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A reaffirmation of the biblical basis for the full
participation of women in the ministries of the church

CALLED & GIFTED

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The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) has long affirmed the full participation of women in all ministries of the church, and in 1976 passed a recommendation to go on record as favoring the ordination of women. Since that time, women have served in all levels of ministry and leadership positions within the church.

Additionally, the denomination has been blessed in the subsequent years with dramatic growth, bringing in many new members unfamiliar with the historical roots of the Covenant Church and some of our core values. Members and leaders in the ECC are sometimes asked where the denomination stands on the subject of women in ministry. Over the years, several statements addressing the issue have been published in various contexts.

This current statement created by the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality of the ECC builds on that foundation in a thorough and well-grounded articulation. Using a question-and-answer format, this document provides a tool both for individual study and for use in churches and families. It seeks to provide a concise expression of the essence of our belief in order to:

- explain the denomination’s position;
- equip members with carefully reasoned responses when asked about this subject;
- equip people with a teaching tool for families and churches; and
- encourage women and men to use their gifts in ministry for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

May God bless the reader of this document with new insight into the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ and the meaning of that gospel for all believers.

GLENN R. PALMBERG

President, Evangelical Covenant Church

What does the Evangelical Covenant Church believe about women in pastoral roles and other ministry and leadership positions within the church?

The Evangelical Covenant Church affirms women in all ministry and leadership positions within the church, both lay and clergy. We believe that the biblical basis for service in the body of Christ is giftedness, a call from God, and godly character—not gender.

What is the biblical basis for this position?

We believe in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments, as the word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. Our tradition, therefore, has always been to ask, “Where is it written?” on matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct. Our position on women in ministry flows from our high view of Scripture and is not derived from cultural or societal trends. We believe that “women ought to minister not because society says so but because the Bible leads the Church to such a conclusion.”¹

¹ Robert Johnston, Jean Lambert, David Scholer, and Klyne Snodgrass, *A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1987).

There are several interpretive frameworks through which people arrive at their conclusions about the subject of women in ministry. This document unpacks the interpretive framework through which the Covenant arrives at its position. We invite those who are in agreement, those who are still searching, and those who disagree to look through the same window with us to see what we see. This document outlines, from creation through redemption, the biblical basis for our position and reflects our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating word.

Creation. From the beginning, the Bible reveals God's plan for human beings as one of community, unity, equality, and shared responsibility. Both men and women were created in God's image, and God initiated a relationship with both, without preference for one or the other. In addition, God charged both women and men equally with the blessings and responsibilities of childrearing and dominion over the created order (Genesis 1:26-28; 5:1-2).

The fact that both men and women were created in God's image is particularly significant. God's plan for community and unity was based on the equality of the human beings God had created and on their equal participation and full partnership. The Hebrew words '*ezer knegdo*' are used as a descriptor for woman in Genesis 2:18. '*ezer*' is frequently translated as "helper," which some have come to interpret or understand as an inferior or one in a supporting role. Unlike the English word "helper," the Hebrew '*ezer*' implies no inferiority; in fact, this word most frequently refers to God in the Old Testament, meaning protector or rescuer.² Its modifier, *knegdo*, means "suitable," "face to face," "equivalent to," or "visible," and indicates that God created an equivalent human being to be

² The word '*ezer*' is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament, and it refers to God fifteen of those times (Exodus 15:2; 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; 1 Kings 7:12; 2 Samuel 22:42; Psalm 9:10; 33:20; 69:6; 89:19-20; and 115:9-11). Because the word '*ezer*' so frequently refers to God, it could be interpreted as implying a *superior* status, except that its modifier *knegdo* seems to point to *equivalency*, not superiority or inferiority. Or, as Andrew Perriman points out, "What the word defines is not essentially the status of the helper (the helper may be either superior or inferior), but the condition of the one in need of help. This is of considerable importance. We cannot conclude from the position of Eve as helper that she was placed under the authority of man" (Andrew C. Perriman, *Speaking of Women: Interpreting Paul* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, London: Apollos, 1998.] p. 179).

a good companion for man. This rules out authority and subordination for either man or woman.

Some would argue that the fact that woman was formed from man creates both preeminence and authority for the man. There is nothing in the text that supports this interpretation. Rather, the text emphasizes that man was incomplete, and God kindly created for him a suitable companion (Genesis 2:21-23). God's loving act to alleviate man's loneliness did not produce an inferior being; rather God created an equivalent human, underscoring the unity and equality of all human beings.

Finally, some point out that the Bible frequently refers to God as male. Four points should be made concerning this matter.

- First, the Bible affirms that God is spirit (John 4:24) and has no body or biological sex, as we do.
- Second, while the Bible often refers to God as male, this is the language of comparison, employing simile and metaphor. We should remember that Scripture refers to God as a rock and a fortress (Psalm 31:2-3); Jesus refers to himself as a mother hen (Luke 13:34); and God refers to himself as rot and a festering sore (Hosea 5:12). These are examples of God condescending to explain himself by comparison to forms we can understand. Yet these descriptions do not alter the basic teaching that God is spirit.
- Third, the limits of human language limit our understanding. Most languages do not have a neutral-gender pronoun (e.g., "it") that can successfully refer to a higher-order animate being (e.g., a human) let alone a deity, even if that deity is perceived to be without biological sex or gender. The lack of appropriate terminology limits our ability to apprehend phenomena that is normally outside the range of human experience. Lacking appropriate pronouns for God, we substitute male pronouns, with the result that they sometimes shape our perception of God in unintended ways, even while serving to make God more personal.
- Finally, in Jesus, God assumed particularity. That is, Jesus was a male Palestinian Jew. Yet neither his Jewishness nor his maleness

is meant to be a standard used to exclude Gentiles or women from full participation in the Christian community. The New Testament affirms that in this particularity Jesus becomes the one for all, the one who draws all to him (John 12:32).³ It was on this issue that Paul opposed Peter (Cephas) at Antioch when Peter withdrew from fellowship with Gentile believers (Galatians 2:11-14). Paul believed that the truth of the gospel is that old distinctions and divisions ought to have no power or efficacy in Christ. The old, said Paul, has passed away. The new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Effects of Sin. Sin entered the world through both the man and the woman. They were co-participants in the fall, and are equally culpable (Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

One of the key results of sin was—and continues to be—the break in unity and fellowship between humans and God, as well as between Adam and Eve. As a result of sin, Adam began to rule over Eve (Genesis 3:16). This hierarchy is an unwanted result of sin and is not God’s prescription. It violates God’s original plan for unity, equality, fellowship, and community. When in discussion with the authorities concerning the law of Moses, Jesus laid down the principle that the standard is the original intention of God found in Genesis 1 and 2 (Matthew 19:3-9).

Another unwelcome result of sin was the corruption of the ensuing culture, which led to hostilities among people and culminated in the oppression and exclusion of those considered to be weaker classes: the poor, the sick, women, the unclean. The Old Testament records these customs, as well as the longing for the day when all creation would be redeemed. The redemption would include the elimination of barriers and reconciliation between former enemies. Isaiah prophesies, “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). The Old Testament prophets foretold the Messiah as the one who would bring about a feast for all people; would heal the blind, the deaf, and the lame; would proclaim release to the captives and freedom for the

³ The Greek word here, commonly translated “all men,” is *pantas*, which means simply “all.”

oppressed (Isaiah 61). It is significant that Luke 4:16-21 records Jesus quoting this very passage before announcing that in him it is fulfilled.

Additionally, the prophets pointed to a time when “You shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God” (Isaiah 61:6), and to a time when God’s Spirit would be poured out on all believers (Joel 2:28-29), both young and old, men and women. This was later confirmed when Peter wrote, “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5), and “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). This is confirmed again in Revelation, where it is repeatedly declared that all those who believe in Christ will be priests: “To him who...made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 1:5-6); “you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God...” (Revelation 5:10); and “...they will be priests of God and of Christ...” (Revelation 20:6).

The hierarchical, divisive, and patriarchal customs that developed are not God’s ideal order. God’s ideal order, plainly stated through the prophecies about the Messiah, is one of healing and reconciliation. God’s ideal order eliminates the effects of sin, including class divisions, hierarchy, and oppression. It restores the original unity, fellowship, and community between God and humans, and between men and women. It reestablishes the God-designed equality of women and men.

The Jesus Paradigm and Redemption. During Christ’s life, he exhibited in his teaching and practices the very qualities that were prophesied: he touched lepers, spoke to women, and consorted with tax-gatherers. By doing so, Jesus modeled the new kingdom and challenged the prevailing sexist and divisive prejudices, tearing down the divisions and restrictions that had arisen as the result of sin. Jesus saw women as persons of equal worth to men and rejected existing practices that devalued women (see Matthew 19:29; 26:6-13; 27:55-56, 61; Mark 5:21-43; 10:11-12; 15:40-41, 47; Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 24:10-11;

John 4:7-42; 11:2-45; 12:1-8; 19:25). This pattern is evident in his teachings (a woman plays the role of God in the parable of the lost coin) and his actions (in clear violation of Jewish tradition, Jesus invited both men and women to receive theological and spiritual instruction from him).

Jesus also taught and practiced servant leadership and the empowerment of others. According to Jesus, leadership is about servanthood, not authority. Passages in the Gospels such as Luke 22:24-30 and John 13:13-17 record Jesus' teaching on this subject and show that Jesus ushered in a paradigm that was counter to the existing culture of hierarchical systems and authority. The remainder of the New Testament continues this teaching of servant leadership, emphasizing that spiritual gifts are given to serve others and build the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 2:3-11; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Most importantly, Jesus Christ came to fully redeem all people, women as well as men. Paul emphasizes that all who believe in Christ are redeemed from sin and become new creations. Not only do we who believe become the children of God, and equal heirs, but we also become one in Christ. These blessings come through our faith in Christ, independent of our racial, social, physical, or gender distinctions (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26-28).

In the world, characteristics such as “maleness” or “femaleness” function as primary markers of personal definition and are used to assign rank, status, and worth. In Christ, we are instead defined by being a new creation in Christ. As a result of becoming a new creation, a believer's primary identity is his or her new life in Christ. Our old identities—those of gender, race, or social class—become secondary to our true identity in Christ. In our culture, like that of Jesus and Paul, maleness and femaleness matter. But our beliefs and practices ought not to be determined by earthly cultures, as our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The domination of one group by another group is one of the effects of sin that Jesus came to abolish. In its stead the New Testament affirms Christian community as marked by mutual interdependence, where differences are not to be of any advantage or disadvantage (Galatians 3:28). The result is a new community with new kingdom realities.

For believers to continue subordinating other humans is contrary to our new identities in Christ and contrary to the new kingdom community. We can choose to model the coming eschatological community (Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven), or we can choose a hierarchical model conformed to this sinful world.

The New Kingdom and the Church as a Fellowship of Believers.

The New Testament gives a model for the fellowship of believers. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled both women and men alike, with no distinction made on any basis. The Holy Spirit is sovereign and distributes gifts without preference and without regard to the strictures of a fallen world (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; 14:31).

As a result of this unbiased indwelling of the Holy Spirit, women were involved in all ministry positions and activities, including apostle (Romans 16:7); prophetic speaking (Acts 1:14; 2:15-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5, 10); serving as ministers, leaders, elders, or governors (Romans 16:1); coworkers (Philippians 4:2-3; Romans 16:3-5; Acts 18:2, 18-19); and gifted teachers who instructed men (Acts 18:24-26).

The Bible also teaches that after Pentecost, both women and men receive spiritual gifts without regard to their gender, both are called to exercise and develop these spiritual gifts, and both are called to be faithful managers of those gifts that have been freely given to them (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are to use these divine gifts to serve one another without restriction (Acts 1:14, 8:4, 21:8-9; Romans 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; 1 Corinthians 12; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:15).

Based on these examples, we conclude that spiritual authority comes from God and is not determined by our gender. Authority is a spiritual function not a function based on our physical attributes. The result of ministering to one another according to our spiritual gifts is that the church becomes a true fellowship of believers characterized by mutual participation in and sharing of the new life in Christ.

How does the church understand biblical passages that seem to restrict women's ministry in the church?

There are passages that seem to advocate a restrictive view of women and their place within the Christian community, such as 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35; and 1 Timothy 2:9-15. To ignore any of the passages relevant to this issue is to damage the integrity of the biblical witness and to abdicate our responsibility to be biblical people. However, these passages, though not entirely clear, must not be interpreted in a way that contradicts the rest of Scripture. Space allows only summary consideration of these texts.⁴

First Corinthians 11:2-16 is among the most obtuse passages in the New Testament, yet its main instructions are sufficiently clear. Paul offers instruction on the decorum of those who pray and prophesy. To “prophesy” in the Bible is to speak God’s word. Most often this takes the form of cogent teaching delivered to the faithful at the behest of the Holy Spirit.⁵ This is the case in 1 Corinthians, where the term “prophecy” is aimed at instruction and exhortation (14:31).

It is worth noting that the New Testament identifies men (Silas in Acts 15:32) and women (the four daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9) with the role of prophet. The combination of “pray” and “prophesy” suggests that Paul is referring to public leadership and instruction of the saints. Paul asserts the clear teaching of “nature” is that women should have their heads covered while men should be bareheaded when praying and prophesying. He then claims that women should have their heads covered because of the angels, and because man is the image of God, while woman is the image of man.

While the meanings of the allusions to nature, angels, and creation are

⁴ More full-bodied theological discussions are available elsewhere, in particular the fine articles by Klyne Snodgrass (“Your Slaves—on Account of Jesus’: Servant Leadership in the New Testament”), Linda Belleville (“Male and Female Leadership Roles in the New Testament”), and David M. Scholer (“Patterns of Authority in the Early Church”) in *Servant Leadership: Authority and Governance in the Evangelical Covenant Church*, v. 1, Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1993. The discussion here is heavily dependent on Linda Belleville’s article.

⁵ Prediction of the future is an important but minor definition of prophecy in the Bible.

difficult to discern, the central issue in the passage is not. The question is how women should conduct themselves while they pray and prophesy, not whether or not they should pray and prophesy.

Paul's argument about nature appears not to reference the created order (after all, Genesis 1 asserts that male and female together are the image of God, and as a Jew, Paul was aware of the vow mentioned in Numbers 6:1-7 by which men did not cut their hair but allowed it to grow long), but rather the then common cultural order of Roman civilization. This is confirmed in verse 11 where the "natural" pattern of gender hierarchy is set in contradistinction to the very different pattern of the Christian community in which woman is as essential to man as man is to woman. Similarly, it is possible that the term "angels" is a symbolic reference to local customs and culture (see Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

Whatever else may be said of this passage, it is clear that Paul believed the Spirit led both women and men to pray and prophesy. The rub, as with the discussion of the Eucharist that follows, is that many in the Corinthian congregation were using the church to pursue their own worldly agenda. They celebrated the Eucharist in emulation of pagan feasts that reinforced social status. Paul claimed this practice indicated they had not understood the leveling effects of the work of Christ: differences exist but are not to be of any advantage or disadvantage in the body of Christ. Socially pretentious women at this time chose to go about in public with their heads uncovered in an attempt to assert social superiority. The point Paul makes here, as with the Eucharist, is that he will not brook efforts at self-glorification that seek to use the Christian community to achieve that end.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul writes that women should keep silent in the churches, that they should be submissive, and that if they want to be taught, they should ask their husbands at home. At first blush this seems a rather unbending injunction. However, we must remember that Paul has already argued that women may pray and prophesy (chapter 11). We should also not fail to note that Paul has in view not women generally but wives whose questions about Christian theology and practice have apparently disturbed the worship service. Paul commends their interest but urges them to seek instruction at home.

In what is generally regarded as the most restrictive passage in Paul's letters, 1 Timothy 2:9-15, Paul claims that he permits no woman to teach or to have authority. While this passage frequently is used to support the claim that Paul (or the Bible as a whole) is against women having authority in matters of Christian faith and practice, this can only be maintained if 1 Corinthians and Romans, among other New Testament documents, are removed from consideration. If Paul did not intend this text as a universal principle for all cultures at all times, then there is no case for restricting women in ministry.

How can this be understood? As always, we must look at the historical context and translation issues. There are several reasonable explanations of this passage that do not lead to the conclusion that Paul restricts women for all time.⁶

First, the word for "authority" (*authentain*) is rare in Greek literature, and often means, "to domineer." This definition makes more sense in the passage than "authority," as it explains Paul's recourse to Genesis: it is not God's plan for women to domineer men, after all Eve was not created first (1 Timothy 2:13-14). It is significant that Paul does not go on to argue that men, therefore, have the right to domineer women. First Timothy 4:3 and 2 Timothy 3:6-7 indicate certain women in the church at Ephesus had come under the influence of false teaching. In light of the fact that heresy was beginning to appear in the church, Paul may be trying to silence the heresy, not women. For example, his intent may have been to say, "When women are the source of heresy, they are not allowed to teach," which is no different than his silencing of male heretics in Acts 18. It is possible that Paul is suggesting that these women (i.e., heretical women) should not be allowed to teach and so to domineer/to have authority.

It is also quite possible, even likely, that Paul is employing a poetic device parallel to that used in Matthew 6:20 "where thieves do not break in and steal." The purpose of the first action is to accomplish the

⁶ Please refer to the attached bibliography for a further reading in this area. Much scholarship has been done on these passages, and there are many fine books and articles that elaborate on the hermeneutical ambiguities presented by these texts and more fully develop the thoughts presented here. Collectively, they present a compelling case that these texts do not adequately support a traditional hierarchical view of women in ministry.

second, that is, one breaks in with the purpose of stealing. Read in this fashion Paul's intent is to say, "I permit no woman to teach if her aim is to domineer."

One can conclude that it is possible that in these passages Paul offers injunctions against women in leadership roles within the Christian community. But, if so, they stand in stark contradiction to other clearly authoritative passages where Paul strongly supports, expresses appreciation for, and advocates for women in leadership roles in the church. Since the totality of Scripture must inform our thinking and practice, and since Paul's thought on women and ministry ought to be consistent throughout his letters, the passages seem to make the most sense when read as suggested above. To claim that Paul did, indeed, intend to restrict women in ministry for all time and all cultures is to attribute inconsistency to Paul and his teaching, which creates a greater burden of proof than does our conclusion, which is as follows:

Based on our examination of the Scriptures as a whole, we humbly conclude that qualified men and women, whether clergy or lay, are free to exercise their God-given gifts in all ministry and leadership positions in the church. As a result, the Evangelical Covenant Church licenses, commissions, and ordains qualified men and women. We encourage our pastors and congregations to recognize, develop, encourage, and use the spiritual gifts of women and men, clergy or lay, in all areas of service, teaching, and leadership, including preaching and pastoral roles.

If you force every church and every individual to embrace this policy on women in ministry, whether they believe in it or not, won't you be encroaching on the high principle of Covenant freedom?

One of the unique features of the Covenant Church has been its policy of theological freedom. The church stands by its position on freedom. The policy on freedom applies to doctrinal issues that might tend to divide, but are easily resolved when we share a respect for each other's positions. We recognize that our members come from many backgrounds and we recognize that as people seriously and honestly explore the biblical

position on women in ministry, they may come to a different conclusion than presented in this document.

We give intellectual and spiritual liberty to all those who unite themselves in Christ as Covenanters, and we prayerfully expect all members to understand and respect this principle of freedom.

In addition, we recognize that for women who have been specifically called to fulfill the great commission through a pastoral ministry, their only option is to do so in churches that authenticate that calling. We believe we have a mandate to confirm their call, to provide avenues for them to fulfill it in our local churches, and to respect and support their ministry and leadership. Therefore, we ask those who expect theological freedom to reciprocate by respecting the freedom of women to exercise their God-given gifts.

We ask all Covenant people to recognize the multifaceted nature of this subject, which includes but is not limited to the following dimensions:

- The subject of women in ministry is about mission. It is about empowering the whole church to be engaged in the task of carrying out the great commission and the great commandment with all of our gifts and abilities. At its heart this is about carrying out the mission that unites us in Christ.
- The subject of women in ministry is about freedom—the freedom of all people in Christ and the freedom of women to exercise their God-given gifts, to respond to God’s call to ministry, and to find a welcoming place within the Covenant as they do so.
- The subject of women in ministry is about justice. When women are not allowed to exercise their God-given gifts, it is an injustice. We hope and pray that all Covenanters will work together to eradicate these injustices.
- The subject of women in ministry is about a clear understanding of grace, redemption, and living new kingdom realities. More important than our commitment to freedom is our biblical and historical commitment to the need for salvation, and our belief

that salvation has a real outcome. Covenant theology has always embraced the necessity of new birth, and we believe that new birth results in new relational dynamics. Consequently, we perceive that affirming women in ministry flows out of our Covenant identity, which is centered on salvation.

- Recognize that the body of Christ should not be conformed to the world, which is characterized by discrimination, prejudice, and segregation. The body of Christ should be a model of unity and equality. When we preach the good news, our credibility is undermined if we are seen as restrictive rather than freeing.

In conclusion, we remain firmly committed to the principle of theological freedom and to our core ethos of affirming women in ministry.

What does this mean for an individual? Can a person who doesn't believe that this is biblical be comfortable in a Covenant church?

As stated in the Covenant membership booklet, “The Covenant denomination believes that membership should be open to all who trust in Christ. Matters on which Christians have not agreed must not be a source of division.” We hope that all people will always feel welcome and comfortable in Covenant churches. If an individual wishes to associate with a Covenant church, he or she should be prepared to encounter women in all ministry roles within the church. We hope this kind of open affirmation of women will make people feel more welcome, because it underscores our commitment to all people regardless of their backgrounds, origins, race, economic status, or gender. In addition, we would ask that individuals who may hold a different position:

- respect and support those women who are called and empowered by the Covenant to serve in ministry and leadership;
- recognize that their position has a profound effect on the freedom of others to follow God's leading into lay or vocational ministry;
- exercise extreme caution not to quench the Spirit in the lives of others;
- and recognize that while their freedom of conscience will be

respected, they are choosing a position that is not central to a Covenant understanding of faith, doctrine, and conduct.

What does this mean for a Covenant church that holds a different view?

We encourage all Covenant churches to accept and affirm women in all ministry roles within the church. We understand that there may be a dissenting voice, and we can respect the fact that others have seriously and honestly wrestled with this question and come to a different conclusion. But this is not the position that the denomination holds, and we hope that all Covenant churches will welcome women in leadership roles. We are deeply concerned that there be open opportunities for all women who are called and have gifts for ministry and leadership. We believe that all of our congregations will be stronger in mission and ministry by embracing this understanding and by being careful stewards of the resources God has given us.

What does this mean for a Covenant pastor who holds a different view?

Pastors who are now being credentialed into the Evangelical Covenant Church are free to hold a position dictated by conscience and their interpretation of Scripture; however, they are expected to teach and preach in ways that are consistent with the biblical understanding held by the Covenant as a whole.

Every Covenant pastor should seek to encourage and empower women in their congregation to lead and to serve and it is our prayer that every woman will sense this kind of strong affirmation from her pastor. In addition, every Covenant pastor and leader should exhibit a collegial spirit to all other Covenant pastors and leaders, male or female.

And finally, it is our hope and prayer that any woman in the Covenant Church who is sensing a call to ministry, whether clergy or lay, will be nurtured and encouraged in that call by her pastor.

What does this mean for a church plant or congregation that is interested in becoming a member church of the ECC?

When new churches come into the faith family of the Covenant, it

is always wise that they enter at the center and not at the periphery of a Covenant understanding of faith, doctrine, and conduct.

In practical terms, this means that when a congregation expresses a desire to associate with the Covenant Church, they have identified a broad compatibility with the Covenant. It is incumbent, therefore, on the representatives of churches interested in joining the denomination to understand and accurately represent our position and practice related to women in leadership to their constituency.

Another practical mark of a collegial spirit is through a congregation's governing documents. A long-standing Covenant practice—of the denomination and the regional conferences—is to require that the constitution and bylaws of joining churches be written in a neutral voice, without references to gender.

Conclusion

We believe that the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in creation and in redemption, and we affirm women in all roles and ministry positions within the church. We recognize that this document cannot answer all the questions related to this subject, but we hope it will stimulate a desire to learn more. And we hope it will stimulate us to love one another in the midst of our quest to live out the new kingdom realities.

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