

**Revision History**

Rev.	Date	Originator	Summary of Changes
A	10/10/2023	Chris VandLinde	

**WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP**


Ever since the church was empowered by Jesus in the first century, women have been a vital part of the body of Christ. God has always used women to show His grace to others, advance the gospel, and serve His people and the world. Cornerstone values the gifting, voice, influence, and contributions of women in our church and in our communities. This document exists to lay out our leadership position on women’s roles in the church with humility, with sound theological reasoning, and with a deep commitment for both women and men to flourish and use their spiritual gifts in the context of the local church.

**WHERE THE VIEWS DIFFER ON WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

Most churches typically view the role of women in some version of the theological views of egalitarianism and complementarianism. Both agree that men and women are equal in worth, dignity, and essence because both are created in God’s image and are charged with responsibility to rule over His creation (Gen 1:26-27). Both views are also in agreement that gender has nothing to do with who may or may not be saved, because we are justified because of His grace regardless of gender (Gal 3:28). And the two views further agree that God gifts women and uses women in ministry for His people and the world. Where the roles differ is on the God-given roles assigned to men and women, specifically in marriage and ministry.

**View #1 - Egalitarianism**

Also known as “Biblical Equality” or mutuality, this view believes women and men are given interchangeable roles in authority, opportunity, and responsibility in service and leadership in the home as well as in the Church (1). This view would affirm the genders as being distinctly male and female, but as functional equals, who, “when in a relationship of mutual submission, function as equal to the task of co-dominion over creation and coworkers in the church” (2). Eve’s description as “helper” in the Genesis account means she who comes to complement and join in equal partnership, not in a subordinate relationship to the man (3; Gen 2:18, 22-24). Proponents view biblical examples of females in partnership with males in the Old and New Testament as evidence that God intends to establish equality in function and that any sort of gender hierarchy is a result of sin and this fallen world (4). Proponents often cite Galatians 3:28 as proof that patriarchal distinctions, classes, or hierarchy were eliminated by Christ. The implication of this view for local church ministry is that men and women called and gifted by

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God can occupy any role in the church.

**View #2 - Complementarianism**

This view believes men and women hold equally important but distinct roles in marriage and ministry. God’s design at creation (5) has implications for marriage and ministry, calling men and women to exercise complementary roles and responsibilities (1 Cor 11:3, 8). In one view (often referred to as Hard Complementarian), that includes forbidding women from certain practices, such as regularly teaching men and exercising any authority over a man (6). In another (often referred to as Soft Complementarian), it includes women refraining from certain practices, such as serving as an elder or senior pastor. Complementarians often assert that God assigned a primary headship (servant leadership) role to men of exercising loving and sacrificial authority over women (Eph 5:21-33). Some interpret Eve being created from Adam’s side and being named by Adam as a sign of headship showing this was God’s intent before sin entered the world.


Complementarians affirm that while God calls men and women to the work of service in the Church, He set some gender guidelines for order in worship and leadership (1 Tim 3:2, Tit 1:6). They cite the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy calling women not to assume authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-13, Tit 2:3-5). The implication of this view for local church ministry is that some roles in the church are specifically reserved for men.

Complementarians differ on which roles are reserved for men. Some complementarians believe the title of elder, overseer, and pastor refer to the same office and are reserved for men. Some complementarians believe that only men in the role of elder/overseer/pastor should teach and preach. Other complementarians believe that “pastoring” and “teaching” is a gift given to both genders, and only the position of elder/overseer is reserved for men, differentiating gifts from office (7).

**SO WHERE DOES CORNERSTONE STAND?**

One of the guiding principles of churches like Cornerstone is a phrase made famous by restoration church leader Alexander Campbell when he said, “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent” (8). That principle guides us to be consistent on what the Bible does say, but also careful to not make the Bible say things it doesn’t say. This includes matters regarding men and women. While there are some things left open to the church for individual practice or understanding, there are others that are clearly stated in Scripture for God’s preferred order.

Cornerstone affirms the soft complementarian position. This position is adopted with a spirit of humility and conviction, recognizing that every believer is a minister. Every person is designed for the Church’s flourishing, both women and men who have been equally created in His image.

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Spiritual headship is expressed at Cornerstone with an elder body consisting of men and a male senior pastor who also serves as an elder. While these roles are reserved for men, Cornerstone believes that all gifts are given to both genders and this is expressed with women serving in pastoral positions, including women on the highest levels of staff leadership (other than lead pastor/primary preacher) (9).

**BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR CORNERSTONE’S POSITION**

**1. Headship in marriage is in the Creation Account.**

In the creation account, the woman is called “helper” (Hebrew: ezer) to the man, Adam (Gen 2:18). This term is not meant to be derogatory or diminishing, since God uses ezer (Ps 54:4) for both male and female who are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). God’s expectation for the man is to love and serve his wife sacrificially by stewarding his role rather than lording it over her (Eph 5:25). A wife is to intelligently, voluntarily, lovingly, and actively submit to her husband as the Church submits to Christ (Eph 5:24). These roles were not restructured after the Fall (Gen. 3), and thus remain God’s primary design for male and female functions and unity in marriage.


**2. Church Headship is God’s created design.**

While most of the previous example is rooted in events prior to the Fall in Genesis 3, the shaping of church leadership according to the writings of the New Testament are written after the Fall. Interestingly, Paul roots his reasoning in the original creation design of headship (1 Tim 2:13) and the timeless example of the triune God (1 Cor 11:3), rather than the changing cultural narratives of his day. This is also harmonious with the historical pattern of God in choosing men to fulfill the primary role of spiritual headship from Old Testament priests to the twelve Apostles of Jesus.

**3. Headship is expressed in the role of Elder/Overseer.**

The terms “elders” or “overseers” are interchangeable and designate the primary spiritual leaders of the Church (Tit 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28). God has designated men as elders/overseers. In the first-century church, male elders were selected by the original church planters (Acts 14:23) or by other elders (Tit 1:5), with recognition from the congregation for its leaders (Acts 6:3; 15:22-23).

On one hand, elders are responsible for the entire flock. On the other hand, these men are not the only ones who shepherd. The gift of pastor (Eph 4:11), which is distinguished from the office of elder/overseer, involves shepherding the body of Christ. Therefore, the term “pastor” is utilized for some leaders, whether men or women, to designate those who direct specific ministries. They shepherd a part of the flock under the elders’ authority. Elders are “pastors” (1 Pet 5:1-2), but their office is distinguished by the term “elder” or “overseer.”

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The designated office of elder comes with great responsibility. While the term “elder” emphasizes maturity, the “overseer” term emphasizes leadership responsibility. They have final responsibility before God for prayer ministry (James 5:14), the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4) including teaching and guarding the church’s doctrine (Acts 20:27-31; 1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:9), the administration of the Church (1 Tim 3:5), and shepherding the flock (1 Pet 5:2).

Furthermore, the office of Elder comes with high standards. Elders must be blameless in character (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9), able to teach Scripture (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17), and answer those who contradict it (Tit 1:9). An elder must be the “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2; 3:12). This qualification does not exclude an unmarried person, someone remarried after the death of a spouse, nor necessarily one who has divorced and remarried. The phrase describes a reputation as a “faithful” husband or a “one-wife kind of man” describing character, not circumstance. Elders are also public leaders. Therefore, a valid accusation of blame should only be accepted by two or three witnesses and result in public rebuke (1 Tim 5:19-20).

Ideally, the local church has a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17; Tit 1:5; Jas 5:14). Their authority is to be expressed in loving leadership and not lording over the flock (1 Pet 5:3; Heb 13:17). Apart from this, Scripture does not describe how elders should organize themselves, and so should be determined by church size, cultural context, and specific needs of the body.


**WHAT THIS DOES AND DOESN’T MEAN FOR CORNERSTONE**

1. This *does not* mean men are viewed as more important than women in the life of the Church.

Women are just as indispensable and invaluable to God’s Church. On the contrary, intentional effort is made to consider and value women both in their voices and in their unique contributions in both servant and leadership roles throughout the church. There are 100 “one-anothers” in the New Testament with 59 of these directly tied to a commandment. There are many more “all-inclusive” references and commandments in the New Testament than gender-specific ones. The tone of the New Testament is one that calls for the necessary presence and participation of both women and men in the life of the Church for one another’s spiritual well-being (10).

This also means that qualified and selected men (elders/overseers) are instructed to carry the spiritual responsibility and burden of sacrificial oversight for the flourishing of the Church (1 Tim 2:12-15; 1 Cor 11:2-12) in accordance with God’s design of headship.

2. This *does* mean headship is taken seriously and considered a God-ordained servant leadership role for men, both at home and in the church family.
3. This *does not* exclude women from exercising their gifts in the life of the Church.

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Christ’s gifts are given equally to men and women to strengthen the Church (Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:1-11; Rom 12:3-8). Spiritual gifts are not given with gender specificity but gender neutrality. They’re given to different people, in different measure, according to God’s wisdom through His Spirit. The New Testament invites the entire body of Christ, as the priesthood of God, to utilize their gifts to build up one another.

For example, Eph 4:11 talks about the gift of pastoring (“poimen”) or shepherding. The Church is strengthened when men and women shepherd and care for others through a variety of ministry contexts. Furthermore, the gift of teaching (“didasko”) is given without gender specificity (Rom 12:7).

The ordering of these gifts, however, is to be maximized for the wellbeing of the Church under the leadership of the elders. For example, while Paul’s words in 1 Tim 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man”) is often interpreted as being two distinct activities which are timeless rather than time-bound (11), “teaching” and “authority” can also be interpreted as being grammatically combined to communicate a concept of “authoritative teaching,” which is teaching with the level of the elder’s authority, determine the church’s doctrine (12). So while women are invited to publicly exercise the gift of teaching, this is to be maximized under the leadership of and in submission to the “doctrinal authority” set forth by the elders and with the elder’s discretion for appropriate frequency (13).

- 4. This *does* mean only men serve in the unique and specific roles of elder or lead pastor.


Women are encouraged to lead, serve, and express their gifts in the greater church body in every other area comparable to their gifting and passions other than elder and senior pastor.

**A WORD TO THOSE WHO DISAGREE**

Gender roles in the church is complex and there are many opinions on the matter, even as it relates to Scripture. Our intent is to always follow our church value, “We are a people who walk in truth. We always ask, ‘What does the Bible say?’” We believe these conclusions to honor that value and elevate the truth of God’s Word.

For those who find this position too broad, understand it is with an incredibly high view of the Scriptures and incredibly deep desire to best honor Scripture that we come to these conclusions. We believe our position both releases the full gifts of the body by God’s design while also holding tightly to biblical headship and gender roles.

For those who find this position limiting, understand it is held with confidence that God’s design is intended to maximize both the gifts of the Body and the flourishing of women and men alike. God’s order and structure is not designed to stifle humanity, but to release humanity into the fullness of Spirit-empowered potential in his perfect design.

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## ENDNOTES

\*This document was borrowed and amended from a thorough research policy document prepared by Mariners Church, Irvine, CA.


1. Sproles, Renee Webb and Harrington, Bobby “Five Conversations on Men and Women For Church Leaders”. Renew.org Discipling Resource (2023).
2. Beck, R. James (General Editor), Gundry, Stanley N. (Series Editor), Zondervan. Two Views on Women and Leadership, pg 103. This is the View of Linda L. Belleville, “An Egalitarian Perspective.”
3. Two Views on Women and Leadership, 25-30.
4. Linda Belleville gives examples of this in Two Views on Women and Leadership. She points out women who were given ministries as judges, prophets, worship leaders and mourners in the Old Testament, 35. She also cites New Testament examples of women who “are singled out in the early church as apostles (Rom. 16:7), prophets (Acts 21:9, 1 Cor. 11:5), evangelists (Phil. 4:2-3), patrons (Rom 16:2), teachers (Acts 18:24-26; Titus 2:3-5), deacons (Rom 16:1; 1 Timothy 3:11)....”, 36.
5. Danver’s Statement Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14). <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>
6. Two Views on Women and Leadership. This is the View of Thomas R. Schreiner, “Another Complementarian Position,” 322.
7. Two Views on Women and Leadership. This is the view of Craig Blomberg in “A Complementarian Position,” 180-181.
8. West, Earl Irvin. “The Search for the Ancient Order: Vol. 1: A History of the Restoration Movement 1800-1865,” 47.
9. Stott, John. Issues Facing Christians Today. 4th Edition, 345-352. See also John Dickson, Hearing Her Voice: A Case For Women Giving Sermons (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).
10. Andrew Wilson regarding Romans 16: “...Phoebe, a deacon who is a patron of many; Prisca, who risked her neck for Paul’s life, and co-host of a house church; Mary, “who has worked hard for you”; Junia, a fellow prisoner of Paul’s and noteworthy among the apostles; Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord; Rufus’s mother, “who has been a mother to me as well”; and several others. Women compose nearly half of the named individuals in this chapter.”
11. Köstenberger, Andreas J. “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis, 81-103. See also Schreiner, Thomas R. “Women Prohibited from Teaching Men: 1 Timothy 2:11-15” in Two Views on Women in Ministry, 307-316.
12. Blomberg, Craig. “First Timothy 2:8-15” in Two Views on Women in Ministry, 165-172.
13. Stott, John. “The Implications of Headship for Ministry” in Issues Facing Christians Today, 345-352.

### Cornerstone as of 9/20/23

Our elders, after much prayer, study, and discussion both as a body of elders, with staff investment and research, and discussion and research with elder’s wives, have determined to:

#### 1. **Embrace this document and soft complementarian view of men/women roles**

This decision was unanimous among the elders.

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**2. Determine Biblical allowance for women on Lead Team**

We concluded that there is no role outside of lead pastor that holds a Biblical restriction for women, but several elders shared roles that may need further consideration or discussion should certain high level staff roles be considered for a female, including the potential of campus pastor.

**3. Do not determine (leave ambiguous) a future role of women preachers, i.e. a female teaching pastor or frequency of women preaching at Cornerstone.**

We agreed to leave the ambiguity here and navigate with prayer and wisdom as necessary in the future.