

Position Paper

Role of Women in the Church:

Implications of Suffrage

Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America
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Affirmation 1: The teaching establishing the role of women in the church must be developed under the authority of Scripture. The Bible is our “final and authoritative guide for faith and conduct” (Constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, Article II, paragraph 1).

The Bible is our “final and authoritative guide for faith and conduct” because it is the inspired Word of God. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17). And as Peter states concerning Scripture: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, we must approach the Bible as servants under its authority, completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to work through it in such a way that our understanding of a particular Scripture portion will be in agreement with all the teachings of Scripture.

This authority will be questioned as we seek to understand how to live in the household of God in our own time and place. When discussing the current issue, the role of women in the church, there may be a clash between the society and the church. This affirmation asserts that the Bible is the normative authority for the church and not the culture. The Bible speaks prophetically to the aspects of all cultures that may be contrary to God’s Word and calls the church “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1,2).

The separate roles of men and women in a given society are established over many generations, but are substantially learned by children before the age of five. The cultural understanding of roles is diffused throughout every part of the culture. The teaching of the church at any one point in history or at any one point on the earth, may be much more influenced by the surrounding culture than the local Christians realize. At some points in history there may

be substantial agreement between the church and the society, at other times there may be serious differences.

In either case, we affirm that the Scriptures are the final guide for faith and life for believers both in the church and in society.

Affirmation 2: There are general principles or rules that must govern our study of the Bible. These hermeneutical rules need to be clarified and applied when the church faces new or changing cultures.

Clarifying the rules of Bible interpretation is a demanding task. While we must always rely on the Holy Spirit as we seek to understand the Word, God also expects us to be diligent students. Paul writes, “Study to show yourself approved unto a God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Some of the major rules of Bible interpretation are listed below:

1. The Bible must be interpreted in its original languages and in its historical and cultural contexts. These contexts include the original language and how it is otherwise used, the immediate passage, the surrounding passages, the entire book in which the passage is found, the other writing of the author, the entire Bible, the culture of the time and the previous history.
2. The Bible must be interpreted in light of its unity since it is all inspired by God. The unity of the Bible enables the reader to let Scripture interpret Scripture and requires the exegete to interpret the parts in terms of the whole, thereby reaching conclusions on which all Scripture agree.
3. The Bible must be interpreted as a progressive revelation. By **progressive** revelation we mean that the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God and not man, in which God brings man to an increasingly clearer understanding of God’s character and His purposes. Progressive revelation is the general pattern of revelation.

Bernard Ramm asserts, “This perspective of progressive revelation is very important to the interpreter. He will expect the full revelation of God in the New Testament. He will not force New Testament meanings into the Old, yet he will be able to more fully expound the Old knowing its counterparts in the New.”

“Progressive revelation in no manner qualifies the doctrine of inspiration, and it in no way implies that the Old Testament is less inspired. It states simply that the fullness of revelation is in the New Testament” (Ramm, 1950, p. 82, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*).

4. Bible passages which speak to an issue in a direct teaching fashion (didactic) should be used to help understand incidental, descriptive and historical references elsewhere. The direct teaching of Paul in the letter to the Romans, showing how men can be made right with God, develops a formal, complete picture of this issue. It helps us to see that the description of Cornelius as a righteous and God-fearing man does not give the full basis of how man can be judged righteous before God (Acts 10:22).

5. The Bible interpreter must distinguish the applications of principles within a given culture, such as the culture of the New Testament, from the principles themselves. The principles, not the specific applications, must be our guide to faith and life.

This rule is particularly important to the subject of the role of women in the church because various culturally determined issues are discussed in the contexts of the passages which deal most directly with the role of women in society and in the church. We must treat similar subjects with the same rules of interpretation.

When Paul expresses his desire that men everywhere should pray, he applies this to a culturally common manner of praying, namely, “lifting up holy hands in prayer” (1 Timothy 2:8). If we lay the stress on the *cultural manner* of prayer we will conclude that we are not really praying unless we lift up our hands! If we recognize that the *principle is* the point of concern, and that culturally acceptable ways of obeying that principle change, we may pray without ever raising our hands.

When Paul exhorts the women, “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God,” the principle is modesty. If we lay stress on the modesty, decency and propriety principles, we will be constantly adjusting them to the changing dress practices of the various societies in which the church serves. If we understand that it is better to be clothed in good deeds than to make a stunning impression with beautiful clothing, we will emphasize character over outward appearance. These are the points of principle Paul is making.

However, if we lay the emphasis on the application, stressing, for example, the word “gold,” we will make rules forbidding the wearing of gold in church. We might then stick to this teaching even though the principle might be circumvented with women wearing other expensive jewelry in excess, carefully avoiding any gold. This mistake has often been made in the history of the church.

Here we must be most cautious and careful to rightly divide the word of truth lest we too easily lay aside a truth as culturally limited, or too easily take a culturally limited truth and make it an absolute statement about the nature of God or mankind. Mary Evans in *Women in the Bible* rightly cautions that, “it is arbitrary to dismiss any Biblical teaching as culturally conditioned without a strong indication within the context that cultural influences have been a primary consideration, and this indication is very rarely present” (Evans, 1983, p. 10). Evans is correct in offering a word of caution. However, indications of the culturally limited aspects of an application are usually not seen until they are seen from another culture. This is the nature of cultural presuppositions. They are rarely seen by people within the culture, they are simply taken for granted. Only careful study will show the relationship between the principle anchored in the character of God and in His design for His world and the particular application to a given culture.

6. The Bible affirms one system of truth about God, man, and salvation because it reveals that God is one. Just as we assume a unity in the Bible itself for purposes of exegesis (rule 2), so also we expect to build a consistent system of truth by which to guide our lives. When there are no exact current day counterparts to Scriptural texts, or when there are present day situations which do not have Biblical counterparts, appropriate teaching will be found by relating to the truth revealed in the Scriptures about the character of God, the nature of mankind, the revelation of God’s purposes, the experience of the church and the leading of the Holy Spirit. These are the basic ingredients of systematic theology in which we seek to think God’s thoughts after Him, starting from the revelation which is given.

Of course, we must not quickly assume that there is no direct counterpart. Gordon Fee suggests this helpful principle: “First, we must do our exegesis with particular care so that we hear what God’s Word to them really was. In most cases a clear principle has been articulated, which usually will transcend the historical particularity to which it was being applied. . . The principle however must be applied to genuinely comparable situations” (Fee, 1981, p. 63).

When the situations are significantly different, we must step back and gain a perspective on the character of God as it relates to the case in point. What do

we know about mankind and his societies in light of God's person which will give us guidance on this issue? What about God's purposes for this people which we are seeking to lead? How has the church faced similar problems in the past? What solutions has the Holy Spirit honored by His presence and power over a longer period of time?

This is the process used in Acts 15 by the first church council. It is the process used when the confessions were written.

Affirmation 3: God created both male and female in His image. He created them equal though different. He gave them dominion over the created world, and commanded them to be fruitful and to increase in number.

First of importance is that both male and female were created in the image and likeness of God. One could not be more or less than the other in the image of God and still be in His image. If so, one would have been partially in the image of God and the other in the very image of God. It would then necessitate that God would have had to create them not as one in two persons, but as two persons never being one. "...God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him (singular); male and female he created them (plural)" (Genesis 1:27). (*Rule 6.*)

It cannot be read into Genesis 1 and 2, as some have suggested, that Adam was created in God's image and Eve was created in Adam's image. Eve did not receive her likeness or her spiritual qualities from Adam. She received them directly from God, just as Adam did.

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over...'" (Genesis 1:28).

From Genesis 1:26-28 we see that both shared equally in the image and likeness of God. Both shared equally in the task of reproduction. Both shared equally in the commitment to rule over all the earth and over all created things. Both shared equally in the blessing and benediction of God. Both shared equally in the partnership as beneficiaries of God and both were equally responsible in the stewardship of these blessings. Both shared equally in the delight of God as He looked upon them. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Both were to rule or lead jointly as one person rather than two. Thus we see the equality of the sexes from Genesis 1.

It is when we turn to Genesis 2 that the relationship of male to female emerges. God's plan for their relationships to Himself and each other is as much a reality as His design in creating them in His image. They were still in the state of

perfection and under the guidance of God in doing His will perfectly when the man begins to manifest leadership and the woman is called to be a helper suitable for him.

John Stott in his chapter on ‘Women, Men and God’ says, “It is without doubt by a deliberate providence of God that we have been given two distinct creation stories, Genesis 2 supplementing and enriching Genesis 1. (Stott, 1985, p. 139)

Genesis 2:18-22 reads, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ “Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then *the Lord God made* a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.” (italics added)

Stott, commenting on this passage says, “What is revealed in this second story of creation is that, although God made male and female equal, he also made them different. In Genesis 1, masculinity and femininity are related to God’s image, while in Genesis 2, they are related to each other, Eve being taken out of Adam and brought to him. Genesis 1 declares equality of the sexes; Genesis 2 clarifies that equality means not ‘identity but complementaries’ (including....a certain masculine headship). It is this ‘equal but different’ which we find hard to preserve. Yet, the two parts of it are not incompatible; they belong to each other.” (Stott, 1985, p. 139) (*Rule 6.*)

It is important to notice that Genesis 1 and 2 become the basis of the Apostle Paul’s teaching on masculine headship and female submission. He writes that “...The husband is the head of the wife” (Ephesians 5:23), and “... That the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Further, he says in 1 Corinthians 11:8,9, “For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (*Rule 4.*)

We should not conclude from chapter 2 that man is in any way to act independent of woman. They are here a perfect oneness and each complements the other,

for both share equally in the image and likeness of God. It is difficult for us to visualize perfect harmony of sexes in their distinctive roles as man and woman. In chapter 2 we do not see Adam dominating Eve but we do see some kind of leadership or headship given and assumed by Adam, and a certain kind of helper suitable for him in Eve.

Of Adam, God says in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

To Adam God brings the beasts and birds he has created and Adam names them. When Eve is brought to Adam it is Adam that names her and says, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23).

The report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (LCMS) of September, 1985, states, ‘when the New Testament talks about the origin of the subordination of woman to man, it does so on the basis of Genesis 2 and not on the basis of Genesis 3. The foundation of this teaching is not the curse of the Fall, but the original purpose of God in creation.’ (CTCR, 1985, p. 24)

John Stott feels that “subordination” is too strong a word in this relationship because it is often seen in the light of man’s dominance or rule that has been tarnished by sin. He says, “Nor does subordination seem to me the right word to describe her submission. It has in modern parlance unfortunate overtones of inferiority, even on military rank and discipline.” However, he does point out that “Headship definitely implies some kind of authority, to which submission is necessary. But we must be careful not to overpress this.” (Stott, 1985, p. 144)

In Genesis 2 we do see leadership emerging in the activities of Adam and that of a helper suitable for him in Eve. This in no way relates in their equality in creation but it does clarify their differences in the role that each is to manifest to the other and to God’s creation. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for Paul’s teaching in the relationship of man and woman in the church as well as husband and wife in the home.

However, we should not read into Genesis 2 a prescribed rigidity of interpretation that does not allow for a great place of service in the church and in the home for the woman.

Genesis 3 is the story of the Fall and its consequences. There are some who believe that the judgment of God on the man and woman in the Fall is the reason for the rulership of the man and the submission of the woman, for does

not God say, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16)?

So what is the meaning of this statement in Genesis 3? The sinful nature that they now acquired would plague their relationship. Sin would change the way they relate to each other within their Goddesigned roles. Her former desire to joyfully submit to her husband would distort to a desire to control. His loving leadership would distort to an assertion of domineering authority. (Foh, 1976, P. 69) (*Rule 3*.)

While Genesis 1 teaches that woman is equal in creation, Genesis 3 teaches that woman is also equal in redemption. Here God reveals the great place that woman was to have in God’s redemptive work for the human race. In Genesis 3:15 God says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” This was fulfilled when the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). Of this the Apostle Paul later wrote, “...When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4). (*Rules 2,3,4,6*.)

That woman shares equally in God’s restorative grace is shown in Genesis 3:21, “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” The unchanging plan and purpose of God for both is revealed in this gracious act and provision of God.

The Scriptures reveal that both are equal in creation, both suffer distortion through the Fall, and both are equal in redemption. God’s design for the relationship of man and woman to himself and to each other is shown in Genesis 1 and 2. The atonement through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in both men and women seeks to accomplish the restoration of this design revealed in creation so that each again may complement the other in their relationship and service to God and to each other.

Affirmation 4: In the Old Testament, the leadership offices of elder (this is not to be equated with the New Testament office of elder), chiefs of tribes and priests, were held exclusively by males. However, other high positions were occasionally filled by women demonstrating that there was a flexibility which allowed women to use their God-given gifts and callings to serve or to lead without overthrowing the Divine order.

“It is fair to say,” write the editors of *The Bible Almanac*, “that people in biblical Israel felt that men were more important than women. The father or oldest male in the family made the decisions that affected the whole family, while the women had very little to say about them. This patriarchal (father-centered) form of family life set the tone for the way women were treated in Israel.” (Packer, Tenney, White, 1980, p. 420) As we have seen in Genesis 1 and 2, God created men and women equal, although male dominance in the Old Testament era too often placed the wife in an apparent inferior position in that society. (*Rule 1.*)

Yet, as a wife and mother in Israel, she was supported and protected by her husband. A good wife was extolled in Hebrew literature, notably in Proverbs, chapter 31. She exerted a vast influence upon her family as mother and teacher, and often upon her husband. It was at times said that no man could truly find great success in Israel unless a wise and able wife moved him in that direction.

Women’s rights were limited. Inheritance of property normally followed the male line only. Where there were no sons in the family, the daughters could obtain the inheritance, but were to marry within the clan (Numbers 27:1-8; Joshua 17:3-6). Husbands could cancel any vow made by the wife, although the disavowal must take place within a day’s time (Numbers 30:1-8,10-16). However, “Any vow of obligation taken by a widow or divorced woman will be binding on her” (Numbers 30:9). Susan T. Foh perceptively observes: “So, it seems the principle of submission does not apply for all women under all men but only within the family structure. It is not women per se who cannot make their own vows. It is only if their position is under the God-established authority of husband or father.” (Foh, 1979, p. 73)

Although only males were required to appear before the Lord at the great festivals, women apparently went along on some of these occasions, were welcome, and found a part in the worship (Nehemiah 8:2; Joel 2:16; also Luke 2:41-42). Women joined in song under the leadership of Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21). Women could also approach the sanctuary and seek God in prayer as did Hannah (1 Samuel) or find a place in the Temple as did Anna in Luke 2:36-38. Women were full members of the worshipping community.

The priestly office in Israel was restricted to the male descendants of Aaron. No woman could fill this office. (Packer, Tenney, White, 1980, p. 420)

Nevertheless, on occasion, God called and equipped women for places of leadership, both religious and political. Miriam was both a prophetess and a song leader. She led the women in praise to God in song and instrumental music after the deliverance from Pharaoh (Exodus 15:20-21). In Micah 6:3-4 she is referred to as a leader with her brothers Moses and Aaron.

Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge. The wording of the text suggests that she was a prophetess prior to her call to serve as a judge. Judge Deborah, speaking both as a prophetess and judge, commanded Barak to lead the armies against Sisera. Timorous Barak, assured that Deborah would accompany him, marched to victory over the enemy. However, because of Barak's refusal to go out to battle without Deborah (Judges 4:8-9), the death of Sisera was at the hands of a woman, not of a general. The Song of Deborah and Barak, apparently composed by Judge Deborah (Judges 5:7), is included in Holy Scripture (Judges, chapter 5), one of many songs and messages from women in the inspired Word.

It must be observed that the judges, Deborah included, were called by God for a mission of salvation, and were endowed by the Spirit of Jehovah. Their leadership was authoritative in both political and religious realms (See Judges 2:16-18; 3:9-10; 4:6,14; 6:34).

Five women in the Old Testament were given the title of prophetess. Most prominent of Israel's prophetesses (both with gifts and in office) was Huldah who lived during the reign of King Josiah. When the High Priest Hilkiah discovered a long lost copy of the Law of the Lord in the Temple, he sent word to King Josiah. A scribe followed and read the Law to the king. Josiah "tore his clothes" and sent word to the High Priest to in-quire without delay as to the will of the Lord. But the answer did not come from Israel's kingly or priestly leadership. God's mouthpiece was a woman, Huldah the prophetess. She authoritatively prophesied to the King and the people, using the formula "Thus saith the Lord" (King James version). The king, the priests and the people repented, and Israel was spared an impending judgment (See 2 Kings 22).

Finally, one must not bypass the prophetic words of Joel 2:28-29: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both *men and women*, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."(italics added) These prophetic words from the Old Covenant were a reminder that as Israel moved closer to the New Covenant, a greater light would

be dawning through the transforming power of redemption. This word points forward to the time of the New Covenant when God would distribute His gifts to both men and women to be used in His kingdom. (*Rule 3.*)

Though male dominance was normal in the Old Testament, there was not an exclusive male leadership, as was noted in the cases of several women called and equipped by God for leadership in Israel. True, no women served as priests or as elders in Israel, but the order of headship or male dominance in the Old Testament did not exclude the possibility of God calling women to leadership positions, except for those offices held exclusively by men. God's callings were of such a nature or flexibility that He provided women the opportunities in that Old Testament structure to use their God-given gifts and callings to serve or to lead as He directed without overthrowing of the divine order. Thus the equality that we have demonstrated existed from creation was not destroyed by the structure God gave the Old Testament society.

Affirmation 5: Jesus recognized women as co-laborers by interacting with them and allowing them to participate in His ministry and in the early church. Women figured more prominently in the Gospel record than in the entire Old Testament economy.

Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41) and spoke aloud concerning Mary and her yet unborn child Jesus; Mary’s Magnificat follows. Both of these testimonies were given before the Savior’s birth. Anna, a “prophetess” spoke “of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:36-38).

Jesus ministered to a number of women in various ways, and always with full respect for their dignity, their intelligence and their faith. He dealt with the woman of Samaria at a public well, engaging in a lengthy conversation. From this meeting with Jesus she left Him and became an effective witness to her own people (John 4:1-39). Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene. She became a faithful follower of her Lord and was present at His crucifixion (John 19:25). After His resurrection Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and commissioned her as the first post-resurrection witness with the words: “Go... to my brothers, and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:14-18).

John Calvin suggests that as the apostles had fled, Christ made women “on that occasion teachers of the apostles, especially Mary Magdalene, formerly captive of seven devils, who Christ raised up from the lowest depths to a place above the heavens...Christ teaches here that God ordains those who seem good to him as his witnesses; and one should not refuse their testimony, even if they

seem unlikely choices by the world's standards.” (Douglass, 1985, pp. 58-59) He commends a Canaanite woman for her faith in Him as the Messiah, and she becomes an early Gentile convert.

Women also ministered to the Lord. He accepted the hospitality of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and dined in their home. It was from the lips of this same Martha that Jesus accepted the great confession: “Yes, Lord...I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” (John 11:27). The Bible records only Peter and Martha making this great confession of faith. Luke records that several women gave financial support to Jesus and His apostles. Several also followed Him to the cross, faithful at his death as they had been during His ministry.

Both men and women were in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Acts 1:14), and women spoke in tongues at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18). Both men and women believed in Christ, both were baptized, and both suffered persecution for their faith (Acts 5:14; 8:12; 9:2). As the first post resurrection witness was a woman, so the first recorded convert in Europe was a woman, Lydia (Acts 16:13ff).

Jesus ministered to the needs of women as well as he did to men, to Jew and Gentile, to the slave and the free. Many women were His faithful disciples, traveling companions, and witnesses of His grace and of His resurrection. Women as well as men were full Israelites, full heirs of salvation, and of equal standing in the sight of God.

All of these indications from the Gospels and the Apostolic Church demonstrate that women had a prominent place and that Jesus valued women as coworkers, interacting with them and allowing them to participate in His ministry and in the early church.

Affirmation 6: The Bible teaches that there is an office of public ministry in the church, the office of overseer (pastor and elder). It is to be filled only by Scripturally qualified men (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Timothy 5:12; 2 Timothy 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 5:12).

The Pastoral Epistles are canonical letters addressed to a particular church leader. Timothy was left in Ephesus to supervise the churches there (1 Timothy 1:3). Titus was given a similar task with respect to the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5). Instructions are given to these men concerning the appointment of church leaders. The titles bishop, deacon, and elder emerge as referring to some church office. The word bishop (episcopos) was

borrowed by the Christians from the secular realm. It had the connotations of management, supervision, and protection long before it was used as a title of a leader in a Christian community. Although the noun *episcopos* occurs only six times in the New Testament, the Pastoral Epistles are the most specific in the use of the term. Paul describes the qualities required of a person appointed to this office. (*Rule 1.*)

The word elder (*presbyteros*) is also used interchangeably with the word bishop. When Paul made one last visit to the west coast of Asia, he called together the presbyters of the Ephesian Church (Acts 20:17). He reminded them that the Holy Spirit had placed them over the congregations as bishops (Acts 20:28). In the Pastoral Epistles, Titus is first instructed that his duty is to appoint presbyters and is then given guidelines concerning the qualities one should take into consideration when appointing a bishop (Titus 1:59).

The Apostle Paul assumes that these overseers are to be men. The Scripture texts say that the *episcopos* is to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5). The meaning of this expression could be explored. For our purposes it need only be stated that (if married) the man must have one wife.

Now we see in these texts that it is clearly established in a historical sense that the Apostle Paul chose men, not women, to fill the office of elder in the apostolic church. The question remains, why did Paul choose men? And does this mean that we also are to choose only men? To answer these questions, we must move on to our next affirmation.

Affirmation 7: The Bible teaches that the Order of Creation which provided the authority structure of the family also provides the pattern for the church (Genesis 1, 2; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Timothy 2).

God created man in His image and gave them dominion over the creation. Man and woman enjoy an equality of value and at the same time a difference of function. We observe from Genesis that God created Adam first; that He created Eve out of Adam; that Adam had responsibility for Eve when he named her in Genesis 2:23; and that God’s instructions concerning marriage, all of which seem to indicate a creation design, reflected in a particular order of relationships known as the order of creation.

Ephesians 5:21-6:4 gives further teaching on the role of the husband in marriage and the home. As the head of his wife he is to love her in a sacrificial manner as Christ loved the church. This indicates that headship is characterized as a responsible nourishing and caring for his wife and family. The creation

design does not present an order defined by authoritarianism or domination. (Rule 4.)

What is the significance of this family structure for the church? In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 the Apostle Paul speaks to the problem of propriety in public worship by appealing to the order of creation. Apparently women were worshipping in such a way that they were considered to be dishonoring their heads (husbands) (1 Corinthians 11:4). Therefore he says, “For man did not come from woman but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9). Because of this order and design in the creation, the Christian women have a continuing obligation to live in such a manner that they show honor/respect for their heads (husbands). In this passage Paul bases the need for this honor and respect on the creation order. (Rule 4.)

The second major passage in the New Testament that relates the order of creation to the life of women in the church is 1 Timothy 2:4-15. Paul’s perspective on order in the church centers on the teaching authority position (office of pastor/elder). In a discussion exhorting believers to pray for all in authority that they may live a quiet and godly life, he addresses also the question of order in the church.

With the goal of preserving the order of creation and the position of teaching authority, Paul instructs the women. He uses the framework of three desirable actions or attributes which will insure reaching that goal: She is to learn from this authority in all submission, she is not to teach in authority over such an office-holder, and she is to learn in quietness. (Rule 4.)

In the book, *Women in the Church*, a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the commission states, “...the terms ‘teach’ and ‘exercise authority’ parallel each other. They are intentionally linked. The kind of teaching referred to in the passage is tied to exercising authority. The authority forbidden to women here is that of the pastoral office, that is, one ‘who labors in preaching and teaching.’ (1 Timothy 5:17; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12)

“A proper understanding of Paul here is of enormous significance for the discussion of the service of women in the church. One cannot divorce the phrase ‘nor have authority over man’ from the pastoral office and then apply it in rather arbitrary ways. For example, if we are to be faithful to the apostles instruction in this passage, we cannot simply take the dictionary meaning of ‘authority’ as the ‘power to act or make decisions’ and then proceed, solely on

that basis, to eliminate women from all congregational meetings or committees which have the power to act or make decisions.

“The theological matrix for the apostle’s inspired teaching on the silence of women in the church and the exercise of authority is, again, the order of creation. In 1 Timothy 2:13 Paul points to the order of creation as the basis for the instructions given in verses 11 and 12. God made Adam before Eve; that is, He created man and women in a definite order. Turning from the creation to the fall, Paul adds that Adam was not deceived but that the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. The conclusion drawn is that the leadership of the official public teaching office belongs to men. Assumption of that office by a woman is out of place because it is a woman who assumes it, not because women do it in the wrong way or have inferior gifts and abilities.”

Instead, Paul addresses women with the positive command that they in quietness learn in all submission. Quietness is the teachable spirit of a self-restrained disciple that listens carefully to the teaching and does not meddle in the affairs of the teacher. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:11,12 places quietness in opposition to being a busybody, i.e. one who meddles in the affairs of others. The silence commanded is not an absolute silence for 1 Corinthians 11:5 speaks of women praying and prophesying.

The order of creation is used by Paul as the Biblical basis for the proper relationships in the church as it is in the family.

Affirmation 8: The Bible distinguishes between office and gift. All members of the body of Christ, men and women alike, may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit wills, but not all members may be appointed to all offices. (1 Corinthians 12:11 and Romans 12, and Ephesians 4). (Rule 3, Rule 4.)

In John 16:7-15 Jesus, speaking to the eleven apostles, foretold the coming of and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, He added further light on the Spirit’s place in the church age: “...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Peter sees the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29.

Any attempt to clarify the respective roles of male/female in the church which omits a careful study of the Holy Spirit’s calling and enabling in the life of every believer is at best a partial study. As we study the Spirit’s ministry, it quickly becomes clear that we must carefully distinguish between the enabling gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the offices within the Church, the body of Christ

on earth. We see that the *restrictions and/or freedoms* in respect to a person's exercising a gift do not necessarily imply similar restrictions and/or freedoms in respect to that person's holding an office that the gift in question would seem to qualify for and vice versa. (*Rule 2.*)

In Romans 12:3-8, Paul uses the figure of the body with Christ as the head. Paul deals with functions within the body in relationship to the head, and the resulting full harmony of all believers under the headship of Jesus Christ. We see both unity and diversity.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-12, the figure is of the body, but the emphasis is on the work of the Holy Spirit. The unity derives from the Holy Spirit (v4, 8, 9, 11) and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The diversity of gifts within the body is seen under the headship of the Trinity, but with special emphasis on the sovereign Holy Spirit who "gives them to each one, just as he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:11b). (*Rule 4.*)

Several observations must be made. 1) It is the Holy Spirit (not the church) who gives gifts "just as he determines." 2) There is no suggestion that He assigns certain gifts to males exclusively, indeed, there is no reference to sex whatsoever. 3) While it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to give gifts, it is the responsibility of the institutional church to call or elect for office or service. It may or may not choose to use any gifted person as it sees fit. 4) The use of the gifts is under the authority of the body, the church. (1 Corinthians 14:26-40). 5) Aside from the gender restrictions on the office of pastor/teacher that we have shown previously, there is no absolute prohibition on women teaching. For example, Luke records that Priscilla and Aquila both explained to Apollos the way of God, a specific incidence of a woman teaching a man which is in harmony with the Joel/Acts passages which make no distinction in the distribution of gifts to male or female. This is not a violation of, or exception to the order of creation.

But while it is clear that the gift of prophecy was at times given to women in Scripture, there exists at least two attempts at exegetically either eliminating or minimizing the implications of these scriptural instances for us today. The one is to affirm as do some dispensationalists that the gift of prophecy ceased at the close of the Apostolic Age. This position we cannot accept. Liefeld notes "God did not bestow the gift of prophecy on men and women as a major feature of the new church age only to withdraw it almost immediately. The gift of prophecy was, as we see in 1 Corinthians 14:5, 26-31, for the encouragement, edification, and instruction of the church." (Liefeld, 1985, p. 12) Others would limit prophecy almost entirely to the Old Testament predictive prophecies (see also 1 Peter 1:21, 22) which became a part of the canon, and fail to recognize

that in the New Testament Church prophecy was not only predictive (see Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11), but in a much fuller sense was also a proclamation of the gospel and with it some measure of instruction. As such, the gift of prophecy, we maintain, is with us in the New Testament Church today.

Thus we need not be afraid of granting women the right to teach. In fact, to prohibit such is to place restrictions on the work of the Holy Spirit that are unscriptural. On the other hand, the offices in the institutional church are a calling by God through the congregation and are subject to the principles of order that Scripture prescribes. The congregation as a body of believers is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture. It is incumbent upon the congregation to seek out for office the men and women who best fill these offices, taking into account their gifts, but also being careful not to violate the principles of order we discussed in the previous affirmation. For example, the office of pastor/teacher is open only to men. It is, however, presumptuous for any gifted person, male or female, to, on his or her own initiative, lay claim to any office his or her gifts may seem to equip him or her for.

Affirmation 9: The Bible teaches that all members of the Body of Christ should be encouraged to discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts under the supervision and leadership of the overseers of the congregation.

The New Testament Epistle of First Peter was written to the Christians who lived in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, places in the northern part of Asia Minor. It is a brief letter in which Peter sets forth in a gentle tone, the blessings of those who are redeemed and exhortations on how these redeemed should live in the world.

As he nears the close of this message, Peter writes about how believers should behave as “the end of all things” (1 Peter 4:7) draws near. Peter lists some actions that should characterize their lives including this one, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10,11). (*Rule 4.*)

The Apostle Paul in Romans 12 discusses spiritual gifts in a similar manner. In this pivotal chapter, Paul discusses the practical application of all that he has said up to this point in Romans. He says, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you

ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Romans 12:38). (*Rule 4.*)

The thrust of the New Testament text is that all God's people, male and female, have spiritual gifts to be used within the one body of which both sexes are a part (Galatians 3:28). And although the male gender is used in some of the word usage (notably the pronouns) the context indicates that both sexes are included in these statements about spiritual gifts. The church should not mistakenly think that these texts are only for men. (*Rule 2.*)

That women were given gifts and used those gifts for the larger body is seen in various references by Luke in Acts and by Paul in his epistles. They participated in all the gifts listed in Romans 12, with perhaps the exception of the sixth one, that of leadership.

1. **Prophecy.** On their travels to Caesarea, Luke writes of coming to the home of Philip the evangelist. Philip was one of the seven deacons chosen by the church. He was a man of integrity and not likely to deviate from the acceptable practices of the church. Luke reports that he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied and Luke didn't condemn the practice; nor did Paul (Acts 21:9).

Further, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:2–14:40 gives instruction on how people should behave themselves in public worship. He has a specific instruction for women which is, "...Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head...." There is a similar instruction to men about praying or prophesying, with this exception, they are not to cover their heads. Both men and women can pray and prophesy in the public worship of the church. Both did. (*Rule 4.*)

The gift of prophecy is never defined. Apparently identifying it was not a problem for the church. Peter writes about prophesy (2 Peter 1:20, 21) and says that its origin is from God. It seems to be a Spirit inspired testimony or witness to the Lord. The authority for it comes from God. The prophet was merely a mouthpiece for God.

2. **Service.** The purpose of this gift in the church was to be of assistance, particularly in a material way, to the household of faith. Paul, in Romans 16:1-2, mentions Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. He asks the Christians in Rome to give her help in the same way that she has given him help. What is important to notice here is the word Paul uses to describe Phoebe. The word is *diakoonon*, a word for deacon or minister which can be used for either male or female persons in the church who held this office. It is of interest to notice that in some translations this word is translated servant when it refers to Phoebe, yet in other places where the context indicates men it is translated deacons.

There are references to other women who served as coworkers or fellow-workers in the work of the church: Mary (Romans 16:6); Priscilla (Romans 16:3); Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (Romans 16:12); Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2, 3). Without a doubt, women were integral members of the church. Submission for them did not mean nonparticipation in the most vital aspects of the church's mission.

3. **Teaching** and 4. **Encouraging.** Priscilla is pictured as fulfilling the teaching role, along with her husband Aquila, in Acts 18:26. While it is not certain that she used her teaching and encouraging (or exhortation) gifts in a public way, she did use them, together with those of her husband, to great benefit in the church. They were well known throughout the church. (Romans 16:3; Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19) Furthermore, Paul encourages women (Titus 2:3-5) to use the gift of teaching to instruct other women.

5. **Giving.** All members of the church are urged to give cheerfully and generously. Concerning giving, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver" (NASV). Women too were included in those who had this gift.

6. **Leadership.** There is no certain reference in the New Testament to women who held pastor/teacher positions of leadership in the church.

This is not to say that women did not have position and influence in the church. When Paul and Silas were released from prison in Philippi, they went to Lydia's house where the church was meeting. There they met the members of the church and encouraged them.

7. **Mercy.** The church of the first century had many physical needs. Life was dangerous for those Christians. Women were part of that group to whom the Lord gave the gift of mercy. Dorcas (or Tabitha) from Joppa was one such person who had this gift. It is said of her that she "was always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36).

Based upon what we believe the New Testament to teach, women are not nor should be prohibited from serving in many different functions within the congregation or the synod. As long as they come under the authority of the overseers in the congregation, they are free to do any function they are called by the congregation to carry out. In our view, the only position closed to them (and most men too) is that of overseer. We base this on the teaching of 1 Timothy 2 and 3. (*Rule 2, Rule 4.*)

The congregation is the organizational structure God has provided to utilize the gifts. Overseers (pastor and elders) oversee the ministry. Everyone serving within the church, both men and women, serve under the authority of the overseers.

Affirmation 10: Role patterns are different in different societies. They change within a given society, sometimes fairly rapidly. Ways of communicating role understandings may also change. The church must address these role changes evangelistically, prophetically and redemptively so as to win people to Christ, to call them to follow Him and to heal their hurts. (*Rule 1, Rule 5.*)

Role patterns establish expectations for the behavior of men and women which allow a society to function in a predictable way. While roles may change significantly, from the viewpoint of the Scriptures, God's design should be our desire. It will be the way of wholeness and joy. As we have seen, one aspect of this design is outlined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. Roles are described in terms of the headship. "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). The male/female relationship in which two become one flesh is a reflection of the image of God in which the three persons of the Godhead interrelate as one God. The Father/Son relationship is not one of domination, nor should headship be. The concept of headship allows two persons who are of equal value in the sight of God to relate to each other in a manner which enhances their oneness. They are not siblings competing with one another, but rather they are mates using their differences to complement and complete each other. This is God's design.

This design is communicated within society in different ways. In the Corinthian society, headship of the man was symbolized by head covering on the woman. Paul extends this pattern to the church worship service by calling for the women to cover their heads while praying or prophesying. Verse 16 indicates that this pattern of headship, then symbolized by head covering, was not

unique to Corinth but was common to all the churches of God. Some must have been advocates of a different practice, perhaps because they sensed the new freedom of being one in Christ. However, Paul urges the head covering in the church because it expresses the role relationships which are appropriate to God's design for the family and the church.

In our society, ways of communicating role expectations are significantly different than in the Corinthian society. Yet, these expectations are communicated, and the language of their communication will carry over into the church. The church must use this cultural sign language but it must use it for its own purposes.

Our society gives conflicting signals on the family because our society is undergoing rapid change. Economic forces are changing the home. Social forces are redefining role relationships. In contrast to Old Testament pastoral settings, the women of our society are not constantly under the protections of husbands, brothers-in-law or the working company of a segregated women's group. They are in the marketplace for a full working day, often in the direct company of men who are not their husbands.

Sexual distance is not maintained by veils, robes or walls. It must be maintained by much more subtle signals. Different clothing is worn in the office than in social situations. These more subtle signals are not always understood. They are easy to ignore. The distance is not always effectively maintained.

The church must speak prophetically and redemptively to this change. This message must be spoken both for the unity of the marriage and for the health of children. For example, the church may encourage young couples to value quality time with each other and with their children so highly that they will not make major purchases that will necessitate women working full-time. Redemptively, the church may provide an "after school club" to care for children when the wife must work.

The prophetic message must also include a call for justice for those who are represented differently in our society than in the society of Biblical times. Working wives are defining a different division of labor with their husbands than the pattern which was common to Biblical times. Single women who are not under their fathers are functioning as heads of household. It is noteworthy that this type of household was so rare in Biblical times as to be outside the normal rules of society. Today single women households can constitute a significant percentage of the church. Role expectations and ways of communicating them will necessarily change. For example, most all of our congregations have responded to this change by recognizing that women

should be free to vote in the congregation because otherwise many will not be represented according to their actual status or involvement.

The prophetic message invites values which lead to strong families. The family bond is more important than the individual fulfillment of one of the members of the family, especially if it leads others astray (Matthew 18:6-7). The God-given pattern for husband and wife relationship, when followed in the loving strength which God gives, can provide the stability children need for a healthy emotional life.

The church must also speak evangelistically to its society. Ideal role definitions must be weighed against the evangelistic opportunities of the time. Some aspects of individual behavior or group behavior must some-times be set aside as a matter which will be addressed as a fruit of rightly relating to God rather than as a condition of rightly relating to God. For example, the council at Jerusalem set aside major Jewish customs in the interest of evangelizing Gentiles (Acts 15:1 9:5).

Conclusion Regarding Receiving Women Delegates:

1. The study of Scriptures show that voting of the people was not practiced in New Testament times when the church was founded. Voting of either men or women who are not elders is an accommodation to the more democratic societies of our time. Formal voting which leads to the possibility of majority and minority groups after the decision is made is a relatively recent western tradition. Most of the world today still operates on a consensus model where divisions are tolerated only before the vote is taken. This was the New Testament model. It served mainly for the leadership groups. The common people are not a part of the decision making process. The Jerusalem council is not an exception. (Acts 15:1 ff) (*Rule 1, Rule 6*) (Acts 6:14; Acts 14:23)

2. The definition of voting does not allow that voting should be considered the highest form of leadership. Rather, it is a response to leadership. The Oxford English Dictionary defines suffrage as “vote given by a member of a body, state, or society, in assent to a proposition or in favor of the election of a person; in extended sense, a vote for or against any controverted question or nomination.”

This is also the understanding of voting shown in the 1969 report on *Homan's Suffrage in the Church* written by The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod). “It is also evident from the definition of the franchise that it does not give to those who have the right of suffrage the power to lord it over others. On the contrary, the right of suffrage

is given in order to prevent individuals or small groups from usurping authority over others” (page 10).

Our practice of voting in the local congregation in the CLB indicates that this is also our view of voting. The pastor and boards lead the congregation. The congregational vote affirms or rejects this leadership. In exercising this authority, the congregation prevents leaders from “lording it over” them. This vote of the congregation is not seen as usurping leadership authority of the pastor and boards.

3. Voting of women in our congregations has been considered a matter which is not specifically commanded or forbidden (adiophora). The principles which govern such questions are to be developed by the believers in the spirit of the gospel seeking to do what is best for the sake of the kingdom (*Affirmation 2: Rule 6*).

4. Leadership and authority in the church of Christ, as in our society, has both executive and legislative functions. Our government is congregational. The highest legislative authority is the congregation: we practice the congregational form of church government and the autonomy of the local congregation. The synod has an advisory function rather than a ruling function. Its power to rule extends to the cooperative efforts of the congregations of the synod (such as the Lutheran Brethren Schools, Lutheran Brethren Publishing Company, Home Missions, World Missions, etc.). In the case of discipline problems in the local congregation, the Executive Board of the synod has whatever authority is delegated to it by the local congregation. It may also, upon recommendation from the district in which the congregation is located, expel a local congregation from membership in the synod if the congregation no longer reflects the position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. It may also revoke the ordination of a pastor for doctrinal, moral, or other sufficient reasons.” (CLB constitution, article III, paragraph 6)

Further, “The Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America shall be composed of Lutheran congregations and individual Christians who accept this constitution. Their admission takes place at the Annual Meeting when a request or petition has previously been filed with the secretary of the synod. A local congregation may withdraw from the synod at any time, provided such decision to withdraw is done in accordance with its own constitution and bylaws.” (CLB constitution, article III, paragraph 1)

Leadership and authority have several dimensions in the local congregation. Overseers (pastor and elders) lead. Lay persons as part of the priesthood of believers are a part of the decision making process through speaking, initiating

issues and voting. We recognize that this participation in the decision making process in the local congregation does not usurp the leadership or authority of those God has called and the congregation has confirmed to be pastors and elders.

In the same way, delegate participation at the synodical meeting is a part of the decision making process. These delegates represent the highest legislative authority, the congregation. This participation does not usurp the leadership or authority of the president, directors of ministries and the boards.

Most items of business that come to the floor of the annual meeting are initiated by either the president, a director of ministries or one of the boards. These and other items that are brought to the convention go through a committee comprised of elected delegates, the director or president of a ministry and a ministry board. Within the committee the ministry leadership gives its direction, the delegates participate in discussion and the committee recommends changes, rejection or passage of the issue before the same process is repeated on the floor.

While voting is an important part of the process, the larger process includes both executive and legislative dimensions. The entire process cannot be telescoped into a question of voting alone. Participation in the process is not the same as usurping the entire procedure.

5. Voting does not threaten the teaching office in the church, nor does it conflict with the reflection of family order which this office gives. Only men can be elders in the local church which is the highest unit in our government. Further, in the Annual Convention, all pastors are given a vote, whether they are delegates from a congregation or not. This includes retired pastors and pastors on special assignments outside of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Elders are well represented as delegates. The net effect of this organization is that the church is led by the pastor/teacher office and that the pastor/teacher office is also highly represented in the vote of the Annual Meeting.

Therefore: The right of women's suffrage is not in conflict with the Bible, and the Annual Meeting should receive duly accredited women delegates from those congregations which choose to send them as their representatives. As is indicated in the previous affirmations, the Bible teaches that there is an office of public ministry in the church, the office of overseer (pastor and elder). It is to be filled only by Scripturally qualified men. In order to maintain the integrity of the office of overseer (pastor and elder), structured and constitutional changes will be necessary.

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