

MALE AND FEMALE IN MINISTRY

Greetings River West Church!

Over the past two years we have devoted significant time to the important issue of women and men in leadership in the church. We recognize it to be an extremely significant issue that is worthy of our care and clarification, but also one that can be highly charged in our cultural climate. The following is where we as a group landed on this very important topic.

Before sharing our position, there are several important things we'd like you to know about our work over the past two years:

1. *We have grown!* This process has involved countless hours of prayer, bible reading, discussion, debate, outside study, and deep reflection. Each one of us has been personally stretched and come away with an even deeper appreciation for God's Word and God's heart for His church!
2. *We understand.* This is a very important issue and many in our church feel strongly about it. It also happens to be a hot-button issue in our culture today. This is all the more reason to seek the scriptures and bring greater clarity. We recognize that haziness on this topic over the years has been confusing for some in our body. We have done our best under the leadership of the Spirit and the Word to present a stance for our church that is both faithful to the scriptures and clear.
3. *This issue is debatable.* Our study has revealed that while some aspects of this issue are black and white in the scriptures, others are not. Devout, godly, and intelligent biblical scholars come down on different sides of the issue. Neutrality is impossible since actual practices in the church reflect a commitment to a view.
4. *We have reached a place of unity, but not uniformity.* Like other important topics in the church, our elders do not have a uniform view on this issue. But we remain completely united even though we don't totally agree at every point.
5. *We have been humbled.* Endeavors like this drive home the immense calling and the humble privilege to serve the body of Christ. As those who have been called by Jesus Christ to serve as under-shepherds, we feel the magnitude of this calling to servant leadership.

For the Glory of Christ,

The Elders of River West Church

Kris Dunning

Kirk Layton

Ryan Lee

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River West Church affirms the following with regard to men and women serving together in local church ministry:

FOUNDATIONS

In the beginning, God created human beings, male and female, in His image (Genesis 1:27). As such, women and men are equal in dignity and value and equal partners in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Both women and men receive spiritual gifts that are essential for the common good of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7). As in the Trinity, there is equality of persons, but diversity in function. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways that can serve to bring maximum glory to Christ both in the marriage relationship and in the ministry of the church.

ELDERS

In the New Testament, the terms "elders" and "overseers" are interchangeable and describe the primary spiritual leaders of the church (Titus 1:5; 7, Acts 20:17; 28). God's design is for qualified men to serve in this position (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) and to express spiritual authority in loving servant leadership *and not lording over the flock* (1 Peter 5:3; Hebrews 13:17). This coheres with the overall pattern of spiritual leadership in the scriptures (Old Testament Priests, The Twelve Apostles, and elders/overseers in the church). Elders are responsible for shepherding the flock (1 Peter 5:2) through the ministry of prayer (James 5:14), the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4), teaching and guarding the church's doctrine (Acts 20:27-31; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:9), equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), and the administration and protection of the church (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:31).

PASTORS

While the elders are responsible for the flock as a whole, they are not the only ones who shepherd. In the New Testament the term "pastor" is most often used as a verb to describe the ministry of shepherding (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) and appears in a list of gifts given to the church (Ephesians 4:11). We use the term "pastor" for some of our leaders, whether men or women, who shepherd a part of the flock or a ministry under the direction of the elders.

DEACONS (MINISTRY LEADERS)

The role of a deacon in scripture is highly regarded (1 Timothy 3:13). Deacons are not charged in scripture with spiritual oversight of the church but as leaders who build ministry by carrying out essential functions designated by the Elders. Deacons were initially chosen to fill a specific need in the early church, and to free the elders to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-6). The spiritual and character qualifications for deacons are similar with elders and the role of deacon can be filled by either women or men (1 Timothy 3:11 *). At River West we use the term Ministry Leaders to describe the role of deacon.

MINISTRIES, SMALL GROUPS, CLASSES

The elders of the church are responsible to call upon mature, gifted, capable, humble and qualified women and men to lead any mixed-gender ministry, small group or class for the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12).

PREACHING

The ministry of preaching the word to the gathered church falls under the oversight of the elders, with special direction and leadership from the Senior Pastor. Every member of the preaching team is accountable to the elders and the Senior Pastor for both doctrine (faithfulness to scripture) and character. We find ample biblical evidence of women exercising their gifts of teaching, prophecy and leading in public prayer (1 Corinthians 11:5; 1 Corinthians 14:1-5; Acts 18:26). Therefore, qualified and gifted male and female pastors can serve on the preaching rotation. This represents a significant change in our position and practice which we will work through together as a body.

UNITY

Since some of these positions are debatable issues in scripture, we welcome believers with different views. We remain committed to the higher biblical call to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We desire to be a church where believers with different views work together in harmony for the higher goal of the spread of the gospel and so we ask that differing viewpoints be held and shared with humility and grace.

* In 1 Timothy 3:11, Paul turns his attention to “women/wives”. Although the term may refer to the wives of deacons, it is more likely that this is a reference to female deacons. The following arguments support this position. The adjective “their” (wives) is missing. There was no Greek word for deaconess and so a term like “woman” or the masculine “deacon” (Romans 16:1) had to be used. It seems unlikely that Paul would include qualifications for the wife of a deacon when such a requirement is absent for elders.