



ChristCommunity
an Evangelical Free Church

MALE & FEMALE IN CHURCH STRUCTURE & POLITY

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How to Use “Church Structure & Polity”

This is one of two papers that outline Christ Community’s approach to men and women in church leadership. It applies the insights from “A Biblical Theology Of Male And Female” to church leadership structures at Christ Community.

“*A Biblical Theology Of Male And Female*” traces God’s design for male and female through the biblical storyline from Genesis to Revelation.

Both papers include an identical set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

The FAQs are a helpful starting point. They provide brief answers that summarize the more detailed discussions in both papers. If after reading the FAQs you want to explore further, you can engage with the relevant sections of the papers or read them in their entirety.

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NOTES:

This position paper is also available in audio format on our [PODCAST feed](#). 

Male and Female in Church Structure and Polity

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CHURCH POLITY

INTRODUCTION

In seeking God's design for male and female leadership in the church, we must first acknowledge that this task requires much grace and humility since devoted and biblically faithful Christians hold differing views on this secondary, but very important, matter.

As we have pursued God's design regarding men and women in church leadership, we first reflected upon God's design for male and female throughout the biblical text. (See our position paper: *A Biblical Theology of Male and Female*.) In observing the grand narrative of Scripture, we are convinced that the overriding purpose in the creation of humanity as male and female was for humans to bear the image of God together in order to rule and reign over creation in deep dependent relationship with God and with one another. This dependency is how they were to fulfill the commission to productivity through their work and generation of family.

Further, we understand that our relationships with God and with one another have been deeply fractured because of the fall of humanity into sin, but that through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, we may experience true reconciliation with God and each other. Therefore, in redemption, male and female are to be reunited in order to embody and share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ by which the Holy Spirit reconciles the broken and sinful world to the family (the church) of our loving Heavenly Father. In this way we are already living into our hopeful future of the union of the bride of Christ, the church, with her bridegroom, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which will be fully realized in the new creation.

While some in the evangelical church have seen the leadership dynamic between male and female as one of hierarchy (men leading as women follow), others have seen the dynamic as a quest for equivalent opportunities (men and women leading in ways that are the same in all areas). Since the late 1980s these views have been described as complementarianism and egalitarianism. Both views have legitimate scriptural support and continue to be debated vigorously.

While acknowledging the merit of these views, we are persuaded that the primary emphasis in the text is neither on hierarchy of genders,¹ nor a flattening out of genders, but rather on a united *relationship* of alliance² between the genders. If we compare gender to musical notes, and consider males and females as totally other, with distinctions exaggerated, the music produced will be a disjointed cacophony. If, on the other hand, we consider ourselves as identical with no distinctions, our music will be plainsong. However, if we are designed to be distinct and also in a united relationship with one

1 The term *gender* is rapidly evolving in the Western world and particularly in the English language at this time. For clarity, we do not mean either "gender role" or "gender identity" when we use the term in this paper. Rather, we mean "the biological sex assigned at birth."

2 Carolyn Custis James describes this relationship as a blessed alliance, *Lost Women of the Bible*, 37.



another, our music will reveal a beautiful harmony as we relate to one another, complementing one another.³ Therefore, at Christ Community we describe our view of men and women in the church, in leadership and participation, as one of *complementary alliance*. In this, we humbly advocate for a nuanced view of the leadership dynamic, embracing both genders in leadership as essential to the mission of the church. As members of the church family, men and women serve together in unity and distinction, as allies on mission together. Andrew Wilson summarizes this view:

They [the Scriptures] present us with a vision of genuine complementarity in which men need women, and women need men, and the image of God is expressed as both serve together. Remove either, or diminish the value of either, and we are all impoverished. The church is a family, and we will only flourish to the extent that we value, honor and esteem both mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters.⁴

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH: CHURCH AS FAMILY

As God's image-bearers, our view of relationships begins by focusing on the character of God himself rather than human categories.

THE HOLY TRINITY

One of the foremost doctrines in Christian theology is the Trinity. The Trinity is best described as the understanding that God exists as three persons and one substance. Thus, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and still one essence. "God is one, yet self-differentiated."⁵ Each person of the Trinity is unique and deserves distinction: the Father (Exodus 4:22-23; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; John 6:27; 1 Corinthians 8:6), the Son (Matthew 1:13; John 1:1; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3), and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Nehemiah 11:16-17; Isaiah 11:2, 63:11-13; Acts 5:3-4, 28:25-27; 2 Corinthians 3:7-8). Each person is distinct from the other two, and thus, they are not identical. God is both one and three. God is unity in diversity.

God is also love (1 John 4:8). For God to be love, love requires a relationship. God has eternally existed as a being in a loving relationship — a loving community — with himself; each person moves distinctly from the other, but still in concert with the other. Because God himself is love, love also has been woven into the fabric of creation. God is spirit and ultimately transcends gender (though the Son chose to inhabit a gendered body for the rest of eternity), yet we need not look further than the character of God to see the grounds for a unified relationship between genders. Jesus' desire for his people to be in a union reflective of his own trinitarian relationship is expressed in his prayer in John 17:21: "May they all be one, as you Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me."

Our united resemblance to the Trinity is indeed the most compelling witness to the world. And in order to reflect himself, God's desire for the genders is unity in diversity, moving in distinct ways in harmony with each other. The church lives out this resemblance as a newly constituted family.

³ This illustration is adapted from Andrew Wilson

⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Beautiful Difference: The (Whole-Bible) Complementarity of Male and Female*, The Gospel Coalition, May 20, 2021, <https://thegospelcoalition.org/article/beautiful-complementarity-male-female>

⁵ Cross, F. L., and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.



CHURCH COMPRISED OF FATHERS, MOTHERS, BROTHERS, SISTERS

Those who are found in Christ Jesus belong to a family. They are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, who have been adopted into the family of God. Paul says in Romans 8:15-17:

“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs — coheirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

A number of things are clear here. First, both sons and daughters (male and female) share in the same Holy Spirit. There are not different spirits for male and female; there is one Holy Spirit, and this Spirit celebrates male and female and their respective distinctiveness. Brothers and sisters are both unique contributors to a family, and thus are distinct from each other while still being unified in one family. Second, there is no priority of one gender over the other in the family of God. Both are equal members, sharing in the Holy Spirit together. Alastair Roberts states:

Women can represent God’s divine activity in ways that men cannot. Men and women are not interchangeable, but different genres of human persons. Gender is not a hierarchy, but is a constitutive difference.... The two hands of humanity need their full strength to operate together.⁶

This family imagery is also presented as lived reality in John’s letters. “See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God’s children — and we are!”⁷ This new family is explored extensively in Pauline theology where it becomes the overriding metaphor in which members of the Lord’s church are called to live in the “household of faith.” Therefore, whether one is married or single, each one who is in Christ Jesus is enfolded into this new family. Each gender is necessary, and each gender needs the other in order to form the family.

Like the Trinity, there is a priority of inclusion (continuous welcome⁸), unity, and love that exists within the household of God. In a world that often defines family order in terms of hierarchy, primogeniture,⁹ and patriarchalism, this model manifests love in relationships, unity in diversity, and inclusion for all who call upon the name of Jesus. God’s family is a counter-cultural space; it was counter-cultural in the first century and continues to be today.

⁶ Alastair Roberts, Lecture “Theology of the Sexes 17 – God Gender and Salvation” <https://wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=30260>

⁷ 1 John 3:1

⁸ “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). Theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer used this in the context of gendered relationships in his published wedding homily.

⁹ Primogeniture is the right or custom of a family estate or inheritance is passed solely to a chosen person instead of a shared inheritance. This could be firstborn son or daughter or another relative. Typically, this custom is based on some type of cultural or contextual right.



SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Spiritual gifts are given to all members, regardless of gender or status (Romans 12), for the building up of the body in unity.

Within this inclusive, interdependent household of faith, the Holy Spirit distributes his empowering, mission-contributing gifts of grace to all members of the family. In Romans 12:6-8 the Apostle Paul writes:

⁶According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; ⁷if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

This means the Holy Spirit pours out gifts on sons and daughters (male and female). Paul writes about how and for what reason these gifts are given. First, these gifts are bestowed as the Lord wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). These gifts of grace are indeed just that; gifts. They are gifts from the Holy Spirit who chooses how and when they are distributed. They may also align with our God-given strengths through birth and learned expertise. Paul makes it clear that these are gifts of grace that have God as the source. Second, the gifts are given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-8). These gifts are to serve the household of faith, in order to strengthen and build it up by means of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere is there a distinction on gender for receiving these gifts of grace.

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

In this unique, inclusive family, how are authority and leadership to be understood? We look first to a biblical understanding of authority in the church.

ALL AUTHORITY IS IN CHRIST JESUS

Without question, the foremost authority for anyone in the church is Christ Jesus. We have received this claim of authority from his own lips as well as from the pen of Paul:

*Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."
(Matthew 28:18)*

¹ Jesus spoke these things, looked up to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have given him." (John 17:1-2)

20 He [the Father] exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens —²¹ far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church." (Ephesians 1:20-22)



AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

As Jesus ministered on the earth, he often delegated authority to his disciples over unclean spirits, demons, and disease (e.g., Matthew 9:5–6, 10:1; Luke 9:1, 10:19), but the source of the authority remained in him. Similarly, after Jesus' resurrection and bodily return to the heavenly places, his *delegated* authority remained on earth through his apostles — the apostolic witness of those who had been chosen and who had access to firsthand knowledge of him (e.g., Matthew 16:18–19). This apostolic witness included Paul, who encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–6). Paul explained in his second letter to the Corinthians that his letter to them was “in keeping with *the authority the Lord gave me* for building up and not for tearing down” (2 Corinthians 13:10, emphasis added; see also 10:8).

Through these apostolic witnesses, the body of the New Testament was inspired (“God-breathed”) and written so that we “may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” and “may be complete, equipped for every good work” (John 20:31; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). As time passed, the apostolic witnesses slowly died off and the New Testament texts were recognized as Scripture and canonized with the Hebrew Bible. At this point, Christ's delegated authority for the church shifted from the apostles and the Hebrew Scriptures to the Old and New Testaments. In the here and now, the word of God is how Jesus speaks to and exercises his authority in the church through the Holy Spirit.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In all times God seems to have given a responsibility to every member of his kingdom. Israel is called to be a “kingdom of priests” and God's “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), with each person responsible for bearing God's name well and expanding God's kingdom across the earth. Peter reiterates that call for the church: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). But does this responsibility also imply authority, and if so, what kind of authority?

In Acts 15, when the church faced the biggest doctrinal danger since its inception, the apostles and elders, together “with the whole church,” decided the doctrinal stance of the church and executed a policy to protect this doctrinal decision. Significantly, no gender distinction is made in the text. The narrator simply states that the whole church participated in the decision process.

This example of collective discernment lines up with the call to be part of a royal priesthood.

Christ Community holds to a congregational polity, whose collective responsibility is to align the church's doctrine and presence with Christ, our authority, and his word. In so doing, we have the responsibility, in submission to the Holy Spirit, to elect our elders from the congregation. Congregational polity does not imply that each individual church member has unilateral authority. Rather, even in congregational churches, doctrinal and governmental oversight are usually exercised by a smaller group of people (the pastor, the elders or deacons, a leadership team, etc.) that is appointed by and accountable to the local congregation.



DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITY TO LEADERS

In response to Christ's authority, God has called some individuals and bestowed spiritual gifts "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12) — in other words, to lead the local church and bring her into unity and spiritual maturity. Within the church, these leaders have additional responsibility according to the degree of their calling, gifting, and appointing. These leaders might, for example, shepherd small groups, facilitate hospitality, lead praise and vocal worship, preach, teach, serve, manage property and tithes, promote and protect the gospel, or exercise spiritual and doctrinal oversight. In addition to gifting and calling, this delegated responsibility is often also contingent on demonstrated levels of skill, faith, and good character (see, for instance, the requirements for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13).

LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Given this biblical understanding of the church family, we understand God's design for men and women in church leadership to be one of *complementary alliance*.¹⁰ That is, men and women are designed for interdependent union as they humbly offer their good and God-given, unique contributions to all aspects of the cultural mandate and the church's mission—including the leadership of that mission. By leadership, we mean those serving the body by providing guidance, direction, and organization.

WOMEN AND MEN AS LEADERS

While leadership in a sin-corrupted world is often understood primarily or exclusively as power *over* others, Jesus radically redefined leadership for his followers as the responsibility to serve and sacrifice *for* others. The Gospel of Mark records these words:

⁴² Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them."⁴³ But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42–44)

Leadership in the local church is exercised in humility as an act of service. In the local church, the Holy Spirit gifts and equips men and women for leadership (Romans 12:8).

Though the twelve apostles were male, Jesus had many female disciples (Luke 8:1–3). There is good evidence that women served as deacons (Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 3:11). Additionally, the book of Acts records not just the contributions of men but of many women as well in the early growth of the Christian movement (Acts 1:12–26, 9:36–43, 12:6–19, 16:11–40, 17:16–34, 18:1–28).

¹⁰ John McKinley has coined the phrase "necessary ally" to capture the idea of the Hebrew word *ezer* in Genesis 2:18, a word that is frequently translated as "helper." The Hebrew word intends none of the subordination that the English idea of "helper" does. The woman is, rather, an "indispensable companion" and a "necessary ally." We lean on this understanding in our term *complementary alliance*. John McKinley, "The Need for a Third Way Between Egalitarianism and Complementarianism," January 27, 2022, <http://fathommag.com/stories/the-need-for-a-third-way-between-egalitarianism-and-complementarianism>; see also NET Genesis 2:18, note 57.



Furthermore, Paul entrusts women with prominent leadership responsibilities. Priscilla (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19) and Nympha (Colossians 4:15) both hosted house churches in their homes. Mary (Romans 16:6), Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:12) are all said to work hard for the Lord. Syntyche and Euodia (Philippians 4:2) also apparently shared some prominence in the Philippian church, as Paul identifies them as loyal co-laborers — a title he often associated with such prominent males as Timothy (Romans 16:21), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:9), Epaphras and Luke (Philemon 24). It can also be suggested that Chloe was in some position of prominence, as she wrote to Paul to inform him of the Corinthian waywardness (1 Corinthians 1:11). Additionally, in Romans 16:7 Paul refers to someone named Junia (a feminine name) as being “outstanding among the apostles.” The implication is that Junia was one of the apostles (though not one of the twelve) who had risen to great prominence.

In light of this, women and men at Christ Community use the gifts of leadership to serve the family in both staff and non-staff capacities.

WOMEN AND MEN AS PASTORS AND PREACHERS

Additionally, Christ Community recognizes that some men and women have been gifted and trained for the work of pastoral leadership and/or pastoral preaching. (Note: in this context the language of “pastor” does not refer to the office of elder but rather to gifts of shepherding. See more in the “Men as Elders” section.)

Not every woman or man with the title of pastor at Christ Community is gifted or trained for the work of pastoral preaching. However, for qualified men and women alike who are gifted and trained in the work of pastoral preaching, Christ Community encourages the exercise of that gifting and training in our gatherings.

We understand the contemporary act of delivering a sermon (*i.e.*, the offering of an explanation and application of an authoritative text) to be much more closely related to the New Testament concepts of “preaching” (*kēryssō*), “exhortation” (*parakaleō*) and “prophecy” (*prophēteuō*) than the “teaching” (*didaskō*)¹¹ that some understand the Apostle Paul restricting to men only in 1 Timothy 2:12. Nowhere does the Bible restrict “preaching” (*kēryssō*), “exhortation” (*parakaleō*) and “prophecy” (*prophēteuō*) to men only. In fact, we see examples of women prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5.¹²

The work of pastoral leadership and preaching sermons in a church service is open to trained and gifted women and men. What seems to be reserved for a particular group of males is the work of guarding and protecting the church family.

11 John Dickson argues convincingly that “teaching” (*didaskō*), particularly in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus), is a technical term that does not mean “expound or explain...but transmit words intact.” He adds: “The fact that a 300-word Bible passage usually inspires a 3,000 word sermon is proof enough that far more is going on in an exposition (and far less) than preserving and laying down the apostolic deposit” (John Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice: A Biblical Invitation for Women to Preach*, 32, 68).

12 For a much more detailed discussion of 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2, see the “Male and Female in Redemption: Epistles” section of the paper *A Biblical Theology of Male and Female*.



MEN AS ELDERS

The ultimate accountability for protecting the church family — by discerning what accords with sound doctrine¹³ and exercising church discipline¹⁴— is entrusted to elders.¹⁵ We are humbly persuaded that the pattern in Scripture indicates that this particular elder leadership responsibility is uniquely entrusted to qualified, chosen, and called males.

In Genesis 2:15-16 God entrusts the male human with a greater weight of accountability for guarding the garden and keeping the command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. While one could argue that this situation is simply because the woman has not yet been formed, it is important to observe that even though the female human is the first to eat from the prohibited tree, God addresses the male human first when confronting the humans about their sin. Additionally, the New Testament explains it is through Adam's trespass (not Eve's) that sin enters the world and death comes to all (Romans 5:12-17). Further, the offices of priest and king in Israel's history are held exclusively by men, and when Jesus appoints the unique group of apostles who will be responsible for preserving the doctrine and discipline of the church, they are also men.

In the New Testament church, we believe the office of elder/overseer continues this pattern.¹⁶ They are charged with protecting and caring for the flock of God (Acts 20:28), warding off false teachers (Acts 20:29), directing the affairs of the church (1 Timothy 5:17), and setting a positive example (1 Peter 5:3).

In the early church, it was the elders and apostles who moderated the Jerusalem Council and ultimately decided the sound course of action (Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23). It is the elders who ultimately bless and commission the work of the gospel (1 Timothy 4:14). It is the elders who serve as the conduit for healing (James 5:14). And ultimately, it is this group of people whom “the Chief Shepherd” would hold accountable for the condition of his bride, the church (1 Peter 5:4), which is why Paul made certain that the appointing of elders was a priority in each church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

At Christ Community we make a distinction between the responsibilities of pastor and elder. While the Bible indicates that all elders do the work of shepherding/pastoring, it does not require that all pastors be elders.¹⁷ Therefore, many of our non-elder pastors are females.

13 The canon of Scripture, the Christian creeds, and our Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) Statement of Faith have established what sound teaching is. Elders are uniquely responsible for protecting the church from that which runs against this body of established teaching.

14 While exercising discipline certainly includes addressing explicit, unrepentant sin, it also encompasses the work of preventing any sort of abuse. That is why elders at Christ Community are closely engaged in the work of financial oversight, discernment of missional direction, and the maintaining of child protection policies, as well as sexual harassment and abuse policies. The goal of this design is (1) to prevent a single leader from exclusively steering the church directionally and financially and (2) to have a group of leaders specifically entrusted with holding leaders (staff and non-staff) or any other congregation member accountable for any form of abuse.

15 It is important to note that while the elders are *ultimately* responsible to protect the church family in these ways, this does not mean they are *exclusively* responsible. Female and male pastoral staff and male and female congregant leaders support and assist the elders in these responsibilities. It is the elders, however, who will ultimately be held to account for the protection of the church family.

16 We understand the Greek terms *episkopoi* (usually translated “overseers” or “bishops”) and *presbuteroi* (usually translated “elders”) as referring to the same office and responsibility in the early church community. Additionally, we acknowledge the negative connotations the word “overseer” can have in English due to the background of chattel slavery in American history. However, since the vast majority of English versions translate *episkopoi* with “overseer,” we have retained it here for clarity rather than using a different term such as “watchman” or “guardian.”

17 For some churches the elder responsibilities are solely entrusted to the position of pastor, in which case it seems best to reserve this position for qualified men. Other churches are led by a board of elders, which may or may not include members of the pastoral staff.



Those entrusted with these elder responsibilities at Christ Community consist of the Elder Leadership Team, the Lead Senior Pastor who serves as a perpetual member of that team, and Campus Pastors. For this reason these particular leadership offices at Christ Community are entrusted to males who meet the rigorous biblical qualifications to bear the added weight of responsibility of serving the family in this way. The office of the elder is not one of “privilege” and “prestige” but one of costly self-sacrifice, additional accountability to God and the congregation, and humble service (1 Peter 5:1-5).

While the Elder Leadership Team and Campus Pastors work closely together in providing oversight, Campus Pastors do not serve on our Elder Leadership Team. In our congregational church polity, we’ve chosen to separate these groups to provide inherent structures of accountability — to keep these staff and primarily non-staff teams as separate branches of government, so to speak. Therefore, we only have one paid staff member who serves perpetually on the Elder Leadership Team (the Lead Senior Pastor). Campus Pastors are, considered non-voting elders, but function as elders, with their responsibilities being most like a Lead Senior Pastor. They are entrusted with the elder responsibilities for spiritual and doctrinal oversight of their campus congregations and the church as a whole.

ADDITIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In addition, Christ Community Church is affiliated with and accountable to the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), a movement of churches descended from the Free Church tradition (free from governmental or political control or connection) of Scandinavia. Historically, the EFCA has included women in a variety of leadership positions such as missionaries, evangelists, and ministry directors.¹⁸

Today women serve in leadership in the National Office, in Reach Global (missions), on the EFCA Board of Directors, as well as Trinity International University’s Board of Regents. In 1988, the EFCA Conference specified that ordination in the EFCA is available only to men whose primary responsibility is preaching the word, and is focused on the office of Senior Pastor.

While the EFCA does not ordain women, EFCA President Kevin Kompelien states, “Local churches have the right and the responsibility to determine their understanding of the biblical texts related to women in leadership in their church and how to live that out in their local ministry context. This means that EFCA churches will have varying understandings and applications. It is vital that we exercise grace and humility toward one another and not make ‘right and wrong’ judgements related to how congregations determine their local leadership structure and practices.”¹⁹

By and large, the EFCA is a “complementarian” association of churches, seeing distinct responsibilities for men and women in the church, but recognizing that there are a multitude of nuanced positions that any individual church may hold. Kompelien says, “However, it is important to note, one must not necessarily personally hold a complementarian position to be in an EFCA church or even to be credentialed by the EFCA.”

18 Gustafson, David and Strand, Gregory, *Ordination and Women: A Case Study in the Historiography of The Evangelical Free Church of America*, Theofilos, vol. 11 nr 2, 2019.

19 Kompelien, Kevin, “Women and Leadership in the EFCA,” Evangelical Free Church of America, January 2020.



While ordination in the EFCA is reserved for qualified men only, a permanent Certificate of Christian Ministry is available to both men and women by the EFCA, which provides them with a professional credential to perform the duties of those who serve as ministers.

Kompelien continues,

It is significant that no matter where a local church lands on this issue that leadership be intentional to open and create opportunities for women to use their leadership and teaching gifts within the church's understanding of Scriptures.... Honoring and affirming each other's gifts, respecting and listening to each other's perspectives, and championing biblically appropriate ways to serve together will strengthen the church and increase our effectiveness in fulfilling God's mission for the EFCA.

Our prayer is that this paper reflects the seriousness with which we have received the right and responsibility that the denomination requires as we've reflected on God's design for male and female in church leadership.

CONCLUSION

Christ Community is persuaded that God's design for male and female leadership in the church is best described as a relationship of *complementary alliance*. We believe that church leadership should model the healthy dynamics of brotherly and sisterly devotion and unity as we serve the church together through the love of Christ Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our church embraces male and female congregational leaders who minister through a variety of gifts to edify the family of God, as well as male and female pastors, directors, and staff who equip and shepherd the church family. In addition, Christ Community, in accordance with a pattern displayed throughout Scripture, bestows an extra responsibility on male elders as the representative guardians of the church until Jesus, our bridegroom, returns for his beloved bride, the church.

FAQ for Male & Female Papers

Does Christ Community consider this a primary or secondary issue?

At Christ Community, our understanding of how men and women serve and lead together in the local church is a secondary issue—not a primary issue.

Christians have understood for a long time that although all teachings in the Bible are valuable, some are more vital than others. These key doctrines are fundamental and set Christians apart from non-Christians. Two examples of essentials are the Trinity and the full humanity and deity of Jesus. It is hard to see how one can deny these essentials and be a Christian.

Then there are convictions. These are secondary issues. One can have genuine Christian fellowship with a person who holds a different conviction. An example of a conviction is the mode and timing of baptism — mode (sprinkling vs. full immersion of the body in water) and timing of baptism (as an infant or when one can make a profession of faith).

Finally, there is the category of opinions or preferences. These things are not unimportant but they don't rise to the level of conviction. An example of opinion or preference is the style of corporate worship service—more liturgical, high church versus more charismatic, low church.

How men and women serve and lead together in the local church fits into the conviction category primarily because in order to organize a local church it must answer questions related to elder qualifications. This does not mean that every Christ Community congregation member or staff person personally holds the exact same conviction, but simply that they are willing to joyfully be a part of a local church that holds Christ Community's convictions on these questions.

What are the different approaches faithful Christians take to these questions?

Since the 1970s the various approaches to understanding what the Bible teaches about how men and women relate to each other in local church leadership have been divided into two camps: egalitarianism and complementarianism. Andrew Bartlett summarizes these two views this way: ¹

¹ Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts*, 11-12.

Complementarianism

- God created men and women to be truly equal. It is right to acknowledge men's bad behavior toward women, which conflicts with God's design. The modern controversy over a woman's place has had the good effect of highlighting and correcting wrong attitudes.
- The concern for equality does not justify departing from the "plain" teaching of the Bible, which is for our good and for God's glory.
- There is an important distinction to be drawn between equality of worth and sameness of role. God has called men and women to different roles. Men are called to lead in the family and in the church.
- Egalitarianism must be opposed. It fails to distinguish correctly between God's Word and cultural misinterpretations of God's Word.

Egalitarianism

- God created men and women to be truly equal, but since the fall, women have been oppressed by men. Historically, patriarchal cultures unjustly kept women under male control.
- Jesus came to redeem the world from the effects of sin, including women's liberation from male domination, but after a short-lived good start, the church accommodated itself to patriarchal culture.
- It is only recently that churches have begun to treat women as equals of men; there is more work yet to be done.
- Complementarianism must be opposed. It is a misguided attempt to cling to misinterpretations of the Bible that arose from the sinfulness of patriarchal culture.

Complementary Alliance

Over the years, these terms have come to hold a wide range of meaning to people depending upon their various backgrounds and interpretations. In addition, we see that biblically, male and female are both complementary and equal. Therefore, we prefer not to limit the conversation to these typical categories, but rather find it more helpful to describe our church's position regarding women and men in leadership (and in life!) as one of "Complementary Alliance," meaning we believe both men and women are essential to the life of the church family and both make uniquely distinct contributions as allies on mission together.

We are persuaded biblically that elders (including our Lead Senior Pastor and Campus Pastors) are to be the primary watchmen and protectors of the church and that called and qualified men are entrusted with the responsibility to serve in this capacity. We also believe that Scripture indicates that called and qualified men and women may both be bestowed by the Holy Spirit with speaking and pastoral gifts. Therefore, men and women serve in a variety of leadership positions in our church including leading teams, teaching, preaching, and shepherding as God uniquely calls and equips them.

What is your approach to interpreting the Bible?

Complementarian

Seeking biblical fidelity, complementarians understand their position to be birthed out of a variety of texts, with these three being key: 1 Timothy 2 (“For I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man...”), 1 Timothy 3 (“If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work ... the husband to one wife), and Titus 1 (“An elder must be blameless, the husband to one wife”). These passages are taken as universal and prescriptive, rather than contextual and descriptive. Based on these passages, and rooted in male headship as grounded in pre-fall creation order (Genesis 1-2) and nature, most complementarians maintain traditional gender roles and reserve leadership for males in both marriage relationships and in church, with female submission to this male leadership.

Egalitarian

Also seeking biblical fidelity, egalitarians understand their position to be birthed out of a variety of texts, with these three being notable: Galatians 3:28 (“There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus”), Ephesians 5:21 (“submitting to one another in the fear of Christ”), and 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 (“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, and man is not independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, and all things come from God.”). Some passages that complementarians see as universal and prescriptive are seen by egalitarians as contextual and descriptive. Ultimately, males and females are bound in a relationship of mutual submission in marriage and in the church.

Complementary Alliance

While both complementarians and egalitarians emphasize certain passages while downplaying others, we seek not to argue for a proverbial “side” but a biblical theology of male and female that comprises a family structure of inclusion and unique contribution.

Seeking biblical fidelity, we lift up what often seems to be overlooked: the family as a central metaphor the Bible uses to describe the ordering and flourishing of the life of the local church, and how the local church views relationships and leadership. Flowing out of the diversity and harmony of the trinitarian life of God, the two genders offered in Scripture, male and female, both in creation and as members of a redeemed family, are designed for interdependent union, with both unity and distinction, as they serve as allies on mission together.

We seek to hold the entirety of Scripture, while not being dismissive of particular passages. Males *and* females use gifts of leadership to serve their marriage relationship and church family. The work of pastoral leadership and preaching sermons in a church service is open to trained and gifted females and males. What seems to be reserved for a particular group of qualified, chosen, and called males is elder leadership, which includes ultimate accountability for guarding and protecting the church family in the discernment of sound doctrine and in the exercising of church discipline.

How does the Old Testament highlight women leading? How does this apply to the church today?

Complementarian

Many assert that women such as Deborah who have positions of leadership in Scripture are exceptions and should not be seen as normative. Some insist that God permitted women to lead during these times because there was a vacuum of male leadership. Some argue that the women prophets in the Old Testament only exhibited “non-directive” influence, saying they could never teach or preach in public and could only prophesy in private. Although the function and office of a prophet was open to women, the offices of priest and king were not. Therefore, a woman might speak for the Lord in private but did not possess the personal authority to oversee or rule men.

Egalitarian

Many see Old Testament female prophets as evidence that God called and continues to call women into leadership. Therefore, they argue, the Old Testament female prophets open the door for women to serve as senior pastors and elders in the church today. They point out that Scripture does not show that Deborah received the position of judge and prophet due to a lack of male candidates. Many insist that it would have been impossible to lead Israel in battle and then in a way that resulted in 40 years of peace without judging and speaking publicly, and further, there is no evidence that she only spoke privately.

Complementary Alliance

We believe that the Old Testament gives compelling evidence that women prophets spoke on behalf of God to the nation (example Deborah) and to the king (example Huldah), and are powerful examples of females who were called by God into leadership (as was Miriam). In Huldah's case, contemporary male prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah could have been consulted; but Huldah was brought to King Josiah instead, where he listened and responded to the Lord's word given through her. Therefore, we welcome women with speaking and leadership gifts to serve our congregation. However, we believe elders have an added responsibility beyond speaking and leading: that of watching over and protecting the church, and that the New Testament indicates that the office of elder is to be held by qualified and called males.

What was Jesus' relationship with women and how were they included in his ministry? How does that inform our leadership structure?

Complementarian

Many often emphasize that Jesus chose exclusively males as his twelve apostles to be his closest associates. These men went on to become the leaders of the early church and sources for the apostolic teaching, and set a pattern for male leadership in the church. They dispute the

idea that Mary Magdalene was a church leader, saying an eyewitness is not the same as a leader. While they note that Jesus had many women followers, they assert that they were never given positions of leadership. Therefore, they see women as included in his ministry, but not as leaders. Therefore, they do not believe women should hold positions of leadership over men in the church today.

Egalitarian

They acknowledge the special choice of the exclusively male Twelve, but do not see that as prescriptive to future church leadership. Rather they emphasize that the choice was to be symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel (showing the new covenant is founded upon the old covenant) since Jesus primarily ministered to Jews during his earthly session. Some counter-argue that if the requirement for leadership was male, then why shouldn't it also be Jewish? In addition, Luke 8 shows women actively participating in Jesus' ministry as disciples, patrons, and witnesses, and set the trajectory for inclusion in future leadership. Moreover, Jesus chose Mary Magdalene as the first eyewitness of his resurrection and tasked her to go and tell the brothers the news. This led Thomas Aquinas to deem Mary as the "apostle to the apostles." Therefore, they believe all positions of leadership should be open to women.

Complementary Alliance

We believe that Jesus' appointment of the Twelve continues a pattern begun in Genesis 2, where God gives the male a heavier weight of responsibility to guard his commandments and message, as the one who received the commandment first before the female was created. This is not to say that women do not also bear responsibility; rather the appointed males (apostles, then elders) bear the greater weight of responsibility.

However, we recognize that our Lord went to extraordinarily counter-cultural measures to include women in his ministry. People who are named in the New Testament are those who had become well-known in the churches, and many women are named - most prominently, Mary Magdalene. Her honor as the first eyewitness of the risen Lord who was commissioned by him to tell the brothers is one compelling reason for women to be included in speaking and leadership.

Another example is the Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus at the well and then becomes the first to proclaim him as the Messiah, becoming a persuasive evangelist to her entire village. Indeed, women are shown to accompany Jesus throughout his life. Highly significant is his mother who was present at his conception, birth, throughout his life and at the cross. Because of these examples and many others, we believe women should be included in leadership in the local church as the Holy Spirit gifts and calls them to service.

Does the Genesis record initiate the idea of male headship?

Complementarian

Most claim that the male receives an inherent and enduring authority in the male-female relationship because he is created first (primogeniture) in Genesis 2. They read Genesis 2:23 as Adam naming the “woman” as he did with the animals, confirming his implicit authority or “headship” over her before sin entered the world, and the difficult-to-translate term *ezer kenegdo*, “corresponding helper,” in Genesis 2:18 as a subordinate, supportive role, postured toward the primacy of the man’s leadership. The curse of the fall disordered this benevolent relationship and gave rise to the more violent and abusive male dominance over women. In the new creation, men and women will still function with the hierarchical relationships they were always intended to have, with males fulfilling their role as loving servant-leaders and with women eternally content as helpers.

Egalitarian

Genesis 1:27–28 describes both male and female as equally called to exercise dominion as co-regents, not as a leader and a subordinate. They see the claim to Adam’s primogeniture as a concept God routinely inverts in Scripture, causing a younger son to rule over his brothers (e.g. Jacob over Esau; Joseph over the older ten; David over all his brothers; Solomon over Adonijah) and teaching that “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:31). Most point out that Genesis never calls men “heads” or explicitly mentions male “headship” as a creation mandate.

The naming of the “woman” is not an act of authority but one of recognition, acknowledging her similar humanness yet diverse form. Similarly, the fullness of the term *ezer kenegdo*, with its idea of “corresponding,” recognizes the equality of the partners rather than expressing a subordinate as opposite a leader.² It’s the curse of the fall that leads to the subordination of woman and abusive male dominion, but this illegitimate hierarchy will be rectified in the new creation.

Complementary Alliance

We believe that the initial description of male and female as co-regents in Genesis 1:28 and the regular inversion of primogeniture in God’s economy hold sway against interpreting Genesis 2 as invoking a necessary creation-order hierarchy of male headship. We reject the idea that when Adam called his partner “woman,” it meant he had power over her. We also don’t believe that naming her “Eve” after the fall has significant implications. Instead, we acknowledge the significance of the coming Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:20, 18).

The term *ezer kenegdo* has been unfortunately construed in the past as “helpmeet” and a lesser “helper,” when its robust meaning speaks to the necessity of each complementary yet equal partner to provide what the other lacks.³ The helper language in Genesis 2 is not only a helper for who, but a helper for what. The creation job description of 2:15 cannot be fully accomplished by Adam alone, nor by the animals. At the same time, God’s giving the first command solely to Adam (2:15–16) and, as he metes out punishment, specifically referencing that command again

² See Sue Edwards and Kelley Mathews, *40 Questions about Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022), 74.

³ Edwards and Mathews, *40 Questions*, 72. See also *New English Translation (NET)* Genesis 2:18, note 57.

solely to Adam, informs us that God has given an additional responsibility to the male line as primary but temporal guardians and watchmen of his word. In the new creation, the creation-intended complementary alliance and corresponding balance between male and female co-regents will be fully realized.

What does the New Testament mean when it refers to males as “heads”?

Complementarian

Most complementarians argue that *kephalē*, the word translated as “head” in Ephesians 5:23 and other passages, means “authority” in all metaphorical instances related to relationships between men and women at home and in the church. Marriage depicts the authority of Christ over the church; thus, the husband has authority over his own wife. In concert with the whole of 5:22–33, they believe that this male headship calls the husband to lead the household with concern for the wife’s needs and form a strategic plan for how the household will serve God’s kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, the use of *kephalē* in its metaphorical sense refers to the authority Christ holds over men, men hold over women, and God holds over Christ. “Woman is the glory of man” (11:7) in the way she honors him and orients her purpose toward the man.

Egalitarian

Many egalitarians argue that *kephalē* means “source” rather than “authority,” as in the head of a river being its source. Ephesians 5:23 speaks not to Christ as the leader but as the savior of the body, the source of their life, love, and nourishment. Others interpret the metaphor in Ephesians as “part of a one-flesh union,” focusing on the physical and mysterious union between two parts coming together as one head and body. Regarding 1 Corinthians 11:3, they argue that if Paul meant to emphasize ranking, he would have listed God first, then Christ, then man. Instead, Paul is emphasizing the unity, interdependence, and connection of the pairs. As for the “woman as the glory of man” phrase (11:7), some interpret Paul as saying that it is the *woman* who God gave to man as his companion and complement, not another *male*. Others note that she was the pinnacle of creational beauty, coming from the man.

Complementary Alliance

We believe that metaphors may have more than one meaning depending on context and intention. We prefer not to box Paul into having only one meaning for the word in all its various uses, and we allow for the meanings of “authority,” “source,” and the literal, physical “head” of a body where they fit contextually.

Therefore, we do not interpret the use of *kephalē* as an “authority” as necessarily intending an inviolable hierarchical structure. Just as the 1 Corinthians 11:3 passage about God being the head of Christ cannot mean he is eternally subordinated to the Father without distorting the doctrine of the Trinity, neither can this verse be used to argue for the eternal subordination of woman to man. Rather, as we argue in our [Biblical Theology paper](#) (pps. 36-39), Paul most likely is advocating in 1 Corinthians 11:2–10 for women to *have authority* over their own heads. Yet he follows this countercultural statement with the admonishment that “woman is not

independent of man” and neither is man “independent of woman.” We recognize Paul’s use of *kephalē* as part of the design of complementarity: give-and-take sharing of differing responsibilities according to gifting, calling, and physical realities.

Is Paul anti-woman?

Paul’s first-century writings make up a large portion of the New Testament. The further we get from that century, the more Paul has been accused of being anti-women. At first glance, Paul’s words about women, especially in parts of 1 Timothy, Ephesians, and 1 Corinthians, can seem demeaning to modern women: “It is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:35); “Wives, submit to your husbands” (Ephesians 5:22); “I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12).

Interpreting these passages well takes study and attention to their larger contexts, both literarily and historically. Without a doubt, the culture into which Paul wrote was decidedly anti-woman, frequently denigrating her intellect, her morality, and her courage, among other qualities. For the sake of the gospel, Paul often had to walk a thin line between empowering women to their full potential in Christ and avoiding giving his restrictive culture a false impression that these women were lawless and immoral. But careful readers can see from Paul’s commendations of women and care and inclusion of them in the kingdom ministry that he did not adhere to the cultural defaults of his day. None of the three positions listed below would call Paul “anti-woman”—far from it! But each position explains how Paul elevates and sets women free in a different manner.

Complementarian

For complementarians, a key component to how Paul celebrates and elevates women is freeing them to fulfill the God-given roles of “being faithful, helpful wives, raising children to love and reverence God, [and] managing the household.”⁴ Mostly rejected, now, is the historical interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:13–14 “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed”—as women being less fit for leadership or teaching. Instead, most complementarians insist on the equality of worth for males and females, while putting heavy weight on Adam’s being formed first as evidence that creation order instilled males with a responsibility for headship and females with a responsibility for submission within the family and church. When each gender fulfills their role as God intended, they experience the greater joy and satisfaction God also intended to bless them with.

Egalitarians

For egalitarians, the key component to how Paul celebrates and elevates women is Paul’s discussion in Galatians 3:28 of how our being in Christ transcends the world’s ranked social classes: “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.” They reject the idea that creation order implies necessary male headship, but

⁴ Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 192.

instead insist that Genesis 1 and 2 “describe the mutual calling, oneness, and divine image-bearing of men and women.”⁵

They interpret most of the difficult, seemingly “anti-women” passages in Paul with an eye to how Paul’s texts flip the patriarchal context of his time on its head. For instance, instead of restricting women from learning, he says “Let her learn!” (see 1 Timothy 2:11). Instead of focusing on the woman’s submission to her husband, a cultural expectation in first-century Greece and Rome, he spends the majority of his Ephesian 5:22–33 passage telling men that God calls them to counter culturally love and serve their wives. (For more discussion on these passages and their various interpretations, see [Add links to Galatians 3 (pp. 41-43 in Biblical Theology Paper), 1 Timothy 2 (pp. 32-36 in Biblical Theology Paper), and Ephesians 5 (pp. 28-29 in Biblical Theology Paper)arguments here?].)

Complementary Alliance

We are convinced that the upside-down kingdom ethic of Paul’s letters as well as the entire New Testament’s emphasis on believers as the family of God must guide our reading of Paul. Like egalitarians, we view Paul’s warm commendation of his female coworkers in the faith (for example, Romans 16) as evidence of his celebration of their gifts and leadership.

We look to current scholarship exploring first-century culture to help us better situate Paul’s words in their historical context. For examples of how a closer look at the early church and surrounding cultures helps us better understand Paul’s view about women, see the discussions on 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 (pp. 36-39 in Biblical Theology Paper) and 1 Timothy 2:8–15 (pp. 32-36 in [Biblical Theology Paper](#)).

We believe Paul declares women and men equally loved by God and created to be on mission in a complementary and necessary alliance. He exhorts women as well as men to fulfill that mission to the full extent of their callings and gifts.

How has our Western culture shaped our understanding of women in church leadership?

The current debate over women in church leadership has been centuries in the making. While currently conceived as two primary “camps,” (complementarianism and egalitarianism), the church’s stance on the inclusion/exclusion of women in leadership is long and varied.

Our Biblical Theology paper reflects our best understanding of this topic within the context of the biblical story. But how have cultural trends since that time affected how women serve the church?

⁵ Sue Edwards and Kelley Mathews, *40 Questions about Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022), 206.

The Early Church: For most of Western history, Aristotle's view that "the female is a misbegotten male" was the predominant view. "Beliefs about female inferiority haunted Christianity from the beginning, influencing early church fathers like Clement of Alexandria and Jerome to characterize spiritual maturity for women as a progression to manliness."⁶ These ideas permeated the early church, resulting in female martyrs behaving like men and virginity uplifted as the highest calling for women. In addition, from the third and fourth centuries onward, there arose orders of cloistered nuns, which gave women an avenue for service and leadership in the church, in addition to education. Celibacy and singleness was seen as a Christian's highest estate at that time.

The Medieval church: By this period the power of the papacy was firmly established. Priests were defined as men who had not been polluted by the sexual impurity of women. In this way, women were seen as threats to the purity of the male leaders and were distanced from leadership. Priests were seen as "icons of Christ" and were, therefore, necessarily male.

The Reformation: The Reformers generally believed "all women are born that they may acknowledge themselves as inferior in consequence to the superiority of the male sex."⁷ The Reformers shifted dramatically from the Roman Catholic high view of singleness and taught that marriage was a woman's highest calling. Luther opposed educating girls beyond the basics. By eliminating the exalted option of singleness (and education), women were encouraged to pursue their husband and children as their highest calling.

The Enlightenment: Descartes' defense of the intellect of women led many to reject the long-held Aristotelian view of the female body as a deformed male body. Both d'Arconville and Descartes held that women's bodies "differed fundamentally from men's and were not inferior versions of them."⁸ He held that women had the power to reason in the same manner that men did. In addition, his claim for gender equality was grounded in the Christian doctrine of the "equality of souls."

The Industrial Revolution: Industrialization rapidly changed the nature of work, the economy, and the home, shifting work from a home-based enterprise to something done outside the home. This led to a private/public divide and redefined faith and family as private, and business and industry as public. As men increasingly worked outside the home, they were less present in raising children and training their children in their skills and trades. Women became less contributors to the family's economy and more dependent on their husbands. If women did find work outside the home by necessity, their wages would be half of their male counterparts.

Post Civil War Period: Victorian ideology created the "cult of true womanhood,"⁹ associating women with the virtues of purity, piety, and domesticity. This period saw a surge in activism by American evangelical women in social reforms and missions. Out of this came the female temperance movement, allowing women to speak from the pulpit and other public platforms about the ills of alcohol. Their concerns were corporate, rather than individual. This led women

⁶ Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, 91.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on I Corinthians 11:10*

⁸ French and Poska, *Women and Gender*, 262-263

⁹ Michelle Lee-Barnewell, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*, 21

to flood to the foreign mission field, where they were allowed considerable opportunity. In America, the women's rights movement grew out of the movement to abolish slavery. Before first-wave feminism, generally women could not vote, own property, serve on juries or be witnesses in court, have custodial rights over their own children, stand for election, or attend most colleges and universities. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote.

Post World War II: While many women had joined the workforce during the war, the predominant message post-war was that they should go back home and care for their husbands and children. The economic prosperity of the 1950s also made it possible for many women to stay home and rely on their husbands financially. Women would be the homemakers, men the breadwinners. Women's continued presence in the workforce was often considered a threat to the stability of the nation's social institutions. Many evangelicals reflected the wider culture in their ideals of the husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker.

Consequently, the church became secondary to the family, and "the corporate body became subtly transposed into a service agency' for the fulfillment of its individual members."¹⁰ Evangelical women were called to the home as their job and ministry, while having a job outside the home was seen as a threat to the family. Church duties could be focused on hostessing, or the more individualistic work of personal evangelism and ministry to family and neighbors. There was a significant shift from "the social value of gender roles to an 'order of creation' that required male leadership and female submission."¹¹ This idea was not new, but in the postwar era, evangelicals proposed a stricter hierarchy, which they also pursued with more insistence. Furthermore, the idea of female submission was now grounded in creation, whereas previously it had been justified by the fall. This intensified the notion of male and female spheres because it rooted the order in creation itself.

Second Wave Feminism: The 1960s saw a massive reaction against domestic expectations placed on women. This feminism wave focused on freeing women from this tightly defined role. Concerns about individual rights and equality dominated. The battle for civil rights for African Americans undergirded the idea that equal rights should extend to women as well. In addition, a major focus of women's liberation was an emphasis on "reproductive freedom" (unlimited access to birth control and abortion). The ascendance of individualism in American culture had given rise to the emphasis on the perceived needs of the individual. Sociologists Brigitte Berger and Peter Berger saw feminism as reflecting what they called "hyper-individualism," or an increased focus on the individual over all collective entities, including the family. James Davison Hunter says, "The individual woman (her rights, her needs, her occupational and political interests) is now emphasized over against every social context in which she finds herself."¹² The majority of evangelical feminists, however, sought to uphold the importance of the family while not limiting women to the roles of mother and housewife. In this movement, evangelical egalitarianism was born as many within the church saw its hierarchical structure as patriarchal, harmful, and unbiblical.

¹⁰ Wuthnow, *Restructuring of American Religion*, 55

¹¹ Lee-Barnewell, 47

¹² James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 90

In response to second wave feminism, George Knight III wrote *New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* in 1977. He rejected the historical view of men as superior and women as inferior, replacing it with “role differences.” He referred to men and women as “equal”; however, he asserted that the man’s “role” was to rule, and the woman’s “role” was to obey. Knight coined this view “complementarianism.” Wayne Grudem and John Piper (and others) popularized this view through the Danvers Statement in 1987, and their highly impactful work, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* in 1991. In his 1994 *Systematic Theology*, which became a standard text for many evangelical seminaries, Grudem expounded an understanding of trinitarian relations (on which he maps male and female relationships), called the Eternal Subordination of the Son (ESS) or the Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son (ESF). However, ESS/ESF has now been widely challenged by most scholars, both complementarian and egalitarian.

Today: The debate has only increased in frequency and intensity. Many nuanced views have arisen in response and critique of the more hardline views and abuses. Many voices from within complementarianism are increasingly challenging what they see as problematic aspects of complementarianism. As more women have entered into the academy, new research has arisen, giving fresh perspectives to many texts. Younger evangelicals are increasingly embracing an egalitarian position, while older evangelicals tend to uphold some form of complementarianism. Therefore, it is imperative to continue this conversation, remaining faithful to Scripture and open to the Lord’s leading as we seek wisdom to pursue God’s design for the household of faith, seeking unity rather than division.

How can you exclude women from serving as elders, but not as pastors? Aren’t the biblical offices of elder and pastor the same office?

Complementarian

Many who take this approach hold that the title of *pastor* refers to the office of *elder/overseer*. In the complementarian framework, only males are qualified to serve as *elders/overseer*. Since the title *pastor* refers to this office, only males are given the title *pastor*.

Egalitarian

Those who take this approach do not see the Bible placing any gender-based qualifications on any title or office in the local church. Therefore, males and females may serve as *elders/overseer* and have the title of *pastor*.

Complementary Alliance

We are convinced that the language of *elder/bishop* refers to an *office* and that patterns in Scripture suggest a temporal male guardianship of sound doctrine for this *office*.¹³ This gives us a humble confidence that eldership is reserved for males (see pp. 47-48 in [A Biblical Theology of Male and Female](#)). However, we understand the language of “shepherd/pastor” to refer to a *gifting* and *practice*, not an *office*. We agree with Harold Hoehner’s assessment of the biblical data:

A woman, then, may have the gift of pastor-teacher, apostle, evangelist, and prophetess (as Philip's four daughters—Acts 21:9), while, scripturally speaking, she cannot hold the office of an elder or bishop. The aforementioned gifts are sovereignly bestowed on her, and it is her duty and privilege to exercise them. This is completely different from appointment to the office of elder, which the Scriptures specify only for men who meet the qualifications for that office. ...By distinguishing between office and gift, 85-90% of the problems raised about women's ministry would be resolved (Hoehner, “Can a Woman Be a Pastor-Teacher?”, JETS 50/4 (December 2007) 761-71).

The vast majority of Christians — men and women alike — who have the gift of shepherding/pastoring will not serve on the staff of a local church. However, for those who do serve as staff members and do the work of pastoring/shepherding as their primary job function, they are given the title of pastor based on their gifting and function regardless of gender.

¹³ At Christ Community, we view those entrusted with overseeing and shepherding the local church as holding an “office.” Some churches also have deacons as officers. Christ Community has not appointed deacons as an “office.” The functions of deacons are performed by volunteer leaders and staff at Christ Community. However, for the sake of limiting bureaucratic complexity, we only have one governing board, the Elder Leadership Team.

The New Testament doesn't provide a one-size-fits-all model for church leadership. Instead, it offers glimpses into the organization of early house churches. As Tim Mackie observes, these early gatherings were small and faced persecution, necessitating meetings in homes.

[This] limited the amount of people that could be a part of one little-mini institution that was a house church, so that reality limited what institutions could even be imagined in the generation of the Apostles. It takes a couple of hundred years before you get later leaders of the church, in the Post New Testament era, having to tackle these problems of institutional structure with the rise of bishops over many regions that are made up of many communities of house churches and how you organize all that.

And the apostles just didn't ever have to speak to that. And neither did Jesus because it just wasn't their social reality. So it's a question most Christians now for most of church history have had to wrestle with, but that the apostles didn't deal with. But what they give us is the ethical vision that Jesus developed for smaller house church communities. That's what we have in New Testament letters and then we have to extrapolate from there. (from a BibleProject podcast)

How are the titles coordinator, director, and pastor assigned at Christ Community?

The titles like coordinator, director, and pastor¹⁴ are assigned on the basis of level of responsibility and job function. A man and woman doing the same job function, experience, and education with the same level of responsibility have the same title regardless of their gender. Women whose position includes supervisorial responsibilities may supervise both men and women and vice versa.

Why are the positions of campus pastor and senior pastor reserved for males?

The Senior Pastors and Campus Pastors — along with the Elder Leadership Team — are entrusted with the responsibility of guarding sound doctrine as part of their job function. Because of this job function, our bylaws require that Campus Pastors and Senior Pastors, who are specifically entrusted with and accountable for guarding sound doctrine, meet the requirement of the office of elder. From Adam onward, Scripture demonstrates a pattern of guardianship of God's commands to males. (See the Biblical Theology of Male and Female paper for more on this pattern.)

Since campus pastors and senior pastors are entrusted with elder responsibilities, why are they not on the Elder Leadership Team?

We are committed to healthy checks and balances on leadership power. If all the Campus Pastors and all the Senior Pastors served on the Elder Leadership Team there would be an unhealthy amount of staff influence on that team.

Therefore, in our congregational form of church government only one staff person—the Lead Senior Pastor—serves as a member of the Elders Leadership Team. The rest of the Elder Leadership Team is comprised of congregation members elected by the congregation.

As another check on abuse of power, the elder chair is always a congregation member, not a staff member. Additionally, the outgoing elder chair, not the Lead Senior Pastor, selects the next elder chair.

¹⁴ All staff members who have the title of pastor are strongly encouraged to seek, over time, licensing (credentialing) with the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA). The EFCA licenses men and women.

How is Christ Community working to give more preaching opportunities to women?

We believe Christ Community is called by Jesus to value the essential and unique contributions of women in the life of the church. Since our inception, we have held that women can be called and gifted for pastoral ministry, preaching, and teaching. In addition to preaching in the pulpit, Christ Community values women teaching, leading and participating in worship arts, and leading and participating in other spaces. We strongly believe we need to develop, empower, and respect women in preaching and teaching of the word of God as well as in ministries that support the preaching and teaching.

In short, we desire more women's voices. We've taken steps, at all levels of our institution, to grow and become more intentional in supporting and growing female leaders, pastors, and teachers. This includes the elders reading books written by women and discussing practical next steps, hiring female residents, and training and equipping female pastors on staff for preaching and teaching. Christ Community has more work to do in this area of ministry, but continues to encourage women preachers and teachers in their essential and unique contributions to the life of our church.

What's the difference between credentialing and ordination in the EFCA?

In the EFCA, "credentialing" is essentially an umbrella term, and there are multiple reasons for denominational credentialing: recognizing God's calling for vocational ministry, ensuring doctrinal commitment to the denominational Statement of Faith, providing avenues for educational and personal development, and establishing ministerial status for the IRS. Under the umbrella of "credentialing," there are different avenues and levels for credentialing as well as specific requirements for different credentials.

The two highest levels of credentialing in the EFCA are the Certificate of Christian Ministry (CCM) and the Certificate of Ordination (COO). The Certificate of Christian Ministry is "designed for qualified individuals serving in local church ministry whose primary ministry is in support of teaching and preaching the Word. It is also fitting for some, both men and women, whose primary ministry is directly related to the ministry of the Word." Those credentialed with the CCM are required to demonstrate theological competency, and this credential is open for both qualified women and men functioning in roles of Scripture-based and Scripture-supporting ministries (this could include senior pastor, associate pastor, seminary professors, chaplains, etc).

For the EFCA, the Certificate of Ordination is offered to qualified men whose primary ministry function is the preaching and teaching of the word of God. Those who are ordained must

demonstrate theological proficiency, and those who carry out that function are those who are in (or could fill) the office of senior pastor, lead, or campus pastor in the local church, which in EFCA denominational policy is equivalent to that of elder. This credential is limited to qualified men functioning as pastors (such as senior and associate pastors) or as seminary professors, chaplains, and so on.

Is it the decision of each individual EFCA church to decide if they're complementarian or egalitarian?

As is made clear in the FAQ above, the EFCA does not ordain women, which is a decision that has been in place since the General Conference denominational vote in 1988. With that said, levels of credentialing outside of ordination are available to women and men in vocational ministry. Since the EFCA does not ordain women for ministry, most EFCA churches are complementarian. Even still, the EFCA leaves that decision of complementarianism and egalitarianism to each church, respecting the congregational form of church government of each church in its denomination: "Our official EFCA policy for those ordained also becomes the policy of many/most EFCA churches, even though there is no official EFCA policy for local churches. However, it must also be stated that because of our congregational form of church government, the local church is free to make its own decision on this matter."¹⁵ If an EFCA church desires to change their position, it is a possibility but unlikely.

Many denominations are becoming more entrenched around these issues. Is the EFCA becoming more exclusively complementarian?

From our understanding, there is a movement within the EFCA to preserve the complementarian identity of the denomination, as it is primarily a complementarian denomination since ordination is only open to qualified and called men.

The EFCA is currently resistant to new partnerships with existing churches or planting churches that don't align with the complementarian position and the ethos of the denomination. At the same time, since Christ Community is already a part of the denomination, and the denomination respects congregational polity within the bounds of the Statement of Faith, Christ Community has the freedom to decide for itself on this theological position. As an EFCA church, we do not anticipate changing our complementarian position.

¹⁵From "What is the EFCA's position on women in ministry and credentialing?"
<https://national-office.ministries.efca.org/theological-faq#:~:text=Our%20official%20EFCA%20policy%20for%20decision%20on%20this%20matter>.

If the teaching regarding women in leadership isn't crystal clear, why would we hold a position that limits certain responsibilities to men?

We understand differing views on women in ministry to be a secondary theological position (meaning it is not among the essentials for saving faith in Jesus). But secondary doesn't mean unimportant. Indeed, Christians are convinced in various ways by the biblical text. We hold to our complementary alliance position because we've done the hard work of study, which leads us to believe the Bible speaks of men and women who are designed by God to serve together in unity and distinction, as allies on mission together. We have a humble confidence that our reading of the biblical text makes the best sense of the whole story of the Bible. We hope that our posture in our position is such that egalitarians and complementarians would feel valued and respected in our church.

My children will not attend a church that thinks like ours. How will we be relevant to the next generation?

We understand the concern and the need for the church to make itself relevant to each generation. The German theologian, Helmut Thielicke said it well: "The gospel must be preached afresh and told in new ways to every generation, since every generation has its own unique questions. The gospel must constantly be forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence." We wholeheartedly agree.

At the same time, we are convinced that cultural relevance is not our primary concern as a church; our primary concern is biblical faithfulness, which we are convinced has been historically demonstrated as consistently relevant to a broken world in desperate need of the good news of Jesus. Therefore, with biblical faithfulness to Jesus and his word as our guide, we will never choose to be culturally accommodating in order to be relevant. Instead, we will actively choose to be a faithful presence—faithful to the gospel of Jesus and Scripture—for the common good of our neighborhoods, city, and world.

How can we make the church a safe place for all people?

Misty Hedrick wisely notes, "Church safety involves more than protecting members from gun violence, hate crimes, or other physical threats. The church must also protect congregations from dangers within, such as emotional, spiritual, domestic, and sexual abuse."¹⁶ What steps have we taken at Christ Community to make it a safe place for all people?

Virtuous People

¹⁶ Misty Hedrick in *40 Questions About Women in Ministry*, 317-318.

First, since the inception of Christ Community, we have placed a heavy emphasis on intentionally developing spiritual and personal maturity through the spiritual disciplines. We do not want to be people who are merely informed about what Jesus taught but rather who are becoming the kinds of people who can obey what Jesus taught. This foundation of virtuous men and women, brothers and sisters in Christ, growing together in Christ-likeness and holiness is the most important proactive step we take in ensuring our church family is a safe place.

Clarity and Culture

Second, we have clear policies on abuse, misconduct, and harassment as well as systems to regularly train and reinforce these policies with staff and volunteers. Additionally, for employees of Christ Community, we have clear staff culture habits/values, which are reinforced in staff meetings. These cultural habits also serve as the basis for our quarterly employee reviews.

Every Christ Community *employee*, as well as any *volunteers* who serve with minors, must pass a thorough application process, including a criminal background and reference check.

We also ensure that each volunteer and staff person working with children has completed Child Protection Training and adheres to the Child/Youth Protection Policy. This document seeks to clearly define sexual abuse, incident reporting, supervision procedures, and other important guidelines that serve to protect our children and nurture their growth. Every staff person is also required to go through Sexual Harassment Training.

Crisis Response and Investigating

We are committed to fostering a safe and supportive environment for everyone. To achieve this, we have established clear pathways for reporting any suspected or actual abuse or misconduct.

Anyone, staff or congregation member, can confidentially report concerns through a secure online portal at www.redflagreporting.com. You have complete control over anonymity and can choose who receives your report.

All reports are taken seriously. We have a well-defined process for investigation, which may involve a third-party investigator depending on the nature and severity of the issue.

If there is ever a suspicion of child or domestic abuse among our congregation members, we prioritize the safety of those involved. We will involve the appropriate law enforcement and social services while continuing to offer support as a church family.

We regularly evaluate all three of these looking for ways to continue to make Christ Community a place where no one is ever abused.