

Women in Ministry Leadership - Summary Position Paper

Evangelical Friends Church - Eastern Region

Since its inception and throughout its history, the Friends movement has recognized and celebrated equality between men and women within leadership. This conviction is rooted in the biblical evidence of both male and female leadership among God's people throughout Scripture. We believe that the Holy Spirit bestows the gifts – and calling – needed for Christian leadership on both women and men.¹

Evangelical Friends believe that God provides for the Church by calling certain men and women to serve in vocational ministry. For the edifying and equipping of the Church, Jesus Christ confers on them the gifts of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11-16) Friends acknowledge that those who give evidence of these kinds of gifts may have unique callings and leadership roles in the local congregations.²

The Evangelical Friends Church - Eastern Region (EFC-ER) affirms women in ministry leadership in every area of church life. This includes (but is not limited to) eldership, preaching, teaching, administration and the senior pastorate. We believe women can serve in any leadership position in which they are called, and they enjoy access to the Spirit's gifting and empowerment in equal measure with men. From the time of George Fox, Friends have affirmed the place of women in recorded (ordained) ministry. This affirmation provides the opportunity for women to serve on the mission field, all capacities of the local church, and all levels of leadership of the Evangelical Friends Church Eastern Region.

Friends have arrived at this distinctive position by studying the Scriptures and through many thoughtful conversations from our founding up to our current cultural environment.

THE ARC OF SCRIPTURE

Old Testament

The affirmation of women in ministry leadership is rooted in Creation. Adam and Eve are both God's image-bearers (Gen 1:26) and are given equal authority to subdue the Earth (Gen 1:28). Their relationship is one of unity and mutuality as Eve is created to complement Adam, offering help and support that is beyond Adam's strength and ability. The Fall blemished their unity resulting in conflicted relationships, not only between the sexes (Gen 3:16), but between all people (Gen 4:8, 23).

Although the Fall (Gen 3) brought conflicted relationships between men and women, there are moments in the Old Testament when God's original intention of shared authority between women and men demonstrate unity and mutuality in leadership. Examples include women who were prophets: Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Huldah (2 Ki. 22:14-20), Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3); Esther who was a queen (Est. 4:14); and Deborah who served as prophet and judge (Jdg. 4:4-5, 31)

New Testament

The New Testament affirms women in leadership beginning with Anna, a prophet who recognized the Messiah and told others (Lk 2:36-38) and Priscilla, a teacher of the gospel and co-worker of Paul (Acts 18:18-19, 26; Rom 16:3-5). Phoebe was a deacon of the church at Cenchrea (Rom 16:1-2) and Junia was an apostle (Rom 16:7).

The Continuity of the Old and New

Jesus ushered in God's Kingdom, which includes restoration of God's original design of unity and mutuality between the sexes. Through His incarnation Jesus inaugurated God's perfect kingdom in this imperfect, broken world where the redeemed seek to live out the reality of the New Covenant. While we acknowledge

¹ EFC-ER Faith and Practice. 2021ed 240.g

² Ibid. 253.b

that this covenant will only be perfectly fulfilled in eternity, until then we labor together for the banishment of all ethnic, social, and gender barriers in Christ.

The Old and New Testaments affirm God's call on both men and women in ministry leadership. On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18), Peter quotes the prophet Joel (2:28-29):

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

Here, gender ceases to be a limitation. This divine outpouring specifically includes both men and women. The focus shifts to the Spirit's power, which compels men and women alike to joyfully proclaim the salvation found in Jesus the Messiah.

Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts reinforces Joel's prophecy. God sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts to every believer as he determines (1 Corinthians 12:11)³. Nowhere in Scripture are spiritual gifts confined to any one gender; therefore, women can receive and use any spiritual gift the Lord bestows on them including leading, teaching, and pastoring. Paul speaks in inclusive terms rather than exclusive terms which is in agreement with Joel 2 and Acts 2.⁴

Ministry among the Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region emphasizes the leading of the Holy Spirit. Calling to pastoral ministry is not determined gender but by the gifting of the Holy Spirit and God's leading in ministry.

Moving Forward Together in Mission

Our purpose as the Church is to unite in fulfilling both the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Spiritual gifts given to both men and women celebrate God's presence, communicate His Word, educate His people, and demonstrate His love. Ministry is not gender-exclusive; it's about meeting needs with love.

Jesus commands all—men and women—to go in His name. We freely give what we have received because of the needs of the world. The laborers are few, but the need is vast (Matthew 9:37-38). Let us send as many laborers as possible, even as we pray for more. May we remain faithful, available, and teachable, equipped by the Holy Spirit for this vital mission!

³ 1 Cor 12:27-29, Rom 12, Eph 4, 1 Pet 4, 2 Tim 1.

⁴ We acknowledge that there are some texts that seem to limit the role of women in ministry leadership. Treatment of these passages is beyond the scope of this paper but is addressed in EFC-ER's Women in Ministry Leadership Expanded Paper