



WIML

Jericho Ridge Community Church
Women in Ministry Leadership
Position Paper
January 31, 2010

The purpose of this position paper is not to present an exhaustive study on the topic of women in ministry leadership (WIML) but to present our understanding of the overriding themes of the Bible on the topics of gender, ministry and missional context. This paper will guide our attitudes and approach to the roles of women and men in ministry at Jericho Ridge Community Church.

WHY THE PROCESS?

Our broader denominational family, the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, has encouraged churches to define their position within their mission and cultural context. We recognize that many men and women with significantly greater experience, education, and expertise have addressed this issue and have come out on differing points of the continuum. We acknowledge that it is difficult to glean and present a consistent view of women in ministry leadership from the entirety of the Bible that is without any questions whatsoever. As a result, we respect people who hold views different from our own. However, we believe it is valuable as individuals and as a community to search the Bible for guidance about all aspects of life, even difficult ones.

THE PROCESS

As an elder-led church, our practice has been for the elders to take the responsibility for prayerfully interpreting the Bible and making theological and practical decisions which guide the church family. For JRCC, this process has included several elements:

Assembling a WIML task-force of women and men with gifts of discernment to guide the process.

Creating a WIML “playbook” outlining the process.

Conversing weekly in all Life Groups over an eight-week period of time.

Engaging in four public forums on related topics (leadership in the local church, missional context, biblical interpretation, and listening to one another) with presentations of all perspectives by external theologians, practitioners and leaders.

Surveying the congregation and maintaining a posture of continual listening.

Individually studying related materials including the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church’s 2006 resolution and the subsequent booklet by the Board of Faith and Life “Gifted, Called and Affirmed” (a copy was offered to everyone at JRCC).

Prayerful consideration by the elders team of all the above as they determined our position for this time in the life of our church.

OUR POSITION

We believe the Bible teaches that men and women were created by God and equally bear His image (Gen. 1:26-27). God’s intention was for them to share oneness and community (Gen. 2:23-24), even as the Godhead experiences oneness within the Trinity. Each had a direct relationship with God and they shared jointly the responsibilities of stewardship over the whole of the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). However, human oneness was shattered by the fall. The struggle for power and the desire to “rule over” another is part of the result of human sin. We understand Genesis 3:16 as a prediction of the effects of the fall rather than a prescription of God’s ideal order.

However, the message of the gospel is that God has acted in Christ to redeem the human race, and to offer to all people the opportunity to be part of the new community, His church. It is God’s intention for His children to experience the oneness



that exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23). This means that old divisions and hierarchies between genders and races are not to be perpetuated in the church, where all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Furthermore, in the formation of the church at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on women and men alike, as had been predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:18). In the New Testament, women as well as men receive and exercise spiritual gifts without regard to their gender (Acts 2:1-21, I Cor 12:4-11). Both men and women are called to be faithful stewards of the gifts that were freely given to them and to serve one another according to the leading of the Spirit, doing so with humility, compassion, and love as we all seek to build up the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-8, I Peter 3:8 & 4:10-11). To prevent believers from exercising their spiritual gifts is to hinder the work of the Spirit.

As followers of Christ, we have been invited to partner with Him in the realization of God’s Kingdom and its values here on earth in anticipation of the redemption of all things when Christ returns (Romans 8:18-21). Our hope is that as we teach and model the values of equality, wise stewardship, spiritual giftedness, missional living, and grace, the gospel will advance.

We affirm that God “gifts” people for His ministry, God and the church “call” people into ministry and the church “affirms” people for ministry. We see spiritual giftedness, divine equipping for ministry and service, and the process of affirmation by a community of faith as some of the overriding themes of the Bible with respect to this discussion.

In all attempts to understand and put into practice appropriate relationships between genders in the body of Christ, our sole authority is the will of God as expressed in the Bible. A few isolated Biblical texts can appear to restrict the full ministry freedom of women. The interpretation of those passages must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of the Bible and their historical and situational contexts. We believe that when the full redemptive scope of the Bible is considered, it teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry.

IMPLICATIONS FOR JERICHO RIDGE

All leadership positions within JRCC are open to women and men (married or single) who are gifted, called and affirmed by the community and who meet the character qualifications for their role(s).

Elders are discerned and called as individuals. If married, their spouses are an integral part of the relationship, but are not required to have any direct leadership responsibilities.

In all areas of ministry leadership, we will seek to...

Provide opportunity for ministry based on giftedness and character, without regard to gender.

Pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between genders that led New Testament writers to describe them in terms of family: “brothers and sisters”.

Use sensitivity in language that reflects the honour and value God desires for maleness and femaleness and to accurately portray God’s will that His church be an inclusive community.

Be intentional, where appropriate, in overcoming sexist elements of our culture and to offer encouragement to women and men in areas where giftedness has been previously or traditionally discouraged.

Teach and model these values to the JRCC church family, the broader church, and the world at large, with a spirit of harmony and humility as God continues to lead and teach us.

RESOURCES, CITATIONS & FURTHER READING

For further clarification of terms, the process referenced in this paper, and a list of resources across the continuum consulted during the discernment process, see the section of JRCC’s website devoted to our women in ministry leadership dialogue at <http://www.jerichoridge.com/wiml.html>.

Sections of this paper draw on the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren’s dialogue and position on WIML as articulated in “Gifted, Called and Affirmed” (Kindred Resources, Board of Faith & Life, 2008) and on the position paper formulated by the elders at Willow Creek Community Church (https://classes.willowcreek.org/Content/HtmlImages/Public/Documents/General/GiftedToLead_Handout.pdf).