



WILLINGDON
CHURCH



Ministry Paper

Willingdon Church Position Papers

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Willingdon Church Elders
(Reaffirmed May, 2024)

God, in His infinite grace, calls men and women to glorify Him through their service and accomplish His purposes within the church family and its mission to the world. This short paper explores the biblical foundations for ministry at and through Willingdon Church, and seeks to clarify how both men and women are blessed and empowered by the Spirit of God for kingdom service.

1. Created in God's Image

God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) creates the cosmos and every living thing and, in His will and purpose, places human beings close to Himself. **Genesis 1:27-28a** **So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created Him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them.**

Men and women are created to be in loving relationship with God and serve as His vice-regents on earth. Being created in God's image, they can be loving, faithful, and self-giving. They are not created to be curved in on themselves; that is, to be self-centred. They are created to love God and serve others.

In stark contrast to the ancient worldview, where women are considered less than men, Genesis 1 clarifies that the image of

God is found, not only in men, but equally in women. God creates two sexes: male and female. Both are very good, equal in dignity, value, and worth.¹ God's blessing on men and women empowers them to act in His service (Genesis 1:28).

2. A Kingdom of Priests

When God enters into a bonded relationship with the people of Israel, He separates them to serve as His priests among the nations. **Exodus 19:5-6a** **Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**

The men and women of Israel are a precious people with a special purpose. They are chosen not only from the nations, but also for the nations. These words go back to the calling of Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3. All the peoples of the earth are to be blessed through His line.

The men and women of Israel are to be a "kingdom of priests." As they worship God and offer sacrifices, they will intercede for the world. Through their verbal and written testimony, they will share who God is (His truth, wisdom, and justice) and

¹Genesis 2:18-25 reveals that the woman was created as a "helper" for the man. The word "helper" is used elsewhere to describe God as a helper to His people. Rather than communicate inferiority, the word indicates that the one being helped is unable to accomplish the task on His own. Men need women and vice versa. Women and men are equal in essence without being identical in role.

narrate how they have experienced His truth.

As they preserve the written word of God, in the fullness of time, anyone in the whole world will be able to benefit from that revelation. In this way, they will mediate the presence and blessing of the Lord to the nations (cf. Deut. 4:6; Is. 61:5-7). The reason for their existence is to represent God to the world and bring the world to God.

This calling on the nation of Israel is extended to the church through Jesus. Peter picks up the language of Exodus 19:5-6 and applies it to the church.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Those who trust in Jesus – whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female – constitute a chosen race born to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. This chosen race is a royal priesthood.

This new identity in Jesus pertains to all followers of Jesus, not just ordained ministers or pastors. As God's people serve together in the real world, they all mirror the glory of the Lord. They proclaim Jesus. They proclaim the wonders of the One who "called them out of darkness into His marvelous light" every day and everywhere. They mediate God's blessings to the nations.

3. All Priests are Equipped for Service

God graces the body of Christ with gifted servants to equip all members, both men and women, for the work of ministry. Ephesians 4:11-14 speaks to this reality. **And he gave the apostles, the prophets,**

the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

When gifted servants equip the saints for ministry, the body of Christ serves in unity, builds each other up, and carries on the mission of the church in the world. The body grows in its knowledge of Jesus and walks in increasing levels of maturity. It grows into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"; that is, it is transformed into His likeness, and fills the earth with the glory of the Lord!

4. The Primary Mission

The primary mission of the church family is to "make disciples of Jesus that make disciples." **Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

The imperative is to make followers of Jesus of all nations. This dynamic disciple-making process is authorized and empowered by the One who has authority over heaven and earth: Jesus. And, the commission comes with a wonderful promise: "I am with you always." Jesus is with His disciples, by His

Spirit. They are never alone as they carry out this commission.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus welcomed women to learn from Him and participate in His discipleship community. They were His ministry partners (Luke 8:1-3; cf. Luke 23:55-56). Mary sat at His feet (Luke 10:38-41). Jesus' longest conversation recorded in Scripture is with the Samaritan woman (John 4), who then witnessed to the Truth of who He was. In fact, women were the first resurrection witnesses (Matt. 28:9-10; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20:11-15).

The mission of male and female disciples flows out of who they are (their nature) in Christ. Because they have been transformed by the Gospel, they share the Gospel. Because they are disciples of Jesus, they make disciples. Because they have been reconciled with one another (a new humanity), they are ministers of reconciliation. Because the Prince of Peace indwells them, they minister peace.

5. All Followers of Jesus Receive Spiritual Gifts

At Pentecost, following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured out on men and women. Quoting the prophet Joel, Luke writes: **Acts 2:17-18 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.**

As God sovereignly reigns over all things, He graces disciples of Jesus, both men and women, with spiritual gifts. Each

member of the body is gifted for a unique function according to the will of God. These spiritual gifts are graciously entrusted to disciples of Jesus for the common good and the edification of the church body so that it might be equipped to carry on the ministry of Jesus.

In the endowment of spiritual gifts, no restriction is made in relation to sex.

Ephesians 4:7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

At least 20 gifts are named in the New Testament. The lists are not exhaustive. When these God-given gifts are working together in harmony, the church family radiates the likeness of Jesus with greater clarity and beauty. God's people are encouraged, edified, and consoled. Those who are not yet followers of Jesus are ministered to through Gospel proclamation and compassionate action.

In Scripture, we see men and women speaking in tongues (Acts 2:3-4, 17-18), explaining the Scriptures (Acts 18:26), teaching what is good (Titus 2:3-5), prophesying (1 Corinthians 11:4-5; Acts 11:27-28, 21:9), serving as fellow-workers in Jesus (Romans 16), hosting churches in their homes (Acts 12:12, 16:40; 1 Corinthians 11:1, 16:19; Colossians 4:15), and laboring side by side with the apostles (Romans 16:1-16; Philippians 2:19-30; 4:2-3).²

² Examples are Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, Euodia, Syntyche.

God's desire is that He be glorified as both men and women flourish. Based on Scripture, all members of the Willingdon Church family are gifted by God for service at Willingdon and beyond. At the same time, men and women flourish best when they align themselves as equal and complementary partners in God's mission according to God's creative design.

6. Governing Eldership and Authoritative Teaching

Men and women are gifted by God to study and teach the Scriptures. Mary's song of praise, after receiving the news of her pregnancy by the Holy Spirit, reveals her knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 1:46-55). Priscilla carries such a deep understanding of "the way of God" that she is able to equip Apollos in a more accurate understanding of the Gospel (Acts 18:26). In the book of Titus, spiritual mothers are instructed to teach and disciple younger women in the faith (Titus 2:3-5).

The governing-teaching eldership role is, however, restricted to men in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:12-13, 5:17-25).³ Paul grounds this restriction in the created order. As a church family, we accept this as God's sovereign design for the health, ministry, and mission of the church.⁴

1 Timothy 3:1-7 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled,

respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (cf. Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

Based on these biblical texts, Willingdon Church restricts the role of governing-teaching eldership to men. The role of lead pastor is also restricted to a man because he serves as a governing-teaching elder.⁵ Having said this, male elders do well to draw on the wisdom of women at every level of leadership, teaching, and decision-making (e.g., conversation with female leaders and members, focus groups, elder meetings).

Elders are overseers of the local body of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2). They are equipped and gifted to teach the Word of God (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9), discern theological and doctrinal matters (Acts 15), protect the church from false teaching (Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:9), and equip other believers for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-13). They protect the church from division, care for those who are straying (James 5:19-20), and pray for the sick (James 5:14).

³ John Neufeld, "Roles and Gender," paper presented to the B.C. Conference of MB Churches, February 5, 2005. Scripture provides no examples of women serving in the governing-teaching elder role.

⁴ Scripture does not call women, as a group, to submit to men in the church. All disciples of Jesus are called to submit to God, to governing authorities, to church leadership, and to other believers (Ephesians 5:21; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14; Hebrews 3:17; James 4:7). We are all called to submit to God's created order. Submission, then is not a virtue for women, but for all.

⁵ The overseeing role of campus pastor would also be restricted to men.

While every member of the church family is called to care about doctrinal purity, teach others the Word of God, care for the sick, pray for others, and equip others for ministry, the governing-teaching elders carry out these functions with a unique spiritual authority, entrusted by God.

This understanding does not undermine the biblical teaching that all men and women are gifted by the Spirit of God, the gift of teaching included. As men and women develop and employ their gifts, in accordance with the Scriptures and the doctrinal guidelines established by the elders, the church family is better able to honour and glorify God.

7. Submission in the Church

Submission is the act of humbly accepting or yielding to the will or authority of another person. Our biblical example for submission is Jesus Himself. He took on the role of a servant and voluntarily (joyfully) submitted to the Father's will, thus glorifying the Father and fulfilling His mission (Phil. 2:5-8). Through His submission, He did not become less divine, less honourable, or less equal, but rather fulfilled His role in God's salvation plan for humanity.

As we have stated in this ministry paper, the Bible affirms the equality of men and women and reveals how they complement one another. In the church family, all believers are called to submit to one another out of obedience to Christ, for His glory and the furtherance of His purposes (Ephesians 5:21). This submission to one another in Christ is the natural outworking of the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) as we fulfill God's mission together.

At the heart of the Greek word for submission (*upotasso*) is order (*taxis*). Any act of submission is a humble recognition

of the divine ordering of human life (e.g., to governing authorities, Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14). In the ordering of the church, God has delegated authority to the governing-teaching elders (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5). When members of a church family, including the lead pastor and individual elders, submit to the body of governing elders, they are honouring God and submitting to Christ, the head of the church.

8. Can Women Preach on Sunday Morning?

We must admit that the "weekend sermon" is not a category used in Scripture, yet it is the most common exercise of "authorized teaching" in the life of the church today.

In 1 Timothy 2-3, Paul expounds on the ordering of society and the church. Believers are to pray for governing authorities, "kings and all who are in high positions" (2:2). In the life of the church, elders are to exercise authority with godly character and be of good repute in society.

In this context, Paul writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." First, His command is based on the created order (vs. 13-14). Second, the teaching and exercising of authority are within the life of the church family and the exercise of governing-teaching eldership.

In the divine ordering of the church family, authoritative teaching that sets the theological direction of the church, curated within the office of eldership, is restricted to men. If a non-elder pastor preaches during a weekend worship service, he must serve under the authority of the elders, always in submission to God and His written Word.

9. What are Women Blessed and Empowered to Do?

First and foremost, women are called to live out their identity as daughters of God. All ministry roles at Willingdon are open to women, including mixed-sex settings, with the exception of the governing-teaching elder role; therefore, women are invited to pursue God's calling on their lives, come to a deep understanding of their spiritual gifting, align themselves with God's purposes for the church, and serve wholeheartedly for the advance of God's kingdom in the world today.

Women are encouraged to exercise all of their gifts as they make disciples who make disciples. They are invited and blessed to exercise leadership in all areas of ministry as active volunteers, ministry leaders, staff, pastors, and team leaders.

Women should seek to be equipped for service through ministry involvement, mentoring, and theological education (e.g., WSBM, Masters in Transformational Leadership). They should teach the Word of God accurately and equip others for ministry (e.g., Discovery, Life Groups, WAM Ministries, Kids Ministries, Student Ministries, Adult Ministries, ILM Fellowships, and WSBM).

10. Concluding Words

As Jesus invited men and women into His discipleship community 2000 years ago, so He invites men and women to know Him and follow Him today. Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). As His first disciples carried on His ministry after Pentecost, so men and women are called to carry on His ministry today, equipped and empowered by the Spirit. They have the joy of joining Jesus in what He is doing and, together, radiating His glory to a world that desperately needs Him.

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