

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Scripture teaches that God created both male and female to bear His image together (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:4). While God created male and female completely equal in essence, dignity and value and to share in the mission together, He did not create male and female as interchangeable – He called them as *complementary* partners. Ultimately, God created male and female to reflect complementary truths about Jesus (Eph. 5:30-32). Males were designed to reflect His relationship to the church in a way that females cannot, and females were designed to reflect the church's relationship to Jesus in a way that males cannot. Who we are as male and female is not about us or what culture dictates, but is what our Creator dictates and is ultimately to testify to the story of Jesus and His mission, for His glory and for our flourishing (Gen. 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

IN PRACTICE

When it comes to women in ministry, we want to be completely in submission to Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) and give every opportunity for women to thrive in the God-ordained and significant roles that they have in building and leading in the local church.

We see all through the New Testament the role women played in the mission of the church (Acts 1:12-14; 9:36-42; 16:13-15; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:1-2, 18, 24-28; Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 1:5; 4:19). Jesus – breaking Jewish and Roman cultural rules – included women in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 10:39). Women like Phoebe, Euodia and Syntyche partnered with Paul in church planting (Romans 16:1-2; Phil 4:3). Priscilla is described as “explaining the way of God more accurately” to Apollos (Acts 18:26). The mission of the church thrives when we empower men and women to use their gifts alongside each other in a complementarian partnership as equal brothers and sisters united in Christ.

Without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them; a pattern that can be seen even in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3).

And so, in submission to Scripture and according to the practice of the early church outlined in Scripture, we affirm that every leadership opportunity is open to women except those prohibited by Scripture. We believe that the Bible reserves the role of elder/pastor specifically for qualified men. (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

Elders are particularly responsible for overseeing the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2) and authoritatively preaching the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9). In shepherding, teaching, overseeing, and leading the local church, elders practice loving sacrificial headship in the care of the church in same way we call a married man to practice loving sacrificial headship in the care of his wife as they partner together (Eph 5:22-25).

Apart from the role of pastor/elder, we believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church. What will this look like at Harvest? We would love to see women serving in areas such as:

Harvest Kids Leader

Youth Leader

Co-leading a mixed small group

Coaching role with her husband

Counting and Finance Team

Hosting a Small Group

Women's Small Group Leader

Teaching a Women's Group/Class

Counselling/Biblical Soul Care
Director of Women's Ministry
Ushering Team
Welcome Team
Worship Team
Prayer Team
Administration Leadership
Evangelism
Visitation
Benevolence Team
Deacon Team

A WORD ABOUT WOMEN DEACONS

With many people at Harvest coming from different faith backgrounds, the term "Deacon" can take on many different meanings (in some churches it can be used interchangeably with "elder"). Based on 1 Timothy 3, we see the office of the Deacon as *distinct from the overseeing office of Elder* and therefore open to both men and women.

The requirements for the office of Deacon (literally, "servant") given in 1 Timothy 3:8-12 focus on the Deacon's character and family life but there are some clues as to the function of Deacons when their requirements are compared with those of the elders. Although many of the qualifications are the same, there are some notable differences.

The most noticeable distinction between Elders and Deacons is that Deacons do not need to be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2) thereby suggesting that the Deacons do not have an official teaching/preaching role in the church. Also, while Deacons, like Elders, must manage their house and children well (1 Tim. 3:4, 12) there seems to be indication that they do not hold a ruling or leading position in the church as Paul does not compare a Deacon's managing of their household to taking care of God's church (1 Tim. 3:5). Paul also warns that a Deacon needs to be tested but does not give the same warning of being "puffed up with conceit" (1 Tim. 3:6) like an Elder, who, with leadership, potentially could be filled with pride. We also see that the term "overseer" (or elder) (1 Tim. 3:2) implies general oversight over the spiritual well being of the church, whereas the title "deacon" implies one who has a service-oriented ministry.

1 Timothy 3:11 is a verse that has been interpreted differently by different English translations. Some say, "*Their wives likewise*" while others say, "*Likewise, the women*". As a local church, we don't have the luxury of leaving the matter undecided. As elders, we argue that the best reading of the verse supports women serving as Deaconesses.

First, the word, "their" has been inserted by ESV translators as a reflection of their interpretation -- the actual word is not there. The word for "wives" comes from the Greek, *gynaikas*, which could be translated as either "wives" or "women". If Paul had used the pronoun "their," there would be no doubt that this refers to wives of deacons and not deaconesses. By not adding the pronoun it would suggest that this is a word about deaconesses and not wives of deacons.

Secondly, the word "likewise" is most naturally interpreted as a natural break in continuing the list of qualifications for different categories ("likewise deacons" - vs. 8 and "likewise deaconesses" - vs. 11) before returning to male deacons in verse 12.

Thirdly, if verse 11 is speaking of the wives of deacons, why does Paul not address the wives of elders - especially considering the importance of the role of elders? Wouldn't the character of an elder's wife be as much, if not more important than the wife of a deacon? But, if the reference is to female deacons, it

makes clear sense as to why the wives of elders aren't mentioned -- because the wives of deacons aren't mentioned, but to female deacons.

If we clearly define the two roles (elders as authority and teaching and deacons as serving needs), there is nothing in Scripture that would prohibit women serving as deaconesses.

So, what are some ways that deacons might be serve in a church today? They could be responsible for anything that's not related to authoritatively teaching and shepherding the church. Such roles might include: facilities, benevolence, finances, welcome and ushering, logistics and administration.

For further reading and study:

[John MacArthur on Deacons](#)

[Village Church Statement](#)

[9 Marks Statement](#)

[Redeemer \(Tim Keller\) Statement](#)

[Discussion between Pastors](#)

[TGC - Complementarianism](#)