (as well as identifying which situations). It may be that fully empowering women is a value Accord is not willing to strongly embrace, or on which the network is willing to have members agree to disagree. Stating this clearly might help some organizational members know whether Accord is truly supportive of women in leadership.

Much research and many resources exist in terms of best practices for organizations that wish to provide more inclusive workplaces, whether around gender or around gender and race/ethnicity. Some of this is specifically directed towards Christian nonprofits like Accord members (Reynolds and Curry 2016; Birmingham and Simard 2022). Some of these practices include intentionally investing in diversity (in

terms of both time and resources), fostering discussion around gender for all members, outspoken support of gender equity among top leaders, both male and female, performing gender audits, and regularly assessing the organization.

Finally, the research done for this study raises questions about the commitment to transparency and availability of data by members of the Accord network. Principle Eight of Accord's Integral Mission Principles states that "We Tell the Story with Integrity" (Accord 2024), meaning that they value truth and transparency in how members talk about their work, and "what (they) choose to say." The data on gendered and racial demographics are important for organizations to report, and having targets for female representation is tied to greater female representation in organizations (Sojo et al. 2016). Organizations should report on these demographics publicly. While the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) requires this of many nonprofits, in the USA to date organizations do not have to reveal this level of information. I recognize the limitations that come with using tax data—while one can reasonably (with some error) code for gender, the same is not true for issues of race and/or disability. Only with greater transparency from organizations can we track trends and measure progress in the field.

Candid (see Clerkin et al. 2024) is in the process of self-collecting such data from organizations that choose to report, which is already a good step. But even in these cases, the intersection of race and gender is rarely reported. For example, organizations list people of color serving and women serving on their boards, but do not provide information on women of color serving on these boards. For organizations committed both to transparency and to reporting, it would be useful to report racial/ethnic and gender data in overlapping ways, so that analysis can move beyond considering gender alone (as done in this paper) and consider how it interacts with race and ethnicity. Further, as some financial data is reported, donors might also request more transparency related to whom is being paid with their contributions. Considering these various data points is vital for assessing and addressing the range of challenges women face in the leadership of Accord organizations.

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