

WOMEN AND MEN IN MINISTRY: WHAT WE BELIEVE
Adopted by the Session of Mt. Pleasant Community Church
June 17, 2002

The will of God expressed in Scripture is our only authority in every effort to understand and encourage ministry among men and women in Christ's body, the Church (I Tim. 3:16). In this and all matters of faith and practice, we must seek understanding within the framework of God's redemptive plan in Christ as revealed throughout the whole Bible.

The Creation account in Genesis 1 forms the crucial starting point for understanding the Bible's teaching concerning men and women in Christ. We believe the Bible teaches that God created men and women to bear His image equally in relationship with each other. Neither bears His image more completely than the other (Gen. 1:27). God intended both alike to share oneness and open, trusting, loving fellowship, even as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share oneness within the Trinity. Each enjoyed a direct relationship with God and shared jointly the responsibilities of rearing children and exercising dominion over creation (Gen. 1:26-28).

Yet the oneness between men and women was shattered by the Fall, bringing in mutual mistrust, blame, separation from God and from each other. Indeed, God predicted that the relationship between fallen men and women would be plagued by mutual conflict--a "desire for" mastery on the part of the wife, an urge to "rule over" the wife on the part of the husband (Gen. 3:16; compare Gen. 4:7). The inequality predicted in the Curse of Genesis 3 is thus an effect of sin, not a prescription of God's ideal order.

Jesus Christ came to redeem humanity from the Fall's deadly effects, to reverse the Curse of Genesis 3 and to renew Creation as God originally intended it (Rom. 8:18-25). Christ invites all people alike to believe in Him and become members of His covenant people, the Church--the current expression of God's kingdom and a picture to the world of what Christ has in store for all Creation when He returns in glory (Mat. 13; John 13:34-35; Eph. 2:11-22; 4:1-16; Rev. 21). God wants His children to experience the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23). This means that worldly divisions and inequalities between men and women must not be tolerated in the Church, where all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

In the formation of the Church at Pentecost, God poured out His Holy Spirit on women and men alike, as the prophet Joel had predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:18). In the New Testament, women as well as men exercise prophetic and priestly functions (Acts 2:17-18; Acts 21:9; I Cor. 11:4-5; I Peter 2:9-10). Further, the Spirit bestows gifts on all members of Christ's body sovereignly, without giving anyone preferential treatment based on sex (Acts 2:1-21; I Cor. 12:7, 11; Eph. 4:7-13). Every believer is to offer his or her gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; I Peter 4:10-11). To prevent believers from exercising their spiritual gifts is to quench the work of the Spirit (I Thess. 5:19-22).

We acknowledge that all believers may affirm together the truths summarized above, yet differ in their understanding of the specific ways in which God has called his Church to work out our redemption and oneness in Christ. "Complementarian" believers hold that a few passages such as I Timothy 2:11-15, 3:1-7 establish complementary roles for women and men in the Church's ministry, reserving the office of elder exclusively for men. "Egalitarian" believers hold that God's redemptive act of making us one in Christ freed women as well as men to minister wherever their gifts are best utilized, including the office of apostle and elder, as suggested by New Testament examples such as Priscilla (Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:3), Junia (Rom. 16:7) Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), Tabitha (Acts 9:40-41), and Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2). Proponents of

the egalitarian view believe that restrictions mentioned in such passages as I Timothy 2 are specific to particular local situations and temporary, intended ultimately to fall into disuse as Christians live out more fully their freedom and oneness in Christ.

The elders of Mt. Pleasant Community Church follow the larger Evangelical Presbyterian Church in believing that the “issue of ordination of women is not an essential of the faith” (EPC Position Paper on the Ordination of Women). We embrace equally those who hold complementarian and egalitarian views on this issue, recognizing our common sincerity and depth of commitment to Scripture as the sole authority in matters of faith and practice. We have come to believe, however, that it is consistent with God’s redemptive purpose revealed in Scripture to open the office of elder to all spiritually qualified candidates, whether male or female. We have done so only after prayerful and extended study, in the conviction that we can best accomplish the mission God has given us to our community and our world when all members of Christ’s Body are fully free to serve as God equips and calls us.

Therefore, the elders of Mt. Pleasant Community Church have instructed our Nominating Committee to consider spiritually qualified women as well as men for the office of elder, and we welcome as equal co-workers all persons who are called to this awesome responsibility. Furthermore, in our attempts to live together as a biblically functioning community, we are committed to the following values:

1. To provide to men and women alike opportunity for ministry based on giftedness and character.
2. To pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between women and men that led the New Testament writers to describe them in terms of family: “brothers and sisters.”
3. To be intentional where appropriate in overcoming elements of our culture that devalue or disrespect women and to offer encouragement to women in areas where their giftedness has traditionally been discouraged.
4. To use sensitivity in language that reflects the honor and value God desires for maleness and femaleness, and which expresses God’s will that His Church be an inclusive community.
5. To teach and model these values to members of our community, to the Church, and to the world at large.

This summary statement by no means exhausts all that may be said concerning women and men in leadership. For more complete discussion of key scriptural passages concerning this issue, see

Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Baker)

Ruth Barton, *Becoming a Woman of Strength* (Shaw)

Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women* (Baker)

Stanley J. Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (InterVarsity)

Gretchen Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Fleming H. Revell)

Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, Wives* (Hendrickson)

Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation* (Zondervan)

Aida Spencer, *Beyond the Curse* (Hendrickson)