

STATEMENT ON WOMEN & MEN IN LEADERSHIP & MINISTRY



PROCESS

Through much study, listening, and prayer, we have seen the Holy Spirit clearly leading among us as we have engaged the topic of women and men in ministry and leadership over the last three years. As elders we have been energized by the process, growing together in unity. We have listened in new ways and desire to see the spiritual gifts of the body at work in new ways as men and women serve together in God's created design. We value the long-held Christian ideal: "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In everything, love."

TIMELINE & STEPS TAKEN

- 2016 **Spring:** Bent Tree Bible Fellowship, a local church and partner in our first ALARM Project, announces women can be elders.
- 2017
- **Spring:** 1. Member asks elders to consider topic of women in church leadership for Spring retreat. Other pressing issues limit retreat discussion. 2. Student submits question about women in church leadership.
 - **Fall:** Member raises question again to address at elder Fall retreat. Discussion generates need for process to engage theological issues and get input from the congregation, which becomes "Wisdom Partners."
- 2018
- **Spring:** 1. Member again asks elders to discuss issue at retreat. Wisdom Partners plan develops, using this topic for Fall launch. 2. Youth series with Dr. Bock, Keith, Diana, and youth volunteers addresses issue over several weeks. 3. Youth leaders ask elders for clarification on TFC's position. 4. Elders present Wisdom Partners project and topic to body at Family Meeting.
 - **Summer:** Elders identify Wisdom Partners and invite to commitment. Material collection begins.
 - **Fall:** Elders and staff visit with multiple scholars, church leaders, and experts:
 - Dr. Sandra Glahn and Dr. Darrell Bock (DTS)—topic approach and collecting resources from breadth of positions committed to authority of scripture.
 - Dr. Dorian Coover-Cox (DTS) and Dr. Jim Howard (DTS, Pastor)—process for guiding church.
 - Local churches—position papers and leaders.
 - 400+ pages of articles, book chapters, video links, etc.—used by Wisdom Partners to discuss:
 1. Cultural issues and gender (ancient and contemporary),
 2. God's creation design and unfolding reality of kingdom in time,
 3. Key biblical words,
 4. Key texts.
 - **Fall:** Wisdom Partners interact together with assigned materials over several meetings.
 - **Fall:** Majority of elder retreat devoted to engaging conversation from personal study, Wisdom Partner discussions, and visits with other church leaders and experts.
 - **November:** Wisdom Partners give testimonies in Family Meeting.
 - **December:** Dr. Bock and Dr. Glahn address topic in sermon and Connection Hour.
 - **December through March 2019:** Elders commit to study biblical passages together each Tuesday morning.
- 2019
- **January:** Elders and Wisdom Partners meet to generate ideas and address implementation concerns.
 - **January–May:** Elders visit Connection Groups.
 - **February:** Elders meet with Women's Ministry leaders (same agenda as above).
 - **March:** Elders visit and discuss with former elders.
 - **March–April:** Adult Connection Hour series addresses culture, kingdom, key words, and key texts.
 - **April:** Elder Spring retreat includes 6 women leaders to discuss key position questions.
 - **April:** Elders lead "INSPIRE" equipping event for Connection Group leaders on how to think through positions and personal convictions on topic.
 - **May 19:** Elders present positions at Family Meeting and respond to initial questions by the Holy Spirit's leading through this process for TFC at this point.

POSITIONS



STATEMENT

We believe from the authority of Scripture that God created men and women fundamentally equal in His image to share the call to multiply His glory in the world. To accomplish this work God offers the same Holy Spirit to both men and women at salvation, and through the Spirit gifts all believers irrespective of gender, age, race, or background. Complimentary gender differences and strengths are honored as men and women serve together with gospel humility. Men and women may freely exercise the gifts of preaching, teaching, and serving in the role of pastor as called by the church leadership. While the elders believe the New Testament implies the office of elder is reserved for men, we affirm the counter-cultural and highly esteemed biblical examples of women leaders. We desire to see a growing unity and flourishing of the church in the world as women and men discover increasing opportunities to serve together with their gifts.

Based upon our study of Scripture and in light of our practices, we have specifically addressed three questions with brief explanation below: • ***Can women preach and teach?*** • ***Can women serve as pastors?*** • ***Can women serve as elders?***

Q1: *Can women preach/teach?* Yes

- God gives salvation and gifts without limit by gender or any other distinction.
- There are numerous examples in Scripture of women prophesying and called by God to lead under his gifting and authority over men and women. These include Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8-14), Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14-20, 2 Chron. 34:22-28), and Junia (Rom. 16:7).
- Two primary NT texts are often cited prohibiting women from teaching with authority (1 Tim. 2:11-15) and speaking in public church worship (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Both passages address specific early church contexts and are not universally limiting to women.
 - To the church at Ephesus Paul's exhortation, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (1 Tim. 2:12) uses a term for authority appearing only once in the NT to describe a disrupting and dominating kind of power. This was in a surrounding context of the temple of Artemis where women priestesses were lording their power over others in contrast to the gospel message.
 - To the church at Corinth Paul exhorts women to prophesy in public worship (1 Cor. 11:4-5). In the same letter he encourages order in the worship service by prohibiting disruptive communication in order to listen to the prophets, including men and women (1 Cor. 14:28-35). Three times in the passage Paul encourages silence in order to learn.

Q2: *Can women serve as pastors?* Yes

- The Bible speaks of "Pastor" as a gift, with a specific role to serve the unity of the body in her corporate worship (1 Cor. 14:40; Mt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:17-26; Mt. 18:15-18). Gifts are not limited by gender.
- All in Christ are a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).
- The NT presents several examples of women serving in a variety of ways in church leadership with pastoral functions alongside the apostles as disciples (Mary), partners in gospel ministry (Euodia and Syntyche, Phil. 4:2-3), deacons (Phoebe, Rom. 16:1), teachers (Priscilla and Aquila, Rom. 16:3), and apostle (Junia, Rom. 16:7).

Q3: *Can women serve as elders?* No

- Without a clear "yes" on this issue, the elders have determined that at this time the office of elder should remain limited to men.
- Qualifications for elders seem to be directed to men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). However, we maintain that elders best live out God's creation design when they benefit from godly, gifted women leaders who help share the load alongside them (*Ezer*, or "helper"—Gen 2:18). Elders are called to exemplify a distinctly Christian sacrificial leadership, leading to mutual submission among the entire body (1 Pet. 5:1-5; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:1-5).
- We may not fully understand God's ordering and design (e.g. OT women judges/prophetesses, but not priests), but God-designed differences between male and female are to be honored by the church as they are honored among the angels watching in heaven (1 Cor. 11:10).