

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing concern within our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, and in our local congregation, Faith Christian Fellowship, to find ways to “do church” that better reflect the honor and dignity that God bestows on women as well as men: as people of who bear the image of God; as heirs of the grace of life, redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and as adopted children in whom the Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell.

While we are grateful for our church, its ministries, and its leaders, we recognize that as a congregation we can do much better. Affirming the value of women and girls, safeguarding their dignity, encouraging them to develop their gifts, providing ministry opportunities, and improving communication and mutual respect between men and women are just a few of the areas where we have opportunities to grow as a community, while holding fast our commitment to the Bible’s teaching that God gives men and women distinct yet harmonizing parts to play in furthering his Kingdom.

After considerable reflection and prayer, and consistent with the Recommendations of the Ad Interim Committee on Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church recently adopted by the 45th General Assembly of the PCA (June 12-16, 2017), we present this Declaration, which includes

- I. An **Affirmation** of the core teachings of Scripture on men and women
- II. A **Confession** of our failings in this regard, and plea for God’s grace
- III. **Recommendations**: to apply our affirmations, and redress our failures

FCF Declaration on Women in the Life and Ministry of the Church

This is an affirmation of the position and practice of Faith Christian Fellowship, a church of the Presbyterian Church in America. Within this declaration, we seek to be faithful, first, to the teachings of Scripture, and second, to the standards of the PCA as reflected in the Book of Church Order. We recognize that these matters are subject to different understandings among believers, however, and welcome in fellowship those of differing viewpoints who are willing to live in peace with FCF's practice.

I. Affirmations

God made people in His image, both male and female. They are equal in their being, dignity and honor. They are called to reflect the unity of God the Father, Son, and Spirit, and to partner with him as his representatives exercising creative authority over and caring for the earth (*Genesis 1:26–28*). Woman was created to be a “strong helper” (*ezer*—a Hebrew word most often used in Scripture referring to God himself).

However, when people rebelled against God, they tragically marred this plan and let sin into their relationships as well as their individual lives. Yet, from the beginning, God promised to rescue his people and restore what was broken. (*Gen. 3:15, Is. 53, Lk. 24:45-47, 1 Pet. 1:18-21*)

God calls men and women to show the world the good news of his grace in the way they relate to one another in society, family, and the church. Men and women in the church should reflect the relationship of God the Father with Jesus Christ the Son. Just as God and Jesus are equal in power, honor, and glory, yet play different parts in redemption, so men and women are equal in dignity and honor, yet have distinct parts to play. They are to work together in unity, submitting to one another as they bring glory to God in the world (*Phil. 2:5-8, Eph. 5:21, 1 Cor. 11:3–10*).

Men and women are chosen to serve God as members of a royal priesthood. Together they are given spiritual gifts in areas such as leadership, administration, teaching, evangelism, mercy, and hospitality (*1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 12; Rom 12; Acts 18:26*).

Scripture is our only ultimate authority. It teaches that God calls qualified men to preach with authority and to safeguard the church's doctrinal purity as elders, exercising servant leadership “as men who must give an account” (*1 Tim. 2:12-14; Hebrews 13:17; Titus 1*). This God-given authority cannot be forced on people, but should be freely acknowledged by those who are served (*1 John 4:1, Mark 10:42-45*).

Jesus Christ condemns all forms of lording authority that abuse, marginalize or diminish the value of women (*Luke 10:41-42; John 4; 8:7, Matt. 26:8-13 etc.*). In the Spirit of Christ, men and women in the church are called to show Christ's sacrificial love and build one another up in the grace of life, encourage the full use of their gifts, and create arenas of partnership where their divine callings can glorify God and advance his Kingdom. (*Acts 18:26; Romans 16:3; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Cor. 10:31*).

II. Confession

O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

You created men and women in your image to reflect your unity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As sinful people, we often do not reflect this unity as men and women.

When this happens, we control one another rather than serve one another, and the church does not reflect your divine community of love.

Forgive us, Lord.

You call men and women, as joint members of your royal priesthood, to partner together in our homes and churches.

As sinful people, we do not adequately partner together, listen and communicate well, and resolve conflict together as we should.

When this happens, decisions are made without important perspectives, ministries are less effective, and misunderstandings occur.

Forgive us, Lord

You grace men and women with a range of spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit, including leadership, administration, teaching, evangelism, mercy, hospitality, generosity, and others.

As sinful people, we often fail to adequately recognize, value, celebrate, and develop gifts in women.

When this happens, the church loses ministry opportunities and does not grow to full maturity.

Forgive us, Lord.

You made men and women equal in being, dignity, and honor.

As sinful people, we do not adequately respect one another as equals.

When brothers disrespect women, our sisters feel undervalued and powerless.

Forgive us, Lord.

You call us to care for one another and build one another in sacrificial love, as Christ sacrificed himself for us.

As sinful people, we confess our inconsistency in caring for and protecting women.

When brothers do this, our sisters are not fully treasured as God's image bearers. They feel marginalized and sometimes objectified as sex objects. Single women do not feel embraced in their full personhood.

Different forms of abuse against women are not seen or responded to. The church and the home fail to be a sanctuary for emotional, physical, and spiritual safety, healing, and growth.

Forgive us, Lord.

Almighty God, in these and other ways, we fall short of your holy standards and calling, as men and women. Yet, because of your great mercy in Christ who died for us, we embrace full and free forgiveness. We find strength through faith in your grace. We are empowered by your Spirit. We commit to walk in repentance and humble unity-- living as your redeemed and reconciled sons and daughters.

Lord, hear our prayer. (Neh 1:6 is from the opening confession to God)

II. Recommendations

We believe that the value and equal worth of women is to be affirmed, celebrated, taught, and practiced in every aspect of the life of the Church. These core truths should be intentionally incorporated into teaching, preaching, pastoral, counseling and outreach ministries, including corporate worship, Sunday school, youth and children's ministries, community groups, evangelism, or mercy ministries.

God calls men and women to serve him together for His glory and His kingdom. FCF leadership should encourage all women in the Church to intentionally develop their gifts in order to fulfill the callings God has uniquely given them. FCF leadership should create opportunities for qualified women to participate, under the oversight of the elders, in leadership, service and corporate worship. FCF should commission and recognize women leaders publicly in a manner consistent with the installation and recognition of male leaders serving similar leadership roles.

Women and men together are members of God's royal priesthood, submitting to one another to bring glory to God. Women should be given more opportunities to pray and speak before the congregation.

Women and men together are called to show Christ's sacrificial love and build one another up.

Qualified women leaders (who satisfy Group 5 requirements of the FCF Service & Leadership Framework) should be invited to attend Session meetings¹ as non-voting participants for counsel, input, and influence. Women leaders should also participate in membership and staff interviews. FCF should strive to hire women to serve as paid senior staff.

God calls men and women together to show the world the good news of His grace in concrete acts of mercy and service. Women should be fully integrated into the diaconal ministry of FCF, and every committee of the Church should wherever possible (outside of men's and women's ministries) include both men and women.

God calls men and women to care for each other with gentleness and grace, following the example of our Lord Jesus. All distortion of God's word to assert illegitimate authority over His sons and daughters is unequivocally condemned and must be biblically corrected. Further, all forms of abuse of women and girls—physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal—must not be tolerated.

God distributes gifts for the ministry of His Church to both men and women, and desires that these gifts be developed to their fullest potential. Women leaders should be involved, at all levels, in planning leadership development within the Church, and women should be fully and systematically included in leadership pathways. Lay people—both men and women—with appropriate certifications who devote themselves to various aspects of ministry should be formally and publicly recognized as commissioned church workers; further, the Church and Church leadership should recognize and celebrate equally the service of men and women in the Church.

God calls His Church to be a redeemed people who honor, affirm, and cherish one another as coheirs of the grace of life, and a community where each one finds refuge in the Rock of our salvation. These recommendations are submitted in the desire to see our community grow in its ability to display more fully the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ among us and to a watching world.

¹ Other than meetings, or portions of meetings, designated as "executive session", *i.e.*, those that the Session designates to be specifically sensitive or confidential.