

## WOMEN'S STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT (January 2021)

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The Study Team to determine the wisdom that must be applied to the practical application of the resolution (09/22/2020) that “any non-ordained function is open to being filled by a female” has met, deliberated, and collaborated. From our discussions we offer the following principles in support of the recommendations which follow:

### Key Underlying Principles During Our Study

*Scripturally Driven Practice.* We have sought to be very clear to articulate what the Bible says about matters of authority, worship, men and women. At the same time, we also want to refrain from drawing lines where Scripture does not. The Scriptures (no more and no less) should direct our practice. Our group discussed key passages such as 1 Tm 2:8-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. We found interpretive agreement with one another and alignment with PCA’s [“Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church”](#) from the 45<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (see especially pages 12-20 from that report).<sup>1</sup>

*“Top-Down” moments in Stated-Worship.* Within our own BCO’s Directory for Worship is a principle that distinguishes *God speaking* from the *congregation speaking* (see BCO 50-1). Some elements of the stated-worship service are, in effect, “Thus says the LORD” moments. The elements that comprise *God speaking* to his people are to be done by the Teaching Elder, namely the 1) preaching of the Word, and 2) administration of sacraments. Conversely, the moments when the *congregation responds to God* in worship may be led by any faithful person.

*Authority of Scripture Itself.* With respect to the reading of God’s Word, the authority of Scripture rests in Scripture alone, not in the reader. The authority is in the very words of the Bible itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning of “didasko” in 1 Tm 2 and the distinction between *speaking* and *discerning* prophecy in 1 Corinthians are important. When Paul writes he does not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority, the verb teach (*didasko* in Greek) carries with it an implied object, namely, “the teaching.” Other biblical passages similarly refer to core teachings: the apostle’s teaching, the message, the traditions. These official and sacred moments of preaching and teaching must not be done by anyone, but one called to this task. Thus, in 1 Timothy 2 it is *not* that Paul means, “A woman must never be allowed to teach anything about God or spiritual life among the believers.” Rather, far more likely, Paul has in mind the official moments of teaching the Word that would occur in formal gatherings of local congregations. Similarly, when Paul instructs the Corinthians, he seems to allow for women to speak in church in various ways, even to give prophecy. Yet, when the moment for *discerning prophecy* comes, this is when Paul requires women to remain silent. It is a time when elders must do what *they* are called to do. So, there are moments when women can speak, participate, encourage and share impressions from God in the gathering of worship. Yet, there are also moments when they should remain silent. The elder-moments seem to be those of “didasko” and “discernment” of prophecy.

## **Key Understandings for The Session of MRPC**

We recommend to the Session of Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church the following statements of understanding regarding the participation of women in ministry at MRPC:

### **I. Non-ordained men or women in ministry at MRPC**

- 1) That all functions specified by the BCO as pertaining to Ruling Elders or Deacons, except as noted in section II-7 below, may be delegated to non-ordained men or to women who are members of the congregation, are desirous of serving in a public fashion, are believed to possess the requisite gifts for the desired function, and are of good character;
- 2) That delegation to non-ordained men or to women who are otherwise qualified is not only permissible but advisable
  - Because of the increasing size of the congregation (Exodus 18:13-23, Acts 6:1)
  - To provide opportunity to exercise and improve the gifts given to them by God (II Timothy 2:2, I Timothy 5:22, Titus 1:5, 9);
- 3) That the officers should actively encourage men and women to participate in those functions which may be delegated to them;
- 4) That such delegation does not confer office on them (BCO 7-2), require ordination, nor designate them as candidates for ordination (BCO 17). Rather, the delegates shall exercise their functions under the supervision and authority of the Session;
- 5) That non-ordained men or women who are members of the congregation, are desirous of serving in a public fashion, are believed to possess the requisite gifts for the desired function, and are of good character may fill any function at MRPC that is not specified in the BCO as exclusively pertaining only to Elders, either Ruling or Teaching, or Deacons.

### **II. Officers' authority and responsibility at MRPC**

- 6) That those functions specified by the BCO as pertaining to Elders, either Ruling or Teaching, or Deacons are
  - Being a regular preacher of the Word during stated worship services (Teaching Elders BCO 7-2, 8-4, 8-5, 53-1),
  - Being a regular administrator of Sacraments (BCO 8-5, 12-5 Teaching Elders),
  - Admitting people to membership by hearing testimony which is admitting them to the Lord's Table (BCO 6-2, 6-4, also 57-4, 58-4) (Ruling & Teaching Elders),
  - Being part of a Session commission who make decisions of oversight or exercise discipline for members (BCO 27-4 Ruling & Teaching Elders),
  - Installing new officers to the courts of the church (BCO 12-5) (Ruling & Teaching Elders),

- Implementing the Rulings of Presbytery & GA (12-5) (Ruling Elders),
- Ministering to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress (BCO 7-2, 9-2 Deacons),
- Developing the grace of liberality in the members of the church, devising effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and distributing these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed (BCO 9-2 Deacons),
- Having the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and keeping in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation (BCO 9-2 Deacons);

7) That of all these functions above, only the following may *not* be delegated a non-ordained man or to a woman:

- Being a regular preacher of the Word during stated worship services (Teaching Elders BCO 7-2, 8-4, 8-5, 53-1)
- Being a regular administrator of Sacraments (BCO 8-5, 12-5 Teaching Elders)
- Admitting people to membership by hearing testimony which is admitting them to the Lord's Table (BCO 6-2, 6-4, also 57-4, 58-4) (Ruling & Teaching Elders)
- Being part of a Session commission who make decisions of oversight or exercise discipline for members (BCO 27-4 Ruling & Teaching Elders);
- Installing new officers to the courts of the church (BCO 12-5) (Ruling & Teaching Elders),
- Implementing the Rulings of Presbytery & GA (12-5) (Ruling Elders),

8) That it is advisable for the ruling elders and deacons to regularly, visibly and publicly participate in the stated worship services, or any other gathering of the church, so that the congregation may become better acquainted with the officers who have oversight of the congregation;

9) The Session is charged with watching diligently over the flock committed to its charge, exercising government and discipline, and taking oversight not only of the spiritual interests of MRPC, but also the Church generally (BCO 8-3). The Session cannot relinquish its ultimate authority and responsibility to God for the exercise of its specified functions;

10) That as it is the duty of the Session to have oversight for MRPC, it is within their purview at any time to determine that is not beneficial to our congregation, and therefore not advisable, to delegate certain permissible functions to non-ordained men or to women, or to any particular persons, whether man or woman.

### **Key Applications to Consider as we Move Forward:**

#### *Sunday Morning Worship*

1. Liturgist & Liturgical Elements during our Stated Worship Services

- a. We would be comfortable having either ordained or non-ordained persons (and therefore women) lead the liturgical elements that comprise the *congregation's response of worship to God*. Elements could include the Call to worship, various prayers, Scripture readings, confession of sin, and words of grace & peace from Scripture.
  - b. However, the regular top-down, "*Thus says the Lord*" moments of Preaching the Word and Administering the Sacraments should remain with the teaching elder.
  - c. Some elements such as the Pastoral Prayer or Benediction have historical precedence of being done by a teaching elder. They "feel" pastoral in nature, yet Scripture does not appear to exclude these to only Teaching Elders.
  - d. Elders may still, of course, lead responsive elements of worship.
2. Reading Scripture in Worship Services:
- a. The teaching elder may, at times, choose to read his own sermon's passage of Scripture, upon which his sermon is based. He is the one who has given much study, prayer and preparation of that specific passage. As such, it could be argued that his reading will best convey the meaning of the text to the congregation.
  - b. Nevertheless, we should not *require* the sermon passage to only be read by the sermon-deliverer, since our doctrinal commitment is to *Sola Scriptura* as the grounds for our authority. The authority of Scripture is in Scripture itself.
  - c. Any reader of Scripture in a worship service should be thoughtful, prayerful, prepared, and have a good sense of the passage being read, using a solid translation of the Bible.
  - d. Further, we want the Reading of the Sermon passage to be one of the most cherished elements of our service. It should not be rushed, or "tagged on" to some other moment. Let this time stand clear in our minds. Let us slow down to make sure we hear God's words.
3. Ideas for Selecting Liturgists
- a. Leaders of Liturgy should be those who have a gift for public speaking, who can make a good connection with those in the pews, since the congregation are participants (not spectators) of worshiping God in the service, who have a spiritual life worth emulating, and who are actively involved in the life of our church.
  - b. Since we are a relational church, we should give priority to the shepherding-leads of our relational communities: Sunday School class presidents & teachers, Community & Journey Group leaders, Staff members, as well as Deacons and Ruling Elders.
  - c. There are certainly women who meet this criteria (3a). With that in mind, thought should be given to the ratio of women who meet this criteria to similarly qualified men so as to approximate the use of women in these roles.

### Sunday School Teaching

1. The Session should continue to discern the philosophy and purpose of Sunday School at MRPC. We support the current endeavors to evaluate and assess this ministry and we seek to integrate our thoughts here with any possible new findings.

2. Consistent with our current practices, we recommend that women be able to teach mixed-gender, adult groups that are more topically geared and focused on issues for which they have appropriate experience or training.
3. The elders should take the lead in teaching classes focused on matters of core doctrine, the essential elements of faith unto salvation.
4. There may be classes that do not fit neatly in numbers 2 and 3 above. In determining a suitable teacher, we recommend the Session analyze the class content in accordance with the didasko principle discussed on page 1, along with additional discernment of the philosophy and purpose of Sunday School.
5. Regardless of class or content, we recommend the Session continue to improve its manner for providing oversight and accountability of all Sunday School teachers, ensuring the spiritual health of our congregation.

### Diaconate

1. We believe the Deacons are already utilizing women to support this vital work, and we encourage them to continue this positive collaboration.
2. Our committee did not study or discuss any considerations having to do with possibly identifying women assistants to the Deacons as “deaconess” or the like, or whether any official recognition would be beneficial.
3. We were in agreement that *ordination* to the office of Deacon is reserved for men only, in accordance with Scripture, the WCF, and the BCO.
4. Nevertheless, it may be helpful for future study to discern better ways to involve and identify women of MRPC who are collaborating with the ministry of the Diaconate.