

**POSITION PAPER OF THE ELDER COUNCIL OF NANSEMOND RIVER BAPTIST  
CHURCH CONCERNING CONGREGATIONAL COMPLEMENTARIANISM**

*Adopted October 14, 2024*

From the beginning, God created men and women as distinct, equal, and complementary genders. While our culture continues to shift in its view of gender, we believe God’s word should be our guide as we seek to honor his design for his creation. Through scripture, the Lord provides clear teaching concerning the distinct nature of men and women, the equality of men and women, and the complementarian nature of the relationship between men and women in the home and church.

Men and women are distinct in the way God created them. From the beginning, he created and designed humanity with two genders: male and female (Gen 1:27). God’s design of gender was called “good” as part of his perfect creation (Gen 1:31 ESV). This intentional design allows men and women to fulfill the commandment to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). The biblical understanding of two distinct genders is not limited to the Old Testament. Jesus affirmed the necessity of a biblical view of gender identity by referencing the creation account while teaching about marriage (Mark 10:6–9). Likewise, Paul affirmed that, among other things, the twisting of the natural order of gender is a sign of sin’s presence in the world (Rom 1:27, 27).

Men and women are equal as image-bearers of God, in their access to the gospel, and their usefulness to the Kingdom of God. Both Adam and Eve, representing all humans, were created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). No teaching of the church should

contradict this truth. Additionally, men and women clearly have equal access to the gospel. It is in this context that Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Also, while their roles within the family and church may vary, the usefulness of both men and women to God’s Kingdom cannot be denied (1 Cor 12:12–31).

Men and women have distinct, complementary roles in the home and local church. As unique parts of God’s creation, men and women contribute to the home and the local church in varied ways. In the home, a Christian husband should provide Christlike, sacrificial leadership to his family, and a Christian wife should joyfully follow his leadership while partnering alongside her husband to reflect Christ in the marriage and family. In this way, their marriage becomes a living picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:21–33). Similarly, some men in the church share the joyful burden of leading and teaching as elders (1 Tim 2:11–3:7). However, this practice does not mean that *all* women must submit to *all* men in the church. The entire body, men and women, are expected to exercise their giftedness while submitting to the leadership of the recognized elders in the congregation (Heb 13:17).

### **Essential Nature of Women Within the Congregation**

Nansemond River Baptist Church will benefit significantly from including women in every aspect of the congregation that is not prohibited by the clear teachings of scripture. The women in our congregation fulfill biblically specific commands in their service, offer valuable insight into various ministries that could not function without them, and bless

our congregation with their gifts, perspective, and presence. Our congregation would limit our missional effectiveness by preventing women from serving in any area of our congregation that is not prohibited in scripture.

Women are specifically tasked in scripture and gifted by the Holy Spirit to fulfill specific roles in the local church. For instance, Paul tasks more mature women in the faith to train less mature women in the faith (Titus 2:3). This women-on-women discipleship includes instructions on what it means to be a godly woman, godly wife, and a godly mother (Titus 2:4). While not limited to these areas of ministry, the women of our church must fulfill this biblical mandate.

Women provide a unique and necessary voice in the leadership of specific ministries of the local church. As a part of the body of Christ, women contend for the gospel side-by-side with the men of our church (Phil 4:3). Because they are equal recipients of the gospel (Gal 3:28), they are equally tasked with serving faithfully within the body. Many women in our church are gifted in hospitality, administration, leadership, teaching, and other necessary gifts for the body to function properly. We should encourage them to use those gifts. Our congregation suffers when we fail to encourage them to use their gifts fully (1 Cor 12:16).

The church should not limit women in their service to the church in any way not clearly defined by scripture, even if that role has traditionally only been filled by men. Any restrictions placed on any member's service within the church must have clear, biblical support. Historically, complementarian churches have suffered by limiting women to certain roles or functions without clear biblical reasoning. No ministry team

formed by the elders of our church, outside of a ministry focused specifically towards discipling and training men, should exclude women from service. Additionally, no restrictions outside of those listed below should be placed on women speaking, praying, teaching, or leading within our congregation.

### **Application of Biblical Restrictions at Nansemond River Baptist Church**

As a church that believes in biblical complementarianism, there are some positions within our congregation that should only be filled by qualified men. While women serve as an essential component in the life of our congregation, we believe the biblical office of elder, Lord's day preaching, and the primary teacher in co-ed small groups should be reserved for men. Our congregation should view these restrictions as biblical and for the good of the church.

Scripture teaches that the office of elder is reserved for men (1 Tim 3:1). We do not believe this restriction is only for a "senior" or "lead" pastor, but for all who fulfill the office of elder within our congregation. While not all men are qualified to serve as elders,<sup>1</sup> only men will be considered for this office. To compromise on this fundamental practice is to open the door to any number of theological compromises.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only our belief that the office of elder is reserved for men only, but also the primary function of the office should only be fulfilled by elder-qualified men when not being performed by an elder of our congregation. As an extension of the primary

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<sup>1</sup> See our position paper on the Qualifications for Elders and Deacons.

<sup>2</sup> Historically, local church and/or denominational compromise with egalitarian ecclesiology has, within a generation or two, lead to the embracing of other aspects of theological liberalism.

ministry of our elder council, preaching in corporate worship services will only be done by men serving as elders of our church or by other elder-qualified men brought in to preach by our elders for special occasions. Even those men not currently serving as an elder who are given the opportunity to preach on a Sunday evening should meet the basic moral requirements for elders found in scripture. While women are encouraged to participate in some leadership aspects of our Lord's Day gathering by leading worship, reading scripture, sharing testimonies, or praying publicly, the preaching of God's word to our assembly will only be done by elder-qualified men.

While other like-minded congregations may not make this restriction, our elders will only ask men to be the primary leader in co-ed small groups. While not all co-ed teaching is restricted to men in our church, the ongoing, pastoral nature and level of importance placed on small groups necessitates we heed the instructions of scripture to "not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12). While small group leaders do not exercise the level of spiritual authority entrusted to our elders, we do view this ministry as an extension of the elder's disciple-making ministry within the body. Therefore, we deem this restriction as necessary.

Through regular and special disciple-making programs of our church, opportunities may arise where members of the congregation may be asked to teach in settings other than our worship gatherings and small groups. When seeking qualified teachers for these occasions, our elders will use biblical wisdom and discernment to determine if asking a woman to teach in that particular situation is appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

Our desire as elders of Nansemond River Baptist Church is to equip the saints of our congregation for the work of ministry in the most biblically faithful manner possible. We are convinced that the Bible teaches a complementary view of men and women within the home and church. Therefore, we will seek to apply these biblical principles as we lead our church to make disciples together.