

Trinity CHURCH | CREC

Policy on Women's Ministry

Adopted: June 18, 2012 (Revised January, 2020)

Purpose: Paul identifies the purpose of his ministry quite clearly in Colossians 1:28: “[Christ] we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Paul’s goal in ministry was to so preach and teach and implement the Word of God in his ministry that every man (*anthropon* – human), every saint (v. 26), be presented before God perfect and complete, mature followers of Christ. Hence, the goal of ministering to women in the body of Christ is to achieve this in their lives: that our women may be presented perfect in Christ Jesus; that those outside our congregation be moved to exclaim, like one ancient Roman, “What women those Christians produce!”

Rationale: Throughout His ministry Jesus intentionally cared for and instructed numerous women – ministering to them and being ministered to by them (cf. Lk 8:1-3). He commended the intellectual zeal of Mary (cf. Lk 10:38-42), sent the Samaritan woman as an evangelist to the people of her village (cf. Jn 4:39-42), defended an adulteress from unjust treatment (cf. Jn 8:1ff), commissioned women to announce the good news of the resurrection to the disciples (cf. Lk 24:10-11), cherished his mother and provided for her at his death (cf. Jn 19:25-27), etc. Women are joint-heirs of the Gospel, inheritors of God’s promises, full participants in the Kingdom of God. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:26-28:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This unity in Christ Jesus does not negate the reality of differing roles for men and women in the congregation. Therefore, whatever ministries the church has for women must be crafted *to support and not supplant* these distinct roles. These ministries must not pull women away from their God-given responsibilities but enable them to fulfill them more faithfully.

Principles: Given that women and men are both to be presented perfect in Christ Jesus, the Church of God must take an active role in shepherding women to understand God’s Word and their role in His Kingdom. The *first principle* driving our ministry to women, therefore, is that women are created in the Image of God and joint heirs of the grace of life. When God created man, He created them male and female, in His own image. In their being, male and female are equal. Together they bear the image of their Creator and Redeemer (cf. Gen 1:27; Gal 3:26-28; 1 Cor 11:8-12) and are worthy of honor and respect (Jas 3:9). The Spirit of God showers His gifts upon both men and women, enabling all to contribute to the edification of the body. This includes granting certain women in the early church the gift of prophecy (cf. Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5), instruction (cf. Acts 18:26; Tit 2:3-5), and service (cf. Rom 16:1-2).

The *second principle* is that male and female are different *by design* having roles that complement one another. God Himself declared, “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him*” (Gen 2:18). The distinction between male and female is not a result of the Fall but the intention of the Creator from the beginning. God created Adam and Eve as male and female and then brought them together as husband and wife to image the distinction between the Persons of the Godhead. The unity and diversity in the Trinity – one God in three Persons – is imaged in the marriage union in which two distinct people, male and female, become joined together by covenant as one new person in a richer, fuller, deeper sense. Similarly, the differences between male and female in the congregation reveal more of God and His character (cf. 1 Tim 2:13; 5:1-2). As Tom Gibbs has written:

Traditionally, Christian theology has recognized gender distinctions to be important, beautiful and mysterious. To remove, denigrate or make them interchangeable is to lose an important aspect of our humanity. One helpful way to understand this relationship is through the metaphor of a dance. For the dance to be enjoyed, each partner must assume their role. We conclude, then, that God made the divine image as male and female to exist in a beautiful, complementary relationship with itself.¹

The *third principle* is that authority and submission are integral parts of the created order, reflecting the nature of God Himself. The Son of God is eternally equal with the Father, of the same being and nature with the Father and the Spirit. Though equal in power and glory with the Father, the Son voluntarily submits Himself to the Father’s will and joyfully does all that the Father asks of Him (cf. Jn 4:34; 8:28).

This relationship of authority and submission within the Godhead is manifest in the various authority structures that God has established in the world – magistrates and citizens, church officers and members, husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees (cf. the 5th commandment). While all individuals are human and therefore equal in being, they fulfill different roles and have distinct callings appropriate to those roles.

All of these authority structures reflect the relationship between the Son of God and the Father. Jesus did not come to earth to do His own will, but the will of the One who sent Him. He was obedient to His Father (cf. Jn 5:30) and, at the same time, fully equal with the Father (cf. Jn 17:4-5; Phil 2:5-11). Equality, authority, and submission need not compete with one another but can exist in harmony even as they do in the Godhead.

The *fourth principle* is that the exercise of authority is to be used to bless and protect those committed to one’s charge. Authority is not an excuse to use and abuse; it is a calling to lead, guide, and protect (cf. Mk 10:42-45; Eph 5:21-6:9; 1 Pet 3:7; 5:1-4), to serve as a shepherd (cf. Ps 23). In this fashion, authority imitates the way the Father relates to the Son as well as the way Christ relates to His Church. Magistrates, church officers, husbands, parents, and employers are to serve those in their care. Sometimes this demands firm and unyielding action since the authority given is real authority and must be exercised faithfully (cf. Job 2:9-10; Prov 13:24; 20:26; Tit 2:15).

¹ “The Role of Women in Ministry at Redeemer Presbyterian Church.” August, 2009. p. 3.

The *fifth principle* is that submission is not slavish obedience but joyful compliance borne out of a love for God and for others. Everyone is called to submit to someone – children to parents, wives to husbands, employees to employers, congregants to officers, citizens to magistrates, pastors to elder boards, Christians to Christ, etc. Consequently, Paul introduces his exhortations to households with the universal command “*submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Eph 5:21). Submission to authority is something which all godly men and women are to manifest (cf. Rom 13:1; Tit 3:1-2; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 2:13-17).

The *sixth principle* is that those who exercise authority in the church, those holding the offices of elder or deacon, are to be male. Church officers are called to represent Christ to the Church and so must be men. While as God the Second Person of the Godhead was and is neither male nor female, as man Jesus was and is male. Hence, in order to represent Christ, Church officers must be male. Consequently, Christ appointed *men* to be his apostles (cf. Mk 3:13-19) and the apostles laid hands on faithful *men* to carry on the faith to future generations (cf. Acts 1:21-26; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 15:6-7, 22; 2 Tim 2:1-2). In addition, Paul insists that elders and deacons must be *men* (1 Tim 3:1-2, 12; Tit 1:6) and would not permit a woman to rule or exercise authority over *men* in the congregation (1 Tim 2:11-15). Women cannot represent Christ to the Church assembled.

Nevertheless, women can assist the officers of the church particularly in ministering to women. Female assistants to the deacons are to be “*reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things*” (1 Tim 3:11 cf. Rom 16:1-2). Such women were in the centuries after the apostles called “*deaconesses*” – women who did not hold the office of deacon but who served as assistants to the deacons in counseling and ministering to women.

The *seventh principle* is that husbands and fathers are primarily responsible to oversee the spiritual health and vitality of those in their home. They are to rule their households well (cf. 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12; Tit 1:6). Husbands are to wash their wives with the Word of God, presenting them before Christ pure and spotless (cf. Eph 5:25-33). They are to be equipped to answer questions that their wives may have about issues that arise in the assembly (cf. 1 Cor 14:34). Fathers are to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (cf. Eph 6:4). They are to speak of the things of God regularly and faithfully with their children (cf. Deut 6:6-7; Proverbs).

Consequently, the primary calling of the Church is to equip husbands and fathers to fulfill their responsibility to shepherd their homes faithfully. As Richard Baxter (1615-1691) once wrote:

[Ministers] must have a special eye upon families, to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed. The life of religion, and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much on family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all. What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all the work be cast on us alone; and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of their own, by which they are bound to help us? If any good be begun by the ministry in any soul, a careless, prayerless, worldly family is like to stifle it, or very much hinder it; whereas, if you could but get the rulers of families to do their duty, to take up the work where you left it, and help it on, what abundance of good

might be done! I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion.²

Therefore, as was stated in the “Rationale”, whatever ministries the church has for women must be crafted *to support and not supplant the responsibility* of husbands and fathers to cultivate piety in the home. These ministries must not pull women away from their God-given responsibilities but enable them to fulfill them more faithfully.

The *eighth principle* is that the more mature women in the congregation are responsible to instruct the less mature women. Paul commands older women to be “*teachers of good things, admonishing the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed*” (Tit 2:3-5). They are to warn younger women from being idle, gossips, and busybodies (1 Tim 5:13). In order for an older woman to teach what is good, she must first model what is good. She must be “*reverent in behavior, not [a] slanderer, not given to much wine*” (Tit 2:3) but rather “*well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work*” (1 Tim 5:10). She must model the godliness of women who have gone before – women like Sarah (1 Pet 3:1-6), Rahab (Heb 11:31), Ruth, Elizabeth, Mary, and many others.

Implementation: The elders will encourage specific women known for their maturity and good works to lead occasional meetings for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship.

Support: Without encouragement and admonishment the spiritual vitality of the women in the Church will wither (cf. Phil 4:2-3). Consequently, the elders are committed to:

- Teaching regularly on the roles of men and women in the Church;
- Reminding the men in the congregation of their responsibility to cultivate the spiritual health of those committed to their charge;
- Encouraging the distinctive callings and responsibilities of both men and women in the home and in the Church;
- Recommending resources that will assist men and women to understand these distinctive callings and responsibilities (making some available via the book table);
- Praying regularly for the women of the congregation, for the growth of maturity so that our older women can instruct the younger women in the ways of Christ and the Name of Christ be adorned by their beauty, industry, and faith.

² *The Reformed Pastor*. (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2005) p. 100.