

Elders' Position Paper – Women's Ministry

The Pastoral Search team asked the Elders, with the prospect of appointing of a Women's Pastoral Care Coordinator, to provide guidance as to the role of someone working in such an appointment. This we are glad to do. This Paper gives a short theological underpinning to our guidance and is followed by some practical examples that will bring clarity, not only to a Women's Coordinator, but also to the wider church.

Our aim is to see the development of both men's and women's ministry that is biblical, healthy and God-honouring. We want to encourage the development and recognise the importance of women's ministry in Central because that is the right thing to do and because we see huge potential for good and for God's glory in this.

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in His own image and likeness. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God Himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to use the gifts that God has given in significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life.

Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that established the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and His church. This means that gender (and consequent gender roles) is a gospel issue as it illustrates relationship with God and the redemption that is ours in Christ. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Jesus for His bride, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to develop their gifts to their full potential to the glory of God.

The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall and redemption and must not be side-lined by appeals to cultural developments. The qualifications for eldership are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The spiritual leadership that is given at home qualifies or disqualifies a man from leadership in the church. An elder must be able to hold on to and communicate the 'trustworthy message' of apostolic truth (Titus 1:9) for the maturing and equipping of the church.

The New Testament shows us that women exercised important teaching roles, sometimes in partnership with the men (Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18:26) and sometimes specifically to women (Titus 2:4), but not in such a way as to damage the God-given creational principle of 1 Timothy 2:11-13, where the guidance to the church in Ephesus is clearly rooted, not in culture, but in pre-Fall creation.

With this underpinning in mind it is our conviction:

1. That the authoritative and directional preaching of the Word, when all the church is gathered, should be carried out by elders or qualified men under their supervision. (1 Timothy 2:11-13). This does not preclude the ministry of women in other aspects of such gathered worship.

2. That other teaching roles open to women may include, for example, serving in home group leadership along with men (Acts 1:14), Sunday school, bible class, and in prayer meetings bringing a devotional word. (1 Cor. 14:26)
3. That we encourage biblical expository ministry among women and open-up training opportunities to encourage gifts to be developed in this area. This training could be shared with the men.
4. That all who engage in Word ministry in Central – male or female – agree to respect the position outlined by the Elders (and affirmed by the membership in this Paper).

In any important but secondary position taught in Central we do not insist that everyone *agrees*, but that members graciously *accept* that this is the position that is held.

Our heart as under-shepherds of Christ in Central is to teach God's word and to encourage God's people into ministry that is truly God-glorifying. This can only happen when God's people submit to the lordship of Christ by joyfully submitting to the Word he has given and embrace the rich roles that he has ordained for men and women.

We unequivocally reject all forms of sexism and misogyny that have plagued society and the church. We affirm that there is nothing to be feared from living within the framework for family and church life that the Lord has given us in his Word.

Yours warmly in Him,

The Elders.

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