

To: Ebenezer LBC members and friends

From: Ebenezer Elder Board

Date: December 12, 2012

Re: **Draft Study Paper – Role of Women in the Church**

Many of you recall that in the summer of 2010, the elder board created a study group charged with the following:

- 1) Consider the question – Does (Has) Ebenezer fully utilize(d) the gifts of women in ministry in harmony with our current statement of faith and the accepted position paper on the role of women in ministry? Discuss and report on how it has and how it does not. Develop recommendations where appropriate.
- 2) As work on question 1 is completed, what other questions or recommendations rise to the surface as it relates to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's current position on the role of women?

After a few months of discussion and study, the study group forwarded recommendations regarding #1 to the elder board for consideration, and we as a congregation have acted on those recommendations. Recently, in answer to question #2 above, the study group completed a draft paper on the role of women in the church and has now submitted that paper to the elders for their consideration.

At its most recent meeting, the elder board discussed a process for handling this draft paper from the study group. As an elder board, we have received this draft paper and now desire to disseminate it more broadly to you as a congregation for study, discussion and comment. We are proposing a six month period of time where you will be invited to respond to this draft paper in a variety of ways. You may submit written responses, interact directly in conversation with any of the elders and study group members, and participate in forums planned for February and March 2013 where individuals may gather to discuss the draft paper.

We also plan to distribute this paper to our partners in ministry within the CLBA family. This will include denominational leadership and theological committees, other pastors, elders and friends within the network of churches.

The document itself is quite long, approaching 90 pages. The draft document is available via our website www.myebenezerchurch.com/#/ebenezer-is/links. We are also happy to email you a PDF version of the paper. If you don't have access to the website or email, call the church office and we will print out a copy for you.

We are inviting individuals to submit written responses in the following ways: Address to: ROW Draft Paper c/o Ebenezer LBC 1830 E. 41st Street, Minneapolis, MN 55407, or

Email to: ROW@myebenezerchurch.com

It is our hope that the unity that binds us together in Christ will guide and direct our discussions on this topic. We seek open, honest and thoughtful conversations about the issues presented in the paper. We want to remain faithful to scripture and our prayer is that these discussions will help us live out the mission and vision God has given Ebenezer.

In Christ,

Ebenezer Elder Board

EBENEZER LUTHERAN BRETHERN CHURCH

Role of Women in the Church- Draft Paper

Ebenezer ROW Study Group

December 12, 2012

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Abstract

We have spent over two years studying for and writing this paper. We understand that the subject we are engaging here can be controversial. And we know that many others, both in our church body and in denominations and groups across the spectrum of believers and of history, have likewise struggled to arrive at a biblical response to this issue. Our approach was straightforward: we focused on hearing and learning what God's Word says on the topic, and in so doing, have drawn deeply from the large body of resources, on all sides of the issue, written by those that have gone before us. We have also listened intently to each other and have enjoyed vigorous debate. We did not seek to break new ground; rather we simply wanted to know what God's Word said for us – for our context, our congregation, and our lives. Now that we have arrived at a set of conclusions, we want to communicate and share these findings for broader feedback and discussion.

The scope of this work is purposefully narrow: we only see ourselves as addressing the specific issue of the role of women in the church. While this issue is broad and tangled in itself, we have been conscious of not wanting to stray into other important or related issues (for example, ordination, male and female roles in marriage and family, or the nature of the church itself). It is enough for this paper to focus on what God's Word says for us about the role of women in the church.

As you will see as you read the rest of this document, a majority of the committee arrived at a position where we believe God's Word does not limit the roles women may have in the church. Rather we see roles for people in the church, whether men or women, as being gift-based and kingdom focused. We support this position with a view of what we see as the big themes of scripture and simultaneously articulate how these big themes (and the specific bible passages that give rise to them) inter-relate to the bible passages that would seem to say the opposite (for example, the so-called order of creation passages, and specific texts within some of Paul's letters). In all cases, we have sought to be explicit about our interpretive assumptions. In fact, we have an entire section on our interpretive stance and an appendix on our hermeneutical principles. Our thinking is that it is equally important (more important maybe) to understand how conclusions are reached as to understand what those conclusions are. Whether you agree or disagree with the conclusions reached here, we ask that you engage with us and provide feedback while being equally clear about your interpretive assumptions.

Given the stance taken in this paper and the historical position of the CLBA on this topic, we expect additional discussion. We understand that the synodical leadership has instructed us as congregations to dig into this issue and is now asking for additional insight from us as congregational leaders. We provide this paper for that purpose and in a spirit of openness and honesty about where God has led us in our studies.

Summary of Study Group's Interpretive Stance

The ROW study group has worked to interpret the key biblical texts that pertain to women's roles in the church. We have had many vigorous discussions over two years, have read several books that approach the issue from varying angles, and are now committing to paper our consensus position on the issue. We each have learned a tremendous amount during this process. Many of us have landed in different places from where we started. In our work, we have wanted our commitment to the truth and authority of Scripture to be paramount. Our interpretative stance, in a nut shell, is that understanding the Bible is the way to understand each of the major questions of life, including the roles for men and women in the church. But saying this is not enough. We also recognize that many thoughtful and faithful believers differ on this particular issue – we have read plenty on all sides. Yet we are now taking a position. And we acknowledge that this position has built into it some assumptions about how we interpret the Bible. It is these assumptions that we want to make explicit. We believe that any readers of this document (i.e., the Ebenezer ROW Study Group position paper) will be well-served by an honest and simple articulation of our basic assumptions in interpreting the biblical texts.

Furthermore, we have confined our study to dealing solely with this particular issue: the role of women in the church. There are scores of other important issues, some even closely related to the one at hand. But this paper is not intended to wrestle with those issues. For instance, the relationship between men and women in marriage is defined or dealt with in many of the same Bible passages we herein interpret. And we must necessarily, to some extent, discuss marriage. But we do so only in service of our goal, which is to articulate what Scripture is teaching on the subject of women's roles *in the church*. Our conclusions about women's roles in the church should not automatically be assumed to apply to marriage relationships. And there are additional examples of related issues not here fully addressed (e.g., ordination, offices in the church). So again, let it be understood that this paper is focused on the role of women in the church.

We also want to state, with emphasis, that we are learners. This position paper is important in that it articulates to the best of our ability our current thinking and gives us a basis for action and behavior going forward. But we know that our understanding is inherently limited and that we will continue to learn as we dig more into the texts and continue to wrestle together over this issue. We consider this paper a significant and necessary milestone, not a final destination.

Here are our primary interpretive assumptions (These should be taken as a whole, not as if in order by priority. See also Appendix B on our hermeneutical guidelines):

1. The big themes of scripture shape the smaller themes. Of course, this begs the question of what are the big themes and what are the small ones. We suggest the

biggest themes of scripture are God's love for all of humanity, our collective and individual rebellion against God, and his work in human history to redeem all of his creation. Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, is the triune God's chief self-revelation. Everything else in scripture either leads up to the Christ event or proceeds from it. Thus, Jesus Christ and his radical practice and teaching regarding gender are foundational to our understanding of this particular issue and shape our understanding of other passages.

To give a specific, yet brief, example of how big themes shape small ones, redemption and kingdom ethics form the context for understanding Paul's teachings about the specific issues faced in some of the early churches. Since we understand that gender equality rests on and flows from the big themes (e.g., nature and scope of redemption; the nature, scope and ethics of the kingdom), the specific passages in Paul that seem to cut against these big themes must be overwhelmingly clear, prescriptive, and universal to, in themselves, override the big themes.

2. Jesus' kingdom is central to understanding how to live in the current age. We presently live with some of the benefits of his kingdom and it is our hope to live fully with all kingdom benefits in the age to come. One of the immediate benefits of Jesus' kingdom is the new reality Paul speaks of in Galatians 3:28. We view this passage not just as articulating equality before God in terms of salvation but in terms of life. For what is salvation apart from the rest of our lives? Doesn't salvation, when understood biblically, include all aspects of our lives, individual and collective? The answers must be yes.
3. The biblical text should, first, speak for itself. While obvious this assumption needs to be said none-the-less. A leading example is Genesis 1 to 3. Our position is that this passage, taken on its own, while establishing differences between males and females, does not teach either an egalitarian or hierarchical view of male/female roles in the church. The interpretive issue lies in Paul's letters not in Genesis 1 to 3.
4. Paul's letters to the early churches must be understood in their historical context. This assumption is closely related to the first above. The big themes for Paul are the new reality that Christ has ushered in, the power and nature of faith in Christ, and that relationship with God through faith in Christ is for all people (i.e., for Gentiles not just Jews). Much of what Paul teaches that deals directly with gender roles applies inside the home for those who are married, is culturally specific, or both.
5. Reason matters. While our reason must be submissive to scripture, it must be present and active. For instance, a readily apparent question is why would God gift women as leaders (a well-documented and obvious fact both historically and in present times) but not let them fully exercise those gifts within his own church? While God is sovereign and beyond human reason, He is not random or

capricious and revealed Himself in order to be understood by humans. So if women's roles are to be limited, then there must be understandable reasons – in the realm of human existence - why that is so. And equally clear consequences if these limitations are not followed.

This summary is not meant to be a complete argument in all aspects. The balance of this paper fleshes out our position and deals much more fully with both the relevant Bible passages as well as the current position paper of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Our purpose here is to be explicit about our assumptions that shape our thinking. We wish all authors would do likewise.

Discussion and Interpretation of Scriptural Passages

This document is a brief summary of our study of the key passages that deal with the role of women in the church. For each passage, we give a summary of the passage itself, a synopsis of current CLBA policy, and an outline of our response. These texts were chosen since they are the ones that deal with this topic and are the ones typically used in these discussions.

Genesis 1-3

Genesis 1:26-31a *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*

Genesis 2:18-24 *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air...But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

Genesis 3:6-7,16-17 *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.... To the woman he [God] said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.*

Summary: In Genesis 1, God creates humankind uniquely within his creating work by making humans in his image and in perfect fellowship with one another and with himself. Genesis 2 describes the interdependent relationship between man and woman. Genesis 3 tells how God’s creative order was twisted by the fall of man and woman together, and details the hierarchical relationship that now exists between man and woman because of the fall and its curse.

Current CLBA policy is supported by the view that women are subordinate to men because 1) God created man first, then woman, and Paul reinforces the importance of this “order of creation” in 1 Tim 2:12-13, and 2) woman as “helper” is a subordinate description, and 3) the curse that a woman’s “...desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

After studying these scriptures, we affirm that there are clear differences between male and female in God’s creative design. We see these differences indicated by the order of creation as well as the duties God metes out to Adam and Eve. But these differences do not lead to present-day limitations on women’s roles in the church. God created man and woman together (Genesis 1:27). Genesis chapter two highlights the pinnacle of creation—humankind—giving detail of woman created from man’s rib is given to make clear God’s creative intent of mutual interdependence between the two genders (Genesis 2:18-25). The word “helper” does not carry the meaning of *hierarchy* but, rather, *mutuality* between man and woman. The same word in Hebrew is used, for example, in relation to God as the “helper” of Israel (Deuteronomy 33:26,29). After the Fall, sin and its curse is now the norm; and where one finds hierarchy in gender relationships, one finds the effects of the fall, not God’s creative design. Both man and woman are created in God’s image; both are equally culpable before God’s law; and both share in the curse of the fall where hierarchy now exists between man and woman, seen especially within the context of marriage.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16 (especially 7-12)

“A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”

Summary: This text concerns propriety in worship within the church, and with head coverings in particular. Men are to worship without their heads covered; women are to have their heads covered.

Our current policy is supported by the argument of headship, where the Apostle Paul uses the same word to mean both “a person’s head” as well as “an authority over.” God is the head (authority over) man, and man is the head (authority over) woman. God’s creation work and order from Genesis 2 means that man is in authority over woman.

Our work on this passage led to a focus on three key points: 1) the cultural context of the church in Corinth, 2) the meaning of the word “head,” and 3) the broader context of this passage. We understand the focus on head coverings was a contextually-focused teaching describing a culturally-appropriate form of Christian worship for that time. Our current practice demonstrates that we do not believe this teaching on head coverings to be applicable across time and culture. For example, we do not require women to wear head coverings when worshipping. Further, the biblical text notes that both men and women were praying and prophesying; there was no restriction for women to remain silent or to refrain from praying or prophesying within the worshipping community.

The sense that “headship” means that man has authority over woman by virtue of gender is first rooted in God’s creating man first, then woman, and that woman is created for man. The text continues, however, in claiming that man and woman are not independent from one another, and that man comes from woman. We need to consider both verses 8-9 *and* 11-12, the latter in which the argument is made that men come from women. Verse 11 begins “In the Lord,” establishing the context to be within the church community, and asserts that, within this context, relationships are that of mutual interdependency between genders. The argument ends by trumping the discussion of gender with the supremacy of God. This leads us to conclude that this text is speaking directly to the local context of the church in Corinth and is not to be considered as being trans-cultural in all aspects. The overarching trans-cultural principle is for us to conduct public worship in a manner consistent with our own cultural practices. That women should pray and prophecy with their heads covered pays respect to local cultural mores; Paul is exhorting the Church to conduct their worship in a culturally appropriate manner. We should do the same for our cultural context today. Therefore, we understand the argument for man being over woman in church is weakened by this text, not strengthened by it.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 (especially 34-35)

“...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”

Summary: This text concerns propriety in worship.

Our current policy interprets verses 34-35 to mean that women should not preach to the congregation, and some might say this also means that women should not teach the Bible where men are present.

After a closer reading of the text, we have come to understand the word translated “woman” (which may mean any woman but also wife) in verse 34 as being connected with the word “husband” in verse 35. In other words, this text is saying that a wife is to ask her questions to her husband at home, not in public during the worship gathering. Therefore, this text is not a prohibition for any woman to remain silent during public

worship of the church, but is, rather, a contextually-specific instruction to the church in Corinth regarding a localized situation between husbands and wives. This view is further strengthened when recognizing that the Apostle Paul's instructions in the immediate context regarding prophecy carries no gender restriction or instruction, but, rather, is an encouragement for everyone to bring a "hymn, word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" (verse 26).

Galatians 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Summary: This text states that unity in Christ removes boundaries within the body of Christ based on ethnicity, social class, and gender. This is one of the great verses in the Bible and speaks to the transforming good news of Jesus Christ.

Our current policy is supported by restricting the implications of this verse to affect salvation alone. In other words, this verse deals only with entrance into Christ's church, but has no bearing on leadership roles within the church. Therefore, this verse does not speak to women being able to fill every position or office within the Church.

After considering the text and context, we understand this verse to apply to all of Christian life – salvation is whole-life transforming. The phrase "one in Christ" extends beyond entrance into the faith community and includes all roles and relationships within the church. Limiting the implications of the unity we have in Christ to church membership alone is unwarranted, and misses the radical nature of that unity in Christ that transcends human discrimination. No one would argue for role restrictions in the church based on ethnicity or social class; why would gender be handled differently? Further, the church is different from the home: there are role and relationship distinctions there. Not so in the Church. We believe this verse is a strong statement against restricting women from a role within the church based on gender, and expresses one of the broad themes of the New Testament – God ushered in a new kingdom in His son, Jesus, and this kingdom operates and lives with a new set of kingdom values.

Ephesians 5:21-33 (especially 22-24)

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Summary: This passage concerns Christ and the Church, and uses that model as defining relationships within marriage.

This passage has been interpreted to mean that women are to be submissive to men and are not to hold positions of authority over men within the church, especially in teaching and preaching roles. Our current policy reflects this interpretation.

Our work on this passage has brought us to a different interpretation. First, the idea of “submission” is first introduced in verse 21, where mutual submission is the instruction to everyone. Second, the word “submit” is actually not included in the Greek in verse 22 but is inferred from verse 21. Third, the context is the home, not the church. In other words, a wife is to submit to her husband (verse 24), and both are to mutually submit to one another (verse 21). We must not, however, assume the same relationships between genders within both the home and the church; they are two different entities. The church is a new creation; the church is now the body of Christ where roles are determined by the calling and gifting of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12). We do a disservice to scripture interpretation when we assume similar relationships between genders within the marriage and within the church.

1 Timothy 2:8-15 (especially 11-15)

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Summary: This is a matter of propriety during worship.

Our current policy interprets “quietness” in verse 11 to mean “silence” (as some translations actually use), and “full submission” to be interpreted by verse 12, “do not permit a woman to teach (a man) or to have authority over a man: she must be silent.” We have not developed a theology around the idea of being “saved through childbearing.”

Our understanding of this passage starts with the interpretation of the Greek word *ἡσυχία*, which may mean “quietness” (description of the life of one who stays at home doing his

own work, and does not officiously meddle in the affairs of others) or “silence.” Direction is given by the interpretation of this same word earlier in the chapter, which reads “...that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (verse 2b). The Apostle Paul is not, in verse 2, teaching that Christians are to live peaceful and “silent” lives; no, we are to live “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” So, too, women are to learn in a similar manner of “quiet living.”

A plain reading of verse 12 indicates women cannot teach men, but are to be “silent” (same Greek word previously translated as “quiet”). The immediate context provides instruction concerning worship, including specific instructions to men to lift up holy hands in prayer (verse 8). Our current practice (while typically not lifting hands, it is not prohibited) during worship indicates that we treat this text as not being trans-cultural. In fact, we believe that “holy hands” is contrasted with “anger or disputing.” In other words, there is to be a peaceful and “quiet” spirit for men in worship, just as there is for women. The plain reading of verses 9-10 would indicate that women today should not braid their hair nor wear any gold or pearls or expensive clothes when in public worship. Again, our current practice indicates that we do not believe this text to be trans-cultural, but, rather, to be a specific issue with the church in Ephesus (where Timothy was pastor). Verses 11-15 regarding women immediately follow these culturally-specific instructions. We believe this text, in regards to the instructions to men and women, are not specifically trans-cultural, but, rather, that the Apostle Paul is teaching there is to be a measure of modesty in outward display during worship as we bring our requests and prayers to God.

The Apostle Paul references the Fall in verses 13-14. This text must be read within the salvation themes and the unity of scripture. Elsewhere in scripture, Adam is held accountable for the Fall (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). The Genesis account shows that Adam was present with Eve at the Fall (Genesis 3:6). Paul is using the creation narrative to establish his teaching of women to learn in quietness and not to usurp authority over men.

Then there is verse 15, for which we do not have a functional theology. This verse sets the context of instruction to be within a marriage (between wife and husband) when it speaks of “women will be saved through childbearing.” This suggests that these instructions are for a wife and her husband, not men and women in general.

Given the above, we believe this text is not a prohibition for women to teach men or to speak during public worship today, but rather addresses a localized situation of wives disrupting worship by asking questions of their husbands with an attitude of usurped authority. Again, this is a matter of propriety in worship.

1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9

The texts list our qualifications for elders (and deacons in 1 Timothy). These texts have been used to support the position that the office of elder is for men only. We propose two challenges for such use. First, both contain the statement: “the husband of but one wife.” At Ebenezer (and within the CLBA), we do not disqualify single men from consideration

of being an elder (or deacon). So there must be contextual consideration given to these passages. Second, our congregational history established both Deacon and Deaconess Boards, the later being composed of women. Therefore, we have not, in the past, eliminated women from church leadership as “deaconesses” in contrast to a strict interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:12, “A deacon must be the husband of but one wife...”

Jesus and Women in the Gospels

As we read scripture from the perspective of our own culture, Jesus’ response to women may not appear to be unusual. In Jesus’ day, however, women were treated as intrinsically inferior to men, unable to learn, not believed in courts. Jewish rabbis praised God that they were not created as gentiles, women, or ignorant people. Jesus’ attitudes and behavior were counter-cultural, and shaped what was to come as he ushered in God’s new Kingdom. Jesus was good news to women! Some examples:

Luke 10:38-42 – Mary

Vs. 39, 41-42...*And she (Martha) had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching...Jesus stated: Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.*”

In Jesus’ day, sitting at the feet of a teacher was something that only men did. Jesus’ actions shattered barriers to religious teaching for women. He encouraged Mary, and other women, to learn. This would open opportunities for ministry of women in future generations. It is vital for women, as well as men, to be grounded in Christian foundations as we all follow Jesus in his mission in our world.

In current CLBA policy, girls and women are included in Christian education given through the church. Women may take classes in the seminary, but many do not see this as a viable opportunity, since it cannot lead to ordained ministry within the CLBA.

John 4:1-41 – Woman at the Well

A woman becomes an evangelist: *7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ...10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ... 27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.*

As the townspeople were coming out to meet Jesus, Jesus talks with his disciples: *31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” 32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” 34 Jesus said to them, “My food*

is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. **35** Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. **36** Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. **37** For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' **38** I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Note, then, the effects of Jesus' ministry to the woman: **39** Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." **40** So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. **41** And many more believed because of his word.

Jesus broke many cultural barriers in this interaction (the longest recorded conversation with any person). He accepted a person across barriers of gender, race, religion and lifestyle. His disciples were surprised that he talked with a woman, but then gave their attention to food. However, Jesus re-focused attention to the larger issue of purpose and mission, and "fields white for harvest." The people affected by the woman's witness were an example of this "harvest." A woman was the catalyst for many finding life in Christ, though an "unlikely person" from the perspective of the disciples.

Current CLBA policy includes men and women being encouraged in personal evangelism. However, there may not be an expectation that women could be evangelists that would affect communities of people. May God be calling us to see "fields white to harvest," as well as messengers to them, with new eyes?

News of the resurrection:

In all the gospel accounts of the resurrection, women were told by Jesus (or angels – his messengers) to speak the truth of the resurrection, a foundation of our Christian faith. The women talked about the resurrection with each other, but were instructed to tell the men. Why did the Holy Spirit inspire gospel writers to record this? What are implications of Jesus' instructions to women to speak about the resurrection to men for ministry of women today?

Matthew 28:8-10

8 So they (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary) departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Mark 16:5-7

5 And entering the tomb, they (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome) saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. **6** And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. **7** But go,

tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Mark 16:9-11 (some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20)

9 Now when he (Jesus) rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

Luke 24:1-11

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they (the women) went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” 8 And they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11 but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

John 20:16-18

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

Current CLBA policy and practice do not encourage women teaching when men are present. There are exceptions in some churches: leading a class with discussion format, and reading scripture and praying during worship gatherings. It would not be acceptable to some people, however, if a woman would speak the Word (preach) during a worship gathering.

Jesus instructed women to be the first communicators of the good news of his resurrection. This was profound, considering the view of women in his culture. Jesus has called and given teaching gifts to some women today, but women realize that the opportunity to freely use all of their gifts is not present in the CLBA. Some choose to develop and use ministry gifts in a para-church ministry or another denomination. This loss of women leaders raises concern for us as we seek to live into our CLBA vision to “reach beyond our own comfort to all people among whom God places us.” Young people and children need examples of men and women who are called by God to communicate the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to present and future generations.

Living as citizens in Christ's Kingdom

The community of Jesus' followers included women (some are noted above). Jesus' example and teaching on the Kingdom of God inspired the early church. Romans 16 includes the ministry of many women, and there are historical records that Junia (v.7) was a woman. In two of Paul's letters (I Cor. 11 & 13, I Timothy 2), he needed to address specific issues in the churches, but other books describe a community of Christ followers who worked together in varieties of ministry. Passages on spiritual gifts do not give restrictions to women. May God continue to foster new partnership and interdependence among men and women in the CLBA. This will result in powerful communication of Christ and His Kingdom to people waiting to hear and see the good news of the Gospel.

CLBA Affirmations with Response

What follows are ten affirmations as set forth in the CLBA's March 1988 position paper entitled, *Role of Women in the Church: Implications of Suffrage*. Inserted within these affirmations are the Ebenezer study group's responses. The inserted responses are bracketed by lines, bold and italicized.

Affirmation 1: The teaching establishing the role of women in the church must be developed under the authority of Scripture. The Bible is our “final and authoritative guide for faith and conduct” (Constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, Article II, paragraph 1).

The Bible is our “final and authoritative guide for faith and conduct” because it is the inspired Word of God. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And as Peter states, concerning Scripture: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, we must approach the Bible as servants under its authority, completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to work through it in such a way that our understanding of a particular Scripture portion will be in agreement with all the teachings of Scripture. This authority will be questioned as we seek to understand how to live in the household of God in our own time and place. When discussing the current issue, the role of women in the church, there may be a clash between the society and the church. This affirmation asserts that the Bible is the normative authority for the church and not the culture. The Bible speaks prophetically to the aspects of all cultures that may be contrary to God's Word and calls the church “in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2).

The separate roles of men and women in a given society are established over many generations, but are substantially learned by children before the age of five. The cultural understanding of roles is diffused throughout every part of the culture. The teaching of the church at any one point in history, or at any one point on the earth, may be much more influenced by the surrounding culture than the local Christians realize. At some points in history there may be substantial agreement between the church and the society, at other times there may be serious differences. In either case, we affirm that the Scriptures are the final guide for faith and life for believers both in the church and in society.

Response to Affirmation 1: We agree wholeheartedly and unanimously with this affirmation.

Affirmation 2: There are general principles or rules that must govern our study of the Bible. These hermeneutical rules need to be clarified and applied when the church faces new or changing cultures.

Clarifying the rules of Bible interpretation is a demanding task. While we must always rely on the Holy Spirit as we seek to understand the Word, God also expects us to be diligent students. Paul writes, “Study to show yourself approved unto a God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Some of the major rules of Bible interpretation are listed below:

1. The Bible must be interpreted in its original languages and in its historical and cultural contexts. These contexts include the original language and how it is otherwise used, the immediate passage, the surrounding passages, the entire book in which the passage is found, the other writing of the author, the entire Bible, the culture of the time and the previous history.
2. The Bible must be interpreted in light of its unity since it is all inspired by God. The unity of the Bible enables the reader to let Scripture interpret Scripture and requires the exegete to interpret the parts in terms of the whole, thereby reaching conclusions on which all Scripture agree.
3. The Bible must be interpreted as a progressive revelation. By **progressive** revelation we mean that the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God and not man, in which God brings man to an increasingly clearer understanding of God’s character and His purposes. Progressive revelation is the general pattern of revelation. Bernard Ramm asserts, “This perspective of progressive revelation is very important to the interpreter. He will expect the full revelation of God in the New Testament. He will not force New Testament meanings into the Old, yet he will be able to more fully expound the Old knowing its counterparts in the New.” “Progressive revelation in no manner qualifies the doctrine of inspiration, and it in no way implies that the Old Testament is less inspired. It states simply that the fullness of revelation is in the New Testament” (Ramm, 1950, p. 82, Protestant Biblical Interpretation).

4. Bible passages which speak to an issue in a direct teaching fashion (didactic) should be used to help understand incidental, descriptive and historical references elsewhere. The direct teaching of Paul in the letter to the Romans, showing how men can be made right with God, develops a formal, complete picture of this issue. It helps us to see that the description of Cornelius as a righteous and God-fearing man does not give the full basis of how man can be judged righteous before God (Acts 10:22).

5. The Bible interpreter must distinguish the applications of principles within a given culture, such as the culture of the New Testament, from the principles themselves. The principles, not the specific applications, must be our guide to faith and life. This rule is particularly important to the subject of the role of women in the church because various culturally determined issues are discussed in the contexts of the passages which deal most directly with the role of women in society and in the church. We must treat similar subjects with the same rules of interpretation.

When Paul expresses his desire that men everywhere should pray, he applies this to a culturally common manner of praying, namely, “lifting up holy hands in prayer” (1 Timothy 2:8). If we lay the stress on the cultural manner of prayer we will conclude that we are not really praying unless we lift up our hands! If we recognize that the principle is the point of concern, and that culturally acceptable ways of obeying that principle change, we may pray without ever raising our hands. When Paul exhorts the women, “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God,” the principle is modesty. If we lay stress on the modesty, decency and propriety principles, we will be constantly adjusting them to the changing dress practices of the various societies in which the church serves. If we understand that it is better to be clothed in good deeds than to make a stunning impression with beautiful clothing, we will emphasize character over outward appearance. These are the points of principle Paul is making. However, if we lay the emphasis on the application, stressing, for example, the word “gold,” we will make rules forbidding the wearing of gold in church. We might then stick to this teaching even though the principle might be circumvented with women wearing other expensive jewelry in excess, carefully avoiding any gold. This mistake has often been made in the history of the church.

Here we must be most cautious and careful to rightly divide the word of truth lest we too easily lay aside a truth as culturally limited, or too easily take a culturally limited truth and make it an absolute statement about the nature of God or mankind. Mary Evans in *Women in the Bible* rightly cautions that, “it is arbitrary to dismiss any Biblical teaching as culturally conditioned without a strong indication within the context that cultural influences have been a primary consideration, and this indication is very rarely present” (Evans, 1983, p. 10). Evans is correct in offering a word of caution. However, indications of the culturally limited aspects of an application are usually not seen until they are seen from another culture. This is the nature of cultural presuppositions. They are rarely seen by people within the culture, they are simply taken for granted. Only careful study will show the relationship between the principle anchored in the character of God and in His design for His world and the particular application to a given culture.

6. The Bible affirms one system of truth about God, man, and salvation because it reveals that God is one. Just as we assume a unity in the Bible itself for purposes of exegesis (rule 2), so also we expect to build a consistent system of truth by which to guide our lives. When there are no exact current day counterparts to Scriptural texts, or when there are present day situations which do not have Biblical counterparts, appropriate teaching will be found by relating to the truth revealed in the Scriptures about the character of God, the nature of mankind, the revelation of God’s purposes, the experience of the church and the leading of the Holy Spirit. These are the basic ingredients of systematic theology in which we seek to think God’s thoughts after Him, starting from the revelation which is given.

Of course, we must not quickly assume that there is no direct counterpart. Gordon Fee suggests this helpful principle: “First, we must do our exegesis with particular care so that we hear what God’s Word to them really was. In most cases a clear principle has been articulated, which usually will transcend the historical particularity to which it was being applied. The principle, however, must be applied to genuinely comparable situations.” (Fee, 1981, p. 63) When the situations are significantly different, we must step back and gain a perspective on the character of God as it relates to the case in point. What do we know about mankind and his societies in light of God’s person which will give us guidance on this issue? What about God’s purposes for this people which we are

seeking to lead? How has the church faced similar problems in the past? What solutions has the Holy Spirit honored by His presence and power over a longer period of time? This is the process used in Acts 15 by the first church council. It is the process used when the confessions were written.

Response to Affirmation 2: We agree wholeheartedly and unanimously with this affirmation. In order for any meaningful discussion to take place pertaining to matters of Biblical interpretation, there needs to be an agreed upon set of principles that guide that discussion and facilitate clear communication. That being said, we also acknowledge that there are bound to be differences in the way that these principles are applied.

As a part of the initial work of the Ebenezer Study Group on the Role of Women in the church, we researched and prepared a set of hermeneutic guidelines. The set of guidelines we worked with, including observations on how they compare or differ with the “rules” outlined in this section of the 1988 CLBA Position Paper, follows:

Principle #1: The One Interpretation Principle. This principle doesn’t appear to have a direct parallel in the 1988 document. Our definition is “that every verse in the Bible has one primary interpretation, although the verse may have many applications. The primary interpretation is that which mirrors the intent of the inspired author.”

Principle #2: The Literal Interpretation Principle. This principle expands on the 1st rule listed in the 1988 document. In our resource material it was spelled out to mean “accepting the literal rendering of each sentence unless by virtue of the nature of the sentence or phrase or a clause within the sentence renders it impossible. This includes the grammatical/cultural guideline. In other words: ‘when the plain sense of the scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.’ Therefore, take every word at its primary, usual, meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.”

Principle #3: The Unity Principle. This principle parallels the 2nd rule in the 1988 document.

Principle #4: The Harmony of Scripture Principle. This is something of an elaboration on the contextual principal and, simply stated, indicates that “no part of the Bible may be interpreted so as to contradict another part of the Bible. If there appears to be a contradiction, it is an apparent contradiction.”

Principle #5: The Progressive Revelation Principle. This principle parallels rule 3 in the 1988 document.

Principle #6: The Accumulated Scholarship Principle. This principle acknowledges that current study relies on centuries of learning and scholarship even as we seek to come closer in our understanding to the original intent of the author. The 1988 document does not have a parallel in its interpretation rules.

Principle #7: The Humility Principle. This principle speaks to the attitude which we all need to bring to the task of biblical interpretation. No individual or group has a corner on biblical truth.

Principle #8: The Historical Background Principle. This principle relates to both rule 1 and rule 5 in the 1988 document. Our statement of this principle is that “The Bible was composed in a specific culture at a particular point in time. While they are universal in application, the truths in the Bible can most fully be realized only when taking the surrounding culture and history into account.”

Principle #9: The Grammatical Principle. This principle is related primarily to rule 1 in the 1988 document, acknowledging that “the Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. While we have several highly accurate translations of the Bible in English, all translation involves a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the translator. Thus the study of word meanings, grammar, and syntax of the original languages is important for a proper understanding of Scripture.”

Principle #10: The Genre Principle. This principle is a broader expression of rule 4 in the 1988 document and can be summarized by the statement that “Proper interpretation must take the general literary category of any given passage into consideration.”

Principle #11: The Grammatico-Historical Method. This “principle” is really more about the methodology involved in using principles 6, 7 and 8 and essentially mirrors rule 5 in the 1988 document.

The set of principles that we worked with did not have a parallel to rule 6 in the 1988 document. That rule seems to be an extension of rule 2 (the Contextual/Unity Principle) to the matter of building a systematic theology (i.e. to “build a consistent system of truth by which to guide our lives”) particularly in situations where societal and cultural issues arise that have no direct counterpart in scripture. As a committee we would certainly agree, however, with the tenor of that rule which suggests that “the process used in Acts 15 by the first church council” be the guide for dealing with such issues.

Affirmation 3: God created both male and female in His image. He created them equal though different. He gave them dominion over the created world, and commanded them to be fruitful and to increase in number.

Response to Affirmation 3: We agree with this affirmation as expressed above but find that the supporting arguments that follow really go beyond the scope of the affirmation itself. This concern is addressed in additional notes (below).

First of importance is that both male and female were created in the image and likeness of God. One could not be more or less than the other in the image of God and still be in His image. If so, one would have been partially in the image of God and the other in the very image of God. It would then necessitate that God would have had to create them not as one in two persons, but as two persons never being one. “...God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him (singular); male and female he created them (plural)” (Genesis 1:27). (Rule 6.)

It cannot be read into Genesis 1 and 2, as some have suggested, that Adam was created in God’s image and Eve was created in Adam’s image. Eve did not receive her likeness or her spiritual qualities from Adam. She received them directly from God, just as Adam did. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over...’” (Genesis 1:28). From Genesis 1:26-28 we see that both shared equally in the image and likeness of God. Both shared equally in the task of reproduction. Both shared equally in the commitment to rule over all the earth and over all created things. Both shared equally in the blessing and benediction of God. Both shared equally in the partnership as beneficiaries of God and both were equally responsible in the stewardship of these blessings. Both shared equally in the delight of God as He looked upon them. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Both were to rule or lead jointly as one person rather than two. Thus we see the equality of the sexes from Genesis 1.

Response to Affirmation 3 continued: Our study of Genesis 1 produced similar conclusions to what is stated (above) and was expressed as follows:

Genesis Chapter 1 (with particular focus on verses 26 to 31).

Humankind (men and women together) was created by God in His image¹ and has a common identity and purpose. This common identity and purpose is primarily defined by relationship to God and being His image and was declared good by God just as He declared all of His creation good. No distinction is made in this passage between males and females with respect to identity or purpose: we are all image-bearers and are dependent on each other to fulfill our image-ness.

¹*The unique aspects of human persons that allow them to mirror God. This concept is derived from Genesis 1:26, in which Adam and Eve are described as created in the image of God. Theologians have debated whether the image of God has been lost or merely damaged by sin. They have debated, in addition, whether the image consists of a set of properties (such as rationality and the capacity for responsible action) or is rather to be seen in our relationality (since the Genesis passage links the image of God to being created male and female) or perhaps even consists of our special relation to God. Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion, IVP, p 58.*

The view of this committee is that human nature was marred in the Fall but the image of God was not lost. We also hold that the image of God includes both the attributes mentioned above and relational and social aspects. We would expand the list given in the above quote to include: intelligence, ability to make choices, creativity, emotional responses, and the possibility of communicating with God. Both the rational and relational aspects of God's image are foundational to what it means to be human and find their source in God."

It is when we turn to Genesis 2 that the relationship of male to female emerges. God's plan for their relationships to Himself and each other is as much a reality as His design in creating them in His image. They were still in the state of perfection and under the guidance of God in doing His will perfectly when the man begins to manifest leadership and the woman is called to be a helper suitable for him.

John Stott in his chapter on ‘Women, Men and God’ says, “It is without doubt by a deliberate providence of God that we have been given two distinct creation stories, Genesis 2 supplementing and enriching Genesis 1. (Stott, 1985, p. 139) Genesis 2:18-22 reads, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ “Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. “But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.” (italics added) Stott, commenting on this passage says, “What is revealed in this second story of creation is that, although God made male and female equal, he also made them different. In Genesis 1, masculinity and femininity are related to God’s image, while in Genesis 2, they are related to each other, Eve being taken out of Adam and brought to him. Genesis 1 declares equality of the sexes; Genesis 2 clarifies that equality means not ‘identity but complementarities’ (including....a certain masculine headship). It is this ‘equal but different’ which we find hard to preserve. Yet, the two parts of it are not incompatible; they belong to each other.” (Stott, 1985, p. 139) (Rule 6.)

It is important to notice that Genesis 1 and 2 become the basis of the Apostle Paul’s teaching on masculine headship and female submission. He writes that “...The husband is the head of the wife” (Ephesians 5:23), and “... That the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Further, he says in 1 Corinthians 11:8,9, “For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” (Rule 4.) We should not conclude from chapter 2 that man is in any way to act independent of woman. They are here a perfect oneness and each complements the other, for both share equally in the image and likeness of God. It is difficult for us to visualize perfect harmony of sexes in their distinctive roles as man and woman.

In chapter 2 we do not see Adam dominating Eve but we do see some kind of leadership or headship given and assumed by Adam, and a certain kind of helper suitable for him in Eve. Of Adam, God says in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” To Adam God brings the beasts and birds he has created and Adam names them. When Eve is brought to Adam it is Adam that names her and says, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23).

The report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (LCMS) of September, 1985, states, ‘when the New Testament talks about the origin of the subordination of woman to man, it does so on the basis of Genesis 2 and not on the basis of Genesis 3. The foundation of this teaching is not the curse of the Fall, but the original purpose of God in creation.’ (CTCR, 1985, p. 24) John Stott feels that “subordination” is too strong a word in this relationship because it is often seen in the light of man’s dominance or rule that has been tarnished by sin. He says, “Nor does subordination seem to me the right word to describe her submission. It has in modern parlance unfortunate overtones of inferiority, even on military rank and discipline.” However, he does point out that “Headship definitely implies some kind of authority, to which submission is necessary. But we must be careful not to overpress this.” (Stott, 1985, p. 144)

In Genesis 2 we do see leadership emerging in the activities of Adam and that of a helper suitable for him in Eve. This in no way relates to their equality in creation but it does clarify their differences in the role that each is to manifest to the other and to God’s creation. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for Paul’s teaching in the relationship of man and woman in the church as well as husband and wife in the home. However, we should not read into Genesis 2 a prescribed rigidity of interpretation that does not allow for a great place of service in the church and in the home for the woman.

***Response to affirmation 3 continued: Here is how we summarized our study of Genesis 2:
Genesis Chapter 2 (with particular focus on verses 18, 21 to 25)***

This passage reveals more specifics about men and women and the language and structure – indeed the order of creation - indicate that there are differences between males and females. These differences are characterized primarily in relational terms – they define community, belonging, love, responsibility and mutual dependence – and as such indicate complementary roles. While many interpret these differences, and the implied role distinctions, as the basis for male leadership in home and church – and draw additional support from New Testament passages – it is the view of this committee that these differences are not characterized explicitly in this text by either of the modern concepts of hierarchy or equality.²

We would argue that the development of, and discussion about, this particular affirmation should be grounded in study of the first 3 chapters of Genesis. There will be room to look at Pauline and other New Testament passages as we progress through the remaining affirmations in a systematic way.

²The word “helper” is an important word in this passage. Our study of this word leads us to the position that the word itself does not imply anything about rank or authority. Rather, the context determines the nuances of its meaning. This view is held by both complementarians and egalitarians. While our committee was not unanimous on the following point, our position is that the context of “helper” in this passage points to an interdependence of genders and a “coming alongside another” much like a colleague in a work environment.”

Genesis 3 is the story of the Fall and its consequences. There are some who believe that the judgment of God on the man and woman in the Fall is the reason for the rulership of the man and the submission of the woman, for does not God say, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16)? So what is the meaning of this statement in Genesis 3? The sinful nature that they now acquired would plague their relationship. Sin would change the way they relate to each other within their God designed roles. Her former desire to joyfully submit to her husband would distort to

a desire to control. His loving leadership would distort to an assertion of domineering authority. (Foh, 1976, P. 69) (Rule 3.)

While Genesis 1 teaches that woman is equal in creation, Genesis 3 teaches that woman is also equal in redemption. Here God reveals the great place that woman was to have in God's redemptive work for the human race. In Genesis 3:15 God says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel." This was fulfilled when the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). Of this the Apostle Paul later wrote, "...When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4). (Rules 2,3,4,6.) That woman shares equally in God's restorative grace is shown in Genesis 3:21, "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." The unchanging plan and purpose of God for both is revealed in this gracious act and provision of God. The Scriptures reveal that both are equal in creation, both suffer distortion through the Fall, and both are equal in redemption. God's design for the relationship of man and woman to himself and to each other is shown in Genesis 1 and 2. The atonement through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in both men and women seeks to accomplish the restoration of this design revealed in creation so that each again may complement the other in their relationship and service to God and to each other.

Response to Affirmation 3 continued: We summarized our discussion of Genesis 3 like this:

Genesis Chapter 3 (with particular focus on verses 1 to 19)

This passage gives us the story of the fall of humankind and tells the results of that fall. Both Adam and Eve shared a common sinfulness and were equally guilty, as is true for all of us today. The chief consequence of sin is that death entered creation. The other specific consequences of sin are different for men and women. Those consequences, including male domination, female pain in child birth yet their desire is for their husbands, and struggle with work, are the curse of the fall not God's original design.³ Even in this passage about the

origin of human sinfulness we are given the wonderful promise of God's redemptive plan which the rest of the Bible unfolds for us.

This summary would seem to be in general agreement with the preceding 3 paragraphs discussing Genesis 3 from the 1988 document.

³An alternative interpretation of this passage would hold that while male domination is a consequence of the Fall, male leadership is not and rather the intention of God and established in Genesis 2. Thus, Genesis 2 is the key passage for understanding gender and role issues.”

Affirmation 4: In the Old Testament, the leadership offices of elder (this is not to be equated with the New Testament office of elder), chiefs of tribes and priests, were held exclusively by males. However, other high positions were occasionally filled by women demonstrating that there was a flexibility which allowed women to use their God-given gifts and callings to serve or to lead without overthrowing the Divine order.

Response to Affirmation 4: While we acknowledge the truth of the first sentence of this affirmation, we would take issue with the tone of the second sentence. The implication is that the arguments offered in the previous affirmation establish a “Divine order” which limits female leadership in the church which we fail to see arising explicitly out of the Genesis 1-3 texts (See pp 7-9 above). The Pauline and other New Testament texts which have been interpreted by others to imply that order will be more appropriately and systematically addressed in a later affirmation which falls more naturally into the historical progression of revealed Truth. (principle #5)

“It is fair to say,” write the editors of The Bible Almanac, “that people in biblical Israel felt that men were more important than women. The father or oldest male in the family made the decisions that affected the whole family, while the women had very little to say about them. This patriarchal (father centered) form of family life set the tone for the way women were treated in Israel.” (Packer, Tenney, White, 1980, p. 420) As we have seen in Genesis 1 and 2, God created men and women equal, although male dominance in the Old Testament era too often placed the wife in an apparent inferior position in that society. (Rule 1.)

Yet, as a wife and mother in Israel, she was supported and protected by her husband. A good wife was extolled in Hebrew literature, notably in Proverbs, chapter 31. She exerted a vast influence upon her family as mother and teacher, and often upon her husband. It was at times said that no man could truly find great success in Israel unless a wise and able wife moved him in that direction. Women’s rights were limited. Inheritance of property normally followed the male line only. Where there were no sons

in the family, the daughters could obtain the inheritance, but were to marry within the clan (Numbers 27:1-8; Joshua 17:3-6). Husbands could cancel any vow made by the wife, although the disavowal must take place within a day's time (Numbers 30:1-8,10-16). However, "Any vow of obligation taken by a widow or divorced woman will be binding on her" (Numbers 30:9). Susan T. Foh perceptively observes: "So, it seems the principle of submission does not apply for all women under all men but only within the family structure. It is not women per se who cannot make their own vows. It is only if their position is under the God-established authority of husband or father." (Foh, 1979, p. 73)

Although only males were required to appear before the Lord at the great festivals, women apparently went along on some of these occasions, were welcome, and found a part in the worship (Nehemiah 8:2; Joel 2:16; also Luke 2:41-42). Women joined in song under the leadership of Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21). Women could also approach the sanctuary and seek God in prayer as did Hannah (1 Samuel) or find a place in the Temple as did Anna in Luke 2:36-38. Women were full members of the worshipping community. The priestly office in Israel was restricted to the male descendants of Aaron. No woman could fill this office. (Packer, Tenney, White, 1980, p. 420) Nevertheless, on occasion, God called and equipped women for places of leadership, both religious and political. Miriam was both a prophetess and a song leader. She led the women in praise to God in song and instrumental music after the deliverance from Pharaoh (Exodus 15:20-21). In Micah 6:3-4 she is referred to as a leader with her brothers Moses and Aaron. Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge. The wording of the text suggests that she was a prophetess prior to her call to serve as a judge. Judge Deborah, speaking both as a prophetess and judge, commanded Barak to lead the armies against Sisera. Timorous Barak, assured that Deborah would accompany him, marched to victory over the enemy. However, because of Barak's refusal to go out to battle without Deborah (Judges 4:8-9), the death of Sisera was at the hands of a woman, not of a general. The Song of Deborah and Barak, apparently composed by Judge Deborah (Judges 5:7), is included in Holy Scripture (Judges, chapter 5), one of many songs and messages from women in the inspired Word. It must be observed that the judges, Deborah included, were called by God for a mission of salvation, and were endowed by the Spirit of Jehovah. Their

leadership was authoritative in both political and religious realms (See Judges 2:16-18; 3:9-10; 4:6,14; 6:34).

Five women in the Old Testament were given the title of prophetess. Most prominent of Israel's prophetesses (both with gifts and in office) was Huldah who lived during the reign of King Josiah. When the High Priest Hilkiah discovered a long lost copy of the Law of the Lord in the Temple, he sent word to King Josiah. A scribe followed and read the Law to the king. Josiah "tore his clothes" and sent word to the High Priest to inquire without delay as to the will of the Lord. But the answer did not come from Israel's kingly or priestly leadership. God's mouthpiece was a woman, Huldah the prophetess. She authoritatively prophesied to the King and the people, using the formula "Thus saith the Lord" (King James version). The king, the priests and the people repented, and Israel was spared an impending judgment (See 2 Kings 22).

Finally, one must not bypass the prophetic words of Joel 2:28-29: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."(italics added) These prophetic words from the Old Covenant were a reminder that as Israel moved closer to the New Covenant, a greater light would be dawning through the transforming power of redemption. This word points forward to the time of the New Covenant when God would distribute His gifts to both men and women to be used in His kingdom. (Rule 3.)

Though male dominance was normal in the Old Testament, there was not an exclusive male leadership, as was noted in the cases of several women called and equipped by God for leadership in Israel. True, no women served as priests or as elders in Israel, but the order of headship or male dominance in the Old Testament did not exclude the possibility of God calling women to leadership positions, except for those offices held exclusively by men. God's callings were of such a nature or flexibility that He provided women the opportunities in that Old Testament structure to use their God-given gifts and callings to serve or to lead as He directed without overthrowing of the divine order. Thus the equality that we have demonstrated existed from creation was not destroyed by the structure God gave the Old Testament society.

Response to Affirmation 4 continued: We find it difficult to reconcile the concept of a “divine order” as used here (i.e. “order of headship or male dominance”) with the phrase “the equality that...existed from creation”. We would hold that God’s calling of various Old Testament women to positions of leadership is a part of His divine order, not an exception to it, and that the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 looks forward with great hope to a day when the sinful male dominance that had suppressed and distorted God’s created equality throughout Old Testament history would give way to a new order, equality become reality!

Affirmation 5: Jesus recognized women as co-laborers by interacting with them and allowing them to participate in His ministry and in the early church. Women figured more prominently in the Gospel record than in the entire Old Testament economy.

Response to Affirmation 5: We find the wording of this affirmation to be significantly understated. While the second sentence is essentially a truism, the first falls far short of expressing the degree to which Jesus “violated societal norms for gender relations and made new ones that more accurately reflected God’s heart toward women.” (Barton, p.43, How I Changed My Mind About Women In Leadership) Note: The original 1988 document used the word “Magnificent” which has been corrected to “Magnificat” in the following paragraph.

Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41) and spoke aloud concerning Mary and her yet unborn child Jesus; Mary’s Magnificat follows. Both of these testimonies were given before the Savior’s birth. Anna, a “prophetess”, spoke “of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:36-38).

Jesus ministered to a number of women in various ways, and always with full respect for their dignity, their intelligence and their faith. He dealt with the woman of Samaria at a public well, engaging in a lengthy conversation. From this meeting with Jesus she left Him and became an effective witness to her own people (John 4:1-39). Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene. She became a faithful follower of her Lord and was present at His crucifixion (John 19:25). After His resurrection Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and commissioned her as the first post-resurrection witness with the words: “Go... to my brothers, and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:14-18). John Calvin suggests that as the apostles had fled, Christ made women “on that occasion teachers of the apostles, especially Mary Magdalene, formerly captive of seven devils, who Christ raised up from the lowest depths to a place above the heavens...Christ teaches here that God ordains those who seem good to him as his witnesses; and one should not refuse their testimony,

even if they seem unlikely choices by the world's standards." (Douglass, 1985, pp. 58-59) He commends a Canaanite woman for her faith in Him as the Messiah, and she becomes an early Gentile convert.

Women also ministered to the Lord. He accepted the hospitality of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and dined in their home. It was from the lips of this same Martha that Jesus accepted the great confession: "Yes, Lord...I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). The Bible records only Peter and Martha making this great confession of faith. Luke records that several women gave financial support to Jesus and His apostles. Several also followed Him to the cross, faithful at his death as they had been during His ministry.

Both men and women were in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Acts 1:14), and women spoke in tongues at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18). Both men and women believed in Christ, both were baptized, and both suffered persecution for their faith (Acts 5:14; 8:12; 9:2). As the first post resurrection witness was a woman, so the first recorded convert in Europe was a woman, Lydia (Acts 16:13ff).

Jesus ministered to the needs of women as well as he did to men, to Jew and Gentile, to the slave and the free. Many women were His faithful disciples, traveling companions, and witnesses of His grace and of His resurrection. Women as well as men were full Israelites, full heirs of salvation, and of equal standing in the sight of God.

All of these indications from the Gospels and the Apostolic Church demonstrate that women had a prominent place and that Jesus valued women as coworkers, interacting with them and allowing them to participate in His ministry and in the early church.

Response to Affirmation #5, continued: We would reiterate that "allowing them to participate" is an inadequate description of the counter cultural ways in which Jesus related to the women he encountered. Besides the examples provided in the previous paragraphs, Jesus also pointed out that Mosaic law regarding divorce was a provision due to the hardness of men's hearts (Matt. 19:8) and that the men seeking to judge a woman for adultery were not free of sin themselves (John 8:1-11). Jesus put his own reputation on the line in many instances to change the course of history in gender relations. He also lived and

taught “servant” leadership (Mark 9:30-36) in opposition to the authoritarian and dominance styles seen in the Old Testament and across human culture.

Affirmation 6: The Bible teaches that there is an office of public ministry in the church, the office of overseer (pastor and elder). It is to be filled only by scripturally qualified men (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Timothy 5:12; 2 Timothy 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 5:12).

Response to Affirmation 6: It must first be noted that there are some typographic or editing errors in this section. 1 Timothy 5:12 does not pertain to the pastor or elder office and 2 Thessalonians 5:12 doesn't exist! Also, the reference to Titus 1:59 at the end of the second paragraph (below) presumably should be Titus 1:5-9 and the reference to Titus 1:5 in the last paragraph of this section should be Titus 1:6.

The Pastoral Epistles are canonical letters addressed to a particular church leader. Timothy was left in Ephesus to supervise the churches there (1 Timothy 1:3). Titus was given a similar task with respect to the churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5). Instructions are given to these men concerning the appointment of church leaders. The titles bishop, deacon, and elder emerge as referring to some church office. The word bishop (episcopos) was borrowed by the Christians from the secular realm. It had the connotations of management, supervision, and protection long before it was used as a title of a leader in a Christian community. Although the noun episcopos occurs only six times in the New Testament, the Pastoral Epistles are the most specific in the use of the term. Paul describes the qualities required of a person appointed to this office. (Rule 1.)

The word elder (presbyteros) is also used interchangeably with the word bishop. When Paul made one last visit to the west coast of Asia, he called together the presbyters of the Ephesian Church (Acts 20:17). He reminded them that the Holy Spirit had placed them over the congregations as bishops (Acts 20:28). In the Pastoral Epistles, Titus is first instructed that his duty is to appoint presbyters and is then given guidelines concerning the qualities one should take into consideration when appointing a bishop (Titus 1:59).

The Apostle Paul assumes that these overseers are to be men. The Scripture texts say that the episcopos is to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5). The

meaning of this expression could be explored. For our purposes it need only be stated that (if married) the man must have one wife. Now we see in these texts that it is clearly established in a historical sense that the Apostle Paul chose men, not women, to fill the office of elder in the apostolic church. The question remains, why did Paul choose men? And does this mean that we also are to choose only men? To answer these questions, we must move on to our next affirmation.

Response to Affirmation 6 continued: This affirmation seems overstated as currently worded. The simple observational language of this section does not warrant the “It is to be filled only by ...” certainty of the affirmation statement. It would be more accurately framed in words similar to those used in its last paragraph, something along the lines of “Biblical texts appear to establish that in a historical sense the Apostle Paul chose men to fill the office of elder in the apostolic church”. It is only in wrestling with the answers to the questions at the end of this section (Affirmation 6) that we can arrive at a more extensive and definitive conclusion.

Affirmation 7: The Bible teaches that the Order of Creation which provided the authority structure of the family also provides the pattern for the church (Genesis 1, 2; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Timothy 2).

Response to Affirmation 7: Now we finally come to the heart of the matter! But before we set out to examine the critical scriptures, and particularly some of Paul's teachings, regarding gender relationships in the church we need to step back and refresh our perspective of what God is doing in the world across the broad sweep of history. Our committee's study and deliberation leads us to the major themes of God's love for all of humanity, our collective and individual rebellion against God, and His work in human history to redeem all of his creation. The focal point of all of human history is Jesus Christ and his entry into human history is God's chief self-revelation.

As we look to Jesus for direction regarding the relationships between men and women, we find Him making radical departures from the Jewish norms in gender relations (e.g. John 4, Luke 10: 38-42, John 8:3-11). We also note the founding of His church being linked to Joel's prophecy (Acts 2: 16-18; "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."). Taken together with the Apostle Paul's assertion in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" we would contend that Christ and His church are at work signaling a new day in gender relationships! It is with this "lens" that we more closely examine the details of this affirmation.

God created man in His image and gave them dominion over the creation. Man and woman enjoy an equality of value and at the same time a difference of function. We observe from Genesis that God created Adam first; that He created Eve out of Adam; that Adam had responsibility for Eve when he named her in Genesis 2:23; and that God's

instructions concerning marriage, all of which seem to indicate a creation design, reflected in a particular order of relationships known as the order of creation. Ephesians 5:21-6:4 gives further teaching on the role of the husband in marriage and the home. As the head of his wife he is to love her in a sacrificial manner as Christ loved the church. This indicates that headship is characterized as a responsible nourishing and caring for his wife and family. The creation design does not present an order defined by authoritarianism or domination. (Rule 4.)

Response to Affirmation 7 continued: As indicated in our response to affirmation 4, our study of the Genesis texts leads to an understanding of an “order of creation” that establishes and supports gender differences but we do not see this “order” establishing limitations on female leadership in the church. We would also observe that the Ephesians text in the above paragraph does not speak of an “order of creation” and its focus is not so much on “headship” as it is on how the marriage relationship should be a symbiotic cycle of submission, love and respect illuminating and reflecting Christ’s relationship with the church. We would further note that the Ephesians text appears to be specifically addressed to households and we need to be very careful about distinguishing husband/wife relationships from more general man/woman relationships, both inside and outside of the church.

What is the significance of this family structure for the church? In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 the Apostle Paul speaks to the problem of propriety in public worship by appealing to the order of creation. Apparently women were worshipping in such a way that they were considered to be dishonoring their heads (husbands) (1 Corinthians 11:4). Therefore he says, “For man did not come from woman but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:8, 9). Because of this order and design in the creation, the Christian women have a continuing obligation to live in such a manner that they show honor/respect for their heads (husbands). In this passage Paul bases the need for this honor and respect on the creation order. (Rule 4.)

Response to Affirmation 7 continued: Our observation with respect to this 1 Corinthians passage is that Paul points back to the God/man/woman relationships at the time of creation, not to establish or define an “order of creation” that is applicable across the board to women’s roles in the church, but to remind his readers of the significance of marriage relationships (which Paul believed reflected the relationship of Christ and the church, cf. Ephesians 5:21-33) and of how the state of those relationships was reflected in the cultural customs of their time (i.e. head coverings and hair lengths). Paul even appears to “pull his punches” to some degree in verses 11-12 when he states: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” (cf. Ephesians 5:21)

The second major passage in the New Testament that relates the order of creation to the life of women in the church is 1 Timothy 2:4-15. Paul’s perspective on order in the church centers on the teaching authority position (office of pastor/elder). In a discussion exhorting believers to pray for all in authority that they may live a quiet and godly life, he addresses also the question of order in the church. With the goal of preserving the order of creation and the position of teaching authority, Paul instructs the women. He uses the framework of three desirable actions or attributes which will insure reaching that goal: She is to learn from this authority in all submission, she is not to teach in authority over such an office-holder, and she is to learn in quietness. (Rule 4.)

Response to Affirmation 7 continued: Again, our study of this passage points to it being directed primarily to husbands and wives with the concern that their uniquely created relationship has an integral function in the church. We understand that verse 12 is most correctly translated to mean that Paul does not permit a wife to have authority over her husband, not just any man or an “office-holder”. In light of the fact that Paul:

- a. *commends many women involved in the work of the church cf. Romans 16,*
- b. *exhorts “(w)hat then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” (I Cor. 14:26),*
- c. *spent time, apparently without reservations or objections, with Philip and his 4 prophesying daughters (Acts 21:8-9), it seems unreasonable, even inconceivable that he would have intended the prohibitions and directives expressed in I Tim. 2: 11-12 be applicable to every man/woman relationship in the church.*

In the book, *Women in the Church*, a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the commission states, “...the terms ‘teach’ and ‘exercise authority’ parallel each other. They are intentionally linked. The kind of teaching referred to in the passage is tied to exercising authority. The authority forbidden to women here is that of the pastoral office, that is, one ‘who labors in preaching and teaching.’ (1 Timothy 5:17; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12)

“A proper understanding of Paul here is of enormous significance for the discussion of the service of women in the church. One cannot divorce the phrase ‘nor have authority over man’ from the pastoral office and then apply it in rather arbitrary ways. For example, if we are to be faithful to the apostles instruction in this passage, we cannot simply take the dictionary meaning of ‘authority’ as the ‘power to act or make decisions’ and then proceed, solely on that basis, to eliminate women from all congregational meetings or committees which have the power to act or make decisions. “The theological matrix for the apostle’s inspired teaching on the silence of women in the church and the exercise of authority is, again, the order of creation. In 1 Timothy 2:13, Paul points to the order of creation as the basis for the instructions given in verses 11 and 12. God made Adam before Eve; that is, He created man and women in a definite order. Turning from the creation to the fall, Paul adds that Adam was not deceived but that the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. The conclusion drawn is that the leadership of the official public teaching office belongs to men. Assumption of that office by a woman is

out of place because it is a woman who assumes it, not because women do it in the wrong way or have inferior gifts and abilities.”

Response to Affirmation 7 continued: It appears that the argument offered (above) from the LCMS commission is based on I Tim. 2:11-12 and collapses with the translation of ἀνδρός as “husband”. It should also be noted that the text of I Timothy 5:17 is merely descriptive of “elders” without reference to gender and that the related reference (I Thessalonians 5:12) requests that “(n)ow we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you.”, again without reference to gender. Several of the women Paul commends in Romans 16 are described as having “worked hard”.

Instead, Paul addresses women with the positive command that they in quietness learn in all submission. Quietness is the teachable spirit of a self-restrained disciple that listens carefully to the teaching and does not meddle in the affairs of the teacher. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:11,12 places quietness in opposition to being a busybody, i.e. one who meddles in the affairs of others. The silence commanded is not an absolute silence for 1 Corinthians 11:5 speaks of women praying and prophesying. The order of creation is used by Paul as the Biblical basis for the proper relationships in the church as it is in the family.

Response to Affirmation 7 continued: We would reiterate that I Timothy 2: 11-12 with its references to “quietness” and “submission” is another of Paul’s messages to husbands and wives, pushing them to live out the uniqueness of their marriage relationship in a way that edifies, rather than harms, the church. The reference to “busybody” in 2 Thessalonians 3 is also a genderless description of those who were “idle” and “disruptive” in that church. We would conclude that, while the God/husband/wife relationships that we see created and lived in Genesis 1 and 2 are significant for the family and the life of the

church, they are also only a subset of the God/man/woman relationships that exist in the church and are not necessarily the norm for that broader set of associations.

Affirmation 8: The Bible distinguishes between office and gift. All members of the body of Christ, men and women alike, may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit wills, but not all members may be appointed to all offices. (1 Corinthians 12:11 and Romans 12, and Ephesians 4). (Rule 3, Rule 4.)

Response to Affirmation 8: The scripture references included as part of this affirmation speak to the Spirit's autonomy in gifting whom He wills, to the humility with which we as individuals should receive and exercise these gifts and to the unity and edification of the church for which these gifts are given. They do not speak to restrictions on which members or genders can exercise which gifts or hold which offices.

In John 16:7-15 Jesus, speaking to the eleven apostles, foretold the coming of and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, He added further light on the Spirit's place in the church age: "...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Peter sees the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29.

Any attempt to clarify the respective roles of male/female in the church which omits a careful study of the Holy Spirit's calling and enabling in the life of every believer is at best a partial study. As we study the Spirit's ministry, it quickly becomes clear that we must carefully distinguish between the enabling gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the offices within the Church, the body of Christ on earth. We see that the restrictions and/or freedoms in respect to a person's exercising a gift do not necessarily imply similar restrictions and/or freedoms in respect to that person's holding an office that the gift in question would seem to qualify for and vice versa. (Rule 2.)

In Romans 12:3-8, Paul uses the figure of the body with Christ as the head. Paul deals with functions within the body in relationship to the head, and the resulting full harmony of all believers under the headship of Jesus Christ. We see both unity and diversity. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-12, the figure is of the body, but the emphasis is on the work of the Holy Spirit. The unity derives from the Holy Spirit (v4, 8, 9, 11) and the

Lordship of Jesus Christ. The diversity of gifts within the body is seen under the headship of the Trinity, but with special emphasis on the sovereign Holy Spirit who “gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11 b). (Rule 4.)

Several observations must be made. 1) It is the Holy Spirit (not the church) who gives gifts “just as he determines.” 2) There is no suggestion that He assigns certain gifts to males exclusively, indeed, there is no reference to sex whatsoever. 3) While it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to give gifts, it is the responsibility of the institutional church to call or elect for office or service. It may or may not choose to use any gifted person as it sees fit. 4) The use of the gifts is under the authority of the body, the church. (1 Corinthians 14:26-40). 5) Aside from the gender restrictions on the office of pastor/teacher that we have shown previously, there is no absolute prohibition on women teaching. For example, Luke records that Priscilla and Aquila both explained to Apollos the way of God, a specific incidence of a woman teaching a man which is in harmony with the Joel/Acts passages which make no distinction in the distribution of gifts to male or female. This is not a violation of, or exception to the order of creation.

Response to Affirmation 8 continued: We commend this teaching on the work of the Spirit in gifting individuals, regardless of gender, in the church for its unity and edification but would take issue with several of the observations. While we would grant that the institutional church has the prerogative of “calling or electing for office or service” (observation 3, above) we would also caution that it has the portentous obligation of insuring that it is not grieving the Spirit in neglecting or turning away any Spirit-gifted individual or class of individuals. The “authority” of the church (observation 4, above) as expressed in I Corinthians 14 is a communal authority, without gender specification, and includes self-control on the part of those exercising their gifts. Offices are not addressed in this passage. As per our response to previous affirmations we would also hold that “gender restrictions on the office of pastor/teacher” (observation 5, above) have not been established by this document.

But while it is clear that the gift of prophecy was at times given to women in Scripture, there exists at least two attempts at exegetically either eliminating or minimizing the implications of these scriptural instances for us today. The one is to affirm as do some dispensationalists that the gift of prophecy ceased at the close of the Apostolic Age. This position we cannot accept. Liefeld notes “God did not bestow the gift of prophecy on men and women as a major feature of the new church age only to withdraw it almost immediately. The gift of prophecy was, as we see in 1 Corinthians 14:5, 26-31, for the encouragement, edification, and instruction of the church.” (Liefeld, 1985, p. 12) Others would limit prophecy almost entirely to the Old Testament predictive prophecies (see also 1 Peter 1:21, 22) which became a part of the canon, and fail to recognize that in the New Testament Church prophecy was not only predictive (see Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11), but in a much fuller sense was also a proclamation of the gospel and with it some measure of instruction. As such, the gift of prophecy, we maintain, is with us in the New Testament Church today.

Response to Affirmation 8 continued: We would commend the authors of this document for their stand on the continuing presence and practice of the prophetic gift.

Thus we need not be afraid of granting women the right to teach. In fact, to prohibit such is to place restrictions on the work of the Holy Spirit that are unscriptural. On the other hand, the offices in the institutional church are a calling by God through the congregation and are subject to the principles of order that Scripture prescribes. The congregation as a body of believers is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture. It is incumbent upon the congregation to seek out for office the men and women who best fill these offices, taking into account their gifts, but also being careful not to violate the principles of order we discussed in the previous affirmation. For example, the office of pastor/teacher is open only to men. It is, however, presumptuous for any gifted person, male or female, to, on his or her own initiative, lay claim to any office his or her gifts may seem to equip him or her for.

Response to Affirmation 8 continued: We would commend the authors of this document for pushing for the maximum possible opportunities for service for women within the church that their theological position allows. We would assert, however, that the offices in the institutional church are primarily a pragmatic construct established with various nomenclatures throughout the church's history to organize, systematize, support and promulgate the work of the Body of Christ here on earth. Bottom line, it is the gifting of the Holy Spirit which should be discerned by the congregation in appointing these office holders and which will determine whether these individuals, regardless of gender, will bear fruit in their efforts.

Affirmation 9: The Bible teaches that all members of the Body of Christ should be encouraged to discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts under the supervision and leadership of the overseers of the congregation.

The New Testament Epistle of First Peter was written to the Christians who lived in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, places in the northern part of Asia Minor. It is a brief letter in which Peter sets forth in a gentle tone, the blessings of those who are redeemed and exhortations on how these redeemed should live in the world. As he nears the close of this message, Peter writes about how believers should behave as “the end of all things” (1 Peter 4:7) draws near. Peter lists some actions that should characterize their lives including this one, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10,11). (Rule 4.)

The Apostle Paul in Romans 12 discusses spiritual gifts in a similar manner. In this pivotal chapter, Paul discusses the practical application of all that he has said up to this point in Romans. He says, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:38). (Rule 4.)

The thrust of the New Testament text is that all God’s people, male and female, have spiritual gifts to be used within the one body of which both sexes are a part

(Galatians 3:28). And although the male gender is used in some of the word usage (notably the pronouns) the context indicates that both sexes are included in these statements about spiritual gifts. The church should not mistakenly think that these texts are only for men. (Rule 2.) That women were given gifts and used those gifts for the larger body is seen in various references by Luke in Acts and by Paul in his epistles. They participated in all the gifts listed in Romans 12, with perhaps the exception of the sixth one, that of leadership.

1. **Prophecy.** On their travels to Caesarea, Luke writes of coming to the home of Philip the evangelist. Philip was one of the seven deacons chosen by the church. He was a man of integrity and not likely to deviate from the acceptable practices of the church. Luke reports that he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied and Luke didn't condemn the practice; nor did Paul (Acts 21:9). Further, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11 :2–14:40 gives instruction on how people should behave themselves in public worship. He has a specific instruction for women which is, "...Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head..." There is a similar instruction to men about praying or prophesying, with this exception, they are not to cover their heads. Both men and women can pray and prophesy in the public worship of the church. Both did. (Rule 4.) The gift of prophecy is never defined. Apparently identifying it was not a problem for the church. Peter writes about prophesy (2 Peter 1:20, 21) and says that its origin is from God. It seems to be a Spirit inspired testimony or witness to the Lord. The authority for it comes from God. The prophet was merely a mouthpiece for God.

2. **Service.** The purpose of this gift in the church was to be of assistance, particularly in a material way, to the household of faith. Paul, in Romans 16:1-2, mentions Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. He asks the Christians in Rome to give her help in the same way that she has given him help. What is important to notice here is the word Paul uses to describe Phoebe. The word is diakonon, a word for deacon or minister which can be used for either male or female persons in the church who held this office. It is of interest to notice that in some translations this word is translated servant when it refers to Phoebe, yet in other places where the context indicates men it is translated deacons. There are references to other women who served as coworkers or fellow workers in the work of the church: Mary (Romans 16:6); Priscilla (Romans 16:3); Tryphena, Tryphosa

and Persis (Romans 16:12); Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2, 3). Without a doubt, women were integral members of the church. Submission for them did not mean nonparticipation in the most vital aspects of the church's mission.

3. **Teaching** and 4. **Encouraging**. Priscilla is pictured as fulfilling the teaching role, along with her husband Aquila, in Acts 18:26. While it is not certain that she used her teaching and encouraging (or exhortation) gifts in a public way, she did use them, together with those of her husband, to great benefit in the church. They were well known throughout the church. (Romans 16:3; Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19) Furthermore, Paul encourages women (Titus 2:3-5) to use the gift of teaching to instruct other women.

5. **Giving**. All members of the church are urged to give cheerfully and generously. Concerning giving, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver" (NASV). Women too were included in those who had this gift.

6. **Leadership**. There is no certain reference in the New Testament to women who held pastor/teacher positions of leadership in the church. This is not to say that women did not have position and influence in the church. When Paul and Silas were released from prison in Philippi, they went to Lydia's house where the church was meeting. There they met the members of the church and encouraged them.

7. **Mercy**. The church of the first century had many physical needs. Life was dangerous for those Christians. Women were part of that group to whom the Lord gave the gift of mercy. Dorcas (or Tabitha) from Joppa was one such person who had this gift. It is said of her that she "was always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36).

Based upon what we believe the New Testament to teach, women are not nor should be prohibited from serving in many different functions within the congregation or the synod. As long as they come under the authority of the overseers in the congregation, they are free to do any function they are called by the congregation to carry out. In our view, the only position closed to them (and most men too) is that of overseer. We base this on the teaching of 1 Timothy 2 and 3. (Rule 2, Rule 4.) The congregation is the organizational structure God has provided to utilize the gifts. Overseers (pastor and

elders) oversee the ministry. Everyone serving within the church, both men and women, serve under the authority of the overseers.

Response to Affirmation 9: We commend the authors of this paper for the extensive review, in this section, of the gifts of the Spirit and the examples from Acts and the Epistles of women exercising these gifts. The apparent goal, of encouraging women to participate as fully as possible in the life of the church, is laudable but we fear that the net results are not so admirable. In restricting women from exercising even one of the gifts of the Spirit (i.e. overseer or elder) the seeds of creeping suspicion are sown. Unfortunately the next step usually seems to be that teaching opportunities for women are circumscribed (can't teach from the pulpit, can't teach men or boys over a certain age, can't teach a mixed Sunday School class, etc.) and, suddenly, gifted women are looking over their shoulder wondering from where the next criticism is going to come. Hanging the rationale for this restriction on 1 Timothy 2 and 3 seems to be a very weak argument for limiting the Spirit's opportunity to serve the body of believers through gifted women. The weaknesses in this rationale include the following:

- 1. The admonition to women in verses 11 and 12 of 1 Timothy 2 to "learn in quietness and full submission" and, "not...to teach or to assume authority over a man" cannot reasonably be understood to apply to all women in the church without making the Apostle Paul appear to contradict himself because in other places he commends and encourages women who are obviously actively involved in worship and church ministry (cf. Romans 16, 1Corinthians 14:26). In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is encouraging the brothers and sisters by saying "when you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" and 8 verses later he is back on the subject of silence and submission. In both of these instances (1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14) it is reasonable to interpret the passages to mean that he is talking specifically to husbands and wives. The husband/wife relationship seems to be a recurring concern of Paul's and in Ephesians 5:21-33 he goes to great lengths to describe what*

it should be and to link that relationship to that of Christ and the church. In Titus 2:4-5 Paul encourages Titus to teach older women so that “they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.” His concern for this relationship and its implications for the church would also appear to be at the heart of the “head covering” issue in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. Understanding these various passages to reflect Paul’s concern that the husband/wife relationship be lived out in a way that illustrates and illuminates the relationship of Christ and the church makes much more sense than trying to make those same verses define all men/women relationships in the church.

- 2. In 1 Timothy 3 there is no explicit gender requirement for those who seek to be “overseers” or “deacons”. If one argues that an overseer must be a man because verse 2 indicates that he “is faithful to his wife” it must be recognized that that statement is also made regarding deacons in verse 12 and yet the Apostle Paul, in Romans 16:1, commends to us “our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.”*
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Affirmation 10: Role patterns are different in different societies. They change within a given society, sometimes fairly rapidly. Ways of communicating role understandings may also change. The church must address these role changes evangelistically, prophetically and redemptively so as to win people to Christ, to call them to follow Him and to heal their hurts. (Rule 1, Rule 5.)

Response to Affirmation 10: We concur with the observations and suggestions stated in this affirmation, but, as articulated in other portions of our response (below), we disagree with portions of the rationale and envision a more far reaching outcome.

Role patterns establish expectations for the behavior of men and women which allow a society to function in a predictable way. While roles may change significantly, from the viewpoint of the Scriptures, God's design should be our desire. It will be the way of wholeness and joy. As we have seen, one aspect of this design is outlined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. Roles are described in terms of the headship. "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). The male/female relationship in which two become one flesh is a reflection of the image of God in which the three persons of the Godhead interrelate as one God. The Father/Son relationship is not one of domination, nor should headship be. The concept of headship allows two persons who are of equal value in the sight of God to relate to each other in a manner which enhances their oneness. They are not siblings competing with one another, but rather they are mates using their differences to complement and complete each other. This is God's design.

This design is communicated within society in different ways. In the Corinthian society, headship of the man was symbolized by head covering on the woman. Paul extends this pattern to the church worship service by calling for the women to cover their heads while praying or prophesying. Verse 16 indicates that this pattern of headship, then symbolized by head covering, was not unique to Corinth but was common to all the churches of God. Some must have been advocates of a different practice, perhaps because

they sensed the new freedom of being one in Christ. However, Paul urges the head covering in the church because it expresses the role relationships which are appropriate to God's design for the family and the church.

Response to Affirmation 10 continued: There is a cold sterility in the focus on “role” and “design” that brings to mind an organizational chart and the preoccupation with position and power inherent in such a construct. When Christ speaks of the marriage relationship (Matthew 19:3-10) he emphasizes the God created unity of that relationship and Paul’s discourse on marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33 focuses on mutual submission and a relationship grounded in love and respect reflective of the relationship of Christ and the church. It is the sense of our committee that Paul’s repeated references to husband/wife relationships in the church are not about reminding us of “role” and “design” as much as they are a plea to couples in the early church to provide a living illustration of Christ’s relationship to His church. Paul’s appeal to the created order in a few of these instances would seem to be aimed at reminding early Christians of the truths of creation amidst the pervasive influence of worship of the goddess Diana (aka Artemis, see Acts 19:23-41) and its female-centric world view in that time and place. And this wasn’t the only threat to the stability of husband/wife relationships in the early church. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul addresses numerous issues related to sexuality and marriage, apparently in response to questions that had been addressed to him by the church. Some of these issues appear to have arisen directly out of the immorality of man’s fallen nature but others would seem to have surfaced due to the transforming nature of the Christian message and the new perspectives it provided on the relationships between men and women, husbands and wives and between individuals and their Creator and Redeemer.

In our society, ways of communicating role expectations are significantly different than in the Corinthian society. Yet, these expectations are communicated, and

the language of their communication will carry over into the church. The church must use this cultural sign language but it must use it for its own purposes.

Our society gives conflicting signals on the family because our society is undergoing rapid change. Economic forces are changing the home. Social forces are redefining role relationships. In contrast to Old Testament pastoral settings, the women of our society are not constantly under the protections of husbands, brothers in-law or the working company of a segregated women's group. They are in the marketplace for a full working day, often in the direct company of men who are not their husbands.

Sexual distance is not maintained by veils, robes or walls. It must be maintained by much more subtle signals. Different clothing is worn in the office than in social situations. These more subtle signals are not always understood. They are easy to ignore. The distance is not always effectively maintained. The church must speak prophetically and redemptively to this change. This message must be spoken both for the unity of the marriage and for the health of children. For example, the church may encourage young couples to value quality time with each other and with their children so highly that they will not make major purchases that will necessitate women working full-time. Redemptively, the church may provide an "after school club" to care for children when the wife must work.

The prophetic message must also include a call for justice for those who are represented differently in our society than in the society of Biblical times. Working wives are defining a different division of labor with their husbands than the pattern which was common to Biblical times. Single women who are not under their fathers are functioning as heads of household. It is noteworthy that this type of household was so rare in Biblical times as to be outside the normal rules of society. Today single women households can constitute a significant percentage of the church. Role expectations and ways of communicating them will necessarily change. For example, most all of our congregations have responded to this change by recognizing that women should be free to vote in the congregation because otherwise many will not be represented according to their actual status or involvement.

The prophetic message invites values which lead to strong families. The family bond is more important than the individual fulfillment of one of the members of the

family, especially if it leads others astray (Matthew 18:6-7). The God given pattern for husband and wife relationship, when followed in the loving strength which God gives, can provide the stability children need for a healthy emotional life.

Response to Affirmation 10 continued: We would find the first sentence of the immediately preceding paragraph to be a positive statement but the remainder of the paragraph is negative and disheartening if not downright offensive! It would appear to be a thinly veiled threat aimed at married women who pursue “individual fulfillment”.

The church must also speak evangelistically to its society. Ideal role definitions must be weighed against the evangelistic opportunities of the time. Some aspects of individual behavior or group behavior must sometimes be set aside as a matter which will be addressed as a fruit of rightly relating to God rather than as a condition of rightly relating to God. For example, the council at Jerusalem set aside major Jewish customs in the interest of evangelizing Gentiles (Acts 15:1 9:5).

Response to Affirmation 10 continued: The reference at the end of the preceding paragraph should presumably be Acts 15:1-35. The logic of the paragraph is also flawed. As written it would imply that new Christians in the early church would eventually be circumcised as a “fruit of rightly relating to God” rather than prior to conversion as a “condition of rightly relating to God” when, in fact, the council at Jerusalem set circumcision aside, period! The logic of the paragraph would more appropriately apply to what we typically identify as common vices or questionable practices.

Conclusions: The original 1988 document concluded with statements outlining the rationale for granting suffrage to women delegates to the national convention of our denomination. After considerable deliberation, which resulted in a compromise effectively limiting women delegates for each church to be less than 50% of their total

delegates, it was adopted and women have participated as delegates to the national convention for over two decades. A generation has passed since that 1988 decision and the development of the rationale on which it was based. The study and deliberation that our committee has done over the course of the past two years, leads the majority of our committee to believe that women should not be restricted from serving in the congregations of our denomination as elders and pastors. We therefore recommend to the Elder Board of Ebenezer Church that they encourage our Synodical Council of Directors to give high priority to taking a fresh look at the role of women in the church.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Ebenezer ROW Study Group was created in 2010 to follow up on recommendations that emerged from the CLBA task force report on “Women in Ministry” created in 2008. That task force had been created as a response to recommendations from the consultants involved in planning the reorganization of our synodical body which was ultimately enacted at the annual convention of 2009.

The ROW Study Group was given two basic tasks:

1. Consider the question – Does (Has) Ebenezer fully utilize(d) the gifts of women in ministry in harmony with our current statement of faith and the accepted position paper on the role of women in ministry? Discuss and report on how it has and how it does not. Develop recommendations where appropriate.
2. As work on question 1 is completed, what other questions or recommendations rise to the surface as it relates to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren’s current position on the role of women?

We dealt with the first question in our early meetings and made recommendations in September of 2010 to Ebenezer’s Elder board which were subsequently approved and implemented. But even as we concluded our work on that question, we felt that it was important to take a close look at our denominations’ current position on the role of women which is articulated in the 1988 position paper, “Role of Women in the Church: Implications for Women’s Suffrage” (hereinafter referred to as “the 1988 document”). This paper was based on the 1987 report of a synodical study committee and its conclusions were primarily aimed at the question of whether or not to allow women to participate as voting delegates at synodical conventions. However, the 1988 document has now served for nearly a generation as the most definitive synodical guideline on this matter and we believed that it was time to revisit the subject.

We have arrived at a position where we understand God’s Word to not limit the roles women may have in the church. It is our committee’s recommendation to the Ebenezer Elder Board that they request that our synodical Council of Directors take a new look at the issue of women in ministry in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren while simultaneously pursuing, in our local congregation, creative ways to integrate gifted women more fully into leadership and teaching ministries. We have articulated our agreements and disagreements with the 1988 paper in detail in another section of this document but would summarize the observations and arguments that reflect the majority opinion of our study group as follows:

1. There is much in the 1988 document that we can agree to starting with Affirmation 1 which asserts the primacy of the Bible as our “final and authoritative guide for faith and conduct”. We also agree with Affirmation 2 which affirms the need for, and then presents, generally accepted hermeneutic guidelines which help to define the basis for interpreting and understanding

- scripture. We further agree with most of the descriptive and observational language of Affirmations 3, 4 and 5 which talks about God's creative work in "making them male and female", outlines the parameters of the leadership of Israel throughout the Old Testament and examines the extent and significance of the New Testament record of Jesus' interactions with women and their involvement in the early church. At the same time we differ with some of the interpretive conclusions in those same Affirmations. Finally, we are encouraged by some of the discussion in Affirmation 9 (which articulates the gifts of the Spirit and calls on women to utilize their gifts to the greatest extent possible within our current theological framework) and Affirmation 10 (which encourages flexibility with respect to our understanding of, and communicating about, male/female role patterns so that those issues do not become hindrances in drawing people to Christ) even though we also take issue with some of the interpretations and conclusions in those two affirmations.
2. Our primary disagreements revolve around the implications of the notion of an "order of creation" which is a fundamental premise of the 1988 document (Affirmation #7), the recent (2012) CLBA Draft paper, *The Role of Women in the Ministry of the Local Church*, and of the Complementarian position in general and which is the basis for arguments asserting that relationships between men and women, both in marriage and in the church, involve issues of hierarchy, headship and submission. We acknowledge that the 1988 document steers away from a broad prohibition of women teaching or leading within the church and, in fact, we recognize that it encourages women to participate in every aspect of church ministry short of the elder or pastoral positions (Affirmation #6 in the 1988 document). But we believe that even those restrictions are inappropriate in the body of Christ here on earth. Our rationale for this disagreement can probably best be expressed in a format that parallels the description of our interpretive stance:
 - a. The big themes of scripture shape the smaller themes.

The idea that the big themes in scripture shape the smaller ones is a restatement of the Contextual or Unity Principle of hermeneutics (principle #3 in our committee list, rule # 2 in the 1988 document, Affirmation 2). In the case of the church, the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." would seem to express such a "big" theme. Peter quotes that prophecy on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) as part of a powerful sermon that brought many to faith. This sermon was an expansion on Peter's confession to Christ in Matthew 16:13-20, which confession Christ indicated was the rock on which He would build his church! The day of Pentecost itself was a fulfillment of Christ's promise in John 14:15-31 to send the Holy Spirit. The church was founded in a promise and an outpouring neither of which was expressed with any gender boundaries attached! We would hasten to add that we do not believe that there are no created gender differences or that the created

differences are somehow erased or irrelevant in the church. But gender differences from our Creator's point of view are about complementarity and synergy, not the domination, submission or hierarchy that our fallen natures gravitate toward.

b. Jesus kingdom is central to understanding how to live in the current age.

We pray “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10) and we see in Jesus' life a tremendous variety of ways in which His kingdom touches earth, including many women. The 1988 document recognizes (in Affirmation 5), and acknowledges the significance of, Jesus' relationships with the women whose lives intersected with his from his mother to Anna the prophetess to the Samaritan woman, from Mary Magdalene to the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon possessed to Mary and Martha. But, even while acknowledging this, the 1988 document fails to recognize the degree to which Jesus “violated societal norms for gender relations and made new ones that more accurately reflected God's heart toward women” (Barton, p.43, *How I Changed My Mind About Women In Leadership*). Additionally, Jesus put his own reputation on the line when he dealt with questions of divorce (Matthew 19:3-11) and adultery (John 8:3-11) by deflecting the issue back onto the hearts of the self-righteous religious men who sought to bind him in the spider web of their pedantic system of moral laws. Jesus' creation of new norms in gender relationships and the Spirit's gender blind outpouring of gifts are precursors of Paul's buoyant expression in Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

c. The Biblical text should, first, speak for itself.

There are several hermeneutical principles evoked by the phrase, “the biblical text should, first, speak for itself”. The Literal Interpretation Principle (principle #2 in our list and rule #1 in the 1988 document, Affirmation 2) calls on us to “take every word at its primary, usual, meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.” Then there is the Harmony of Scripture Principle (principle #4 in our list and related to rule #2 in the 1988 document) which holds that “no part of the Bible may be interpreted so as to contradict another part of the Bible. If there appears to be a contradiction it is an *apparent* contradiction”. The Progressive Revelation Principle (principle #5 in our list and rule #3 in the 1988 document) holds that “the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God and not man, in which God brings man to an increasingly clearer understanding of God's character and His purposes”. And the Grammatical Principle (principle #9 in our list and covered in rule #1 in the 1988 document) acknowledges that “the study of word meanings, grammar, and syntax of the original languages is important for a proper understanding of Scripture.” These principles all came into play as we poured over Genesis 1-3 and the Pauline passages

which give rise to the notion of an “order of creation” and speak most directly to husband/wife relationships (1 Corinthians 11:1-16 and 14: 26-40, I Timothy 2 and Ephesians 5:21-33). These principles led us to conclude that there is a “divine order” or an “order of creation” in the Genesis texts that supports clear differences between genders but that these differences do not extend to limitations on female leadership roles within the church. Paul’s appeals to the creation narrative are not about invoking such an “order” by way of limiting roles within the church as they are about pressing husbands and wives to live out the Christ/church likeness (Eph 5:21-33) of their marriage relationships in ways that would edify, rather than disrupt, worship gatherings.

d. Paul’s letters to the early church must be understood in their historical context.

Paul lived and wrote on the leading edge of Christian history and was dealing with issues and questions that were being raised for the first time in the context of a fledgling church. Even though then, as now, the church was full of sinner/saints whose wide range of behaviors and ideas were scattered across the full spectrum of spiritual maturity, Paul was in a socio-cultural context far removed from our experience. The importance of understanding the historical context is the concern of the Historical Background Principle (principle #8 in our list and covered in both rules #1 and #5 in the 1988 document). The core issue in this principle is that “the Bible interpreter must distinguish the applications of principles within a given culture, such as the culture of the New Testament, from the principles themselves.” Or, expressed another way, “while they are universal in application, the truths in the Bible can most fully be realized only when taking the surrounding culture and history into account.” As we examined the Pauline texts at the core of this discussion we found each of them to be a part of a broader discussion of orderly and appropriate worship behavior. As we considered the historical context we came to understand that men and women probably sat or stood separately from each other in the worship services. They came from a mix of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and likely had widely disparate educational experiences. The participants included men and women coming out of vastly different religious traditions ranging from orthodox Judaism and its male centric patterns to former followers of the goddess Diana (also called Artemis, her temple at Ephesus was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world, cf. Acts 19:23-41) and its female centered world view. Consider also the egalitarian call of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:26, “What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.” Into this potentially chaotic mix of ingredients, add some husbands and wives whose marriages are not particularly harmonious and who begin to indirectly air their grievances through vocal exchanges in the worship setting, or, even if they were in harmonious marriages, the (usually) less educated wife raises questions across the room to her husband about

things she doesn't understand during the worship service! It quickly becomes understandable that Paul would speak the words that he did in the interest of harmonious and orderly worship (the "principle" or "truth" involved). But it also becomes apparent that these particular words are intended to address a specific situation in a specific place and time (like the discussions of head coverings, long hair, lifting up holy hands, and hairstyles, jewelry and clothing in adjacent verses in these passages) and to treat them as conveying some additional "principle" or "truth" distracts us from Paul's real concern.

e. Reason matters.

The meaning of the first article of the Apostles' Creed begins "I believe that God has created me and all that exists, that he has given to me and still sustains my body and soul, my senses, and all my members, my *reason* and all the powers of my soul." At the same time we also confess in the meaning of the third article that "I cannot by my own *reason* or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but that the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith..." Too often we think of reason as an enemy of faith rather than considering them to be allies. True, our fallen nature seeks to make our reason captive to it, to do its bidding as it tries to drag us into the debilitating and ultimately destructive downward spiral of sin and death. But, praise God, "he has given to me and still sustains...my reason" and this is the starting point for us to perceive, to comprehend and to communicate the realities of creation around us and within us. Reason leads us to the boundaries of the known and knowable. Faith, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) informs us and draws us beyond those bounds, enabling belief, enlightening the mind, sanctifying our beings and providing hope for now and eternity. Yet faith without reason may be nothing more than delusion which has its own hellish spiral. Given that the 1988 document affirms that the Holy Spirit's gifts are showered on male and female alike (see the explanation of Affirmation #8) and that it acknowledges that the "learn in silence" (KJV) of I Timothy 2:11 is not an absolute silence (see the last multi-sentence paragraph of Affirmation #7 in the 1988 document), how does it *reasonably* arrive at a prohibition on women exercising elder or pastoral gifts? It attempts to do so with a rationale that hinges on the interpretation of a single verse. That verse is I Timothy 2:12 where Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man" and the rationale links "teach" with "assume authority" to reach the conclusion "that the leadership of the official public teaching office belongs to men." (see the last several paragraphs of Affirmation #7 in the 1988 document) We would disagree strongly with the reasoning used to reach this conclusion, especially given that the word translated as "man" in verse 12 can also be translated as "husband" which is more consistent with the related Pauline passages and aligns the passage more reasonably with our contention that "Paul's appeals to the creation

narrative ...were about pressing husbands and wives to live out the Christ/church likeness (Eph 5:21-33) of their marriage relationships in ways that would edify, rather than disrupt, worship gatherings.”

We are thankful for the opportunity that we have had to consider this matter in depth and are certainly interested in answering any questions about our report or clarifying any of the verbiage to the best of our ability. The role of women in the church has been a significant issue throughout history but is particularly relevant for our time and we trust that the requests and recommendations that are being made herein will receive thorough and timely attention. May God bless our congregation and our denomination as we continue to pursue His direction!

Minority Report

It will come as no surprise that our Study Group was not unanimous in its interpretations of key Bible passages or in its overall conclusions. The purpose of this Minority Report is to give voice to dissenting views and, while not exhaustive of all differences, to highlight the main areas of divergence. It should also be noted that the 1988 CLBA Position Paper, the affirmations from which are quoted above in their entirety, also lays out an interpretation of the Bible and conclusions contrary to that of this paper generally. (For after all, that is what gave rise to the Study Group in the first place!)

The minority believes that Scripture clearly delineates the roles of men and women in the church with the chief distinction in those roles (as affecting the church) being that men alone are called to positions of authority as pastors and elders. This position is supported by an approach to interpreting the Bible that lets biblical texts, first of all, speak for themselves and secondly, correlate with other scripture (scripture interpreting scripture). A primary biblical concept for this position is that of an order of creation which arises out of Genesis chapters 1 – 3 and has the clear affirmation of the Apostle Paul in his epistles.

Response to the Study Group’s Interpretive Stance

We concur with the majority’s interpretative stance “that understanding the Bible is the way to understand each of the major questions of life, including the roles for men and women in the church,” and that the assumptions leading to that understanding must be explicit. But there are specific places where our interpretive assumptions diverge significantly.

Please refer to the Majority Report, beginning on page 4, since the following, for brevity, is a summary of that position.

Majority: The big themes of scripture shape the smaller themes.

Minority: Using a “big themes” construct in our interpretation of scripture can prevent biblical texts from speaking for themselves. The overarching theme of the Bible is God’s provision of a way of salvation for sinners through faith in the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Big themes flow out of Scripture; they should not be used without direct exegetical support. See comments on Galatians 3:28 below.

Majority: Jesus' kingdom is central to understanding how to live in the current age. One of the immediate benefits of Jesus' kingdom is the new reality Paul speaks of in Galatians 3:28. We view this passage not just as articulating equality before God in terms of salvation but in terms of life. For what is salvation apart from the rest of our lives? Doesn't salvation, when understood biblically, include all aspects of our lives, individual and collective? The answers must be yes.

Minority: An examination of this text and its context does not justify the majority's conclusion. The context of Galatians 3:28 is clearly an emphasis to the Galatian Christians on faith and gospel versus law and points to Abraham as the example of faith leading to righteousness. In verse 28 the Apostle enumerates the three dominant cultural distinctions of ethnicity (Jew/Gentile), status (slave/free) and gender (male/female) as being obliterated when "you are one in Christ Jesus." The consideration is one's standing as a Christian, not the elimination of God-ordained roles.

Majority: The biblical text should, first, speak for itself. While obvious this assumption needs to be said none-the-less. A leading example is Genesis 1 to 3. Our position is that this passage, taken on its own, while establishing differences between males and females, does not teach either an egalitarian or hierarchical view of male/female roles in the church. The interpretive issue lies in Paul's letters not in Genesis 1 to 3.

Minority: We affirm this principle: the text, first, speaks for itself (with context.) What is egregious is that the first three chapters of Genesis are not allowed to do so! The majority interpretation recognizes that there are biblical established distinctions between genders but does not extend those distinctions to role differentiation within the church. The minority interpretation relies on Paul's treatment of the Genesis 1 to 3 texts to extend and apply the order of creation concept to distinct roles for men and women within the church.

(Majority) Paul's letters to the early churches must be understood in their historical context.

(Minority) The minority position agrees that historical context is important to biblical interpretation.

Discussion and Interpretation of Bible Passages

Genesis 1-3

Majority: Summary: In Genesis 1, God creates humankind uniquely within his creating work by making humans in his image and in perfect fellowship with one another and with himself. Genesis 2 describes the interdependent relationship between man and woman. Genesis 3 tells how God's creative order was twisted by the fall of man and woman together, and details the hierarchical relationship that now exists between man and woman because of the fall and its curse.

(Minority) Summary: A plain and literal interpretation of the text (Hermeneutical Principle #2) as it applies to the issue under discussion is as follows:

Genesis 1: (Concur with Majority)

Genesis 2: Yes, there is an interdependent relationship between man and woman, but there are also distinctive functional roles assigned to Adam and Eve. Important to note that these “historical” relationships existed prior to the fall of mankind. Furthermore, the New Testament consistently upholds the same “headship” relationship between men and women in the home and in the church.

Genesis 3: God’s creative order – and order of creation – were twisted and distorted by the fall. But the fall did not bring about the “hierarchical relationship;” it existed prior to the fall. Now, in Christ, the distortions introduced by the curse can be reversed when, as in the case of families, husbands forsake selfish leadership and grow in Christ-like love and care for their wives. Likewise, believing wives, who are partners in oneness, grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands’ leadership. In the church, having been redeemed by Christ, women and men have an equal share in the blessings of salvation, but some teaching and governing roles are given only to men.

What does the word “helper” mean in Genesis 2:18,20? Man was created as God’s helper and consequently the primary leader; he was the tender of God’s creation in the garden. Woman (so named by Adam) was created as man’s helper. The Bible claims no superiority or inferiority for either. As for the Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, its meaning must be derived from context. Here, plainly in context, a purpose of her creation was to be a help to the man.

Galatians 3:28

Majority: Summary: This text states that unity in Christ removes boundaries within the body of Christ based on ethnicity, social class, and gender. This is one of the great verses in the Bible and speaks to the transforming good news of Jesus Christ.

Minority: This is, indeed, a great verse. But it’s great with reference to the salvation we have in Jesus Christ, not the dissolution of God-given roles for women and men.

a. Looking closely at this verse we ask the question, “How are women and men equal as they come to Christ through faith and baptism?” The context lists six ways:

v. 24 they are equally justified by faith,

v. 25 they are equally free from the bondage of legalism,

v. 26 they are equally children of God,

v. 27 they are equally clothed with Christ,

v. 29 they are equally possessed by Christ,

v. 29 they are equally heirs of the promise to Abraham.” (Grudem & Piper, “Answers to Basic Questions about Biblical Manhood and Womanhood”)

b. If we ask the question, “How do the three ‘pairs’ in the verse compare?” We note that only the third, “male/female,” has its roots in creation.

c. If we ask the question, “What is the context of the Apostle’s statement?” we note several things:

1) The key element in coming to Christ is “faith.” All must approach Him the same way: by faith. Note that the word “faith” is used in every verse from 3:22 to 3:26.

2) Neither of the pairs “servant/free” and “male/female” is mentioned again in the epistle.

3) So what is the significance of the first pair, “Jew/Greek?” In fact that is the subject of this and every chapter (1:13,16; 2:7-9, 12-15; 3:14; 4:8,21; 5:6; 6:15). Why does Paul emphasize that to the Galatian readers? Galatians 2:4 calls out “false brothers.” (See also Acts 15:5 “Pharisee believers.”) They are attempting to impose Jewish rituals (v. 2:3 + 32 times in Galatians), calendar observances (4:10), kosher food laws (2:12) and circumcision (2:3 + 12 times). Paul is arguing for faithfulness to Christ (1:23 + 21 similar times, 2:7 + 3 times, & 3:9)

(Wayne Walden, “Galatians 3:28: Grammar, Text, Context and Translation”,
Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Spring 2010)

4) A simple outline of the context would be:

How one gets “into” Christ (vv 24, 27)

Who can be “in” Christ (vv 26, 28)

Who belongs “to” Christ (v. 29)

5) Verse 28 gives examples by showing the restrictions that have been eliminated. One does not have to be Jew, free, or male; Greeks, servants, and females are also eligible.

6) So what is the organizing principle of this text? From the text itself, “All are one in Christ Jesus.” It does not say, “All are equal in Christ Jesus,” but “All are one in Christ Jesus.”

d. Conclusion: Neither this verse, nor this chapter, nor the book of Galatians addresses the God-ordained roles of women and men.

1 Timothy 2:8-15 (especially 11-15)

Majority 1: Summary: This is a matter of propriety during worship.

Minority 1: This is a key section of Scripture pertaining to the issues at hand.

First, the Apostle Paul is enumerating several principles here, for instance:

- 1) United prayer without strife. (“Lifting up holy hands” is probably an idiom for prayer, as is “washing the feet of the saints” (1 Tim 5:10) an idiom for Christian service.
- 2) Modest attire with a focus on a woman’s inner godly disposition. (In the culture of Galatia and relevant today: not dressing seductively or ostentatiously.)
- 3) Obedience to God-given principles for leadership in the home and in the church.

(**Majority 2**) The Apostle Paul references the Fall in verses 13-14. This text must be read within the salvation themes and the unity of scripture. Elsewhere in scripture, Adam is held accountable for the Fall (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). The Genesis account shows that Adam was present with Eve at the Fall (Genesis 3:6). Paul is using the creation narrative to establish his teaching of women to learn in quietness and not to usurp authority over men.

(Minority 2) The question to ask is, “Why did Paul reference the Genesis accounts?” He does so to cite the “informing norm” for his statement in verse 12, making perfectly clear that his proscription of women teaching or exercising authority over men is grounded in the order of creation and therefore trans-cultural. Note: This is a good place to state that we believe that women are not barred by 1 Tim 2:12 from teaching altogether, but only from the teaching of men, which in context refers to *the authoritative doctrinal instruction of a local church gathered for worship*. (See also Minority 4 below.)

Majority 3: Then there is verse 15, for which we do not have a functional theology. This verse sets the context of instruction to be within a marriage (between wife and husband) when it speaks of “women will be saved through childbearing.” This suggests that these instructions are for a wife and her husband, not men and women in general.

Minority 3: The Apostle is certainly not suggesting that women need to be married or mothers in order to be saved. Consider the many other passages in his epistles that honor single women. Therefore, he must be using the figure of speech called a synecdoche which is “a more inclusive term” for a woman’s domestic role.

Majority 4: Given the above, we believe this text is not a prohibition for women to teach men or to speak during public worship today, but rather addresses a localized situation of wives disrupting worship by asking questions of their husbands with an attitude of usurped authority. Again, this is a matter of propriety in worship.

Minority 4: (See Minority 2 above.)

- a. What does the Genre (#10) Interpretation of this text reveal? 1 Timothy 2 is part of a Pastoral Epistle, whose very nature is that of apostolic instruction regarding the organization of the apostolic and post-apostolic churches. Therefore, the injunctions of 1 Timothy 2 should be considered paramount. “In other words, while the purpose of a letter such as Galatians was demonstrably not primarily to lay down permanent guidelines on the organization of the church in terms of qualifications for elders or the roles of men and women in the church, the injunctions of 1 Timothy 2 are part of an epistle whose entire purpose for writing is wrapped up in the purpose of providing such normative instruction.” (Kostenberger, “The Crux of the Matter: Paul’s Pastoral Pronouncements regarding Women’s Roles in 1 Timothy 2:9-15”, Faith&Mission, 1997)
- b. What is the informing norm for 1 Tim 2:12? It is explicitly stated in verses 13 & 14. Paul cites Adam’s temporal priority over Eve in creation and Eve’s priority over Adam at the Fall. “This effectively waylays the contention that the thrust of Paul’s teaching is here directed toward women’s lack of education, their teaching of heresy or unruly behavior in the Ephesian church, or other matters.” (T. David Gordon, “A Certain Kind of Letter: The Genre of 1 Timothy,” in *Women in the Church*, ed. Kostenberger et al.)
- c. So 1 Timothy 2:12 is not addressing a localized situation, but is trans-cultural for the church today.

Note: The question is asked, “Granted that the Apostle Paul speaks to men’s and women’s roles in marriage, how do similar roles apply in the church?”

The simple answer is “through the household of God, which is the church.”

Believers are members of the family of God. (Ephesians 1:5, Romans 8:29,30 & more).

We are to call God “our Father.” (Matthew 6:9)

Then Paul in his first letter to Timothy not only links qualifications for leaders in the church to their reputation within the home (men: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; mature women: 1 Timothy 5:9-16), but he links the purpose of his letter to his readers’ conduct in God’s household: “I am writing you these instructions so that ... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (1 Tim 3:14-15)

1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9

Majority: The texts list our qualifications for elders (and deacons in 1 Timothy). These texts have been used to support the position that the office of elder is for men only. We propose two challenges for such use. First, both contain the statement: “the husband of but one wife.” At Ebenezer (and within the CLBA), we do not disqualify single men from consideration of being an elder (or deacon). So there must be contextual consideration given to these passages. Second, our congregational history established both Deacon and Deaconess Boards, the later being composed of women. Therefore, we have not, in the past, eliminated women from church leadership as “deaconesses” in contrast to a strict interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:12, “A deacon must be the husband of but one wife...”

(Minority) The Apostle Paul does not mandate that deacons only be men (1 Timothy 3:8), nor does he “insist” on married officeholders in the church. He *assumes* that they will usually be married and on the basis of that general assumption states certain requirements. Furthermore, nowhere does the Bible describe deacons as having positions of authority such as is given to elders and bishops.

Jesus and Women in the Gospels

Majority: The community of Jesus’ followers included women (some are noted above). Jesus’ example and teaching on the Kingdom of God inspired the early church. Romans 16 includes the ministry of many women, and there are historical records that Junia (v.7) was a woman. In two of Paul’s letters (I Cor. 11 & 13, I Timothy 2), he needed to address specific issues in the churches, but other books describe a community of Christ followers who worked together in varieties of ministry. Passages on spiritual gifts do not give restrictions to women. May God continue to foster new partnership and interdependence among men and women in the CLBA. This will result in powerful communication of Christ and His Kingdom to people waiting to hear and see the good news of the Gospel.

Minority: Jesus and Women in the Gospels: Jesus set a wonderful example of Kingdom-life by the respect He exhibited toward women as against the practices of His day. Praise God for the women who stepped up to support Jesus and the disciples. Praise God that women faithfully appeared at the tomb to carry out their responsibility to tend to the body of Jesus that was interred in haste on Good Friday. Praise God that some carried the message of the risen Savior as “first evangelists” (but not exclusively, note the two men

on the road to Emmaus.) Praise God that women also are called to be witnesses to the Gospel; He has given them special and unique opportunities.

But where do the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, or the epistles list women in positions of authority? The evidence does not exist. The question is often asked, “Why didn’t Jesus select women as disciples?” It certainly wasn’t because he wanted to observe the social mores of that day. Jesus had no fear of overturning social ideas and practices. Consider his calling a tax collector to be his disciple, or his dining with “sinners,” or his honoring a poor widow who gave two pennies, or his cleansing the temple, or healing on the Sabbath. He was simply following the biblical imperative that called men to positions of authority in the church.

But let us be clear: women and men alike enjoy the same standing in Christ, in no way are women inferior to men, we all are members of one Body, the Holy Spirit bestows His gifts sovereignty on all Christians, and the work of the Kingdom of God does not depend more on one than the other. Women should not be placed in positions of ultimate responsibility and authority over the church, but there are significant opportunities for them to hold responsible positions of leadership in the church.

We echo the prayer of the majority: “May God continue to foster new partnerships and interdependence among men and women in the CLBA.”

To God be the glory.

Appendix A – Background, Scope and Purpose

Background

The issue of the role of women in ministry seems to surface with greater frequency in conversations within the elder board, our congregation and the denomination. It is a topic that elicits passionate responses from people who differ significantly on the extent to which women may be involved in ministry and/or leadership within the church.

In 1988, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLBA) issued a position paper, “Role of Women in the Church: Implications for Women’s Suffrage”. This position paper is based upon a 1987 report that was received by the annual meeting, “The Role of Women in the Church”.

More recently, as a part of a broad initiative to consider the reorganization of the structure of the CLBA, a task force on “Women in Ministry” was created. This task force was assigned the responsibility of addressing Dr. Ken Hunter’s recommendation, in his report to the CLBA, that we maximize women’s ministry within our congregations and denomination to the fullest extent allowed by our theology. The task force made nine recommendations and included a short bibliography of suggested readings for further study.

In their first recommendation (see full text later in this document), the task force recommended that elder boards in local congregations be reminded that as our theology is currently stated, the issue of what role women are to have in ministry in their congregation is their responsibility. The task force does not presume to dictate precisely how each elder board will use women in ministry. Instead, they call upon elder boards to continually study the Word and also their own cultural setting as they determine what is appropriate for their congregation.

It is based on this recommendation that the elder board has initiated a study group at Ebenezer.

Study Group

The study group is comprised of the following individuals: Jerry Larson (moderator), Todd Mathison, Jim Olson, Roberta Rivard, Dan Stennes-Rogness, Joanie Soholt, Shel Sorensen, Mary Thompson and Dale Varberg. This study group will submit a report of their findings and recommendations to the elder board. We have also asked the study group to consider ways to engage with the congregation during and/or at the completion of their work (i.e. written updates, open meetings, forum etc). The elder board will act upon any recommendations proposed by the study group.

The three papers noted above represent an important body of work to read and understand. As an elder board, we affirm the approach used by those compiling these documents and encourage the study group to draft their report and recommendations with a similar spirit of unity and humility. Our charge to those selected for this study group is that they enter this study with no pre-determined outcome in mind. Additionally, each individual affirms that scripture is the basis for all discussion and recommendations emanating from the study group.

Study Group Scope and Purpose

- 1) Consider the question – Does (Has) Ebenezer fully utilize(d) the gifts of women in ministry in harmony with our current statement of faith and the accepted position paper on the role of women in ministry? Discuss and report on how it has and how it does not. Develop recommendations where appropriate.
- 2) As work on question 1 is completed, what other questions or recommendations rise to the surface as it relates to the Church of the Lutheran Brethren’s current position on the role of women?
- 3) The group has twelve months to complete their work and report back to the elder board.

The background for this scope and purpose come from three of the eight recommendations made by the Women in Ministry task force referred above. Below is a copy of the three recommendations (See also Appendix C).

Recommendation 1

We recommend that all of our elder boards be reminded that as our theology is currently stated, the issue of what roles women are to have in ministry in their congregation is their responsibility. We would not presume to dictate precisely how each elder board will use women in ministry. Instead we call upon them to continually study the Word and also their own cultural setting as they determine what is appropriate for their congregation. This is one of the most critical roles of an elder board, and not only on this particular issue. The elder board must be sensitive to its culture; yet it also must realize that some of our internal cultural mores may become so sacred that they bind us stronger than Scriptural principles do. We remind them to be diligent that elements of internal church culture as well as external societal culture are not allowed to take precedence over Scripture. We encourage them to exercise true servant leadership in this matter and not lord it over the flock. We call for an approach that is proactive in utilizing all God given gifts within their congregation, as it seems appropriate to them. This was the recommendation of the study committee to the church over twenty years ago. It wrote in the 1987 committee report, “The Role of Women in the Church,” “Every indication from the Gospels and the Apostolic Church is to the effect that the men of the church today need to take the initiative in encouraging and supporting Christian women to become much more active than in the past and, to as quickly as possible, approximate their role as they did in the early church.”

We must not allow this to become a forgotten paragraph of a committee report. If we are to use women in ministry to the fullest extent our theology allows, it is up to the elder boards of all of our churches to take the lead.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the elder boards and denominational leaders be proactive in helping people discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts in appropriate ministry roles.

We affirm the following recommendations from Dr. Kent Hunter:

- A. that churches be helped to organize around spiritual gifts.
- B. that roles be identified and filled with a focus on spiritual gifts.

Recommendation 8

We recognize that the Statement of Faith is not to be altered in this time of proposed major organizational change. The Synodical Council and this task force recognize that there is confusion about what our theology on the role of women in ministry is.

Therefore:

- A. We recommend that the elder boards of all of our churches thoroughly study Scripture and our approved position paper on the role of women. How does it help you? How does it not help you in your ministry? What questions do you have?
- B. In light of the commitment to consider no change to our Statement of Faith at this time, we recommend that our church body review our theology on the role of women in ministry only after the current process of acting upon organizational change is complete.
- C. Should the proposed organizational changes pass, we recommend that a study of the role of women in ministry be a priority for the newly established Theological Commission.

Additional items of note

Regarding the 8th recommendation, subparagraph B, the organizational change within the CLBA was passed at the 2009 Annual Convention.

1. The 2009 Annual Convention passed a motion accepting all recommendations of the Women in Ministry Task Force. Regarding the 8th recommendation, subparagraph C, the elder board has sent a letter to President Egge and Joel Nordtvedt, Regional Pastor for the Central Region, affirming this particular recommendation and encouraging them to act upon it.

As a part of our communication with President Egge and Rev. Nordtvedt, we have informed them of our study group, including a copy of this document.

Appendix B – Hermeneutic Guidelines

Scripture forms the foundation and authority for our theology, and so it is imperative that we handle scripture appropriately. Biblical hermeneutics is the science that teaches the principles and methods of interpreting the Word of God. Proper hermeneutics provide us tools to help ensure that we are basing our interpretations on the truth as God has revealed it, while avoiding error to the greatest degree possible. Our goal is to follow what Paul wrote to Timothy: *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth* (2 Tm 2:15 TNIV).

Validity in interpretation is our hermeneutical goal. We work to understand biblical texts by establishing meaning as being the intent of the author. The following two citations express our intent. “Simply stated, the task of interpreters of the Bible is to find out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and thereupon to transmit that meaning to the modern readers.”¹ “On purely practical grounds, therefore, it is preferable to agree that the meaning of a text is the author’s meaning.”²

The following are the hermeneutical principles that undergird our study. Each of the principles are tools that need to be balanced by the interpreter.

GROUP ONE: Philosophy of Biblical Interpretation

The Bible, including both Old and New Testaments as originally given, is the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God and is free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final authoritative guide for faith and conduct (CLBA Statement of Faith).

¹ Mickelsen, A. Berkeley. *Interpreting the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963, 5.

² Hirsch, E. D. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967, 25.

Principle #1: The One Interpretation Principle

Every verse in the Bible has one primary interpretation, although that verse may have many applications. The primary interpretation is that which mirrors the intent of the inspired author.

Principle #2: The Plain Sense Principle

Literal Interpretation means accepting the literal rendering of each sentence unless by virtue of the nature of the sentence or phrase or a clause within the sentence renders it impossible. This includes the grammatical/cultural guideline. For instance, figures of speech or fables of allegories do not admit to being of a literal interpretation. In other words: *“When the plain sense of the scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”* Therefore, take every word at its primary, usual, meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.

Principle #3: The Unity Principle

The Bible must be interpreted in light of its unity, since it is all inspired by God. The unity of the Bible enables the reader to let Scripture interpret Scripture and requires the exegete to interpret the parts in terms of the whole, thereby reaching conclusions on which all Scripture agree. There are two essential guidelines for applying this principle: 1) The context of the two passages must be the same; and 2) the plain passage must be used to guide our interpretation of a less clear passage, not the other way around.

Principle #4: The Harmony of Scripture Principle

No part of the Bible may be interpreted so as to contradict another part of the Bible. If there appears to be a contradiction, it is an *apparent* contradiction. Further, we need to hold a humble posture in our understanding of scripture and of our knowledge claims; scripture trumps personal interpretation (see literal and contextual principles).

Principle #5: The Progressive Revelation Principle

The Word of God is to be understood from the Old Testament to the New Testament as a flower unfolding its petals to the morning sun. God initiated revelation, but He did not reveal His truths all at one time. It was a long and progressive process. Therefore, we must take into account the then-current state of revelation to properly understand a particular passage. For example, an interpretation of a passage in Genesis that assumes a fully delineated view of the "new Covenant" would not be sound. As the common saying goes, *The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.*

Principle #6: The Accumulated Scholarship Principle

We rely on learning and scholarship accumulated over the centuries when we study and interpret biblical texts. The English language translations we have are the results of years of work by teams of scholars in biblical texts and translation principles. Bible commentaries are another example of materials written by scholars and students of scripture that are valuable for our study and learning. The goal of this scholarship is (or should be) to get us closer to understanding the original author's meaning. We acknowledge our reliance on a great and long stream of scholarship when interpreting biblical texts.

Principle #7: The Humility Principle

We come to our biblical interpretations with thoughtful conviction, but hold these convictions with humility and a certain amount of tentativeness, acknowledging that no single individual or group of us has the corner on interpreting or articulating biblical truth. We ask that others have the same attitude.

GROUP TWO: Historical, Lingual, and Cultural Considerations

The Bible must be interpreted in its original languages and in its historical and cultural contexts. These contexts include the original language and how it is otherwise used, the immediate passage, the surrounding passages, the entire book in which the passage is

found, the other writing of the author, the entire Bible, the culture of the time and the previous history.

Principle #8: The Historical Background Principle

The Bible was composed in a specific culture at a particular point in time. While they are universal in application, the truths in the Bible can most fully be realized only when taking the surrounding culture and history into account.

Principle #9: The Grammatical Principle

The Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. While we have several highly accurate translations of the Bible in English, all translation involves a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the translator. Thus, the study of word meanings, grammar, and syntax of the original languages is important for a proper understanding of Scripture.

Principle #10: The Genre Principle

Genre is a literary term having to do with the category of literature under consideration. Proper interpretation must take the general literary category of any given passage into consideration. Ask, for example, “Are we dealing with poetry or prose or history or prophecy? The genre may have direct bearing on the proper interpretation. A guiding principle in this regard is that Bible passages that speak to an issue in a direct teaching fashion (didactic) should be used to help understand incidental, descriptive and historical references elsewhere.

Principle #11: The Grammatico-Historical Method

This method of interpretation focuses attention not only on literary forms but also upon grammatical constructions and historical contexts out of which the Scriptures were written. A guiding principle in this regard is that the Bible interpreter must distinguish the applications of principles within a given culture, such as the culture of the New Testament, from the principles themselves. The principles, not the specific applications, must be our guide to faith and life.

As an example of using hermeneutic principles, we provide the following excerpt from the CLBA 1988 Position Paper on the Role of Women in the Church.³

This rule is particularly important to the subject of the role of women in the church because various culturally determined issues are discussed in the contexts of the passages that deal most directly with the role of women in society and in the church. We must treat similar subjects with the same rules of interpretation.

When Paul expresses his desire that men everywhere should pray, he applies this to a culturally common manner of praying, namely, “lifting up holy hands in prayer” (1 Timothy 2:8). If we lay the stress on the cultural manner of prayer we will conclude that we are not really praying unless we lift up our hands! If we recognize that the principle is the point of concern, and that culturally acceptable ways of obeying that principle change, we may pray without ever raising our hands.

When Paul exhorts the women, “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God,” the principle is modesty. If we lay stress on the modesty, decency and propriety principles, we will be constantly adjusting them to the changing dress practices of the various societies in which the church serves. If we understand that it is better to be clothed in good deeds than to make a stunning impression with beautiful clothing, we will emphasize character over outward appearance. These are the points of principle Paul is making.

However, if we lay the emphasis on the application, stressing, for example, the word “gold,” we will make rules forbidding the wearing of gold in church. We

³ CLBA 1988 Position Paper on the Role of Women in the Church, 3-4.

might then stick to this teaching even though the principle might be circumvented with women wearing other expensive jewelry in excess, carefully avoiding any gold. This mistake has often been made in the history of the church.

Here we must be most cautious and careful to rightly divide the word of truth lest we too easily lay aside a truth as culturally limited, or too easily take a culturally limited truth and make it an absolute statement about the nature of God or mankind. Mary Evans in *Women in the Bible* rightly cautions that, “it is arbitrary to dismiss any Biblical teaching as culturally conditioned without a strong indication within the context that cultural influences have been a primary consideration, and this indication is very rarely present” (Evans, 1983, p. 10). Evans is correct in offering a word of caution. However, indications of the culturally limited aspects of an application are usually not seen until they are seen from another culture. This is the nature of cultural presuppositions. They are rarely seen by people within the culture, they are simply taken for granted. Only careful study will show the relationship between the principle anchored in the character of God and in His design for His world and the particular application to a given culture.

Please consider our hermeneutical principles as you read through our study.

Appendix C – Abstract - Current CLBA Position on Women in Ministry

The theology of the role of women in the church is defined primarily by two CLBA documents: the Constitution which contains the Statement of Faith, and the 1988 Position Paper on the Role of Woman in the Church. The CLBA Statement of Faith explicitly limits the offices of pastor and elder to men but places no other restrictions on the role of women in the church. Those filling the offices of pastor and elder are typically ordained and installed.⁴ The 1988 Position Paper states that while men and women are created, fallen and restored equally by God, men have been given the primary leadership role in both marriage and the church. The Position Paper bases this on its interpretation of Genesis 1-3 as well as several New Testament passages (see below). The Position Paper goes on to distinguish between “office” and “gift,” and states that all members of the body of Christ may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit wills, regardless of gender (see additional passages below), but again only men may fill the offices of pastor or elder. In making this distinction, the Position Paper also clearly states that woman may teach and lead according to their gifts and as called by the church community, but do so under the authority of the offices of pastor and elder.⁵

New Testament passages:

1 Corinthians 11, 14; Ephesians 5:21-6:4; 1 Timothy 2, 3 and 5:12; 2 Timothy 2; Titus 1; and 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

Additional passages on gifts:

1 Corinthians 12:11; Romans 12; Ephesians 4, Galatians 3:28

Sources:

All references to the CLBA Constitution and By-Laws are to the version adopted at the 2009 Annual convention.

⁴ See CLBA By-Laws Art. II Congregational Management, Section C: “Pastors and elders shall be ordained and installed according to the ritual of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America.

⁵ See pp 16-20 of Position Paper, Role of Women in the Church: Implications of Suffrage, Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America, March, 1988.

*“The Church of the Lutheran Brethren practices the congregational form of church government [nationally] and the autonomy of the local congregations. **The office of pastor and elder is to be filled by men only.** The synodical administration has an advisory function as it relates to the congregation and an administrative function as it relates to the cooperative efforts of the congregations.”* [Emphasis added by bold above.] Church of the Lutheran Brethren Doctrinal Statement of Faith, Paragraph J

CLB Position Paper, Role of Women in the Church: Implications for Suffrage, March 1988. See also, The Committee Report on the Role of Women in the Church, April 1987. See key affirmations from the Position Paper are below:

Affirmation 3: God created both male and female in His image. He created them equal though different. He gave them dominion over the created world, and commanded them to be fruitful and to increase in number.

Affirmation 6: The Bible teaches that there is an office of public ministry in the church, the office of overseer (pastor and elder). It is to be filled only by scripturally qualified men (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Timothy 5:12; 2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Affirmation 7: The Bible teaches that the Order of Creation which provided the authority structure of the family also provides the pattern for the church (Genesis 1&2; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Timothy 2).

Affirmation 8: The Bible distinguishes between office and gift. All members of the body of Christ, men and women alike, may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit wills, but not all members may be appointed to all offices (1 Corinthians 12:11; Romans 12; Ephesians 4).

Report & Recommendations from the Task Force on Women in Ministry, March 2008.

We Believe, Statement of Faith, Church of the Lutheran Brethren, by Dr. Timothy Ysteboe, 2010 edition.

Appendix D – Annotated Reading/Resource List

The Ebenezer Study Group on Role of Women in Ministry reviewed a large number of books and papers in its study of the role of women. We agreed from the beginning that the Bible would be our chief and final resource. Of second importance was the official position paper of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America, titled *Role of Women in the Church: Implications of Suffrage*, dated 1988, which revolves around 10 affirmations and concludes with a lengthy bibliography of books and articles that were studied in its preparation. We have added to this list the following items that have been useful in our study.

It is important to clarify terminology that is becoming standard and will be used in what follows. The traditional male headship position is referred to as Complementarian whereas the modern position emphasizing equality between the genders is termed Egalitarian. We have arranged the items reviewed chronologically according to the date of publication.

1. *Let Me Be a Woman*, Elizabeth Elliot, Tyndale House, 1976. This well written book by a well known author consists of 49 short letters the author wrote to her daughter Valerie just before the latter's wedding. It emphasizes that the differences between men and women are part of God's plan and are thus to be celebrated. Yes, women have gifts and God intends that they should be developed but under the leadership of men. In particular, a successful marriage is dependent on accepting the headship of the husband. Elizabeth Elliot is definitely a complementarian.

2. *Beyond the Curse, Women Called to Ministry*, Aida Besancon Spenser, Hendrickson Publishers, 1985. Aida Spenser, a Princeton Ph D, is a professor at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. She discusses male/female issues with attention to the significant Bible passages. She strongly supports the egalitarian interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and beautifully expounds on how Jesus redeems women from the curse that came with the fall. An interesting contribution is the last chapter of the book, written by her husband. He shows how two people, both ordained ministers, can have a truly equal marriage.

3. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, editors, Crossway Books, 1991. This book, a 1993 winner of Christianity Today's book of the year, is the definitive book on the complementarian position. It is a monumental work (26 chapters, 566 pages, 22 different authors) and deals in detail with all the relevant passages of Scripture. It is uncompromising in its complementarianism. On the other hand, the book is generally courteous toward Christian egalitarians and rejects the dictatorial subordination of women practiced by some men. In fact it encourages women to serve in most church roles but is emphatic that this does not include being an elder/pastor or teaching doctrine to men (based on 1 Timothy 2:12). Piper and Grudem were the leaders in formulating the

influential Danvers Statement Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood which has been signed by a large number of Biblical scholars.

4. *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference*. Larry Crabb, Zondervan, 1991. This well known Christian psychologist leans toward the complementarian position. His main point is that men and women are different and have different needs. We should celebrate these differences. The Ephesians 5 passage provides instructions for a happy and fulfilling marriage.

5. *I Suffer Not a Woman*, Richard Kroeger and Catherine Kroeger, Baker Book House, 1992. The late Catherine Kroeger was the founder and long serving president of Christians for Biblical Equality. This is the leading evangelical organization promoting the egalitarian position. When the above book appeared in 1992, it caused a major stir in the evangelical world. Concentrating on 1 Timothy 2:11-15, the Kroegers insist that this passage must be interpreted in terms of its historical and cultural setting. The situation in the Ephesian church where Timothy was pastor was very special and this explains Paul's strong words which accordingly are not to be taken as applying universally in time and space. Some scholars find the Kroegers' analysis of history to be faulty but their idea of treating the 1 Timothy passage as culturally determined has been very influential in the writings of later egalitarian authors.

6. *Women in the Maze*, Ruth A. Tucker, InterVarsity Press, 1992. This book by a seminary professor answers 30 questions such as: Was Paul a chauvinist? Did Paul in 1 Timothy 2 forbid women to teach and have authority? On what basis do churches today deny women ordination? Having grown up in a very traditional rural Wisconsin community, Tucker has gradually become an articulate but irenic defender of the egalitarian position.

7. *Women Leaders and the Church*, Linda L. Belleville, Baker Books, 2000. Linda Belleville is a professor at North Park Seminary, a Covenant institution. Because the Covenant church is similar in background, form of worship, mission emphasis, and lack of hierarchy to the Lutheran Brethren church, her book is of special interest to us. It is scholarly without being pedantic, readable without being superficial. She shows convincingly that women of the Bible displayed all the spiritual gifts and argues that it is gifts that determine function, not the other way around. She treats all the Biblical male/female passages and fits them into an egalitarian framework.

8. *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, James Beck and Craig Blomberg, editors, 2001. Here is a book for those who want to see both views of women's issues presented in a fair and competent way. Four theologians, two from each point of view, give strong defenses of their positions.

9. *Men and Women in the Church*, Sarah Sumner, InterVarsity Press, 2003. During college years at Baylor University, Sumner's unusual talents were recognized and she was asked to teach the 500-member college class at First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas. Here she discovered her gifts of teaching and exposition and determined to go to

seminary. Despite her egalitarian leanings, she chose the complementarian dominated Trinity Seminary partly because she was determined to take the Bible very seriously and wanted to understand the complementarian view. Wayne Grudem was one of her teachers and served on her PhD committee. Sumner wound up searching for a way to bridge the complementarian/egalitarian divide. Her book, notable for its conciliatory tone, has won high praise for her sometimes novel attempt to do this. In 2003, Sumner held a professorship at an evangelical seminary and co-pastored a church.

10. *Sarah Sumner's Men and Women in the Church: A Review Article*, Dorothy Patterson, JBMW 8/1, Spring 2003. Dorothy Patterson is a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a leader in the Southern Baptist convention. She strongly criticizes Sumner saying that her arguments put priority on her experience rather than on Biblical exegesis. And furthermore says Patterson, Sumner is attempting an impossible task: bringing complementarianism and egalitarianism into harmony. Patterson even finds reasons to question Sumner's integrity, a charge that we are reluctant to accept.

11. *Evangelical Feminism, A New Path to Liberalism*. Wayne Grudem, Crossway Books, 2006. Following up on the book reviewed as number 3, Grudem continues his exegetical analysis of the key Biblical passages in support of the complementarian position. Calling on the carpet the leading writers (by name) of the egalitarian view, he tries to show that their knowledge of history is flawed and that their theology is tainted by false presuppositions. But he also maintains that as evangelicalism moves in the egalitarian direction, it is on a slippery slope toward liberalism.

12. *The Creator's Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church, A report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations*, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 2010. Here is an extensive and well-argued statement on the official position of the conservative Missouri Synod. It is irenic in tone and balanced in its treatment of the church's evolving position. The Missouri Synod now says that the body of Christ requires that its individual members exercise the wide variety of their gifts, whether that individual is male or female. Thus it affirms the freedom of congregations to grant women's suffrage and the calling of women teachers, deaconesses, professors and missionaries. On the other hand, it says the Bible gives clear direction on male leadership in the home and male ordination to pastoral ministry.