

SMCC Statement on Women in Ministry

We believe that men and women are equally created in the image of God, and equally called to exercise their spiritual gifts to build up the church. We also believe that men and women are not simply interchangeable, but complement one another in certain roles in the context of church leadership and the marriage relationship.

Specifically, we believe that men are called to a role of servant leadership in the marriage relationship, and that the office of elder/bishop/overseer (and pastor as we typically use the term) in the church is reserved for men. Nonetheless, we affirm the vital importance of women in the life of the church, and encourage women to serve in any non-elder function in the church, according to their area of gifting.

Our desire is to be faithful to the full counsel of Scripture in this area, neither affirming what is forbidden nor forbidding what is affirmed.

ALL CHRISTIANS CONTRIBUTE TO THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

In the Bible, women are actively engaged in the ministry of the church on a variety of levels. Contrary to cultural expectation, Jesus welcomed women among his disciples, teaching them (Luke 10:39) and involving them in his ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Phoebe served as a deaconess, whom Paul commended as “a patron of many and of myself as well” (Romans 16:1-2, cf. I Timothy 3:11). Euodia and Syntyche “labored side by side” with Paul in the gospel (Philippians 4:3). Tabitha was well-known for her mercy ministry (Acts 9:36). The married couple Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), and led a house church (Romans 16:3-5).

More basically, the New Testament epistles teach that all Christians are given spiritual gifts that are essential to the health of the church (e.g., I Corinthians 12:4-31). The gift of prophecy, for example, is specifically given to both men and women (Acts 2:17-18), and there were female prophets in the New Testament (Acts 21:9), as there were in the Old Testament (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, etc.). Paul envisions women praying and prophesying in the local church context (I Corinthians 11:4-5), and encourages all believers to engage in “teaching and admonishing one another” (Colossians 3:16).

THE OFFICE OF ELDER/PASTOR IS RESERVED FOR MEN

Although men and women are portrayed as equals throughout Scripture, they nonetheless complement one another in various ways. The creation narrative of Adam and Eve, while clearly affirming the equal status of Adam and Eve as God’s image bearers, nonetheless stipulates differences in their respective roles. Adam is created first, directly by God (Genesis 2:7); Eve is created from Adam’s rib, named by Adam, and called his helper (Genesis 2:18, 21-22).

Throughout the Old Testament, women played a vital role in the life of God’s people, including at times serving as prophets. Nonetheless, the Levitical priests, who held the regular, ongoing office of leadership among God’s people, were exclusively male. Similarly, in the gospels, Jesus invited both men and women to be among his disciples, but nonetheless called only men as his twelve apostles. Finally, the New Testament epistles limit the authoritative teaching and leadership office of the church to men (I Corinthians 14:33b-35, I Timothy 2:9-15), and specify different roles within the marriage relationship (I Peter 3:1-7, Colossians 3:18-19, Ephesians 5:21-33).

Therefore, although we encourage women to be active throughout the life of the church, we reserve the office of elder, and the responsibilities unique to it, for qualified men within the church.

We maintain that the Bible's teaching regarding gender differences is ultimately rooted in the doctrine of creation and thus transcultural, while affirming a degree of flexibility in the specific application of these principles.

We recognize that godly Christians can hold to different views on the issue of gender roles and strive to maintain unity and graciousness amidst whatever differences we may have in this area.

For further reading on the issue of gender roles, we recommend chapter 6 of [*The Meaning of Marriage*](#), by Tim and Kathy Keller, "Embracing the Other."