

The Roles of Men and Women in Ministry: Complementarian and Egalitarian Guidelines

(A companion to the Official Statement on The Roles of Men and Women in Ministry)

A Guideline of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

Complementarian Guideline

1. Both men and women are created equal before God as persons, and as such are encouraged, equipped, and empowered to use their gifts to serve the body of believers in the church, as is consistent with Scripture.
2. Complementarians hold to the distinctions of the male and female roles as found in Scripture to be ordained by God, and as such are not subject to change. In a marriage and in the church, headship is assigned by God to men - the husband in a marriage and biblically-qualified men in the church. Headship consists of the God-ordained responsibility for the flourishing of those under one's leadership and a corresponding authority to carry out that task. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the fall and is not a result of sin. Since the fall into sin brought distortions in these roles, the Gospel provides not a nullification of those roles but a restoration to their original purpose and glory (Genesis 2:16-18, 21-24; Genesis 3:1-13; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9).
3. Christ, our Saviour, demonstrates both headship (in relation to the Church) and submission (in relation to God the Father). Christ's example shows the glory, beauty, and worth of both roles (Ephesians 5:22-29; Philippians 2:5-11).
4. While both husbands and wives are responsible for leading and teaching within the home, God has assigned headship specifically to the man, not as a weapon used to lord over, but to mirror the sacrificial love seen in Jesus Christ and His love for His Church (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9).
5. Elders have been assigned authority through the headship of Jesus to lead with, preach, and teach the Word of God to the body of believers. The role of elder (or its equivalent) is therefore restricted to biblically-qualified men (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-2; Titus 1:6-9).
6. Biblical headship in the church requires that the elders bear primary responsibility to ensure that the church is led by, fed with, protected with, shaped by, and obedient to the Word of God, and, in so doing, ensure that the church is ultimately led by Christ, her Head, who loved her enough to take her punishment. It is the responsibility of the elders of a church to ensure that women and men are pursued as co-labourers in the Gospel, equipped with the Word, and given opportunities to serve wherever they are gifted and Scripture would not forbid. In so doing, they ensure that all the gifts that the Spirit would graciously give us are being used to build up the Church for Christ's glory.
7. We believe that headship and submission within marriage and Church were ordained by the Lord to be living parables of the Gospel. Therefore, the church's embrace of this design bears witness to the Gospel. We believe that obedience to Christ's complementarian design for marriage and the church is a way of testifying to Christ and the Gospel and therefore is a conscience-binding religious/faith conviction.

Complementarian Practice

1. In the local church, only biblically qualified males are to fill the office of elder, which includes the lead pastor (or equivalent). Beyond that, many variables produce a spectrum of how complementarian theology is taught and practiced.

2. Local church leadership (elders and pastors) is responsible to prayerfully affirm the ministry functions of men and women in the local church.
3. Church leaders may teach a complementarian interpretation of Scripture with conviction and humility while respecting those who, with equal conviction and humility, come to other conclusions.

Egalitarian Guideline

1. In creation, women and men together reflect the image of God by illustrating the unity and diversity of the Godhead. Together, women and men, in equal partnership, are charged to be fruitful, to fill the earth, and to steward creation (Genesis 1:26, 28). Man and woman's relationship of mutuality, partnership, and equality was marred through sin, resulting in a distortion of the created order and the subjugation of the woman under the man (Genesis 3:14-19).
2. The former inequality between men and women has been eradicated in Christ, and the original unity and equality — rooted in creation — can now be restored (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Scripture reveals God's grace, breaking down inequality and moving toward what God first intended. This restoration has profound social and relational implications with respect to gender and leadership. The primary expression of Christian leadership is servanthood, including the empowerment of others to serve (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
3. At Pentecost, God established and empowered His Church by pouring out the Holy Spirit on women and men. In the Church, the Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes gifts to all members, without gender preference or limitation (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:14-18; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). Gifts of leadership, teaching, pastoring, and prophecy are to be used by the women and men to whom they are given.
4. Every disciple of Jesus, young and old, male and female, married and single, has been given spiritual gifts to glorify Christ, to build up His Body, and to bear witness to the world (1 Peter 4:10-11). The church is to create an environment in which all of God's people — women and men — are encouraged to exercise all of the Spirit's gifts in all the biblical offices in order to fulfill these tasks. Women and men who lead within the church extend God's blessing to the world and glorify God through their obedient service.

While Scripture does limit the speech, teaching, and improper authority of some women in some specific contexts, this cannot be applied to all women in all situations (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:11, 12). The Bible portrays women employing spiritual gifts in a variety of leadership roles, including judge (Judges 4:4, 5), apostle (Romans 16:7), prophet (Exodus 15:19-21; 2 Kings 22:14; Acts 21:7-9; 1 Corinthians 14:26-31), teacher/preacher (Acts 18:24-26), evangelist (Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 4:2,3), deacon (Romans 16:1,2), and house church leader (Romans 16:1,2; Romans 16:7; 1 Corinthians 14:31; Acts 18:26). These examples of female ministry, leadership, and authority model valid and necessary roles for women within the Church today and guide churches to provide opportunities for ministry on the basis of spiritual giftedness and godly character.

Because men and women image God together — in life and in leadership — they are invited to submit to God and to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 4:15; 5:21). Christ's relationship to the Church as Head illustrates how relationships can work within a church and a marriage. Christ's headship is explicitly expressed through humble, self-sacrificing love (Ephesians 5:25-28). The Church distinguishes herself from those who rule by power and control as men and women follow His example together (Mark 10:42-44).

5. The Gospel breaks down barriers of restriction and privilege, replacing old hierarchies with new freedom (Galatians 3:28). This freedom has personal, theological, and social implications. Jesus and Paul demonstrate a respect for and inclusion of women (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 24:9-11; Luke 10:38-42; Luke 8:1-3; Acts 18:18, 18:26; Romans 16:1,3,7; 1 Corinthians 11:5), modelling the freedom the Gospel extends and encouraging the church to extend this same freedom.

Egalitarian Practice

1. In the local church, only biblically qualified individuals are to fill the office of elder, which includes the lead pastor (or equivalent). Beyond that, many variables produce a spectrum of how egalitarian theology is taught and practiced.
2. Local church leadership (elders and pastors) is responsible to prayerfully affirm the ministry functions of men and women in the local church.
3. Church leaders may teach an egalitarian interpretation of Scripture with conviction and humility while respecting those who, with equal conviction and humility, come to other conclusions.

Amendments

This statement may be amended by a majority vote of General Assembly, with written notice having been given prior to General Assembly.

Adopted – General Assembly 2016