

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP @ SEASIDE

[SUMMARY & MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER]

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PART 1: MEN, WOMEN, & THE CHURCH

Biblical Foundations (Essentials)¹

- We affirm that God created humanity in his image. We are created male or female and affirm that our sexuality is good. We reject the premise that gender is subjective, negative, a social construct, or a matter of personal preference. (Genesis 1:26, 27, 31, 2:18, 23, 25; Psalm 8, Matt. 19:4)
- We affirm that women and men have equal access to God through faith in Christ Jesus. (John 3:16-17, Romans 4:5, 10:10, Galatians 3:28-29, Ephesians 2:8-9, 4:7-13)
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit resides in men and women who are made new in Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers, leads, and gifts both men and women to build up and strengthen the church and bear witness to the Lordship of Christ in this world. (Numbers 11:29, Joel 2:28-29, Mark 16:16-18, Luke 24:1-12, 46-49, John 4:8-29, Acts 2:17-18, Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-13)
- We affirm that men and women are equal in dignity and yet significantly different and not interchangeable. We were created this way for the purpose of interdependent flourishing. Accordingly, we affirm the Biblical mandate that the church be a place where women and men are welcomed, respected, disciplined, and celebrated. Both men and women are essential to the body of Christ and the advancement of the gospel.

¹ While we ultimately say, "The Bible is our doctrinal statement," it is helpful to have statements like this (along with the Apostles Creed and our full Doctrinal Statement) to help in clarifying the core beliefs we hold. Find more about what we believe at <https://seasidechurch.com/what-we-believe>.

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(Genesis 1:28, 2:18-25, Matt. 19:5-6, 28:19-20, Romans 16:1-23, 1 Cor. 11:11-12, 14:1-5, Ephesians 5:22-33, Philippians 4:2-3, 1 Timothy 5:1-2)

Challenges of Biblical Interpretation and Application

"In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Rupertus Meldenius

At Seaside Church, we are committed to living by faith in response to the direction and instruction we receive from the Bible as our only authority.

We recognize that Christians and churches that carefully study the Bible and submit to it as the only infallible rule of faith and practice still reach different conclusions about women's role in church leadership. Key factors that have led to different conclusions include the interpretation of Jesus' earthly ministry, the practices of the early church, and the instructions given to churches and church leaders in the New Testament. The debate includes the challenge of interpreting and then applying several key texts. Specifically, whether they were meant to be universal (intended for all believers over time) or specific (intended as particular instructions for the original audience).

In light of these challenges in interpretation and application, and as we attempt to tackle this complicated topic, which includes both essentials and non-essentials, we commit ourselves to unity, liberty, and charity. Too often, we are harsh, critical, and dismissive of those with whom we disagree, quickly calling into question their character, cultural views, motivations, and/or belief in the authority of the Bible. Some of the loudest voices on either side of this debate do the same. We must lead differently, with humility, curiosity, and respect toward those with whom we might disagree (especially those who hold to the same orthodox Christian beliefs as we do), eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit as we learn together from the Bible.

PART 2: MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER @ SEASIDE

At Seaside Church, we invite all people to believe in the Good News of Jesus, be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, find belonging in God's family, and be renewed by the truth of God's word. In all this, we are transformed into instruments for God's work in the church and world as God gifts, equips, and sends us out to build up His church and make disciples of all nations.

We see this emphasized in Ephesians 4, which provides a foundation for how we desire to move forward on this complex topic.

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I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:1–3, ESV)

We seek to be humble and loving, eager to maintain unity even as we hold different beliefs and convictions related to this topic. Where “knowledge puffs up, love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1). The sacrificial love of God leads us to lay down our own needs, wants, and freedoms for one another, giving ourselves to what God wants and others need. (John 15:12-14, Romans 15:1-3, 1 Cor. 8-9, Galatians 5:13-14, 1 Peter 3:8, et. al.). Paul continues to emphasize this unity as he writes,

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all... And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:4–6, 11-12, ESV)

We seek to be one body with many members (1 Cor. 12:12-31, Romans 12:4-5), trusting that in one body, our differences are an asset, not a liability (Genesis 1:28, 2:18-25). We affirm the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-10), and seek to equip and empower all in our church to serve, love, and give, in alignment with their gifts (Romans 12:6-7, 1 Corinthians. 14:26).

Seaside’s elders recognize that a solid Biblical case can be made on both sides of the ongoing debate over whether the roles of elder, pastor, and/or preacher in the church are exclusively reserved for men. Pivotal to one’s conclusion is how one interprets and applies key texts in Paul’s letters of 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, and Titus, which in turn may influence one’s understanding of other passages within the Bible.

In light of the call to unity and love that Paul offers, the challenges of this particular debate, and after much prayer, bible study, and conversation, Seaside’s elders believe the Holy Spirit has led us to move forward with a few changes.

Ultimately, we believe these changes allow as much room as possible for those with differing beliefs and convictions on this topic to walk forward together in the unity of the Spirit, humbly bearing with one another in love.

We also believe these changes allow for those in our church and the world around us to benefit from the spiritual gifts of all in our church family- women and men, boys and girls.

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Elders:

We will continue to refer to those who oversee our church as “elders.”

In the New Testament, elders and overseers seem to be the same (Titus 1:7, Acts 20:28). We adhere to the New Testament directive that a group of elders/overseers provide leadership and oversight for a local church (Titus 1, 1 Peter 5:1-3).

Additionally, elders in the New Testament are told to shepherd/ pastor those in their care (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:12); this, too, is essential for elders at Seaside as we seek to follow the example and leadership of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, in providing care and oversight for our church family.

Paul lists qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5:1-4. While not exhaustive, these provide essential qualifications for our elders in character, maturity, and competence. In these qualifications, we interpret the statement that an elder be the ‘husband of one wife’ or ‘one-woman man’ (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6) as primarily addressing marital faithfulness in alignment with the other character, reputation, and spiritual maturity qualities listed. Some also interpret these passages to include the instruction that elders/ overseers must be men.

Moving forward at Seaside, the elders will continue to be a group of men who share equally in the oversight responsibilities of Seaside Church, under the authority and direction of Jesus. We make this decision mindful of those whose biblical convictions lead them to believe only men should be in authoritative positions in the church. That said, ultimately, our focus is on doing everything we can to equip and empower men and women in our church to serve, love, and give in alignment with their gifts.

Here’s how we work this out practically,

- At Seaside, the elders are a group of men who share equally in the oversight responsibilities of Seaside Church under the authority and direction of Jesus (the elders serve as the registered Non-Profit Board of Governors with the state of WA).
- Our Elder team is primarily composed of volunteers, but it also includes staff elders (such as the Lead Pastor).
- Elder Responsibilities include: Service, Authority/Oversight, Shepherding/Pastoring, Teaching, & Prayer.

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- Elder qualifications include being a trusted and seasoned leader at Seaside, meeting the Biblical character and competency qualifications for elders as outlined in the NT, and fulfilling the requirements of and agreeing to the Seaside Leader Covenant.
- We will also establish an Advisory Council (to the Elders): a council of representatives, made up primarily of male and female ministry leaders at Seaside. This council will meet quarterly with the elders to pray, work alongside them to share insights into church health, provide feedback on the church's vision and direction, and offer non-binding counsel to the elders.

Preaching:

At Seaside, we affirm that the call of Colossians 3:16 to "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*" (ESV) is a directive to all Christians. Young and old, rich and poor, male and female are to speak and sing words of truth, wisdom, encouragement, and thanksgiving to one another in our interactions with each other.

Broadly, we affirm preaching as the work to which all Christians are called: sharing the gospel (preaching/proclaiming/making disciples) through words and actions with those around us (Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8, 1 Peter 3:15, et al.).

Specifically, for our purposes here, we are referring to preaching as delivering a sermon from the Bible to the church on a Sunday morning, which has been an important part of most churches' practices throughout church history.

We believe that when the church gathers and opens the Bible, God uses his servants to proclaim His good news: teaching, exhorting, and encouraging those gathered from the Scriptures, in alignment with sound doctrine and by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16- 4:2). Accordingly, we continue to emphasize the significance of the sermon each Sunday morning (along with everything that is sung, said, taught, led, prayed, and practiced when we gather together as an entire church).

We interpret Paul's prohibitions on women teaching or speaking in the church in Corinth and Ephesus (1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15) as specific, culturally-bound restrictions based on the false teaching and disorderly conduct present in those churches. We also recognize that some interpret these passages universally and apply them in various ways, at the very least arguing that teaching in the church must be done under the authority of the church's leaders. In light of this, Seaside's elders will continue to oversee preaching at Seaside.

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That said, we are also committed to developing and encouraging those with the gift of teaching, and want our church to benefit from their gifts. Therefore, we will establish a preaching team of gifted and qualified men and women who will serve our church through preaching, alongside our elders and under their authority.

Additionally, we want to be clear that women, along with men can also teach and lead in all other capacities during Sunday gatherings and in the life of our church (groups, ministries, seminars/conferences, etc.).

Practical Details Related to the Preaching Team:

- Preaching Team. A group of gifted and qualified Seaside leaders (elders and non-elder men and women) who preach on Sunday mornings and provide input on the sermons.
 - ◆ Seaside's Lead Pastor will lead the preaching team, and all sermons will continue to be reviewed and approved by the elders.
 - ◆ This team will work together to grow as preachers, plan and review sermons, and preach occasionally. (Seaside's lead pastor will continue to be the primary preacher, preaching 2-3 Sundays per month)
 - ◆ Qualifications for the preaching team include being a leader at Seaside, being able to teach, and fulfilling the requirements of and agreeing to the Seaside Leader Covenant.

Pastors:

The office of "pastor," as we most commonly understand it today, isn't found in the Bible. We get our modern word "pastor" from the Greek word (poimén), which can be translated as either "shepherd" or "pastor." This word is most commonly used in the Bible to refer to actual shepherds or to describe Jesus. Three times though it is used to speak to the responsibility of shepherding others (John 21:15, Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-2) and one time it is used to speak of the gifting and/ or role of pastoring (Ephesians 4:11). Some have equated the "elder/overseer" leadership role in the NT with the position of pastor, however, there is no text in the New Testament that states that pastors/ shepherds must be elders, nor is there concrete evidence that they are the same office.

In Ephesians 4:11, the Apostle Paul mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds), and teachers as those who together equip the saints for the work of ministry. It seems that the NT church recognized these gifts as different leadership roles, or at least leadership giftings, in the early church. The important part here is that they are different and given by God for the purpose of building up the local church.

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The use of the term “pastor” as a leader or an authoritative leader in the local church has developed in earnest over the last three centuries, arising from the historical office of priest. It remains a widely used term within the church and in our contemporary culture; however, its specific use in local churches and denominations varies widely.

What do we mean by “pastoring/shepherding”? A spiritual leading, feeding, caring for, and protecting those in one’s care. Accordingly, we want to think of “pastoring/ shepherding” in three distinct ways:

- Shepherding/ Pastoring as a verb.
 - ◆ The chief shepherd is Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who shepherds us both individually and corporately.
 - ◆ Seaside elders have the unique responsibility of shepherding the entire church.
 - ◆ All leaders at Seaside are responsible for shepherding those in the ministries or groups they lead.
 - ◆ All Christians are responsible for shepherding those in their own circles of influence, which is part of discipling others.
- Shepherding/ Pastoring as a spiritual gift. Some Christians are gifted with the specific ability to pastor/ shepherd. Like we might say that all are called to evangelize, but some are uniquely gifted at it, we would say the same about shepherding/pastoring. We want to encourage, celebrate, and develop all spiritual gifts in our church, including the gift of pastoring.
- Shepherd/ Pastor as a noun/ office. For the most part, churches today use the title “pastor” to refer to a paid (vocational) ministry or church leader. In many denominations, this title is given after a formal ordination process. In contrast, in other denominations and in most non-denominational churches, this title is given when someone is first hired for that position. Additionally, most people outside the church understand plainly that a “pastor” is a leader in a church.
 - ◆ At Seaside, we want to expand the office or title of “pastor” to include some paid (FT or PT) staff members who oversee particular groups of people and/or ministries. (ie- Worship Pastor, Community Pastor, Lead Pastor, etc.).
 - ◆ At Seaside, pastors serve as under-shepherds to the chief shepherd (Jesus), and these serve under the authority of Seaside’s elders. They are spiritual leaders who have been affirmed by our church and assessed, affirmed, and installed as pastors by our elders. They oversee a ministry/ ministries, shepherding (feeding, leading, caring for, and guarding) those in their ministry and our church as a whole through their service and leadership.

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- ◆ We make this change, acknowledging that titles matter. We want our church and community to know our pastors lead, feed, care for, and protect those in their care and in our church. We also want to honor the spiritual leadership and commitment we ask of our staff who serve as pastors.

Leadership Positions & Responsibility @ Seaside

- Elders (Church Governing Board): A group of men who equally share the oversight responsibilities of Seaside Church, under the authority and direction of Jesus. Primarily composed of volunteers, but also includes staff elders (like the Lead Pastor)
- Pastors: Staff leaders who have been affirmed by our church and assessed, affirmed, and installed as Pastors by our elders. They oversee one or more ministries under the authority and direction of the elder board.
- Ministry Leaders: Staff or volunteer leaders who lead specific ministries at Seaside, under the authority of the elder board and direction of the pastor(s). Currently, these include: Director of Community and Operations (Liz), Worship Ministry Leader (Ellie), Kids Ministry Leader (Erin), Youth Ministry Leader (Kyle), Tech Team Leader (Jason), Greeting Team Leader (Katie), Coffee Team Leader (Casey).
- Leaders: Volunteer leaders in specific ministries at Seaside, including: SeasideKids Leaders, SeasideYouth Leaders, Worship Leaders, Care Ministry Leader(s), Meals Ministry, CG Leaders, Adult Ministry Leaders, etc.

