

## **The Session of Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church's Position Paper on the Roles of Women in the Church**

Affirmation:

The Session of Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church affirms that all positions of leadership and service at Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church are open to qualified women, except for the office of Deacon as described in **BCO 7-2** (PCA Book of Church Order), and the office of Elder that the Bible, in **1 Timothy 2:12-14**, reserves for men. In a Presbyterian system of government, the authoritative teaching (preaching) and disciplinary role of the church is embodied solely in the Session, composed of ruling and teaching elders. Aside, therefore, from the offices of Elder and Deacon, women are encouraged to seek out all avenues of leadership and service, including Bible teaching, leading small groups, serving on the various church ministry teams, assisting in diaconal work in a non-ordained role and by any other means fully exercising their gifts for the greater benefit of Christ's body.

### **Introduction**

**Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church's mission statement** is to exalt Jesus Christ by leading every member (male and female) to seek grace from God, share this grace in community and show grace to all. It is our desire to show forth God's glory through our unity for the good of our community and the world in mutual sacrificial submission. Celebrating and worshiping God is our joy, privilege, and duty as created beings. In His sovereignty, God created man first and then, deeming it not good for man to be alone, created woman. Both **were** created in God's image, both **are** bearers of that image to the world, equal in value and worth yet functionally different. In our living as image bearers, men and women can and should share many roles. Yet, being created differently, both physically and psychologically, we are also gifted uniquely to complement one another and more fully reflect God's nature and character.

This Church, the bride of Christ, is that place, that home where believers gather to truly worship and serve the Lord. While we acknowledge the universal Church, over time many denominations have been formed. Our denomination, The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), has an orthodox, traditional history growing out of the Reformation's theology. This tradition is grounded in a firm commitment to the Gospel of Jesus, to the Church, to the Scriptures, and to the spirituality of all life. Oak Mountain Church believes in and is committed to the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life, and to honoring our denominational standards (the BCO as well as WCF and catechisms).

Jesus came to "set at liberty those who are oppressed." As we understand this grace, it results in freedom and liberation. Gender roles in the church are no exception. Though the Scriptures are sufficiently ambiguous regarding certain roles, the all-encompassing premise of freedom in Christ applies. While our **fleshly propensity** is to seek categorization and stratification, it appears that God desires to maintain a tension in our lives to emphasize our daily dependence upon Him. Understanding this, the struggle in gender roles within the church underscores man's sinful and extreme tendencies.

Our struggle and desire is more with bowing our will to God's than seeking to satisfy cultural pressures. It is an area that brings opportunity to examine our hearts and confess with the Psalmist to "forgive our hidden sins."

Unfortunately, when placed through the lens of tradition and geography, women have often been relegated to lesser roles, even injustices. Questions must be asked: "Is our view of a woman's calling and her ministry options too narrow? Do these restrictions stunt her impact and influence in our world?" **Additionally**, "Is there a need for repentance by our women living in a culture which leans toward "traditionalism" as an excuse to stay on the sidelines and not engage in ministry? " **Conversely**, "**How are we influenced by our current culture of feminism?**" As imperfect beings, both extremes are certainly possible and we must examine our hearts before the Lord. We need to earnestly seek repentance **where and when this has occurred**. Christ desires and the Holy Spirit provides for our liberation so that both men and women can fully reflect the image of God.

## Scriptural Perspective on Women in Ministry in the Church

As Oak Mountain Church considers the roles of men and women in the Church, and the impact and influence God calls each of us to have in his Kingdom, we begin and end with Scripture. We desire to avoid the extremes of being stricter than Scripture warrants or looser than Scripture allows by avoiding both a traditionalistic stance toward the role of women from a legalistic church culture and a feministic view from a liberal secular culture. Our responsibility is to study Scripture humbly, interpret it properly, and apply it wisely in our day. In this paper, we have listed several key passages related to women's leadership in the church as well as passages on the limitations to that leadership.

**God's Creation Mandate: Genesis 1-2** are some of the most important chapters in the Bible related to the roles of men and women. Gender is emphasized in the creation account, with no other elements of creation divided as "male and female." **Genesis 1:28** states that God said to *them*, the male and the female, to be fruitful and increase in number; to fill the earth and subdue it; and to rule over creation. This mandate is given to both male and female. Women play a key role in leading, influencing, and subduing all of creation to the plan of God.

In **Genesis 2**, God says "It is *not* good." It is *not* good for the man to be alone, for the man to work alone or care for the garden alone. He needs a helper. Men need women, and women need men to carry out God's mandate to rule over the earth and bring it under His plan. God's command to rule over the earth involves a partnership between men and women with each carrying out their appropriate roles.

**Scriptural Basis for Female Leadership Limitations:** Man and woman equally fell into sin in **Genesis 3**. Based on Eve's deception by the Serpent, the Church has placed limits to female leadership. In **1 Timothy 2:13-14**, Paul cites **Genesis 3** in his call for women not to exercise authority over men. In the Old Testament, only men were priests and in Acts 6, only men were named as the original diaconate. Additionally, **1 Timothy 3:1-7** indicates that only men can be elders.

### **Scriptural Basis for Female Leadership Roles in the Church:**

*Teaching:* Because Paul clearly writes that women do teach in the church at times, (see **1 Cor 11:5, 13**), the **1 Timothy** limitation must relate to a woman being excluded from taking on the authoritative teaching of an elder in the church.

*Prophecy and Worship:* In **Exodus 15:20**, Miriam, Aaron's sister, was a prophetess, musician and singer.

In **2 Kings 22:14 (2 Chronicles 34:22)**, during the reign of Josiah, Hilkiah and a group of men consulted the prophetess Huldah who spoke the word of God to them. They could have gone to Jeremiah or Zephaniah, but instead consulted with Huldah.

In **Joel 2:28-32**, it is written that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." We are told clearly that God will pour out His Spirit on the "male and female servants." This is fulfilled in **Acts 2:17-18** and through the Book of Acts.

Philip, one of the first deacons, had daughters who prophesied (**Acts 21**).

*Counsel:* In **Acts 18:26**, Apollos was an eloquent man who was competent in the Scriptures. He was taken aside by both Priscilla and Aquila so that they could explain to him the Way more accurately. Priscilla's name is mentioned first in a way similar to Paul's name being mentioned first after he is given a place of honor in ministry. In the beginning of his ministry we read "Barnabas and Saul" (**Acts 13:2**), but it becomes "Paul and Barnabas" (**Acts 15:35**).

### **Scriptural Examples of Women in Ministry:**

*Ministry to Jesus:* Women played an important role in Jesus' mission.

In **Luke 8:1-3**, a group of women traveled with Jesus as He brought the Good News of the Kingdom of God. These women are mentioned in the same context as the Twelve who were with Him. Similarly, in **Mark 15:40-41**, a group of women followed Jesus and ministered to Him.

*Resurrection Witnesses:* God chose women to be the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (**Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:10; John 20:1-18**). This was a radical choice in the first century since women had no legal standing as material witnesses in the courts at that time. His choice demonstrates God's fundamental commitment to the roles of male and female complementing one another in the call to subdue the earth.

*Ministry with Paul:* Women played an important role in the mission Christ assigned to Paul. In **Romans 16**, 10 of 27 names Paul mentions as fellow workers were women. The first, Phoebe, was listed as a deaconess/servant (**Rom 16:1**). Paul's emphasis on our unity in Christ is evident as he breaks down gender, economic, and class distinctions in **Galatians 3:28**. Paul writes that in Christ we are all one, that in Christ "...there is no male and female." In light of other passages, such as **1 Timothy 2**, we know that Paul is not saying there is an obliteration of all distinctions. What Paul is saying, as we read in the ESV Study Bible notes, is that "old divisions and wrongful attitudes of superiority and inferiority are abolished." Along similar lines, in **1 Corinthians 12** we are to affirm that the Spirit has distributed gifts to each person, both men and women, in the Body.

**Scriptural Call for Advancing His Kingdom:** The Church, therefore, wanting to maximize the gifts of the Spirit within a particular Body, must allow women to use their gifts, abilities, insights and perspectives to inform and influence the formal leadership of the Church (elders and deacons). Scripture seems clear that the Church must seek to use the leadership gifts of women in a way consistent with the Church's use of the leadership gifts of non-ordained men. Only in this way can the image of God in women be honored, respected and treated with dignity. And only in this way can the Church truly hope to obey God's original call to subdue the earth and rule over it. From the beginning of Genesis's mandate for men and women's co-rule over the earth, through His redemptive path, to the end of Revelation—our cry is united: "Come Lord Jesus!" Together, as a local church, we strive to exalt Jesus Christ and seek, share, and show his gospel of grace to all as we await His return.

(The following Table of Scripture passages are in no way meant to be exhaustive, but do list some of the most important texts related to the role of women in the church).

Passages on Leadership	Passages on Limitation
<p><b>Genesis 1-2</b>—Joint leadership in the Cultural Mandate</p> <p><b>Exodus 15:20</b>—Miriam was a prophetess</p> <p><b>2 Ki 22:14 (2 Chr 34:22)</b>—Huldah is a prophetess in Jerusalem</p> <p><b>Joel 2:28-32</b> fulfilled in <b>Acts 2:17-18</b>—God will pour out His Spirit on sons and daughters who will prophesy.</p> <p>Women Involved in Christ’s Ministry  <b>Luke 8:1-3</b>—women used in same context as the disciples  <b>Mark 15:40</b>—text assumes women were involved in the ministry of Christ  <b>Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:10; John 20:1-18</b>—the resurrection appearance was first to women and women were told to proclaim it to the disciples</p> <p><b>Acts 18:26</b>—Priscilla plays a key role in ministry and discipleship</p> <p><b>Acts 21:8-9</b>—Philip’s daughters who prophesied</p> <p><b>1 Corinthians 11:5</b>—women praying and prophesying in the assembly</p> <p><b>Galatians 3:28</b>—Joint Heirs with Christ  <b>1 Cor 12</b>—gifts given to male/female</p> <p><b>Phil 4:3</b>—Paul talks about women who had labored side-by-side with him in the gospel</p> <p><b>Romans 16:1-15</b>—Paul sends greetings to his fellow-workers, many of whom are women.</p>	<p><b>Genesis 3:16</b>—the man shall rule over the woman</p> <p><b>Matthew 10:1-4</b>—no women as part of The Twelve</p> <p><b>Acts 6:1-6</b>—no women as part of the first diaconate</p> <p><b>1 Corinthians 14:33-40</b>—women should keep silent in the churches</p> <p><b>1 Timothy 2:8-15</b>—I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man</p> <p><b>1 Timothy 3:1-7</b>—elders/overseers as husband of one wife</p>

## **Approved Applications and Action Steps to Implement the Policy in the life of Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church**

a. Allow men and women to read Scripture for the sermon and pray prior to the sermon unless the minister preaching prefers to do that himself. The **Worship Team** will implement this in coordination with the minister who is preaching each week.

Responsible Team: **Worship Team**

b. Adopt the following statement as our position on women being allowed to teach mixed groups of adults and ask the **Adult Ministries Team** to develop a plan to allow qualified women to teach in adult Sunday School.

Since Paul clearly urges that women teach other women (**Titus 2:3-5**), a woman teaching any size group of other women is not only Biblical but also encouraged. Our answer to the “mixed gender” question is that women, like men, are able to teach such groups. Our reasoning for this is in the structure of OMPC's adult ministry. We have elders assigned as shepherds for every Sunday School class in order to oversee that the gospel is being taught and defended in such a manner that is consistent with the authority and supremacy of Scripture. With this oversight in place, gifted and approved individuals, male and female, who accept submission to the authority of our Session should be free to teach adult Sunday School.

Responsible Team: **Adult Ministries Team**

c. Allow non-ordained men and women to lead ministry teams effective summer 2010 as team assignments are made. Those non-officers who lead teams will be responsible to attend deacon or session meetings to give reports and answer questions concerning their team's work.

Responsible Team: **Leadership Development Team**

## Applications of the affirmation

The following is not exhaustive and is meant to provide examples of the ways women, as well as non-ordained men, might serve. Final decisions on specific applications would rest with the Session of OMPC.

- 1. Leading Corporate Worship** - We believe that in the framework of the spiritual leadership of the elders, freedoms and responsibilities are given to all the saints of God – men, women, and children. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, that the Holy Spirit, for the common good, gives every Christian gifts and that those gifts should be used for the benefit of the body. All believers are encouraged to participate in the corporate worship of the church. Paul encourages all to come with a hymn or word of instruction in **1 Corinthians 14:26**. His references to women being silent in church refer to the authoritative teaching of the Word and the evaluation of prophetic messages. There does not appear to be a prohibition to women participating in corporate worship through reading or reciting scripture, music, testimonies, and announcements. Our position is consistent with the Book of Church Order (**BCO**) which in **51-4** states, “The leadership in song is left to the judgment of the Session.”
- 2. Leading in prayer or praying publicly** - In **1 Corinthians 11**, propriety in worship is discussed. Paul says, “every woman who prays or prophesies must...” It could be assumed that women in the Corinthian church prayed and prophesied. Richard Pratt and Dan Doriani state that this topic is a hotly debated one. **BCO 52** specifically confines the invocation and pastoral prayer to ministers (though this section does not have binding constitutional authority). Women have led prayer or quoted scripture at OMPC in the context of musicals or dramatic readings. Practically, a woman or man who is not ordained can participate in corporate prayer. Following the wise advice of **BCO-52**, the invocation and pastoral prayer should ordinarily be reserved for Teaching Elders. There could be instances where a ruling elder might perform those tasks.
- 3. Ushering-** There is truly no precedence, scriptural basis, nor denominational reason for a woman not to be an usher at OMPC. The qualifications for an usher could be surmised as “An OMPC member who can willingly and cheerfully assist worshippers by greeting them, distributing bulletins, finding seats, and collecting offerings.” The ushers do not perform duties that would limit the ministry to ordained officers. The post should be open to all. (see also **BCO-9-7**)
- 4. Teaching Sunday School** – Since Paul clearly urges that women teach other women (**Titus 2:3-5**), a woman teaching any size group of other women is not only Biblical but also encouraged. Our answer to the “mixed gender” question is that women, like men, are able to teach such groups. Our reasoning for this is in the structure of OMPC's adult ministry. We have elders assigned as shepherds for every Sunday School class in order to oversee that the gospel is being taught and defended in such a manner that is consistent with the authority and supremacy of Scripture. With this oversight in place, gifted and approved individuals, male and female, who accept submission to the authority of our Session should be free to teach adult Sunday School.

5. **Leading a Life Group** - The best scenario for a mixed gender small group would be a co-leader relationship, where a man and woman, usually husband and wife, have jointly had the opportunity of receiving LIFE Group leader training. This leadership would offer the strengths of both sexes under the authority of the Session to nurture and encourage the small group.
6. **Counseling men** – Women may counsel men. However, it is recommended that another person should be present, just as it is encouraged for men who counsel women.
7. **Leading ministry teams** – Leadership of ministry teams should be open to all non-ordained men and women. Leading a ministry team is primarily an administrative role, not a role of spiritual leadership. The pre-requisites for filling such a role is submission to the government of the church and possessing the leadership/administrative gifts necessary to lead a team and having a passion for and knowledge of the particular ministry area.

These are **only several EXAMPLES** of the ways qualified women, as well as qualified, non-ordained men, **MIGHT** serve at Oak Mountain Church.

Our desire in writing this paper is to seek the Lord's heart and mind for His Church and to provide some guidance as we navigate these often murky waters.

We close, again, with the **Affirmation** determined through this study:

The Session of Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church affirms that all positions of leadership and service at Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church are open to qualified women, except for the office of Deacon as described in **BCO 7-2**, and the office of Elder that the Bible, in **1 Timothy 2:12-14**, reserves for men. In a Presbyterian system of government, the authoritative teaching (preaching) and disciplinary role of the church is embodied solely in the Session, composed of ruling and teaching elders. Aside, therefore, from the offices of Elder and Deacon, women are encouraged to seek out all avenues of leadership and service, including Bible teaching, leading small groups, serving on the various church ministry teams, assisting in diaconal work in a non-ordained role and by any other means fully exercising their gifts for the greater benefit of Christ's body.