

1                   **REPORT OF THE AD INTERIM COMMITTEE ON**  
2                   **WOMEN SERVING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH**  
3                   **TO THE FORTY-FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
4                   **OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

5  
6     [Includes Recommendations, pp. 59-63, as amended and adopted by 45<sup>th</sup> General Assembly]  
7  
8

9                   **CHAPTER ONE**  
10                  **INTRODUCTION**

11       The Presbyterian Church in America is joyfully and confessionally committed to the Bible's  
12       teaching on the complementarity of men and women. As a denomination, we believe that  
13       this teaching is true, good, and beautiful. We affirm the full dignity of men and women as  
14       created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). We also humbly and happily embrace Scripture's  
15       clear teaching that the eldership is to be composed of qualified men (1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1-7;  
16       5:17), who are entrusted by Christ with the ministry of the authoritative teaching and ruling  
17       of the church for the building up of the whole body (Eph. 4:11-13). In marriage, this  
18       mutually-edifying complementarity is displayed when a Christian husband expresses his  
19       responsibility of headship in sacrificial love to his wife (Eph. 5:23-31) and when a Christian  
20       wife welcomes her husband's headship with respect (Eph. 5:22-24, 33).

21  
22       Within this framework of our common and principled commitment to complementarianism as  
23       defined by our confessional standards and polity, the 44th General Assembly of the  
24       Presbyterian Church in America approved the formation of a study committee on the issue of  
25       women serving in the church's ministry in ways that are consistent with those standards. The  
26       General Assembly directed the moderator to appoint a committee of competent men and  
27       women who represent the diversity of opinions within the PCA. This diversity of opinions  
28       refers not to the inclusion of views out of accord with our confessional position but regards a  
29       number of subsidiary matters such as the role of women in diaconal ministry; the best way to  
30       promote the use of women's gifts and ministry in the church; in what settings is it appropriate  
31       for women to teach; whether deacons ought to be ordained; what the nature of the diaconal  
32       office is; whether women may serve on denominational boards and agencies, and the like.

33  
34       For instance, consider the question of women's role in diaconal ministry. All sides are  
35       agreed that there is biblical warrant for the involvement of women in the church's diaconal  
36       work. Our *Book of Church Order* already allows for and encourages that (*BCO* 9-7). Indeed,  
37       women have been involved in the diaconal ministry of the church with apostolic benediction  
38       and encouragement from the beginning (1 Tim. 5:10). The question is, how? And, is there an  
39       appropriate title for this work? That is one place where there is a diversity of opinions in the  
40       PCA. Our *BCO* says: "To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen  
41       men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies,  
42       and sound judgment." Many embrace this view as their personal conviction. Some in our  
43       denomination believe that the office of deacon should be open to women, and thus that  
44       women should be ordained as deacons (and this would require a *Book of Church Order*  
45

change). Others favor a distinctive ordained office of deaconess (which would also require a *BCO* change), while some simply view deaconess as the title for a qualified, unordained woman who assists the officers of the church in their work. Still, others have installed an unordained diaconate made up of men and women (a disputed practice in our denomination).

Into these diverse opinions and out of a desire to promote the peace, purity, unity, and progress of the church, the 44th General Assembly directed this committee to give particular attention to the issues of:

1. The biblical basis, theology, history, nature, and authority of ordination,
2. The biblical nature and function of the office of deacon,
3. Clarification on the ordination or commissioning of deacons/deaconesses, and
4. Should the findings of the study committee warrant *BCO* changes, the study committee will propose such changes for the GA to consider.
5. Compose a Pastoral Letter to be approved by the General Assembly and to be sent to all churches, encouraging them [within the parameters of our doctrinal standards] to:
  - (1) promote the practice of women in ministry,
  - (2) appoint women to serve alongside elders and deacons in the pastoral work of the church, and
  - (3) hire women on church staff in appropriate ministries.

In fulfilling the assignment given to the committee, our unanimous aim is not to undermine or alter our confessional commitments, but rather to foster a robust complementarian position and practice that creates a culture which welcomes and encourages the ministry of women in the PCA in ways that are consistent with the Bible's teaching, as expressed in our confession and polity. The moderator appointed seven voting members and six advisory members (five of whom were able to serve) to our committee. All members unreservedly embrace our denominational standards' affirmation of complementarianism in the home and church.

Committee members met numerous times during the year, face-to-face and electronically, supplemented by a continuous correspondence on matters of discussion and dispute, as well as about the content of our report. We debated all the matters put to us by the General Assembly and were, by the grace of God, able to arrive at an overwhelming consensus.

We present our report to you in five chapters:

1. Introduction (including our response to Overture 3)
2. A Biblical Foundation for the Roles of Women in the Church
3. Ordination - A Definition, with Special Reference to the Office of the Diaconate
4. Encouraging a Robust and Gracious Complementarian Practice
5. Pastoral Letter and Recommendations

The committee is not recommending any *Book of Church Order* changes. We do offer some prudential recommendations to sessions and presbyteries, and we suggest an overture that could be made by a presbytery, if one so desired. We have sought to make recommendations

1 that accord with the clear teaching of Scripture and our denomination's doctrinal standards,  
2 and that serve the interests of the church's unity.

3  
4 We believe that the matters the General Assembly asked us to study are timely and needed.  
5 Along with our confessional complementarian convictions, we want to champion the  
6 dignity, ability, and service of women in the church. It is important that we do both.

7  
8 When the PCA was formed, objection to the ordination of women as pastors and elders was  
9 an animating issue. We agreed upon it and rallied around it (all of us, men and women),  
10 because we rightly saw that it was an issue of biblical authority. Today, that commitment  
11 remains dominantly embraced in the membership of the PCA, but both members and ministers  
12 are asking how to equip, encourage, and utilize women in the church's ministry in ways that  
13 are consistent with our confessional and theological commitments to complementarianism.

14  
15 When the PCA began, North American society was in flux on the issue of women's roles.  
16 Today, the society is settled on the full inclusion of women in every sphere. This presents us  
17 with a challenge and opportunity. In this moment, we need positively and persuasively to  
18 make the case for biblical complementarity in the home and church, showing that it is true,  
19 good, and beautiful. At the same time, we want actively and unhesitatingly to pursue and  
20 equip the women of the church for every biblical role of service open to them. This then is  
21 the aspiration of the report we offer.

22  
23 *Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Ministry of the Church:*

24 TE Leon Brown (Advisory Member)

25 TE William Castro (Advisory Member)

26 TE Jeffrey Choi (Voting Member)

27 TE Dan Doriani (Advisory Member)

28 TE Ligon Duncan (Voting Member)

29 TE Irwyn Ince (Voting Member)

30 Mrs. Lani Jones (Advisory Member)

31 Mrs. Kathy Keller (Voting Member)

32 Mrs. Mary Beth McGreevy (Voting Member)

33 TE Bruce O'Neil (Voting Member)

34 TE Harry Reeder (Voting Member)

35 TE Roy Taylor (Advisory Member)

36  
37 **Response to Overture 3**

38  
39 Overture 3 from Westminster Presbytery calls on the Assembly to "Declare that the 44th  
40 General Assembly Erred in the Formation of an Ad Interim Committee on Women, that the  
41 General Assembly not Receive the Report of the Ad Interim Committee on the Role of  
42 Women as not Being Properly before the Court, and Dismiss the Ad Interim Committee with  
43 Apology."

44  
45 The *Rules of Assembly Operations (RAO)* 11-5 directs the Stated Clerk on where to refer  
46 overtures. RAO 11-5 specifically states that "Any overture, other than an overture proposing

1 amendment to the Constitution, having to do with the nature or responsibilities of a  
2 permanent Committee or Agency shall be referred by the Clerk to the appropriate  
3 Committee or Agency or ad interim committee.”

4  
5 It should be noted that in 2000, Westminster Presbytery sent an overture (Overture 20)  
6 regarding Covenant College (CC) and asked that it be referred to the Overtures Committee  
7 (*M28GA*, 2000, p. 252). The Stated Clerk reported to the Assembly that he had referred  
8 Overture 20 to CC (*M28GA*, 2000, p. 51). The Moderator of the Twenty-eighth General  
9 Assembly, TE Morton H. Smith, did not rule the Stated Clerk's reference to CC to be out of  
10 order. The Stated Clerk did not refer it to the Overtures Committee; he referred it to the  
11 Board of Trustees of Covenant College (CCB), which in turn sent it with their  
12 recommendation to the Committee of Commissioners on Covenant College (CC CoC),  
13 which in turn reported it to the General Assembly. The CC CoC asked the opinion of the  
14 CCB as to whether it was in order for the CC CoC to consider Overture 20. The CCB replied  
15 that, in their opinion it was in order (*M28GA*, 2000, p. 249). There was no point of order  
16 raised from the floor at the time of the CC CoC report (perhaps due to the CCB opinion).  
17 The CCB, the CC CoC, and the Assembly answered Overture 20 in the negative (*M28GA*,  
18 2000, pp. 250-252). Under the provisions of *RAO* 11-5, in keeping with past practices on  
19 reference of overtures, and in keeping with the previous constitutional advice of the CCB,  
20 this ad interim committee was, in fact, the proper place to which to refer Overture 3.

21  
22 The ad interim committee is recommending to the General Assembly that Overture 3 be  
23 answered in the negative (see recommendations section of this report) and offers the  
24 following grounds for our recommendation:

25  
26 The assertion that the formation of the ad interim committee originated with the Cooperative  
27 Ministries Committee (CMC) and was therefore out of order (**Whereas** section 2) was dealt  
28 with at the 44th General Assembly.

29  
30 TE David Coffin raised a point of order that Recommendation 3 was not  
31 properly before the Assembly for consideration because the matter at hand did  
32 not fall within the limits of the Cooperative Ministries Committee's  
33 responsibilities (*RAO* 7-3) nor did the Administrative Committee have subject  
34 matter jurisdiction. The Moderator ruled the point of order not well taken,  
35 stating that the Permanent Committee Recommendation was in order and that  
36 the CMC had acted properly and referred the matter appropriately. The ruling  
37 was appealed, and the Moderator's ruling was sustained (582-466-36)  
38 (*M44thGA*, 2016, p. 51).

39  
40 The presupposition of **Whereas** section 2 that requests for ad interim committees must arise  
41 from presbyteries is simply erroneous. Moreover, the request was a recommendation of the  
42 Administrative Committee (AC) in accordance with *RAO* 7-3.c.

43  
44 The citation of *BCO* 14-1.7 in **Whereas** section 3 and section 6 is erroneous because any  
45 recommendation of an ad interim committee must be approved by the General Assembly. In  
46 that way, the Assembly sets policy.

- 1 The assertion of **Whereas** section 4 that the appointment of an ad interim committee  
2 violates *RAO* 11-2 likewise is erroneous. The recommendation of the CMC to the AC was  
3 not a group of individuals who had to go through a session or presbytery. The CMC  
4 correctly followed *RAO* 7-3.c. in referring the matter to the AC. It was the AC, not the  
5 CMC, that brought the recommendation to the Assembly.
- 6
- 7 The assertion of **Whereas** section 5 that the ad interim committee urges adoption of changes  
8 to the *BCO* is factually incorrect. The ad interim committee is not proposing any *BCO* changes  
9 to the General Assembly. The assertion is also procedurally incorrect. An ad interim committee  
10 may propose *BCO* changes as the Ad Interim Committee to Study and Make Recommendations  
11 as to Structure and Procedure did (*M14thGA*, 1988, pp. 81; 103-108; 425-448).
- 12
- 13 The assertion of **Whereas** section 8 that placing women on a General Assembly ad interim  
14 committee is a violation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is erroneous because any recommendation of a  
15 committee must be approved by the church court appointing it. Moreover, a related point of  
16 order was ruled to be not well taken:
- 17
- 18 TE Wes Reynolds raised a point of order, based on *BCO* 14-1.9-10, that  
19 committees ought to be representative of the presbyteries and therefore the  
20 recommendation should be found out of order. The Moderator ruled the point of  
21 order not well taken, stating that this reference in the *BCO* is not applicable to  
22 study committees, and that *Roberts Rules of Order* allows for non-members to  
23 be appointed to committees (*RONR* [11th ed.], p. 174, ll. 31-34; p. 489, ll. 24-25).
- 24
- 25 Additionally, the General Assembly accepted as satisfactory North Georgia Presbytery's  
26 argument to reject an exception taken by the CRPR that it was improper for women to serve  
27 as voting members of a Presbytery committee (*M23GA*, 1995, p.199).
- 28
- 29 The assertion of **Whereas** section 9 that our culture's attitude concerning women has  
30 changed with a repudiation of God's word as the norm is correct in several respects. But it  
31 does not logically follow that an appointment of an ad interim committee to study the  
32 teaching of the Word is a repudiation of the Word of God.
- 33
- 34 The presupposition of **Whereas** section 10 that the church is to reform culture and that the  
35 church is not to conform to culture is a valid principle, but it does not follow that the  
36 establishment of an ad interim committee is conforming to the culture. There have been  
37 times in history where the culture has stirred the conscience of the church on such issues as  
38 chattel slavery, segregation, and voting rights for women and minorities.
- 39
- 40 The presupposition of the **Whereas** section 11 that the ad interim committee will propose a  
41 change on women in office is factually incorrect. The committee is not making any such  
42 proposal.
- 43
- 44 The committee has spent much time and effort in preparing a report for the General  
45 Assembly. The Assembly deserves to hear the results of the committee's labors.
- 46

## CHAPTER TWO A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The Old Testament, New Testament, and church history provide a robust foundation for the roles of women in the ministry of the church. This chapter exegetes key scripture passages that supply the biblical foundation for the value, dignity, and service of women in Christ's church. It further explores views held by church leaders when appropriate.

### A SURVEY OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SCRIPTURE

Women are invaluable assets to Christ's church. From Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs. 22:14-20) to Mary the theotokos (Luke 2:6-7) and Phoebe a diakonos, co-laborer of the apostle Paul (Rom. 16:1-2), their ministries are breathed into holy writ as examples of faithful service to God and His people. Paul praised women for their assistance as he planted churches. Euodia and Syntyche contended at Paul's side in the cause of the gospel (Phil. 4:2-3). He lauded Mary, Junias, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis for their singular aid (Rom. 16:6-13). Paul commended women for teaching children (2 Tim. 1:5), urged older women to instruct younger women (Titus 2:3-4), and noted their prophetic ability during church services (1 Cor. 11:5). Women have served for thousands of years in Christ's church.

While women maintain significant ministries in the church, they did not fulfill every role. Women occasionally served as judges, prophetesses, and co-laborers alongside church planters, but they were neither apostles (Matt. 10:2-4), nor expected to be monarchs (Deut. 17:14-20; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; cf. 2 Kgs 11). Additionally, God's law dictated that priests were males (Exod. 29:30). Elders in the new covenant church (1 Tim. 3:1-7) and all of the traveling companions Paul mentions in his letters are male: Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy, Titus, John Mark, Epaphras, and Epaphroditus, among others.

Women in ministry carry out important roles, but the biblical text demonstrates that men and women hold distinct, God-given roles in His church. The following section analyzes the various ministries of women throughout the Scriptures. While time does not permit a full citation of everything women do as recorded in Scripture, the list will be extensive enough to reveal patterns and draw implications.

#### Women Served as Prophetesses

In Exodus 15, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, is the first Old Testament prophetess. As an older sister, she helped save her brother's life (cf. Exod. 2:4). In adulthood, Miriam emerged in conjunction with her brothers' leading. Miriam praised God for Israel's deliverance from suffering, slavery, and oppression, concluding a terrible history of enslavement and assimilation to worshiping foreign gods.

Through the hand of Moses, the Lord drowned Pharaoh and his army. Then, the people of God responded in great shouts of praise. Moses led the initial part of the worship service

1 (Exod. 15:1-8). Of particular interest is Moses' response in verse 1: "I will sing to the  
2 LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."  
3 In Exodus 15:20, Miriam followed Moses' lead. "Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister,"  
4 replied by taking "a tambourine in her hand and all the women followed her, with  
5 tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed  
6 gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea'" (Exod. 15:20-21).

7  
8 Miriam's words were virtually identical to Moses'. Her purpose was the same as his. Both  
9 led Israel in praise to God. Both helped the people respond to a great event in Israel's  
10 history. Moses led the victory and its celebration. Miriam stood beside her brother, leading  
11 the women in celebration and praise. When Miriam supported Moses, she was effective and  
12 blessed.

13  
14 In contrast, Numbers 12 says Miriam and Aaron spoke against their brother Moses, asking,  
15 "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?" (Num. 12:2).  
16 God rebuked them verbally and struck Miriam with leprosy for a week, so that she was sent  
17 out of the camp for seven days (Num. 12:4-15). When Miriam opposed Moses, she was  
18 rebuked.

19  
20 Huldah, another prophetess, served God's people at a peculiar point in Israel's history. The  
21 newly installed King Josiah was just eight years old (2 Kgs. 21:1-24). He was a godly king  
22 who ordered repairs to the temple after it suffered decades of abuse and neglect.  
23 Unfortunately, as a young king, Josiah did little to reverse the sins of his father and  
24 grandfather. Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, defiled the temple for fifty-five years, and  
25 Josiah's father, Amon, did evil for two more years. However, in the eighteenth year of his  
26 reign, Josiah ordered a reform and restoration of the temple (2 Kgs. 22:1-7).

27  
28 As the temple repairs proceeded, Hilkiah the high priest discovered the "Book of the Law,"  
29 that is, Deuteronomy (2 Kgs. 22:8).<sup>1</sup> Hilkiah delivered it to the king's secretary Shaphan,  
30 who read it to the king. As he listened, Josiah became so dismayed at Israel's sins against  
31 this law that he tore his robes. Josiah said, "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the  
32 people... [For] great is the Lord's anger....because our fathers have not obeyed the words of  
33 this book" (2 Kgs. 22:9-13). Josiah surmised that the law condemned Israel's misdeeds and  
34 threatened God's judgment. Still, he sought a prophet's assessment, or rather a prophetess,  
35 named Huldah.

36  
37 This occurred during the fifth year of the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah (compare Jer. 1:2  
38 and 2 Kgs. 22:3). Although the precise dates are unknown, the prophet Zephaniah was also  
39 active around this time (Zeph. 1:1). Nevertheless, Hilkiah and other royal officials sought  
40 Huldah to hear the Lord's assessment (2 Kgs. 22:14).

41  
42 If Jeremiah and perhaps Zephaniah were available to prophesy, why would the officials  
43 consult the prophetess, Huldah? Huldah's husband was a royal official (2 Kgs. 22:14). That  
44

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase, "the book of the law" is almost a technical term for Deuteronomy in much of the Old Testament.

1 suggests the officials already knew and trusted her. Perhaps Huldah had already declared  
2 God's judgment on the sins of Manasseh. If so, she might know if repentance could reverse  
3 God's judgment (2 Kgs. 21:10-15).

4  
5 These are mere speculations. What is clear is that the king's officials consulted Huldah, who  
6 declared God's Word: Israel would suffer punishment for her decades of sin, "according to  
7 everything written in the book" (2 Kgs. 22:16-17). Yet, because Josiah humbled himself and  
8 wept in penitence, judgment would not befall Israel during his reign (2 Kgs. 22:18-20).

9  
10 The outline of this event reveals helpful considerations. When he discovered the law, the  
11 high priest took the initiative (2 Kgs. 22:8ff.). The king led the preliminary response (2 Kgs.  
12 22:12ff.). The king also made the final decision regarding a course of action (2 Kgs. 23:1ff.).  
13 Yet the king and his officials genuinely consulted Huldah. She influenced the course of  
14 events. She neither initiated the action, nor determined the action, but she did influence the  
15 action.

16  
17 At both a high point (i.e., Miriam) and at a low point (i.e., Huldah) in Old Testament history,  
18 a prophetess rose to interpret events and lead Israel's response to it.<sup>2</sup>

19  
20 The Bible mentions other prophetesses. Isaiah 8:3 notes a prophetess who bore a son named  
21 Maher Shalal Hash Baz. God sent the boy as a sign of God's coming judgment on wicked  
22 king Ahaz. Acts 8 says Philip, a leader of the early church, had four daughters who  
23 prophesied. Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge. Her significance will be considered  
24 later. Sadly, some women joined men in false prophecy. Nehemiah denounces the  
25 prophetess Noadiah who joined male prophets in trying to intimidate him (Neh. 6:14), and  
26 Ezekiel condemns false prophetesses (Ezek. 13:17-24).

27  
28 In the Bible, the great majority of true prophets are male. All sixteen writing prophets, Isaiah  
29 to Malachi, were male. Further, all known miracle-working prophets (e.g., Moses, Elijah,  
30 and Elisha) were male. These men, with others like John the Baptist, led Israel publicly. Yet  
31 a number of women were godly prophetesses.

32  
33 **Scripture Records How Women Declared Truth and Performed Acts of Service**

34  
35 While no woman wrote a book of the Bible whose author is stated, the Bible records the  
36 words of women and regards them as inspired truth. Since several women served God  
37 faithfully as prophetesses, God's people would expect women's words, such as Miriam's  
38 song and Huldah's word of judgment, to be recorded in Scripture. The words of women  
39 became Scripture on other occasions, too. These include the outstanding prayer of Hannah  
40 (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and the great speech of Abigail to David in 1 Samuel 25:23-31.

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<sup>2</sup> Although not a prophetess, Queen Esther is worthy of mention. She resembles Huldah, for she, too, persuaded a king to take proper action. Her king was the pagan Ahasuerus, but she presented the truth wisely, to move him to do justice and preserve Israel in a desperate hour (Esther 4-8).

1 Priscilla's ministry of correction is somewhat like Abigail's. Priscilla and Aquila were a  
2 husband-wife team who labored with Paul occasionally for years (Acts 18:2-19; Rom. 16:3-  
3 5). They hosted a house church in Rome and Corinth (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19). These  
4 faithful Christians received Apollos, a gifted expositor, but they noted the deficiencies in his  
5 preaching. After hearing him, "Priscilla and Aquila invited him into their home and  
6 explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:26). Just as people puzzle over  
7 the decision to consult Huldah before Jeremiah, they wonder why Acts usually mentions  
8 Priscilla before Aquila. Did she speak more or have greater gifts? Did she have a higher  
9 social status before their marriage?<sup>3</sup>

10  
11 Why Acts mentions Priscilla first is unknown, but Priscilla and Aquila privately instructed a  
12 leading Christian teacher. Apollos "spoke with great fervor" and "was a learned man with a  
13 thorough knowledge of Scripture," but "he only knew the Baptism of John" (Acts 18:24-25).  
14 Hence, when Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos, they took him into their home and taught  
15 him (Acts 18:26).

16  
17 Since their craft as tent-makers allowed them to travel widely, Priscilla and Aquila assisted  
18 Paul in Rome (Rom. 16:3), Corinth (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor. 16:19), and Ephesus (Acts 18:18-26).  
19 Thus, Paul honored Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16 as fellow workers for whom the  
20 whole church gave thanks (Rom 16:3-4).

21  
22 Paul also honored other women in Romans 16, which offers glimpses of the contributions  
23 women made in the early church. Paul had never visited the church in Rome when he wrote  
24 them a letter to prepare for an impending journey to Rome and beyond, but he knew many  
25 Christians there and greeted them in chapter 16. The greetings show women functioning as  
26 leaders in the church.

27  
28 In Romans 16:1-2, Paul commends Phoebe, a "servant" (NIV, ESV) or "deaconess" (RSV)  
29 of the church.<sup>4</sup> The Greek term in question, *diakonos*, ordinarily means a servant or helper,  
30 but it can mean deacon. When Paul calls Phoebe a servant, or deacon, of the church in  
31 Cenchrea, the close connection of *diakonos* to a particular person may indicate that she  
32 holds an office. However, it could also mean she was very helpful. (Additional clarity will  
33 be provided upon examination of 1 Timothy 3 below). Regardless, the phrase servant, or  
34 deacon "of the church" suggests that Phoebe had a recognized role in her local congregation.<sup>5</sup>  
35 Clearly, Paul urges the Romans to receive Phoebe with honor, for she helped many.

36  
37 In Romans 16:3, Paul calls Priscilla and Aquila his co-workers. In Romans 16:6, he  
38 commended a certain Mary who "worked very hard." In Romans 16:12, Paul mentioned  
39 three women, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, who also "worked hard" in the Lord. Paul

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<sup>3</sup> On social status, James Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 195.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek term *diakonos*-διάκονος can be translated "servant" or "deacon."

<sup>5</sup> Since there is a feminine form of the noun, the fact that the masculine is here applied to a woman might indicate that an official position is in view. See also C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975-1979), 2:780-783; Douglass Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 913-914; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 786-787.

1 further mentioned Andronicus and Junias. They were probably married, since Andronicus is  
2 a man's name and Junias is a woman's. In a sentence that is difficult to translate, Paul called  
3 them prominent either "with" or "among" the apostles (Rom. 16:7).<sup>6</sup> If "with" is correct,  
4 Paul means the apostles held them in high regard. If "among" is correct, he means they are  
5 prominent among the people called "apostles."

6  
7 Since Junias is a woman's name, some propose that she is a "forgotten" apostle, but Paul did  
8 not equate either Andronicus or Junias with the Twelve. Rather, Paul used "apostle" in the  
9 less technical, more ordinary, sense of someone selected and sent out for a particular  
10 purpose. The Bible called Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), Silas (Acts 17:1ff.; cf. 1 Thess. 2:7),  
11 Titus (2 Cor. 8:13) and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) apostles in the same sense. The church sent  
12 them on missions to spread the gospel. Paul honored Andronicus and Junias for the faithful  
13 discharge of vital tasks.

14  
15 **Examples in the Roles of Women in the Old Testament**

16  
17 Women neither served as priests nor legitimate monarchs in Israel. Furthermore, they did  
18 not preach. However, they did serve as gifted leaders and teachers. Some had an exceptional  
19 ability to navigate situations wisely and train others to do the same. Huldah, Zipporah,  
20 Miriam, and Esther testify to the God-given talent and leadership ability of women in the  
21 Lord's church.

22  
23 As mentioned previously, in 2 Kings 22:14-20, Huldah spoke privately to the king's  
24 emissaries. Huldah did not go to the court; the court came to her. Hilkiah, Anikam, Achbor,  
25 Shaphan, and Asaiah, after arriving at Huldah's domicile, listened intently to the prophecy.  
26 Later, these men brought the word of the Lord back to the king for implementation, because  
27 he had ultimate authority (2 Kgs. 22:14, 20; 2 Kgs. 23:1-3). Huldah did not decree a course  
28 of action, but she proposed the course that king and nation followed.

29  
30 Like Huldah, Deborah is a prophetess. She is also a leader or judge of Israel. As a  
31 prophetess, Deborah was "leading" (NIV) or "judging" (ESV) Israel.<sup>7</sup> "She held court...  
32 between Ramah and Bethel... and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided"  
33 (Judg. 4:4-5). The disputes, which required her judgment, were difficult cases, perhaps  
34 beyond the ken of local authorities. Deborah apparently dispensed spiritual counsel and  
35 issued judgments with legal authority. Interestingly, the Book of Judges never suggests she  
36 taught or prophesied in the way that Jeremiah or Isaiah did. That is, she did not deliver  
37 sermons or publicly proclaimed oracles from God.

38  
39 Perhaps most notable is Deborah's interaction with Barak. When God determined to deliver  
40 Israel from Jabin and Sisera, He told Deborah. Through the prophetess, the Lord told Barak  
41 to gather a force of 10,000 men for battle, and God would grant victory to Israel. However,  
42 Barak was reluctant and refused to go alone. He insisted that Deborah go with him. Despite  
43 Barak's reluctance, Deborah did not lead Israel into battle. She consented to go with Barak  
44 into battle (Judg. 4:9), but did not lead the troops.

---

<sup>6</sup> The Greek preposition "en" [ἐν] may be used either way.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew "shaphat" [שָׁפַט] is traditionally translated "judge" but it can mean "lead" as well.

1   *Prophets with Limited Authority*

2  
3   God used many prophets who lacked official, ongoing leadership. The companies of  
4   prophets mentioned in 2 Kings had no visible authority. Other prophets simply delivered  
5   messages without continuing ministries. In Israel, regular teaching authority resided with the  
6   law, not prophecy. Thus, the words of prophets always had to be tested (Deut. 13:1-5; Deut.  
7   18:20-22; 1 Cor. 14:29). If a prophecy urged disobedience to God's law, it was false. Death  
8   resulted. When God gave the law in Egypt and during Israel's exodus, He required  
9   obedience but did not require testing to prove its validity, as He did with prophecy.

10  
11   Malachi wrote, "The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men  
12   should receive instruction" (Mal. 2:7). Confirmed in Deuteronomy 33:10, priests and  
13   Levites—not prophets—taught God's law. This is further verified in Jeremiah 18:18 and  
14   Ezekiel 7:26. The teaching capacity remained with priests, and priests were men. The  
15   authoritative function to proclaim God's law, regardless of the audience and whether in  
16   public or private, resided in God's revealed will for men to maintain that office. Since  
17   prophets did not necessarily have the same responsibilities, that position was open to both  
18   women and men. Therefore, while women filled the office of prophetess, they did not hold  
19   the permanent, public teaching office of priest.

20  
21   *Conclusions*

22  
23   Women instructed men, but often in limited and private settings. They advised and rebuked  
24   men, great and small. Women counseled men, who listened and adopted their ideas. They  
25   taught and prophesied, giving messages with theological content. Nonetheless, scripture has  
26   no example of a woman preaching (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). Women led beside men in Israel and the  
27   church, but no woman held the rank of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Peter, or  
28   Paul as a principal leader. In fact, when Miriam aspired to equality with Moses, God  
29   rebuked her. When Barak tried to avoid leadership, Deborah urged him to accept it.

30  
31   **THE ROLES OF WOMEN DURING THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS**

32  
33   Jesus chose twelve male apostles, yet women held vital roles in Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:46-56).  
34   Wealthy women not only supported his ministry, but they accompanied Him (Luke 8:1-3).  
35   Faithful women remained with Him at His crucifixion (John 19:25-27). Women were the  
36   first to witness His resurrection (John 20:1-18) and to carry His instructions to His disciples.  
37   A woman witnessed to the goodness of God in Christ to her townsmen (John 4:29).

38  
39   As an aside, during His public teaching ministry, Jesus featured women in many of His  
40   illustrations and parables: women bake bread (Matt. 13:33), grind grain (Matt. 24:41), wait  
41   for a wedding party (Matt. 25:1-10), search for lost money (Luke 15:8-10), pray persistently  
42   (Luke 18:1-5), and give whole-heartedly (Luke 21:1-4). Jesus sometimes described His  
43   ministry using feminine terms and illustrations (Matt. 23:37; John 16:19-22).

1 Jesus' disregard for Jewish traditions also led Him to associate freely with women. In Luke,  
2 for example, Jesus encounters a grieving widow and mother (Luke 7:11-15), lets a sinful  
3 woman anoint His feet (Luke 7:36-50), seeks out a long-suffering woman who touched His  
4 cloak amidst a throng of people (Luke 8:43-48, cf. 13:10-16), engages a marginalized Samaritan  
5 woman at the well (John 4:7-26), and cares about poor women (Luke 2:24, 21:1-4). Going to  
6 His crucifixion, Jesus took a moment to address a group of women who mourned His  
7 impending death (Luke 23:27-31). Jesus' willingness to ignore custom is part of His resolve  
8 to minister to all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social status, or personal moral history.  
9

10 Jesus refused to allow the traditions of men to restrain His ministry to and with women. He  
11 never denigrates the service of women in the home, though Jesus does prioritize their roles  
12 as His disciples (Luke 10:38-42). There is no conflict between service in the home and  
13 discipleship, but sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear His teaching takes priority (cf. Luke  
14 11:27-28).

## 16 THE ROLES OF WOMEN DURING THE APOSTOLIC ERA

18 Priscilla was a theologically astute disciple. Together with her husband, Aquila, she observed  
19 the doctrinal inaccuracy of Apollos' teaching, took him aside, and "explained to him the  
20 way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Priscilla's gifts were also utilized alongside and  
21 under the authority of the apostle Paul. In fact, she and her husband traveled with Paul  
22 during one of his missionary journeys (Acts 18:18-19). Further, Priscilla is among the many  
23 faithful and gifted women whom Paul praised for their dedicated work in Romans 16.

25 Since women are called to be disciples who faithfully utilize their gifts, how does that affect  
26 their service as church members? How can women utilize their gifts to glorify God in the  
27 worship and ministry of the church? Can women become church officers (1 Tim. 3:1-13; cf.  
28 Acts 6:1-7)? Should they be involved in the liturgy of Sunday service? The following  
29 section addresses key passages in the Pauline Epistles concerning women's roles in the  
30 church: 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Acts 6, and 1 Timothy 3:8-11.

### 32 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

34 Christ has ascended and has poured out the Holy Spirit on both men and women, in  
35 fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29. God's people are utilizing the good gifts He has given, which  
36 extended to corporate worship gatherings. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at  
37 Corinth, encouraged believers to employ their gifts, and to ensure the church is edified, the  
38 gifts must operate decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). Part of proper order is that women  
39 must remain silent, at least for a time (1 Cor. 14:34). How can this be? How can Paul expect  
40 women to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), expect everyone to offer a hymn, a teaching, a  
41 revelation, or an interpretation (1 Cor. 14:26), and yet tell women to remain silent (1 Cor.  
42 14:34)?<sup>8</sup> There are two plausible options.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Paul says this to the "brothers," but "brothers" includes male and female Christians in his epistles.

<sup>9</sup> There are four unlikely ways to resolve Paul's apparent contradiction: 1) Paul did contradict himself, saying one thing in 11:5 and another in 14:34. 2) Paul never permitted women to speak in 1 Corinthians 11:5. He

1 Option one maintains there are two kinds of worship in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. In chapter 11,  
 2 women pray and prophesy during private or informal worship in which everyone shared.  
 3 Their prophecy may be roughly correlated with what many today call testimony or sharing.  
 4 In chapter 14, the worship is more structured. It may be like the synagogue worship (Luke 4;  
 5 Acts 13), where one person is invited to bring the main exhortation. A few others may  
 6 speak, and none of them may be women.

7  
 8 This view makes several plausible points: there must be structure within worship services,  
 9 and certain leaders would expound the Scriptures. However, it does not adequately  
 10 harmonize 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 14:35. How can Paul say that everyone has a hymn or a  
 11 word in instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:26, then state that women must be silent in 14:35 if  
 12 there is no qualification or limit on that silence?<sup>10</sup>

13  
 14 Option two harmonizes 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 14:35 by proposing a limit on the command  
 15 of silence in 14:35. Specifically, when Paul says women must remain silent, he means either  
 16 silent by not preaching (espoused by Calvin,<sup>11</sup> and other older interpreters) or he means  
 17 silent during the testing of prophecy (espoused by Carson, Grudem, and other more recent  
 18 interpreters)<sup>12</sup>. The testing of prophecy is the theme of 14:29-35. Paul wanted women to use  
 19 their gifts, but he also wanted all teaching to be tested. That task belonged to elders (or  
 20 overseers). Close analysis of 1 Corinthians 14 supports the view that women may prophesy  
 21 (1 Cor. 11:5) but must remain silent when prophecy is tested (1 Cor. 14:34). Consider  
 22 Hurley's observations:<sup>13</sup>

23  
 24 Theme (14:26) When you come together, everything must be done to edify the church.  
 25  
 26 Issue 1: Tongues The number: Two or at most three should speak.  
 27 (14:27-28) Why? To edify the church: Let one interpret. If there is no interpreter,  
 28 let him keep silent.

merely entertains the possibility; if they spoke and did so without a head covering, it would be a disgrace. 3) 14:34-35 is not from Paul; they are an explanatory note added by an early copyist (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 699-705. 4) 11:5 is a general principle for all churches; 14:34-5 is temporary counsel for Corinth, where women were quite uneducated or unruly. The problems with some of these are obvious. For detailed critique of these views, see the exhaustive work of D. A. Carson, "Silent in the Churches: On the Role of Women in I Corinthians 14:33b-36," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway 1991); and Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1150-8.

<sup>10</sup> Someone might object that option 1 requires "prophecy" to have one sense in 11:5 – informal sharing – and another in 14:26 – formal instruction. But the term "prophecy" had a wide range of meanings in Greek and Biblical literature, so it could well have two different meanings when used several chapters apart.

<sup>11</sup> If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently, prohibited from authority to teach in public." John Calvin, *1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians* (1 Corinthians 14:34), trans. John Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 468.

<sup>12</sup> Carson, "Silent in the Churches"; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), 245-255.

<sup>13</sup> James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 188-189.

|    |                               |   |
|----|-------------------------------|---|
| 1  | Issue 2a: Prophecy<br>(14:29) | The number revisited: Two or three prophets should speak.<br>Why? To edify the church: Let the others weigh what is said.                             |
| 2  |                               |   |
| 3  |                               |   |
| 4  | Issue 2b:<br>(14:30-33a)      | Additional note on the number that prophesy.<br>On speaking: If a revelation is made to one, let the first be silent.<br>You can prophesy one by one. |
| 5  |                               |   |
| 6  |                               |   |
| 7  | The goal                      | Everyone will be instructed and encouraged.   |
| 8  | Reason 1                      | The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.   |
| 9  | Reason 2                      | God is not a God of disorder but of peace.  |
| 10 |                               |   |
| 11 | Issue 2c:<br>On weighing      | Additional note on the weighing of prophecy (14:33b-35)<br>As in all congregations, women should remain silent.                                       |
| 12 | On woman's silence            | They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission. If they want to inquire, they should ask their husbands at home.                            |
| 13 |                               |   |
| 14 |                               |   |
| 15 | Reason                        | For it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.   |
| 16 |                               |   |

This outline shows how the silence of women applies to the weighing of prophecies. When leaders sift prophecy, then women must “be in submission, as the Law says” (1 Cor. 14:35). “The Law” Paul cites in 14:35 may be God’s will, given at creation, that Adam must lead Eve. If women wish to inquire about the testing, they may ask at home; they must be silent during the testing itself (1 Cor. 14:35-36). This is the order “in all the congregations of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33b). If anyone disagrees, Paul notes ironically, they must think God has spoken to them alone, because every church does it his way, or rather, that this is how it is to be done in all the churches (1 Cor. 14:36-38).

The term Paul chooses for silence suggests the women's silence is not absolute. Greek words for silence overlap, and share many similarities. However, Paul uses the word, *sigao* – σιγάω, which rarely means total speechlessness. It can mean to keep something to oneself (Luke 9:36), to listen (Acts 15:12), or to be silent after speaking (Luke 20:26; Acts 15:13). The word appears in 1 Corinthians 14:28, 14:30, 14:34. In Corinthians 14:28, Paul said that if someone who is speaking in tongues has no interpreter, they should be silent (*sigao*) – temporarily stop speaking. In verse 30, the apostle said that if one prophet is speaking and something is revealed to another, the first should be silent (*sigao*) – temporarily stop speaking. Lastly, in verse 34, while prophecy is tested, Paul required that women should temporarily stop speaking. Outside the testing, women may pray, prophesy, sing, and provide a lesson (1 Cor. 14:26).

*Additional Considerations*

Some may ask why Paul let women prophesy but not test prophecy. Prophets like Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah were prophets and authority figures. With this conception of prophet, it seems Paul gave women high authority when he let them prophesy. However, many prophets were outsiders, prone to appear on occasion without ongoing office or formalized training (1 Kgs. 17:1; 1 Kgs. 18:12). They were voices in the wilderness, some lacking official, ongoing leadership. Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and John the Baptist

1 were ignored or abused, not honored (Matt. 23:29-37).<sup>14</sup> Priests were the regular, authoritative  
2 teachers (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 21:5; 33:10; Mal. 2:6-7).

3  
4 Furthermore, apostles and elders, not prophets, are the primary authorities in the New  
5 Testament. Prophets were God's principal spokesmen in the old covenant, but apostles are  
6 the principal spokesmen in the new. For example, in Acts 15, apostles and elders determined  
7 the proper response to a theological crisis; then they deputized prophets to carry the message  
8 (Acts 15:2-6, 22-32). Paul also subordinated prophets to himself, which indicates apostles  
9 outranked prophets (1 Corinthians 14:37-38). Moreover, Paul assumed elders, not prophets,  
10 would succeed the apostles when they die (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, prophets do not  
11 bear primary authority in the church.

12  
13 Concerning 1 Corinthians 14, there are two dangers. First, there may be chaos if several  
14 prophets spoke at once or if someone speaks in a tongue but has no interpreter (1 Cor.  
15 14:27-28). Second, false teaching may go unchecked if someone erroneously claims to  
16 speak at God's direction. To prevent chaos, Paul commends self-control. The Corinthians  
17 must stifle an impulse to speak if another is already speaking or if there is a tongue but no  
18 interpreter. Each must speak in turn. Even so, there must be no more than two or three  
19 tongues (1 Cor. 14:27-8) and no more than three prophecies for a session (1 Cor. 14:30-33).

20  
21 To prevent false teaching, "the others should weigh carefully" what the prophets say, for not  
22 everyone who thinks he speaks God's word does so (1 Cor. 14:29). It is necessary to weigh  
23 or sift speeches that claim to come from God.

24  
25 Who are "the others" who test prophecy? They could be other prophets, but that is unlikely.  
26 First, Greek writers would use the term "the rest" [of the prophets], not "the others" if they  
27 wanted to say the remaining prophets do the testing. Second, the gift of discernment is  
28 separate from prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10). Third, God appointed teachers to evaluate prophetic  
29 words delivered to the church.<sup>16</sup>

30  
31 Some may ask why these "others" have the right to test a prophet's speech. The answer is  
32 vital to a proper grasp of women's roles. It is necessary to test prophecy because people can  
33 falsely claim to speak for God. Moses warned about false prophets (Deut. 13:1-10) and  
34 insisted that Israel investigate when they heard of prophets who led the people astray (Deut.  
35 13:14). Prophets might also believe they speak for God yet merely voice their impressions  
36 (1 Kgs. 22:1-37). Believers must test all things (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1), for there are  
37 many false prophets (Matt. 7:15; Matt. 24:11, 24; 1 John 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:1). Many teachers  
38 seek only to please men (2 Tim. 4:3).

---

<sup>14</sup> Some, like Elijah, came and went rapidly. Others, like Jeremiah and Amos, were rejected by Israel's leaders.

<sup>15</sup> More evidence that prophets have limited authority: 1) 1 Corinthians 14 assumes the words of even recognized prophets must be tested. 2) Prophecy cuts such a low profile that Paul must tell the Thessalonians not to hold it in contempt (1 Thess. 5:20). 3) Church leaders such as Tertullian, Origen, Aquinas and Calvin agreed that prophecy must be tested.

<sup>16</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 120; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 70-74.

1 Everyone should be discerning (Job 34:2-6; Ps. 19:12; Matt. 16:3; Phil. 1:10; Heb. 5:14), but  
2 elders are especially responsible to guide the church to true doctrine (Acts 15:1-35; Acts  
3 20:17-31). Among elders, some especially “labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17).  
4 Whether they label them pastors, teachers, preachers, ministers, or even priests, churches  
5 know God calls some men to proclaim and guard the truth. Paul wanted every church to  
6 have men who labor in the Word, teach, and discern (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 29). He appointed  
7 such men—elders—in every church (Acts 14:23) and told church planters to do the same  
8 (Titus 1:5).<sup>17</sup> Thus it is fitting for women to prophesy but neither to preach nor to test  
9 prophecy.

10 **1 Timothy 2:8-15<sup>18</sup>**

11 The apostle Paul stated his purpose in writing Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:14-15: “I am writing  
12 these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the  
13 household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”  
14 One may examine Paul’s thesis under several categories: pure doctrine and good conduct  
15 (1 Tim. 1:4-5, 18; 1 Tim. 2:8, 11-15), proper gender relations in the church (1 Tim. 2:9-15;  
16 1 Tim. 5:1-16), and proper leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-13). There are reasons to  
17 believe 1 Timothy 2:9-15 especially guides believers who gather for worship.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the  
18 church faces threats of heresy by standing firm in the gospel, maintaining good conduct,  
19 retaining proper gender roles, and following qualified leaders, especially in worship.

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<sup>17</sup> On priests and elders, see John E. Johnson, “The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (April-June 1995): 193-196; Peter Leithart, “Attendants of Yahweh’s House: Priesthood in the Old Testament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 85 (1999): 3-24, especially 22-3; Robert S. Rayburn, “Three offices: Minister, Elder, Deacon,” *Presbyterion* 12 (1986): 108-110; Paul Schrieber, “Priests among priests,” *Concordia Journal* 14, no. 3 (July 1988): 215-227; Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 10-20.

<sup>18</sup> Strong feminist interpretations of our passage include Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 101-132; I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 436-71. Among traditionalists, see Douglass Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 179-193; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 94-149; Thomas R. Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, eds. Andreas Kostenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 105-154.

<sup>19</sup> The rationale: 1) The topic and mode of prayer fit worship. They pray for authorities and “lift holy hands” (2:1-4, 8). 2) 2:8 says men should pray (literally) “in every place.” “In every place” means “places of worship” in 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 2:14, 1 Thess 1:8). “The place” is also a circumlocution for God’s temple in the gospels (Matt 24:15, John 4:20, 11:48). 3) Paul says **males** should pray, not using the word for mankind (*anthropos* – ἄνθρωπος), but the one for adult males (*aner* – ἀνήρ), and we know men normally led in prayer in Jewish worship (J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963), 65; Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 126, note 67). 4) The modest apparel of women fits worship, since prominent Greco-Roman women displayed their social status with costly clothes and elaborate coiffures. 5) The command that women learn in silence fits worship, since women may speak at home or in private meetings (1 Cor 14:34).

1    *1 Timothy 2:9-10 – Apparel*

2  
3    “I want women<sup>20</sup> to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or  
4    gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who  
5    profess to worship God.”

6  
7    “I want women to dress modestly” indicates women should adorn themselves with good  
8    deeds, not immodest clothes.<sup>21</sup> Expensive clothes might display a high social rank or a  
9    desire to rise in status. Greeks and Jews also viewed extravagant dress as a sign of  
10   promiscuity and disregard of a husbands' authority.<sup>22</sup> In the early church, “the rejection of  
11   external adornment was part of a woman's submission to her husband and a recognition of  
12   her place among men in general,” but ostentatious adornment indicated “sexual infidelity  
13   and materialistic extravagance.”<sup>23</sup>

14  
15   Modesty is the principle. When Paul cited braided hair, gold, and pearls, the point is not that  
16   pigtails are sinful, but that elaborate displays of wealth take attention from God who is  
17   worshipped and place the attention upon a well-dressed worshiper. If men were prone to  
18   disrupt the church through angry disputes, women were prone to disrupt it through physical  
19   displays.<sup>24</sup>

20  
21   *1 Timothy 2:11-12 – Learning, Submission, and Permission*

22  
23   “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to  
24   exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”

25  
26   This passage both liberates and restrains. First century Greek and Jewish cultures generally  
27   considered women mentally inferior. They judged women's education a waste of time at best  
28   and a cause of temptation at worst. The Mishnah advised men not to talk with women  
29   frequently, lest they bring evil on themselves, neglect the law, and inherit damnation. Near  
30   Jesus' day, Philo, a Jewish philosopher influenced by Greek thought, said Satan wisely

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<sup>20</sup> A few scholars believe the Greek term γυνή—gyne, rendered "women" in almost all English translations, should be translated "wives." (Gordon Hugenberger, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Timothy 2:8-15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992: 341-60.) Greek does use the same word for women and wives, but "women" seems right since 1) When Paul wants γυνή—gyne to indicate a wife, he mentions marriage or their husbands in the context; 2) Paul would hardly forbid wives to dress ostentatiously, but permit single women to do so. See Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15," 115-7.

<sup>21</sup> "I want" indicates Paul's command, not his mere desire. The Greek means "I counsel," not "I wish." One may call it stereotyping, but Paul warns **men** about anger (2:1) and warns **women** about ostentation.

<sup>22</sup> After a long complaint about the jewels, makeup, perfumes, and luxuries of women, Juvenal adds, "Meantime she pays no attention to her husband." See Juvenal, "Satire 6" in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. C. G. Ramsey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 121-125.

<sup>23</sup> David Scholer, "Women's Adornment: Some Historical and Hermeneutical Observations on the New Testament Passages," *Daughters of Sarah* 6, no. 1 (1980): 5.

<sup>24</sup> Paul does not ban all hair styling, as if tangles signified godlessness. Hair braids could be simple. The problem is elaborate, expensive hairstyles. See James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 104-5.

1 attacked Eve through her senses, “For in us mind corresponds to man, the senses to woman.”  
2 He also said the masculine soul devotes itself to God the Creator, while the feminine soul  
3 attends to things created.<sup>25</sup> Paul believed otherwise. He did not acquire Philo’s philosophies  
4 neither did he rank the capabilities of one’s soul based on gender. Paul rightly understood  
5 that women—image-bearers of God—should learn and be taught.

6  
7 Since no one can learn if noisy and insubordinate, it is sensible that Paul would request  
8 women to learn quietly, which is an indication of their submission. To learn quietly is meant  
9 to portray a woman learning in a quiet manner. It does not mean absolute silence.<sup>26</sup>  
10 Submission means that women should accept the doctrine taught by the church leaders (1  
11 Tim. 3:2). Quiet and submissive dispositions demonstrate that women respect their teachers  
12 and accept biblical doctrine.

13  
14 Some say that after women learn enough, they will begin to teach. Some reason that when  
15 Paul prohibits women from teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12, it is a temporary ban, which applies  
16 only until women are well instructed.<sup>27</sup> It is true that women can impart what they know to  
17 others, but this line of reasoning often believes well-instructed women should hold the  
18 teaching office, as elders or preachers. This view rests in part on a distinctive interpretation  
19 of the phrase, "I do not permit" in verse 12.

20  
21 Paul's counsel is clear: women may learn, but may not teach or exercise authority over men.  
22 Yet, almost every word of verse 12 is contested. Paul sometimes lets women teach men. He  
23 permitted female prophets to speak in Corinth and listed female coworkers, who must have  
24 said something as they toiled. He declared that all Christians have gifts they must exercise  
25 for the common good, knowing one must speak to exercise most gifts. How is Paul's  
26 prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 reconciled with his permission elsewhere? There are two  
27 possibilities: the prohibition may be temporary or it may be partial.

28  
29 Egalitarianism suggests the prohibition is temporary. Adherents note that the verb “permit”  
30 is in the present tense. Therefore, they say, Paul only prohibited teaching in the present,  
31 when women were uneducated. When that was remedied, women could teach. This  
32 argument fails in that the next sentence declares why women may not teach. Paul cites the

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<sup>25</sup> See Philo, "On the Creation" and "The Special Laws," in *The Works of Philo*, trans. F. H. Colson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929 and 1937), 1:131 and 7:581-3, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> The term hesuchia – ἡσυχία – can mean total silence, but more often describes a quiet attitude. All the terms for silence and quietness overlap with each other somewhat, but the family of siopao, sige and sigao – σιωπάω, σιγή, σιγάω - is more likely to denote speechlessness, perhaps by choice (Luke 9:36, Acts 15:13). The term phimoo – φιμώω can mean to be silenced by an order (Mark 1:25, 4:39) by being ashamed (Matt 22:12) or by a refutation (Matt 22:34). Epistomizo – ἐπιστομίζω means to keep someone from speaking (Titus 1:11). We must not exaggerate the difference between these words, but our term seems apt to describe the relative silence that is a virtue for students. See Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 75-81.

<sup>27</sup> Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, 84-6; Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 109-13; Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 179.

1 order of creation, not a lack of education. Further, some wealthier women were educated.<sup>28</sup>  
2 Simply put, if the problem was a lack of education, Paul could have written, “Women may  
3 not teach until they are educated.”

4  
5 Complementarianism suggests Paul's prohibition is permanent but partial. Thus, women may  
6 teach privately, informally, and occasionally, as Priscilla and others did, but they should not  
7 present the doctrines of the faith as authoritative church leaders in the assembly of the saints.  
8 This task (e.g., guarding the gospel) occupied Paul's letters to Timothy and was given to  
9 elders or overseers who are male and “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2  
10 Tim. 1:12-14).<sup>29</sup>

11  
12 Three factors indicate that Paul forbids only authoritative instruction in doctrine. First, the  
13 Bible indicates that women taught. The Scriptures do not, however, describe women  
14 preaching or teaching the assembly of Christians. Second, the context of 1 Timothy is  
15 worship in the church. During the corporate gathering, church officers teach bindingly and  
16 have been given the task to do so (1 Tim. 3:2). Third and finally, Paul's language suggests  
17 that he forbids women to teach doctrine and to exercise ruling authority in the church. That  
18 language will now be considered.

19  
20 The verb translated “teach” (διδάσκω - didasko) means to teach or instruct someone, but in  
21 Paul's letters, especially 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, what is taught is usually the  
22 foundational doctrine of the faith.<sup>30</sup> Timothy and Titus were Paul's most trusted pastoral  
23 representatives; the three letters to them form a cluster called the Pastoral Epistles. A clear  
24 example of teaching that has doctrine as its content is found in 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things  
25 you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will  
26 also be qualified to teach others.” Similarly, in Titus 1:9 Paul wrote elders must “hold firm  
27 to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound  
28 doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict.”

29  
30 The noun “teaching” is very similar. For example, Paul said that God called believers  
31 through the gospel, to share in the glory of Jesus, then adds, “So then, brothers, stand firm  
32 and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter”  
33 (2 Thess. 2:14-5). The teachings or “traditions” (ESV) are the message of the apostles,  
34 carefully handed down by spoken words and letters (Gal. 1:6-12).

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen Baugh, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century" in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, eds. Andreas Kostenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 45-47.

<sup>29</sup> The terms elder and overseer are interchangeable in Titus 1:5-7 and Acts 20:17, 28.

<sup>30</sup> By my estimate, in the fifteen verses that use the verb "teach," three certainly refer to basic doctrine (1 Cor 4:17, Gal 1:12, 2 Thess 2:15) and six almost certainly do (Rom 12:7; Eph 4:21; Col 1:28, 2:7; 1 Tim 2:12, 4:11), leaving six that refer to other teaching. There are two cognate nouns for teaching, didache – διδαχή and didaskalia – διδασκαλία. The first word, didache, refers to Christian doctrine in four of its six uses in the New Testament (Rom 6:17, 16:17; 2 Tim 4:2 and Titus 1:9, but not 1 Cor 14:6, 26). The second word typically refers to false teaching (Matt 15:9, Mark 7:7, Eph 4:14, Col 2:22, but not Rom 15:4), until we get to the Pastoral Epistles. There Paul specifies if it is sound doctrine or not (1 Tim 1:10). See also George W Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 88-9, 140-1; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: A & C Black, 1963), 50; Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2," 127-8.

1 Hence, when Paul said, “I do not permit a woman to teach,” he has as his background the  
 2 doctrines of our most holy religion and the men, specifically, elders who are charged to  
 3 teach and preach these truths. Those called must be apt to teach and lead exemplary lives,  
 4 proving their ability to lead by caring for their wives and children (1 Tim. 3:1-5). Some  
 5 elders work hard in the Word, preaching, teaching, and defending the gospel (1 Tim. 5:17).  
 6 The point is not that men must do all the teaching or women must never teach men anything.  
 7 Rather, Paul wrote that the primary calling of men who are tested, approved, and  
 8 consecrated by the church (i.e., elders) must preach, teach, and defend the gospel of Christ  
 9 (2 Tim. 2:24-6; cf. Acts 6:2).

10  
 11 Paul also says women must not “exercise authority.” The significance of the Greek word  
 12 ( $\alphaὐθεντέω$  - authenteo) is difficult to articulate because it is rare, appearing just once in the  
 13 New Testament and approximately 100 times in all ancient literature. It sometimes has  
 14 negative connotations. Some say Paul means women must not “usurp authority over men” or  
 15 “abuse their authority over men,” but evidence indicates “rule” or “exercise authority” is the  
 16 best definition.<sup>31</sup> John Chrysostom says women must not teach men because Eve “once  
 17 taught Adam wrongly” and women must not exercise authority over man because “she once  
 18 **exercised authority** wrongly.” When Chrysostom utilized the term, he added “wrongly,”  
 19 which indicates that he felt the phrase, “exercise authority,” did not, by itself, have a  
 20 negative force. If *authenteo* does not intrinsically mean to abuse or usurp authority, then  
 21 Paul is forbidding women to rule or govern the church.<sup>32</sup>

22  
 23 Third, the grammatical structure also points to the translation “exercise authority.” The  
 24 terms “teach” and “exercise authority” are joined by the Greek conjunction oude (οὐδε).  
 25 Oude is a word that negates. It means “and not,” “neither,” or “nor.” Oude also has an  
 26 interesting grammatical feature. When it links two verbs, both are bad in themselves or both  
 27 are good in themselves. It never links a negative and a positive verb.<sup>33</sup> Consider these  
 28 sentences:  
 29

|   |  |
|---|--|
| You may neither eat your food nor drink your juice until we pray. | “Eat” and “drink” are both positive. They will be linked, in Greek, by oude.         |
| Neither steal nor destroy your brother's toys.                    | “Steal” and “destroy” are both negative. They will be linked, in Greek, by oude.     |
| Neither call nor bother me.                                       | “Call” is positive; “bother” is negative. They would not be linked in Greek by oude. |

<sup>31</sup> See Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995). For “exercise authority” see H. Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ in 1 Timothy 2:12” and “Appendix 2: ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ in Ancient Greek Literature” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 65-80 and 269-305. See especially Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), Wolters, “The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω,” and Burk, “New and Old Departures in the Translation of Αὐθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12.”

<sup>32</sup> John Chrysostom, *Sermons in Genesis*, cited in Baldwin, ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ in 1 Timothy 2:12,” 73-4, 283.

<sup>33</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, eds. Andreas Kostenberger, Thomas Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 84-104.

1 In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul links “teach” and “exercise authority” with oude. This means both  
2 are positive or both are negative. Since “teach” is clearly positive, “exercise authority” must,  
3 likewise, be positive.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is correct to translate 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a  
4 woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” Paul is not merely forbidding women to  
5 rule wickedly – by domineering, or usurping authority. Paul is forbidding that they rule in a  
6 church context. Women may lead in various ways, but just as men bear final responsibility  
7 for the doctrine of the church, so men bear final responsibility for the direction of the  
8 church.

9  
10 Regarding authoritative teaching, this apostolic mandate is to be implemented consistently  
11 in the life and leadership of the local church. The implementation begins with, but is not  
12 limited to, the called services of divine worship. There are differences of opinion in the PCA  
13 on the proper definition and exercise of “authoritative teaching.” The committee urges  
14 presbyteries and sessions to study this matter diligently and to practice their convictions  
15 (Rom. 14:1-8).

16  
17 *1 Timothy 2:13 – Reasons for Male Leadership*

18  
19 “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”

20  
21 God implemented male leadership in the Garden of Eden, prior to the fall. By highlighting  
22 God’s creative acts in the beginning of time, Paul appeals to first principles. Likewise, Jesus  
23 reasoned from creation when he was questioned concerning marriage and divorce (Matt.  
24 19:3-9; cf. Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:24). Further, Paul cited Genesis to explain male-female roles in  
25 1 Corinthians 11. This citation to creation indicates a proto-rubric for the church, which is  
26 further unfolded in the Pauline Epistles. This does not indicate, however, that women are  
27 subservient ontologically or in terms of their capabilities. Moreover, as Christians, women  
28 and men are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Men and women are equal in value and in purpose;  
29 nevertheless, equality in Christ does not eradicate the different roles men and women  
30 maintain.

31  
32 *1 Timothy 2:13-15 – Roles of Women*

33  
34 “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was  
35 deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through child-bearing - if they  
36 continue in faith, love and holiness with self-control.”

37  
38 This is a notoriously difficult passage and interpretations vary, but it is clear that Paul  
39 affirms the continuing validity and blessing of the creation ordinance of procreation (Gen.  
40 1:28; Gen. 3:20; Gen. 4:1), and the mitigation of the curse of the fall for believing women  
41 (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:15). At the very least, God blesses and preserves women in the roles of  
42 wife and mother.

---

<sup>34</sup> Paul uses a distinct word for false teaching (heterodidaskaleo) in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3.

1 Why does Paul suddenly shift from the subject of women not teaching authoritatively or  
2 preaching and exercising the authority of elders to that of salvation and childbirth? Perhaps  
3 he is drawing attention to the second of two role-reversals of creation in the fall  
4 (man/animals and Adam/Eve).

5  
6 Adam and Eve were to have dominion over the animals (Gen. 1:28), but in the fall, an  
7 animal not only tells them what to do, but calls God a liar and urges them to disobey God  
8 (Gen. 3:4-5). When they succumb to this role reversal (obeying an animal they were  
9 supposed to have dominion over), the world is plunged into sin and misery: “They  
10 exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the  
11 Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25).

12  
13 In 1 Timothy 2:14, Paul draws attention to a second role reversal in Genesis 2. Eve is  
14 deceived by the serpent, because, in part, Adam failed to play his role as husband and  
15 covenant keeper. Though Adam was created first (1 Tim. 2:13) and was personally given the  
16 command/prohibition by God before Eve was created (Gen. 2:15-17), Adam listened to his  
17 wife’s voice instead of God’s command. Moses explicitly explains: “Then [God] said to  
18 Adam, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree  
19 about which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it”; Cursed is the ground  
20 because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life’” (Gen. 3:17). Paul’s whole  
21 discussion in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is squarely based on Genesis 1-3. Eve was deceived, but  
22 Adam is responsible (Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22) because he failed in his role as  
23 covenant keeper and federal head. Adam listened to Eve, even when she contradicted the  
24 word God had personally spoken to him. Eve was deceived, but Adam disobeyed an explicit  
25 command. His was high-handed sin.

26  
27 Thus, Paul’s argument in 1 Timothy 2:13-15 explains the basis of his command in 1  
28 Timothy 2:11-12, and warns of the consequences when it is disobeyed. Paul is calling  
29 attention to the fact that abandonment of God’s order inevitably creates disorder and error,  
30 while embracing that order is attendant with blessings (1 Tim. 2:15).

31  
32 Incidentally, Paul both affirms women in their roles of service in the home and family, as  
33 well as beyond them. Lydia, the businesswoman (Acts 16:14-15), and Phoebe, the patron  
34 (Rom. 16:1-2) are highly regarded by Paul. There is no hint of rebuke or impropriety  
35 regarding their professional vocation or standing, just as Proverbs 31:16-24 celebrates a  
36 woman who manages an estate. Furthermore, Paul has a high view of Christian singleness  
37 (see 1 Corinthians 7:32).

38  
39 *Conclusions for Male-Female Partnership*

40  
41 Because 1 Timothy 2 occupies a central place in all discussions of women and ministry, it  
42 was examined in detail. Women should learn the faith, and share their knowledge in some  
43 settings (Titus 2:4). They should not become the principal instructors and defenders of the  
44 faith in the institutional church. This has been God’s plan and order from the beginning, one  
45 in which women thrive as they live out their faith.

1   **Deacons: A Consideration of Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3**

2  
3   As the number of disciples in the early church multiplied, some in need of assistance were  
4   inevitably overlooked. The Grecian Jews—those who were neglected—grumbled until their  
5   complaint reached the apostles. Previously, people brought their gifts to the apostles, who  
6   had authority and responsibility to distribute them, but the church was growing too big.  
7   Teaching and prayer are the apostles' essential calling. Therefore, others needed to take  
8   responsibility to serve the needy: “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are  
9   known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and  
10   will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4).

11  
12   *Acts 6: Gifted Men Serve the Needs That Arise in Faithful Churches*

13  
14   The apostles presented criteria for the men who would take responsibility for serving the  
15   needy. The church must choose wise, Spirit-filled men who will know how to love and care  
16   for the needy. All seven names were Greek, perhaps easing their work with Greek widows.  
17   Seven was a customary number for boards or committees in that day so the apostles  
18   advocated normal cultural procedure. Still, the apostles asked the congregation to select its  
19   next leaders. Pleased with the apostles' proposal, the people chose seven men and presented  
20   their choices to the apostles. In Acts 6, the chosen men seem accountable to the apostles and  
21   the whole church. Although the seven were not called deacons (*diakonos*), they served  
22   (*diakoneo*), which leads some to believe that Acts 6 marks the basics of diaconal work:  
23   caring for widows, caring for the neglected.

24  
25   Of further concern is Acts 21:8. While Acts 6 does not call the seven chosen men,  
26   “deacons,” Acts 21:8 calls Philip, who was chosen in Acts 6, “one of the seven.” J. M. Ross  
27   argues that recourse to Acts 6 confuses study of the diaconate.<sup>35</sup> Edmund Clowney, among  
28   others, argues that the seven in Acts 6 were “assistants to the ministers of the word” but not  
29   “officers.” Many in the Presbyterian tradition disagree. Those who affirm Acts 6 as a  
30   paradigm for the diaconate mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 observe that it is pedantic to insist on  
31   the noun *diakonos* when the cognate verb is present. More importantly, it is clear that the  
32   men 1) distributed material resources to meet ongoing needs in the church, 2) met spiritual  
33   qualifications, 3) were set apart by prayer and by the laying on of hands, and 4) received the  
34   blessing of the apostles and the whole church. While some disagree over whether Acts 6  
35   describes the first commissioned deacons, the PCA *BCO* employs the aforementioned  
36   insights to describe the roles of deacons.

37  
38   *1 Timothy 3:8-11 – An Overview*

39  
40   All Christians are called to a life of service “because the Lord himself has come in the form  
41   of a servant.” It is both a spontaneous expression of love and a command of Christ. Every  
42   Christian is a slave of Christ and therefore a servant (*diakonos*) of others. Some Christians,

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<sup>35</sup> J. M. Ross, "A Reconsideration of the Diaconate," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 12 (1959): 151-152.

1 however, have a special authority and commission to serve. Service is essential to all; the  
2 commission to lead and to organize service, however, is for some.<sup>36</sup>

3  
4 The first clue that some are set apart for organized service is that the character traits for  
5 deacons are similar to that of elders. While the skill set is different, the character required  
6 for commission is similar.

7  
8 Second, deacons are tested. Jesus first stated this principle: “You have been faithful over a  
9 little, I will set you over much” (Matt. 25:21). Testing is not mentioned explicitly for the  
10 overseer, but it is implied in 1 Timothy 3:7. 1 Timothy 3:10 is therefore rightly translated,  
11 “Let them also be tested.”

12  
13 Third, deacons are not teachers, but they hold the mysteries of the faith with a clear  
14 conscience. Deacons must know how to make sound ministry decisions, how to explain their  
15 work as they do it, and how to articulate the faith, even if they are not suited for public  
16 teaching.

17  
18 Fourth, 1 Timothy 3 has implicit, not explicit teaching about the work of a deacon; Paul  
19 addresses character. Acts 6, therefore, serves by default as a model and judge that diaconal  
20 work is chiefly mercy ministry. Organizational aspects (tending funds and buildings) of  
21 diaconal work are largely traditional. While not necessarily misguided (i.e., ushering,  
22 greeting, and caring for finances are real services that let apostles and pastors focus on their  
23 ministries), the New Testament never names these tasks. Deacons first care for mercy  
24 among the poor and the marginalized. Customary practices should not be read into the New  
25 Testament.

26  
27 **1 Timothy 3:8:**<sup>37</sup> “Likewise” signals that Paul is not changing topics completely.<sup>38</sup> He is  
28 moving from the overseer (*episkopos*, singular in 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7) to “deacons”  
29 (plural). The shift from singular to plural raises questions that stand outside the scope of this  
30 study. Still, the plural is no mystery. A congregation might require many deacons to meet  
31 the material needs of a congregation. This interpretation assumes that Acts 6 defines  
32 diaconal work.

33  
34 To define the term *diakonos* in Paul’s usage, Yarbrough has listed uses of *diakonos* in Paul.  
35 *Diakonos* (servant, minister, deacon) in Paul.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> T. F. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," in *Service in the Church*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (London: Epworth, 1966), 1-3.

<sup>37</sup> Note: The following comments on 3:8-13 draw heavily on Robert Yarbrough's forthcoming commentary on the Pastorals for Eerdmans. *1-2 Timothy, Titus*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, forthcoming). Yarbrough is almost a co-author on some pages.

<sup>38</sup> See use of the same expression (*hōautōs*, likewise) in Rom 8:26; 1 Cor 11:15; 1 Tim 2:9; 3:11; 5:25; Titus 2:3, 6. It also occurs nine times in the Synoptic Gospels.

<sup>39</sup> Yarbrough, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*.

1

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Rom. 13:4         | For the one in authority is God's <i>servant</i> for your good...   |
| Rom. 15:8         | For I tell you that Christ has become a <i>servant</i> of the Jews on behalf of God's truth . . .                   |
| Rom. 16:1         | I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a <i>deacon</i> of the church in Cenchreae . . .                                |
| 1 Cor. 3:5        | What, after all, is Apollos? And Paul? Only <i>servants</i> , through whom you came to believe.                     |
| 2 Cor. 3:6        | He has made us competent as <i>ministers</i> of a new covenant  |
| 2 Cor. 11:15      | his [the devil's] <i>servants</i> also masquerade as servants of righteousness.                                     |
| Gal. 2:17         | is Christ then a <i>servant</i> of sin? (ESV)   |
| Eph. 3:7          | Of this gospel I was made a <i>minister</i> according to the gift of God's grace                                    |
| Eph. 6:21         | Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful <i>minister</i> in the Lord   |
| Phil. 1:1         | To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and <i>deacons</i>                        |
| Col. 1:7          | Epaphras our beloved fellow servant [ <i>syndoulou</i> ]... is a faithful <i>minister</i> of Christ on your behalf. |
| Col. 1:23         | the gospel . . . of which I, Paul, became a <i>minister</i> .   |
| Col. 4:7          | Tychicus is a beloved brother and faithful <i>minister</i> and fellow servant [ <i>syndoulos</i> ].                 |
| 1 Tim. 3:8,<br>12 | Deacons likewise must be . . . Let <i>deacons</i> each be the husband of one wife                                   |
| 1 Tim. 4:6        | If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good <i>servant</i> of Christ                            |

2

3     *Diakonos* means someone who performs a service or ministry, but the term does not  
 4 normally label someone appointed to church office. A magistrate, Christ, Apollos, Paul, his  
 5 opponents, Tychicus, Epaphras, and Timothy are all called “deacon” in a non-technical, or  
 6 non-church-office use of the term.

7

8     A few uses of deacon seem like more technical or official uses. These include the officials at  
 9 Philippi and the deacons of 1 Timothy 3. Some would include Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). The  
 10 official uses refer to someone occupying a recognized position or ongoing role in the church.  
 11 Even with Acts 6, little is known about official deacon's work. Many practices rise from  
 12 church custom, often recent church custom.<sup>40</sup> Still, the practice at Philippi, where there were  
 13 both “overseers and deacons” is in view in 1 Timothy 3. A church has two classes of leader  
 14 – elder/overseer and deacon.

15

16     Paul first lists two desirable and two undesirable qualities of deacons. Deacons should be  
 17 “dignified” or “worthy of respect” (*semnos*). The term can mean dignified, noble, or  
 18 honorable (Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 2:2). Character and conduct go together.

19

---

<sup>40</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson's comments on early church structure and order provide a helpful framework (Luke Timothy Johnson, *1 and 2 Letters to Timothy, The Anchor Bible* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001) 217-25.

1 They are also "not double-tongued." The Greek is *mē dilogous* - not double-talkers, who say  
2 one thing and believe another. They do not lie or play the hypocrite. Integrity of speech is a  
3 great emphasis in Proverbs, the Synoptics (Matt. 5:33-37; Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45), James,  
4 and Paul (Eph. 4:15, 25, 29; Eph. 5:4; Rom. 3:13-14). Harmful talk is a recurrent theme of  
5 the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>41</sup> Sadly, pastors, elders, and deacons lack this trait with remarkable  
6 frequency, to the great harm of the church.

7  
8 "Not addicted to much wine" and "not greedy for dishonest gain" are close to traits for elders  
9 in Titus 1:7, 23. Greed is often condemned in the Scriptures.<sup>42</sup> Deacons must be generous,  
10 not mercenary. They should like to give resources to the needy. The tight-fisted deacon may  
11 be a familiar church experience, but not to the New Testament deacons.

12  
13 **1 Timothy 3:9:** Deacons "must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."  
14 Yarbrough points out that this sounds like Stephen in Acts 6. He spoke with the Spirit (Acts  
15 6:3, 5, 10, 55) with wisdom (Acts 6:3, 10), in deep faith (Acts 6:5), and by "God's grace and  
16 power" (Acts 6:8, 60).

17  
18 Paul's term, "mystery," signifies redemptive truths formerly concealed but now revealed at  
19 Jesus' coming.<sup>43</sup> Paul's counsel to Timothy assumes that deacons know Scripture and  
20 doctrine. To hold the truth with a "clear conscience" requires that experiential and cognitive  
21 faith unite. Deacons need theological understanding and personal integrity.

22  
23 **1 Timothy 3:10:** "And let them also be tested first." *dokimazō*, translated "tested," means  
24 test and approve (*apodokimazō* means *test and find wanting*). Deacons are "also tested;" the  
25 "also" refers to the implication that overseers are tested too. Like overseers, deacons are  
26 tested both by groups<sup>44</sup> and individuals.<sup>45</sup> Timothy must make "full inquiry" to discern the  
27 work and the character of deacons,<sup>46</sup> no easy matter since deceivers abound (1 Thess. 5:21).

28  
29 "First" and "then" in 1 Timothy 3:10 point to a process of assessment: If they are blameless,  
30 then Timothy can consider them eligible. "Blameless" translates *anenklētos*, which  
31 (negatively) means innocent of charges. Positively, deacons should display the range and  
32 depth of Christian faith and practice. If Timothy establishes that they are mature, he can "let  
33 them serve as deacons" (from the verb *diakoneō*).

34  
35 **1 Timothy 3:11:** The NIV and ESV render 1 Timothy 3:11 as a series of qualifications for  
36 "their wives." But other translations (ASV, RSV, NASB, NRSV, CEV) translate *gune* as  
37 "the women."<sup>47</sup> The root of the uncertainty lies with the Greek word *gune* – γυνή which can

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<sup>41</sup> 1 Tim 1:7; 3:11; 5:13; 6:4; Titus 1:10; 2:9.

<sup>42</sup> Rom 1:29; Eph 4:19; 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 2:5.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:26.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., 2 Cor 13:5: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you —unless, of course, you fail the test?"

<sup>45</sup> E.g., Gal 6:4: "Each one should test their own actions."

<sup>46</sup> John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 229.

<sup>47</sup> Also, "the" or "their" which appear in most translations is not present in the Greek.

1 mean either "woman" or "wife." The comparable masculine noun can mean either "man" or  
2 "husband." Does 1 Timothy 3:11 mean "women likewise" or "wives likewise"?

3  
4 Phil Ryken notes that "woman/wife" is such a common term "that it hardly seems sufficient  
5 to designate an office in the church."<sup>48</sup> If Paul wanted to indicate deaconesses, he chose an  
6 extraordinarily minimal way to say so. On the other hand, the failure to mention qualities of  
7 overseers' wives in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 seems to count against 1 Timothy 3:11 speaking of  
8 deacons' wives in 3:11.<sup>49</sup> At a minimum, the word is open to more than one interpretation.  
9 The flow of thought is also difficult. Does Paul move from deacons to deaconesses, or from  
10 deacons to their wives, and possibly overseer's wives as well?

11  
12 Warfield, although an advocate of female deacons, says he "cannot believe" that Paul meant  
13 "to speak of deaconesses" in 1 Timothy 3:11, "since this would require us to assume... a  
14 double transition from one subject to another, of the harshest and most incredible kind." He  
15 believes the office of deacon for women rests on the "narrow" and uncertain case of Phoebe  
16 in Romans 16:1, and the record of female deacons in the early church.<sup>50</sup>

17  
18 Warfield favors female deacons because Romans 16:1 probably indicates that Phoebe was a  
19 deacon, but Guy Waters draws the opposite conclusion from the same data. No one doubts  
20 that Paul lists the "qualifications for a certain group of women," but if 1 Timothy 3:11 does  
21 not describe female deacons, and if Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) might be a woman known for her  
22 service or might be a deacon, then nothing is established.<sup>51</sup> Warfield thinks the early  
23 church's use of deaconesses proves his interpretation of Romans 16:1, but to base  
24 interpretation of the New Testament on early church practices is a perilous move. Since the  
25 evidence is so thin, Waters judges that women should serve as "female assistants" to the  
26 deacons, not ordained deacons. Even if the office of deacon is one of service rather than rule  
27 (per the *BCO*), it "is an office" which "necessarily entails the possession and exercise of  
28 authority."<sup>52</sup>

29

### 30 *Interpretations throughout Church History*

31

32 Since many translations render 1 Timothy 3:11 with "wives," many exegetes believe Paul  
33 refers to wives of deacons, not deaconesses. On the other hand, those who advocate female  
34 deacons point out a long history of deaconesses, with supporters such as John Calvin, B. B.  
35 Warfield, and other conservative Presbyterians, including the RPCNA.<sup>53</sup> The history of the  
36 question, however, is complex. Calvin's claims must be qualified, and Warfield's advocacy  
37 of female deacons requires comment. The following traces key church leaders and their  
38 interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:8-11, beginning earlier in church history.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Phil Ryken, *1 Timothy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 131.

<sup>49</sup> Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles* (London: A & C Black, 1963), 83-4.

<sup>50</sup> B. B. Warfield, "Presbyterian Deaconesses," *Presbyterian Review* (1889): 283-286.

<sup>51</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 112-113.



<sup>52</sup> Waters, *Jesus Runs the Church*, 114-115.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory R. Perry, "Phoebe of Cenchreae and 'Women' of Ephesus: Deacons in the Earliest Churches," *Presbyterion* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 9-36.

<sup>54</sup> The next paragraph follows Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 132-3.

1 In the second century, "church women provided nursing mothers who sat in the public  
2 squares," while other women scoured the streets "to collect the unwanted babies abandoned  
3 in the night." They "nursed, bathed, and raised babies" who would otherwise have died of  
4 exposure or become slaves.<sup>55</sup> This was representative diaconal work in the early church.  
5 J. M. Ross's survey of women's ministry in the early church concludes that they paralleled a  
6 number of tasks performed by male deacons. They visited the sick, acted as doorkeepers (for  
7 a women's entrance?) in the church, assisted in the baptism of women, catechized women,  
8 and sponsored orphans.<sup>56</sup>

9  
10 Chrysostom, of the fourth century, also described an "order" of deaconesses that is  
11 "necessary and useful and honorable in the Church."<sup>57</sup>

12  
13 Calvin is claimed, by those who promote deaconesses, as an advocate for their position, but  
14 his teaching is complex. He had deaconesses in Geneva, but he limited their role: "Women  
15 could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor." He placed  
16 them in the second of two types of deacon. The first group must "distribute the alms," the  
17 second "devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick." Men (Acts 6) did the  
18 administration, women as well as men performed the service.<sup>58</sup> In Calvin's commentary on  
19 1 Timothy 3:11, he says the wives of deacons and overseers perform this service, saying,  
20 "He refers here to the wives of both bishops and deacons."<sup>59</sup> In his commentary on Romans  
21 16:1, however, Calvin says of Phoebe, "Paul commends her on account of her office."  
22 Readers cannot simply conclude Calvin wanted to ordain women as deacons, both because  
23 of the remarks in the *Institutes*, his most settled, authoritative work, and because his  
24 comments on Romans 16:1 also call Phoebe "a helper to all the godly" and "an assistant of  
25 the Cenchrean church."<sup>60</sup>

26  
27 Warfield also advocated for a recognized group of women, which he calls either deacons or  
28 (more commonly) deaconesses. His argument rests on the status of Phoebe, the servant  
29 (*diakonos*) of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1) and the reference to a primitive order of  
30 deaconesses in the letter from Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, to Emperor Trajan,  
31 in 112 A.D. Pliny says, "I judged it... necessary to find out what the truth [about Christianity]  
32 was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing."  
33 Warfield judges the women to be members of a servant office. They "constituted a female  
34 diaconate similar to and of like standing with the board of deacons which, in the New

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<sup>55</sup> Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 192.

<sup>56</sup> J. M. Ross, "Reconsideration of the Diaconate," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 12, Issue 2, 1959, 153.

<sup>57</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon," trans. and ed. Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 13:441.

<sup>58</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:1061-2.

<sup>59</sup> John Calvin, "Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon," *Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XXI*, trans. Rev. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 87.

<sup>60</sup> John Calvin, "Commentaries on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," *Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 19*, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 542.

1 Testament, we find in every church."<sup>61</sup> Warfield surveyed and criticized various ways to  
2 organize deaconesses. He concluded that "the church has a distinct right to organize the  
3 work of women" in a variety of ways as long as there is "some sufficient form of  
4 ecclesiastical oversight" that created "adequate points of union with the official church  
5 machinery" and guarded against the dangers inherent in independent associations.<sup>62</sup>

6

7 *1 Timothy 3:8-11: Possible Interpretations*

8

9 It seems that there are four ways to understand Paul in 1 Timothy 3:11.

10

11 First, the women may be part of the general order of deacons. This is unlikely since they are  
12 set apart from deacons by the term "likewise" (ὡσαύτως), just as deacons are set apart from  
13 elders by "likewise" (ὡσαύτως) in 1 Timothy 3:8, and by a somewhat different set of  
14 qualifications. It also seems unlikely that a new order would be 1) so short and 2) embedded  
15 in the description of another office.

16

17 Second, the women are female deacons or deaconesses who correspond somehow to the  
18 male deacons. This is doubtful for two reasons. First, the statement about the wives or  
19 women is embedded in a larger section that describes the duties of male deacons. If  
20 deaconesses are a distinct group, why is their character, in 1 Timothy 3:11, sandwiched  
21 between three verses that describe the qualities of a deacon (3:8-10) and two that comment  
22 on their family life and reputation (3:12-13)? Second, outside this passage, no clear  
23 Scripture references an office of deaconess. In Romans 16:1 Phoebe may be a deaconess,  
24 but it is unclear whether she held an office, since Romans 16 does not focus on church order,  
25 and since the word *diakonos* – διάκονος is generally nontechnical in the New Testament.<sup>63</sup>

26

27 Third, Paul has a separate office in view. "Likewise" marked a new category in 1 Timothy 3:8,  
28 so it could do the same here. Furthermore, the Greek does not have a possessive pronoun—  
29 their wives—or even a definite article—the wives—possibly suggesting that the women are a  
30 separate group, not simply deacons' wives. On the other hand, the absence of the possessive  
31 pronoun or definite article may signify that Paul omitted the definite article, as he often did  
32 when referring to people in this section (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1, 8, 12). Finally, why should  
33 deacons' wives be singled out for a separate list of qualities, when no qualities are required  
34 for the wives of elders? On the other hand, Yarbrough detects a possible nod to wives of  
35 overseers when Paul says, "In the same way, deacons" (1 Tim. 3:8). The similarity "affirms  
36 a close parallel between the two—and if deacons' wives are critical to the diaconal ministry,  
37 that holds no less true for the wives of pastoral church leaders."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> B. B. Warfield, "Presbyterian Deaconesses," *Presbyterian Review* (1889): 286.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-3.

<sup>63</sup> Again, Romans 15:8 calls Jesus a *diakonos*. In 1 Corinthians 3:5 it is Paul and Apollos. Paul is again *diakonos* in 2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4. In Ephesians 6:21 Tychicus is *diakonos*, in Colossians 1:7 it is Epaphras, and so on.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Yarbrough, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*.

1 In this interpretation, women are assistants to deacons, perhaps taking on duties that  
2 especially pertain to ministry to women. Kelly summarizes the testimony of the practices of  
3 deaconesses in the early church, "female officiants were required for duties in connexion  
4 [sic] with women."<sup>65</sup> This is plausible for two reasons. First, some of women's needs could  
5 be handled more appropriately by women than by men. Second, there may be a hint that  
6 women have special, recognized tasks elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles. For example, Paul  
7 takes note of exemplary widows in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 and blesses older women who train  
8 younger women in Titus 2:3-5. (As an aside connecting to application, if option three is  
9 correct, then churches might have women's advisory committees that regularly work with  
10 deacons to consult on policy and serve the needy. See Chapter Four for further discussion on  
11 application.)

12 A fourth interpretation is that the women are indeed the wives of deacons. Given that γυνή –  
13 γυνή can mean woman or wife, twice in the context, the term clearly means "wife" (1 Tim.  
14 3:2; 1 Tim. 3:12). It is very unlikely that a term would shift meanings from 3:11 to 3:12.  
15 Also, Paul's failure to mention this person's marital status, prominent as marriage was with  
16 elders and deacons, indicates that it refers to deacons' wives.<sup>66</sup> Finally, if the women are  
17 wives, it would explain why 1 Timothy 3:10 is embedded in the section on deacons: one  
18 requirement for deacons is that their wives be able to assist them. The very brevity of  
19 1 Timothy 3:11 also points toward "wives" as the right translation. Would Paul say so little  
20 if he were instituting a new class of officer?<sup>67</sup>

21 Interpretations three and four stand on firmer exegetical ground than one and two, and  
22 number four stands most firmly of all. Whichever view is correct, Paul anticipates that  
23 women will have a hand in diaconal work. Yarbrough says, "If indeed Paul has deacons'  
24 (and overseers') wives in mind, this is another indication of his concern for the full  
25 engagement and benefit of women in the ministry of the church."<sup>68</sup>

26 Even if Paul does not have deaconesses in mind in 1 Timothy 3:11, many will point to  
27 Romans 16:1, which says Phoebe was a *diakonos* of the church. But again, as the chart on  
28 Paul's use of *diakonos* indicates, it normally has a non-technical sense, so that the term by  
29 itself proves nothing regarding office. On the other hand, Romans 16:1 shows women are  
30 recognized for something. To say it differently, whatever one's stand on women in the office  
31 of deacon, there is widespread agreement that women are essential servants in the church,  
32 and some level of screening, recognition, and regular service are in view.

33 All four positions agree women should be involved in diaconal work. How their work  
34 should be construed ecclesiastically is another matter. If deacons have authority in the  
35 church, roughly on par with elders, so that church members rightly promise to submit to  
36 them and obey them, then 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibits female deacons. If deacons do not  
37

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<sup>65</sup> Kelly, *Pastorals*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> George Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 171.

<sup>67</sup> Ryken, 1 Timothy, 130-1.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Yarbrough, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*.

1 exercise authority, if they lead by example and by service, then female deacons or  
2 deaconesses are conceivable. Most leadership occurs by service and example, by experience  
3 and persuasion.

4  
5 If deacons are leaders by way of service, and not by way of rule, the office of deacon may be  
6 shared by both men and women. Yet "service, not rule" may be an inadequate description of  
7 deacons. *BCO* 9-2 says of deacons, "It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in  
8 the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people."  
9 These points sound authoritative, overlapping somewhat with the role of elders. The  
10 authoritative note may also appear in *BCO* 9-5. Calvin apparently bent his thought to some  
11 version of this issue when he distinguished two types of deacon, one more administrative  
12 and financial, held by men. Meanwhile women were to be devoted to "caring for the poor  
13 themselves." On the other hand, he calls this service a "public office."<sup>69</sup>

14  
15 *1 Timothy 3:11: Character Traits*

16  
17 Regardless of whether Paul envisions women or wives in 1 Timothy 3, he still sets forth  
18 traits that qualify people for service. First then, they must be "dignified," which translates  
19 *semnos*, a term already discussed at 1 Timothy 3:8. Second, they are "not slanderers," which  
20 translates *diabolous*, a term for malicious speech, false accusations, and slander (2 Tim.  
21 3:3). The term is used for the Devil in Revelation 12:9-10. At a minimum, all officers and  
22 servants must know how to keep quiet about the needs of the people they serve. What a  
23 betrayal to speak maliciously or falsely about the people in need. Third, they are "sober-  
24 minded," translating *nephalius*. Paul also requires sobriety or temperance of elders in  
25 1 Timothy 3:2 and of older men in Titus 2:2. Fourth, they should be "faithful in all things."  
26 "Faithful," translating *pistos*, is a common term in the Pastoral Epistles, one used to describe  
27 doctrines (1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Tim. 3:1) as well as people.

28  
29 If indeed Paul describes the wives of deacons and elders, his decision to describe their traits  
30 needs to be weighed. Clearly, Paul expects husbands and wives to operate together; he saw  
31 them "as integral to ministry infrastructure and execution." Even if the wives "did not hold  
32 formal office," they still constituted a major force in the ministry of the congregations of  
33 Ephesus, and in the ministry of congregations today.<sup>70</sup> With privilege and position, formal  
34 or informal, comes responsibility. Just as men can and do face shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19)  
35 through doctrinal deviation or moral turpitude, so women can and do wound their families  
36 and their churches if they are slanderous, unfaithful, or frivolous. On the other hand, faithful  
37 wives enjoy the same rewards as faithful deacons and elders, described in 1 Timothy 3:13  
38 and

39 1 Peter 5:4, "an unfading crown of glory."

40

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<sup>69</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1061 (4.3.9).

<sup>70</sup> Robert Yarbrough, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*.

1                   **COHERENCE BETWEEN THE ROLES OF WOMEN**  
2                   **DURING THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS**  
3                   **AND THE PAULINE EPISTLES**  
4

5       Jesus chose twelve males as his apostles: Simon (called Peter), Andrew, James, John, Philip,  
6       Bartholomew, Thomas, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 10:2-4). Jesus appointed the  
7       apostles as his foundational witnesses. He trained them to testify to what their ears heard,  
8       their eyes saw, and their hands touched during His ministry (1 John 1:1-4; John 1:14; Acts  
9       1:8; Acts 4:20). After His resurrection, they saw the wounds on Jesus' hands and feet. They  
10      touched, saw, believed, and testified (Luke 24:39; John 20:20-5; Acts 4:20).<sup>71</sup> They  
11      preached and wrote down the church's foundational message.

12      Evangelical egalitarians do not deny this, but they do try to minimize its significance.<sup>72</sup> They  
13      claim Jesus' choice of male leaders set no precedent for Christian leadership today.<sup>73</sup> They  
14      reason that temporary conditions, related to ancient cultures, prevented Jesus from  
15      appointing female apostles. Since those conditions belong to the distant past, Jesus' choice  
16      of male leadership allegedly belongs to the past as well.<sup>74</sup>

17      Would Jesus refrain from choosing women as disciples and traveling companions because  
18      that choice would have offended social sensibility of His day? Jesus violated cultural  
19      conventions whenever He saw fit. He touched lepers. He called tax-collectors and prostitutes  
20      His friends. He healed Gentiles. He violated customs for the Sabbath. He tossed recognized  
21      businessmen out of the temple. Jesus violated convention by talking to women, disciplining  
22      them, and letting them travel with Him (Luke 8:1-2). He shattered so many conventions;  
23      why should he quail at one more? Besides, "when moral issues were at stake, Jesus did not  
24      bend to social pressure."<sup>75</sup>

25      Were women uneducated, intellectually inferior, and, therefore, unacceptable as public  
26      leaders? The Twelve were not highly educated either (Matt. 13:54-57; John 7:15; Acts 4:13)  
27      and early Christians accepted their leadership. Formal education is not a requirement for  
28      ministry.

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<sup>71</sup> On Jesus choosing and training foundational eyewitnesses, see Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed., (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1988), 12-24.

<sup>72</sup> Non-evangelical Christian feminists do deny the veracity of the gospel accounts. They allege that there were many female leaders in the early church and that a male-dominated hierarchical church later suppressed information about early female leadership. See chapter 9 for more on non-evangelical feminists.

<sup>73</sup> On finding precedents in Scripture, see chapter 2, "A Note on Method."

<sup>74</sup> This summarizes published arguments and conversations with feminists. See Rebecca Groothuis, *Good News for Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 109-111; Paul K. Jewett, *The Ordination of Women* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 58-60; Stanley Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in the Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 211-212. For a rejoinder, see James Borland, "Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill : Crossway, 1991), 120.

<sup>75</sup> Borland, "Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus," 120-3.

1 Was travel too dangerous for women? Travel was dangerous for men, too. Paul was  
2 imprisoned, lashed, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, sleepless, hungry, thirsty, cold, and naked  
3 (2 Cor. 12:23-27). Furthermore, the apostles' wives sometimes traveled with them, dangers  
4 notwithstanding (1 Cor. 9:5).

5  
6 Many also reason that if Jesus' choice of male disciples signifies that only males can lead,  
7 then the choice of twelve Jewish disciples should signify that only Jews can lead.<sup>76</sup> That is,  
8 if the gender of the choice is normative, then so is the ethnicity. Since Jesus' choice of  
9 Jewish leaders does not set a precedent, egalitarians argue His choice of males does not set a  
10 precedent either.

11  
12 This argument rests on an analogy. Jesus' decision to choose men first is the same as his  
13 decision to choose Jews first. Since the appointment of Jewish leaders was temporary, they  
14 reason, the appointment of males is temporary too. But the analogy fails historically and  
15 biblically. The appointment of Israelites is different from the appointment of males.  
16 Historically, the appointment of Israelite disciples is a unique element in God's plan of  
17 salvation. Scripture shows that Israel's privileges were temporary. When the gospel went to  
18 the Gentiles, Gentiles soon began to lead. See Titus, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, and Luke  
19 (2 Cor. 8:16-23; Phil. 2:25-30; Col. 4:7-14; Eph. 6:21-22; Philemon 23-34).<sup>77</sup> Men, such as  
20 Titus, exercised great authority. Paul left Titus in Crete to straighten out Paul's unfinished  
21 business and to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). No woman is given such a charge.  
22

23 The apostles saw Jesus' choice of twelve male apostles as a precedent. When they replaced  
24 Judas, they said a male must take his place: "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the  
25 men who have been with us the whole time" (Acts 1:21). The word for "men" is not  
26 *anthropos*, a human, but *aner*, a male. Later, the apostles followed the precedent again and  
27 had the church choose seven males (*aner*) to oversee the church's mercy ministry (Acts 6:1-6).  
28

## 29 **Ephesians 5 and Subordination**

30

31 Few texts are more controversial than, "Wives submit to your husbands" (Eph. 5:22). Why?  
32 Many men abuse Paul's command, citing it as a pretext for selfish domination of women.  
33 The submission of wives does not imply domination by husbands, as Ephesians shows.  
34 Also, in an age that resists the concept of submission to authority, many women (like many  
35 men) resent the idea that they should submit to anyone, including their husbands.  
36

37 In context, the command, "wives submit," develops two broader imperatives. Ephesians 5:1-2  
38 reads, "Be imitators of God... and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself  
39 up for us." Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine.... Instead, be filled in the  
40 Spirit." Grammatically, the next five verbal nouns are participles that describe the character  
41 of a Spirit-filled life. Spirit-filled people will demonstrate His influence by "addressing one  
42 another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with  
43 all your heart, giving thanks always... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"  
44 (Eph. 5:18-20, ESV).

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<sup>76</sup> Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 45

<sup>77</sup> Most men found in New Testament leadership lists have Gentile names. In Colossians 4:11-14, Paul records several, then adds that Barnabas and Jesus-Justus are "the only Jews among my fellow workers."

1 The phrase "submitting to one another" stands as a banner over Ephesians 5:22-6:9, which is  
2 one of the longer descriptions of family life in the Bible. "Submitting to one another" is a  
3 striking phrase, an apparent oxymoron. Submission is one-directional in New Testament and  
4 extrabiblical Greek usage. People submit (*hypotasso*) to authorities—to God, king, governor,  
5 or officer. People submit to parents and laws. Submission means one person yields to the  
6 will of another. But how can two people submit to each other? They cannot both outrank the  
7 other. Should parents submit to children? Can a husband and wife each submit to the other?  
8 There are two possible answers.

9  
10 The first possibility is that believers should submit to whatever authority is over them. On  
11 this view, the command to submit to each other does not mean, *everyone should submit to  
everyone*, as if all authority structures cease. Rather, Paul means that Christians should yield  
12 whenever someone has proper authority over them (with the necessary caveat from Acts  
13 5:29—one must disobey if an authority commands sinful acts or sinful inaction). "Submit to  
14 one another" does not mean parents should submit to their children just as children submit to  
15 parents. Parents should serve their children so selflessly that it may appear that the parents  
16 are submitting, but irreversible authority structures remain. Parents can still tell children  
17 when to go to bed, but children may not reply, "Fine, but you should go to bed too."

18  
19 A second possibility is that all fixed authority relations are relativized, so that no one has the  
20 right to exercise authority over anyone else except by temporary necessity or mutual  
21 agreement. So husbands have no general duty to lead their wives, pastors have no intrinsic  
22 authority over their church and employers have no objective authority over employees.

23  
24 There are several reasons to favor and affirm the first possibility: "Submit to one another"  
25 means all Christians should submit to the relevant authorities, not "Everyone submits to  
26 everyone." If the following arguments are valid, then authority structures remain at home  
27 and church.<sup>78</sup>

28  
29 Reason 1: The term "submit" (*hypotasso* – ὑποτάσσω) means to subject, subordinate, bring  
30 under control or obey. Excluding Ephesians 5, submission is one-directional in all New  
31 Testament uses. Hypotasso normally refers to one person, who is lower in position or power,  
32 yielding to a person of higher position or power. Therefore, to "submit to one another" does  
33 not mean all Christians submit to everyone, it means they submit to whatever authorities are  
34 appropriate. That is, "submit to one another" means submit whenever there is a rightful  
35 authority.

36  
37 Reason 2: The chief reason to speak of mutual submission is the pronoun "to each other."  
38 The phrase "to one another" translates one Greek pronoun, "ἀλλήλοις." In English, "one  
39 another" implies full reciprocity, but the Greek does not. There is full reciprocity in  
40 Philippians 2:3, "Consider one another better than yourselves," and in Mark 9:50, "Be at  
41 peace with one another." Other times, it is not fully reciprocal. In Galatians 6:2, "Bear one  
42 another's burdens," does not mean everyone trades burdens with everyone else. Rather, some

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<sup>78</sup> Hurley, *Man and Woman*, 139-41.

1 should help others as Galatians 6:5 shows, "Each one should carry his own load." Paul does  
2 not envision total reciprocity. Rather, those who have lighter burdens carry others' burdens  
3 when appropriate. Similarly, Christians should submit when appropriate. Similarly,  
4 Ephesians 5 commands that people submit to whomever exercises proper authority over  
5 them. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 does not teach full reciprocity of submission. Children obey parents  
6 and slaves submit to masters, but not visa versa. The presumption, therefore, is that absolute  
7 reciprocity is not the norm for marriage either – Wives submit, husbands love sacrificially.  
8 Again, a husband should serve his wife so selflessly that it may appear that he submits to her  
9 needs or wishes, but selflessness is actually a form of leadership, according to Paul.

10  
11 The text also limits the extent of the submission, so that it falls short of total mutuality.  
12 Thus, wives are not told to submit to all men but to their own husbands. Further, Paul tells  
13 children to obey and slaves to submit, but he never tells husbands, parents, and masters to  
14 submit to wives, children, or slaves.

15  
16 Reason 3: Paul's other writings show that authority structures remain. Paul commands  
17 Christians in Rome to submit to governing authorities. Paul orders the church to submit to  
18 their overseers. He neither commands the government to submit to the people, nor tells  
19 overseers to submit to the people (1 Thess. 5:12). Ephesians 5 neither teaches full reciprocity  
20 nor ends authority structures. Wives submit to husbands, children obey parents, and slaves  
21 obey masters, but not vice versa.

22  
23 Paul's directions do alter the concept of authority. If husbands sacrifice for their wives, if  
24 parents do nothing to exasperate their children, if masters never threaten but treat slaves  
25 respectfully (Eph. 5:25; Eph. 6:4; Eph. 6:9), if authorities wield power for others, the spirit  
26 has changed, even if structure has not.

27  
28 Authorities remain. Yet, if they lead benevolently, their authority will appear to fade. When  
29 a husband loves his wife, when parents nurture their children, when masters forgo threats,  
30 when authorities bend to the needs of their subordinates, casual observers might think they  
31 have abdicated. In the world, the powerful lord it over others for their benefit. Not so in the  
32 family of faith. To a widow newly married to a Christian husband, to an orphan newly  
33 adopted by a Christian father, all would seem new, if they left the sway of a typically self-  
34 indulgent lord. Their needs matter. Arbitrary demands wane. Christians should exercise  
35 authority with enough love that all life seems new. Still, Christians are not free to create  
36 whatever arrangement seems workable. Men still bear responsibility to direct the family, for  
37 its good.

38  
39 Of course marriage is different from other authority relations. Paul tells children and slaves  
40 to obey; he tells wives to submit, not obey, suggesting the husband-wife relationship is more  
41 nearly reciprocal. Remember that parents can tell children to go to bed. Yet, marriage is so  
42 nearly reciprocal that a wife can summon her husband to bed (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Further,  
43 submission as understood in Greco-Roman culture allowed a certain level of freedom to  
44 order affairs within the parameters established by a leader (although today, submission is an  
45 intensively pejorative term).

46

## CHAPTER THREE

### ORDINATION –A DEFINITION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE OFFICE OF THE DIACONATE

*The Book of Church Order* defines ordination as “the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship” (*BCO* 17-2).

Within the church universal, ordination has been viewed in two distinct ways:

1. The authoritative act of the church inducting one into an ecclesiastical office which gives to the ordinand the authority to exercise ecclesiastical office, or
2. The authoritative act of the church inducting one into an ecclesiastical office which gives to the ordinand the authority to exercise ecclesiastical office and also, through the act of ordination, the spiritual gifts to exercise the ecclesiastical office. Proof texts for the idea of ordination conveying spiritual gifts include John 20:22-23; 1 Timothy 1:18; 1 Timothy 4:14. Communions such as the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches regard ordination as conveying both authority and spiritual gifts. They also consider ordination to Holy Orders to be a sacrament.

Most Protestants, including those within the Reformed tradition, hold to the authority-only view and not the authority-plus-spiritual-gifts view, and do not regard ordination as a sacrament.

*BCO* 7-2 lays out the traditional Reformed view of ordination to the eldership that involves a personal sense of divine calling to service, evidence of providential enablement and spiritual gifts, and the approbation of the church as necessary pre-requisites for ordination. It recognizes two ordinary and perpetual offices in the church, elders and deacons.

Further, the PCA’s branch of Reformed and Presbyterian churches formally expresses that the Scriptures and history reserve ordination for sent and qualified men. Other branches of Reformed and Presbyterian churches permit that women may be ordained to the diaconate, according to their understanding of biblical texts and historical precedent.

While the committee members hold to the authority-only view of ordination, there is still a diversity of views on the definition. The majority of members agree with the definition below:

*Ordination, biblically, historically, and with specificity in Reformed and Presbyterian evangelical churches, is the formal setting aside of a called, sent, and qualified man from the fellowship of an ecclesiastical assembly consisting of God’s covenant people to a specific office, with vows affirming the responsibilities, power, and authority necessary for the fulfillment of the specified, ecclesiastical office.*

1                   **ORDINATION AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS:**  
2                   **A BRIEF BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL SURVEY**

3  
4     In Book IV of his *Institutes*, Calvin writes:

5  
6       It remains to consider the form of ordination, to which we have assigned the  
7       last place in the call, (see chap. iv., sec. 14, 15.) It is certain, that when the  
8       apostles appointed any one to the ministry, they used no other ceremony than  
9       the laying on of hands. This form was derived, I think, from the custom of the  
10      Jews, who, by the laying on of hands, in a manner presented to God whatever  
11      they wished to be blessed and consecrated... In this way <sup>79</sup> they consecrated  
12      pastors and teachers; in this way they consecrated deacons.

13  
14   What follows is a brief<sup>80</sup> overview of the biblical basis for ordination in the church,  
15   examining particular words and passages that display elements relevant to the doctrine. The  
16   overview specifically examines how these particular words and passages relate to someone  
17   or something being set apart or appointed to sacred work accompanied by the laying on of  
18   hands. While the elements of being set apart and the laying on of hands are not visible in  
19   every passage that looks like consecration for God's work, one or more of the following  
20   components will be present: 1) divine gifting 2); God's presence to empower ministry;  
21   3) recognition by human authority. This recognition by human authority is often, but by no  
22   means always, said to occur with the laying on of hands.

23  
24     Ἐπιτίθημι

25  
26   The most common definition in the ESV for *epitithemi* is “to place something on or transfer  
27   to (a place or object).” In the New Testament, *epitithemi* is commonly used to express the  
28   laying on of hands. The Synoptic Gospel writers often use this word to indicate Jesus’  
29   healing of people by the laying on of hands (Matt. 9:18; Mk. 5:23; Mk. 6:5; Mk. 7:32; Mk.  
30   8:23, 25; Lk. 4:40; Lk. 13:13). On two occasions in Acts, it is used to refer to the receiving of  
31   or filling of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:19; Acts 9:17 [also includes  
32   Paul receiving his sight]).

33  
34     Ἐπιτίθημι also occurs frequently in the Septuagint. Most of those occurrences are in the  
35   Torah with particular concentration in Exodus and Leviticus. It is the verb of choice when  
36   the writer wants to indicate the laying on of hands (e.g., Exod. 29:10, 15, 19; Lev. 1:4; Lev.  
37   4:4). In these cases, a transfer of some sort is occurring. Thus, in the New Testament, the  
38   apostles would have been accustomed to this practice of the laying on of hands to signify a  
39   transfer with liturgical or ecclesial significance.

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<sup>79</sup> John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 3:71.

<sup>80</sup> Time does not permit the committee to provide an exhaustive study. However, we believe that the brief overview provides enough information to draw certain conclusions.

1 In 1 Timothy 5:17ff Paul addresses Timothy regarding the way elders are to be honored and  
2 held accountable in the church. In that context, he instructs Timothy not to be hasty in the  
3 laying (ἐπιτίθημι) on of hands. That is, not to be hasty in ordaining men to the office of  
4 elder. The nominal form of ἐπιτίθημι (ἐπίθεσις) is found in 1 Timothy 4:14 and  
5 2 Timothy 1:6 to refer to Timothy's ordination to ecclesiastic office.

6  
7 In the case of Acts 13:1-3, prophets and teachers at Antioch, at the Holy Spirit's direction,  
8 set apart Barnabas and Saul to the work to which he had called them. After prayer and  
9 fasting, the prophets and teachers laid (ἐπιτίθημι) their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent  
10 them off. This is clearly not an ordination in an ecclesiastical sense since Saul, also called  
11 Paul, is already an apostle. Rather, the leaders of the church in Antioch commissioned  
12 Barnabas and Saul for their task.

13  
14 **Καθίστημι**

15  
16 The relevant English definition for *kathistemi* is “to assign someone to a position of  
17 authority, appoint, put in charge.” This definition is the sense of the verb in most of its New  
18 Testament occurrences (Matt. 24:45, 47; Matt. 25:21, 23; Lk. 12:14, 42, 44; Acts 6:3; 7:10,  
19 27, 35; Titus 1:5; Heb. 5:1; Heb. 7:28; Heb. 8:3). When it is used in the Septuagint, it also  
20 regularly carries the sense of being set in authority over someone or something.

21  
22 Thus, it is not surprising that when the apostles instruct the congregation in Acts 6 to select  
23 seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, they use *kathistemi* (Acts 6:3)  
24 to indicate that they will appoint these men to the duty of serving the need that had arisen.  
25 The seven were “in charge of the tables.” They were appointed to this duty by prayer and the  
26 laying on of hands (ἐπιτίθημι). As stated in Chapter Two, although the seven are not called  
27 deacons (*diakonos*), they do serve (*diakoneo*), so that Acts 6 marks the basis of diaconal  
28 work—caring for widows, caring for the neglected.<sup>81</sup>

29  
30 Additionally, Paul left Titus in Crete so that Titus would put what remained in order: to  
31 appoint (*kathistemi*) elders in every town (Titus 1:5). Those elders would hold authority as  
32 overseers in the churches (Titus 1:6).

33  
34 **Ποιέω**

35  
36 Among the most frequently utilized verbs in the New Testament, *poteō* is also very common  
37 in the Septuagint. Its most common English glosses are to produce/make something  
38 material, or to undertake to do something that brings about an event, state, or condition. It is  
39 rarely glossed as “appointed” in the New Testament (Mark 3:14, 16; Heb. 3:2). In the Old  
40 Testament, the ESV gloss for the Hebrew verb שָׁנַת (šānāt) is “appointed” in 1 Samuel 12:6,  
41 and the Septuagint gloss is *poteō*. In 1 Samuel 12:6, Samuel is speaking to the people of  
42 Israel, telling them that the Lord appointed Moses and Aaron [to their “offices”]. In Mark

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<sup>81</sup> There are varying conclusions on the committee as to whether the seven men appointed in Acts 6 are the first deacons. The men are ordained, but they are not referred to as deacons. However, the committee is in agreement that this passage helps to form a pattern for diaconal ministry.

1 3:14 and 16, Mark is relating Jesus' appointing the twelve apostles. In Hebrews 3:2, the  
2 writer declares that Jesus was appointed by the Father to His office of "apostle and high  
3 priest of our confession."

4  
5 **Xειροτονέω**  
6

7 This word occurs twice in the New Testament, and has no occurrences in the Septuagint.  
8 The English gloss is "to elect or choose someone for definite offices or tasks." In Acts  
9 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appoint (*cheirotoneo*) elders in the churches they planted. In 2  
10 Corinthians 8:19, Paul tells the Corinthians that Titus was appointed (*cheirotoneo*) by the  
11 churches to travel with Paul as he collected money for the needy believers in Jerusalem. The  
12 word indicates the congregation members stretched forth their hands.

13  
14 There are also examples of its use in extra-biblical church literature. For example, the  
15 Didache uses the word to indicate that congregations are to elect their own overseers  
16 (*episcopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*): "Therefore appoint (*cheirotoneo*) for yourselves bishops  
17 and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and  
18 approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. (2) You  
19 must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honored men, along with the prophets  
20 and teachers."<sup>82</sup>

21  
22 The apostolic father, Ignatius, uses this word (IPhld. 10:1; I Sm. 11:2) when he writes to the  
23 Philadelphians that they are to appoint a deacon to bring congratulations to the church at  
24 Antioch: "Since it has been reported to me that in answer to your prayer and the compassion  
25 which you have in Christ Jesus the church at Antioch in Syria is at peace, it is appropriate  
26 for you, as a church of God, to appoint a deacon to go there on a mission as God's  
27 ambassador, to congratulate them when they have assembled together and to glorify the  
28 Name."<sup>83</sup>

29  
30 **Conclusion**  
31

32 Clearly, in Scripture, the laying on of hands includes more than ordination and the appointing  
33 of people to roles. It denotes several other functions, such as:

- 34  
35 1. Consecrating animals for sacrifice, ritual identification of sins, or sinners with the  
36 sacrificial animal (Exod. 29:10, 15, 19; Lev. 1:4; Lev. 3:1, 2, 8., 13; Lev. 4:15, 24,  
37 29, 33);  
38 2. Commissioning a leader ([Joshua as successor to Moses commissioned by him]  
39 Num. 27:23; Deut. 34:9);  
40 3. Identifying a blasphemer before stoning him (Lev. 24:14);  
41 4. Blessing children (Matt. 19:13; Mk. 10:16);  
42 5. Setting apart Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey (Acts. 13:1-3);

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<sup>82</sup> Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 267.

<sup>83</sup> Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 183.

6. Praying for believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; Acts 9:19; Acts 19:9);
  7. Praying for healing (Matt. 5:23; Matt. 8:23, 25; Mk. 6:5; Mk. 7:32; Mk. 16:18; Lk. 4:40; Lk. 13:33; Acts 28:8).

At the same time, the biblical data indicates that the *BCO* definition of ordination as, “the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship,” is on sure footing. Elders are ordained to an authoritative office within the church. Furthermore, not all servants of the church are ordained. Some may be commissioned to specific tasks. The ordination of deacons in Scripture rests heavily on whether the seven men in Acts 6 are the first deacons. The Westminster Assembly evidently considered them to be so, since it cited Acts 6 as a proof text for the office of deacon in the Form of Government adopted by the Assembly. If the seven are deacons, then deacons are also ordained to authoritative office as stewards of resources and mercy in the church.

What must be considered is the way Christ's church has applied the Scripture's described and prescribed instruction on the diaconate as it relates to ordination and service.

## **THE DIACONATE: ORDINATION AND SERVICE**

The present perspective on ordination in the PCA's Constitution has been shaped by several factors, including:

1. The Old Testament Scriptures, particularly those related to the respective roles of men and women, and the roles of priests, elders, and prophets.
  2. The New Testament Scriptures, particularly those that deal with the roles of men and women in the life of the ministry of the early church, both the prescriptive passages and the descriptive passages.
  3. The theological-historical development of the church, particularly the PCA's branch of the church. Of special interest are the documents of the early church, the mediaeval Western church, the Protestant Reformation, the restoration of Presbyterian polity among Reformed churches, and Presbyterianism in America leading up to the founding of the PCA.
  4. The interaction between Christianity, the church, and the historical-cultural situation throughout history. Unfortunately, examples abound of how portions of the church at particular periods have allowed their surrounding culture to supersede the Scriptures on some issues. Two regrettable examples from Presbyterian history are the justification of chattel slavery and racial segregation in America. When it comes to the role of women in society and in the church, the committee desires to evaluate today's culture by the Scriptures and realizes that Christians are susceptible to interpreting Scripture through a cultural lens instead of interpreting culture through Scripture's lens.

A thorough examination of the Scriptures is detailed in Chapter Two of this report, with an additional analysis in the first part of Chapter Three. What follows is a brief examination of the theological-historical development of the diaconate in the church, with an emphasis on

1 the role of women in that ministry. Although the word “deaconess” is not found in Scripture,  
2 it has been the most common word in the history of the church to identify women serving in  
3 diaconate ministry. The text below follows that utilization.

4

## 5 **The Role of Deaconesses in the History of the Church**

6

7 The ancient church era offers helpful information and insights. Several documents instruct  
8 on the existence, duties, and ministry of deaconesses in the ancient church.

9

10 One of the earliest extra-biblical references to women serving as deaconesses in the church  
11 is Letter 96 from Pliny the Younger (d. AD 113) to the Emperor Trajan. Pliny was a Roman  
12 government official who wrote to the emperor regarding the growth of Christianity in  
13 Bithynia and attempted to suppress Christianity by torturing believers. He wrote, “I judged  
14 it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from  
15 two female slaves, who were styled *deaconesses*: but I could discover nothing more than  
16 depraved and excessive superstition.”<sup>84</sup>

17

18 The *Apostolic Constitutions*, compiled from the second to the early fifth centuries (showing  
19 dependence upon the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, from the late first to early second  
20 century) mentions deaconesses in several places.

21

22 Book II, Section IV addresses the management of resources collected for the support of the  
23 clergy and the relief of the poor. Chapter XXVI explains the pattern and dignity God  
24 appoints to every order of the clergy. The bishop is the minister of the word, who presides as  
25 one honored with the authority of God. Then:

26

27 let the deacon minister to him, as Christ does to His Father; and let him serve  
28 him unblameably in all things, as Christ does nothing of Himself, but does  
29 always those things that please His Father. Let also the deaconess be  
30 honoured by you in the place of the Holy Ghost, and not do or say anything  
31 without the deacon; as neither does the Comforter say or do anything of  
32 Himself, but gives glory to Christ by waiting for His pleasure. And as we  
33 cannot believe on Christ without the teaching of the Spirit, so let not any  
34 woman address herself to the deacon or bishop without the deaconess.<sup>85</sup>

35

36 Book II, Section VII—On Assembling in the Church—describes the church, the clergy, and  
37 the responsibilities people have in worship services. The bishop sits in the middle. The  
38 presbyters sit on each side of him. The deacons “stand near at hand.”<sup>86</sup> The laity is to sit

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<sup>84</sup> Pliny, *Letters*, Vols. 1 & 2, ed. T. E. Page et al., trans. William Melmoth, The Loeb Classical Library (London; New York: William Heinemann; The Macmillan Co., 1931), 2:405.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, trans. James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 7:410.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

1 quietly and in good order. The women sit by themselves in the same manner. Then, as the  
2 aspects of the service are described, it says:

3  
4 And while the Gospel is read, let all the presbyters and deacons, and all the  
5 people, stand up in great silence; for it is written: “Be silent, and hear, O  
6 Israel.” And again: “But do thou stand there, and hear.” In the next place, let  
7 the presbyters one by one, not all together, exhort the people, and the bishop  
8 in the last place, as being the commander. Let the porters stand at the entries  
9 of the men, and observe them. Let the deaconesses also stand at those of the  
10 women, like shipmen. For the same description and pattern was both in the  
11 tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple of God.<sup>87</sup>

12 Presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, men, women, and young people stood as groups while the  
13 aged and infirm were allowed to sit.

14 Further, in Book III, Section II of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, instructions are given on the  
15 ordination of deaconesses, specifying that they baptize other women for modesty’s sake as  
16 baptism evidently involved disrobing, total immersion, and receiving a white robe:

17  
18 Ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for ministrations toward  
19 women. For sometimes [the bishop] cannot send a deacon, who is a man, to  
20 the women, on account of unbelievers. Thou shalt therefore send a woman, a  
21 deaconess, on account of the imaginations of the bad. For we stand in need of  
22 a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities; and first in the baptism of  
23 women, the deacon shall anoint only their forehead with the holy oil, and  
24 after him the deaconess shall anoint them: for there is no necessity that  
25 women should be seen by men.<sup>88</sup>

26 Deaconesses ministered to other women and even baptized them. The same section  
27 describes the actual baptism:

28 After that [anointing with oil], either thou, O bishop, or a presbyter that is  
29 under thee, shall in the solemn form name over them the Father, and Son, and  
30 Holy Spirit, shall dip them in the water; and let a deacon receive the man, and  
31 a deaconess the woman, that so the conferring of this inviolable seal may take  
32 place with a becoming decency. And after that, let the bishop anoint those  
33 that are baptized with ointment.<sup>89</sup>

34 Evidently, women were baptized out of the sight of men. Women then went into the room  
35 where the church was assembled, and the presiding minister received them into the church.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

1 In Book VIII, Section III, chs. XIX and XX of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, instructions are  
2 given on procedures for ordaining a deaconess and the wording of the prayer, after  
3 instructions on ordaining a deacon are given:

4  
5 Concerning a deaconesses, I Bartholomew make this constitution: O bishop, thou  
6 shalt lay thy hands upon her in the presence of the presbytery, and of the deacons and  
7 the deaconesses and shalt say:— O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
8 the Creator of man and of woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and  
9 Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah; who did not disdain that Thy only begotten Son  
10 should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the  
11 temple, didst ordain women to be the keepers of Thy holy gates, :—do Thou now  
12 look upon this Thy servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and  
13 grant her Thy Holy Spirit and, “cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,”  
14 that she may worthily discharge the work that is committed to her to Thy glory, and  
15 the praise of Thy Christ, with whom glory and adoration be to Thee and the Holy  
16 Spirit for ever. Amen.<sup>90</sup>

17  
18 Though the committee believes that Presbyterian polity has roots in the Old Testament, the  
19 synagogue, and the New Testament, most church historians recognize that nascent  
20 episcopacy arose quite early in the life of the ancient church and developed in stages  
21 because of several factors over the first five centuries of the church, and that Presbyterian  
22 polity was not restored until the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

23  
24 The New Testament uses the terms elder/presbyter and bishop/overseer as synonyms. An  
25 Anglican bishop and New Testament and patristics scholar, J. B. Lightfoot argues, in an  
26 appendix to his commentary on the Greek text of Philippians, for the synonymous use of the  
27 terms.<sup>91</sup>

28  
29 Elder/bishop, a term more familiar to Jews, indicated spiritual maturity and bishop/overseer,  
30 a term more familiar to Gentiles for civil servants, was descriptive of function. Over time, a  
31 hierachal system developed with three levels of ministers: deacon, presbyter, and bishop,  
32 eventuating with the bishop of Rome functioning as a pope (Damasus, r. A.D. 366-384). Leo  
33 the Great was the first to use the title of pope (r. 440-461). The deacon of the New  
34 Testament era soon became an entry-level clergy position as hierarchy began developing in  
35 the second century. Yet, as previously evidenced in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, deaconesses  
36 arose early in the life of the church and continued, especially in the eastern churches.  
37 Although it died out over time, in the Reformation, the role of deaconess was revived.

38  
39 Different church traditions in various eras determined how deaconesses were to be ordained.  
40 In the history of the church, there were definite instances of deaconesses being ordained in  
41 the early centuries, and yet, later there were direct prohibitions of the ordination of

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>91</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot, ed., *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1913), 193–195.

1 deaconesses. This may be explained by the development of hierachal polity, by the  
2 sacerdotal understanding of presbyter/priest and bishop that evolved, and by the esteem  
3 celibacy enjoyed resulting in more women becoming nuns.

4  
5 The exact meaning of the ordination of deaconesses and when it took place is somewhat  
6 uncertain. The clergy lists from the first three centuries include deacons, presbyters, and  
7 bishops but also sub-deacons, deaconesses, exorcists, readers, musicians, and porters.  
8 Eventually, deacons, presbyters, and bishops were considered the major clergy, and sub-  
9 deacons, deaconesses, exorcists, readers, musicians, and porters were considered the minor  
10 clergy (recognized servants of the church).

11  
12 The regional and ecumenical councils of the church and the gatherings of colleges of  
13 bishops dealt with doctrinal issues, dealt with practical issues, and issued canons. The First  
14 Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (AD 325) produced a creed and a number of canons. Canon 19  
15 dealt with deaconesses: “And we mean by deaconesses such as have assumed the habit, but  
16 who, since they have no imposition of hands, are to be numbered among the laity.”<sup>92</sup>  
17 Evidently, “habit” was an early reference to nuns who began to wear distinctive clothing.

18  
19 A regional council, the Council of Orange (AD 441) in Gaul (France), issued thirty canons  
20 (one canon encouraged celibacy for deacons, presbyters, and bishops). Canon 26 explicitly  
21 forbade the ordination of deaconesses.<sup>93</sup> The Synods of Arles affirmed the Council of  
22 Orange’s canons in 443.

23  
24 The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), the Fourth Ecumenical Council mostly known for its  
25 definition of the person of Christ, also issued a canon (Canon XV) that a woman must be at  
26 least forty-years-old to be ordained as a deaconess.<sup>94</sup>

27  
28 In the Arabian Peninsula, as Christianity flourished before the rise of Islam, Dr. Robert L.  
29 Wilkens points out, “By the sixth century there was a well-established Arabic-speaking  
30 Christian community in Najran with a full ecclesiastical organization, bishop, presbyters,  
31 deacons, and deaconesses.”<sup>95</sup>

32  
33 By the time of the Emperor Justinian (d. 565), the Hagia Sophia listed forty deaconesses  
34 who served the church.

35  
36 The regional Council of Trullo, held in Constantinople in 692, issued a canon on age  
37 requirements for ordination. Canon 14 says, “Let the canon of our holy God-bearing Fathers  
38 be confirmed in this particular also; that a presbyter be not ordained before he is thirty years  
39 of age, even if he be a very worthy man, but let him be kept back. For our Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>92</sup> Henry R. Percival, “The Canons of the 318 Holy Fathers Assembled in the City of Nice, in Bithynia,” in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 14:40.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>95</sup> Robert L. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, (New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2012), 218.

1 was baptized and began to teach when he was thirty. In like manner let no deacon be  
2 ordained before he is twenty-five, nor a deaconess before she is forty.”

3  
4 The position of deaconesses died out over time, particularly in the Western church, for  
5 several reasons: 1) the rise of hierarchy (episcopacy) in which deacon became an entry-level  
6 office leading to presbyter; 2) the rise of a sacerdotal (priestly) view of the role of clergy and  
7 a resultant categorization of major and minor clergy with deaconesses being minor; 3) the  
8 growth of the role of nuns doing many of the mercy ministries formerly done by deaconesses  
9 as celibacy became more highly esteemed, particularly in the Western church; 4) with the  
10 spread of Christianity, most baptisms became infant baptisms, coupled with the preference  
11 for effusion (without a change of clothing) over immersion (which involved a change of  
12 clothing), so that deaconesses no longer baptized women for modesty’s sake.

13  
14 The Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Church (1545-1563) forbade the ordination of  
15 deaconesses because they did not have priestly functions. In May of 2017, however, Pope  
16 Francis announced that he was establishing a commission to study the possible reintroduction  
17 of deaconesses into the Roman Catholic Church.

18  
19 When John Calvin revived Presbyterian polity in sixteenth-century Geneva, he restored the  
20 collegial government of a plurality of elders, and restored the office of deacon to its New  
21 Testament nature as a ministry of mercy. The church at Geneva also had deaconesses who  
22 served under the deacons and ministered especially to women and children.<sup>96</sup> Calvin saw  
23 deacons as having two primary tasks based on Romans 12:8: 1) distribution of alms and  
24 financial management, and 2) care for the poor and the sick. Calvin viewed deaconesses as  
25 enrolled widows, based on 1 Timothy 5. There is no indication that the deaconesses of Geneva  
26 were ordained, though they had official ecclesiastical roles and evidently served under the  
27 leadership of the ordained, male deacons.

28  
29 In nineteenth century Germany, there was a renewal of unordained deaconesses in the  
30 Lutheran tradition. In 1836 the Rev. Theodore Fleidner and his wife opened a deaconess  
31 mother house in Kaiser Werth on the Rhine. Scandinavian Lutherans then established  
32 deaconesses. American Lutherans followed suit and began to encourage deaconess service.  
33 Clara Barton used Lutheran deaconess nurses in the Civil War. In 1888, Deaconess Hospital  
34 was established in Cincinnati. In 1895, a Lutheran deaconess training center was established  
35 in Baltimore.

36  
37 In the Church of England, Elizabeth Catherine Ferard visited Kaiser Werth. With the Bishop  
38 of London’s approval, she founded the North London Deaconess Institution, and received  
39 (unordained) deaconess License Number One from the Bishop of London.<sup>97</sup> In 1887,  
40 Isabelle Gilmore founded an order of Anglican deaconesses not living in community. Lady  
41 Grissel Baillie was recognized as a deaconess Church of Scotland (unordained) in the Church  
42 of Scotland in 1888. Deaconess Hospital was opened in Edinburgh in 1894 to honor her.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> See Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 4: Ch. 3: Sec. 9; and 4:13:15-19.

<sup>97</sup> <https://forallsaints.wordpress.com/2011/07/18/elizabeth-ferard-deaconess-1883>

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.charteriscentre.com/history> and <https://archive.org/details/b21709944>

1 In 1889 Lucy Rider Meyer M.D. led in the reviving of the office of unordained deaconess in  
2 the American Methodist Episcopal Church that eventually founded New England Deaconess  
3 Hospital in Boston in 1896.<sup>99</sup>

4 Further:

- 5 • In 1901, Mennonites founded Bethel Deaconess Home and Hospital Society in  
6 Beatrice, Kansas, that continues to this day.<sup>100</sup>
- 7 • After the 19<sup>th</sup> century resurgence, deaconesses both declined and diversified from  
8 primarily medical roles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The decline was due to several factors:
  - 9 • An increase in professional nurses' schools in state colleges and universities,  
10 and nursing schools associated with secular hospitals.
  - 11 • An increase in state-run schools of social work and the professionalization of  
12 social work.
  - 13 • The "Great Reversal" or conservative withdrawal from many aspects of social  
14 service in reaction to the social gospel movement during the fundamentalist-  
15 modernist controversy between WWI and WWII.
  - 16 • The growth of women's ordination to all offices in the mainline denominations.
- 17 • The diversification occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as unordained deaconesses moved  
18 beyond being nurses or social workers. For example, unordained deaconesses in the  
19 Lutheran Deaconess Association (LCMS and ELCA) serve in a number of functions  
20 to express the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup> For example:
  - 21 • Medical service as physicians, nurses, midwives, physical therapists, and  
22 occupational therapists.
  - 23 • Teaching from pre-K to the professional and graduate levels.
  - 24 • Music ministry.
  - 25 • Administration in the local church or non-profit organizations.
  - 26 • Campus ministry to women.
  - 27 • Institutional ministry in hospitals, hospices, jails, and prisons.
  - 28 • Legal services to and advocacy for the poor as lawyers or paralegals.
  - 29 • Cross-cultural or inner-city missionaries in the US and abroad.
  - 30 • Educational mentors to the disadvantaged.
  - 31 • Geriatric care.

32 This brief survey from the ancient church era to the twentieth century demonstrates that in  
33 the various branches of Christ's church, women have served a vital, necessary, and varied  
34 role in diaconate ministry. While there have been periods and denominations when women  
35 were ordained to this service, what has been most consistent is that they were recognized,  
36 screened, and set apart for it.

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<sup>99</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucy-Jane-Rider-Meyer>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.bethelks.edu/alumni/alumni-association/bethel-college-nursing-alumni-association/history-of-the-bethel-deaconess-hospital/>

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.thelda.org/about/history.php>

1 It is a commendable and necessary task to identify, encourage, equip, and empower women  
2 to the full use of their gifts in the gathered assembly of God's people and the scattered  
3 ministry of God's people as the church fulfills both the Great Commission and the Great  
4 Commandment. Additionally, the full use of gifts must not be defined or implemented in  
5 any way that undermines the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the church and  
6 the family or contradicts biblical exhortations and prohibitions. In a word, the biblically  
7 defined complementarian relationship of men and women in the family and church is to be  
8 embraced (including ordination as the PCA has defined it), and inconsistent practices should  
9 not undermine or contradict it.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ENCOURAGING A ROBUST AND GRACIOUS COMPLEMENTARIAN PRACTICE**

**Gen. 1:27-30** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

**Gal. 3:27-28** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The infallible rule for the church's faith and practice is the Word of God. The first thing the Bible declares about human beings is that they are made in the image of God. God speaks in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." God's church gladly confesses that by the renewal of the Spirit, she ever more reflects the glory of God (Eph. 3:19; Eph. 4:23-24), who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Indeed, the confession of the Trinity is the heartbeat of the Christian religion.<sup>102</sup> No analogies in the surrounding world adequately convey the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>103</sup> The most fitting analogy available is God's declaration that humanity is made in His image.

The declaration in Genesis 1 establishes humanity's unique place in God's kingdom. God has given people the unique role of image-bearer.<sup>104</sup> This means that individual human beings possess inherent dignity and worth. Further, this inherent dignity and worth is particularly declared of humanity as male and female. Herman Bavinck reinforces this high position of men and women when he highlights, "in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed confession, the idea that a human being does not *bear* or *have* the image of God but that he or she *is* the image of God."<sup>105</sup> Men and women are truly and essentially human only because they are the image of God. For Bavinck, all other creatures display vestiges of God. Only a human being is the image of God:

<sup>102</sup> Herman Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, trans., John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 258.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 6.

<sup>104</sup> Richard Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 7.

<sup>105</sup> Bavinck, 554.

The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members. Just as the traces of God (*vestigia Dei*) are spread over many, many works, in both space and time, so also the image of God can only be displayed in all its dimensions and characteristic features in a humanity whose members exist both successively one after the other and contemporaneously side by side...Only humanity in its entirety—as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth, as prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation—only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God.<sup>106</sup>

Human beings image God individually but most strikingly as a community. The commands of Genesis 1:28-30 are tied to how humanity images God. To multiply and fill the earth and to exercise dominion are all impossible to carry out as solitary individuals. In creation, human destiny is in community because humanity images the triune God who lives in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nonna Harrison rightly points this truth out when she says, “The unity of humankind is an important facet of the image of God, who is one. Humankind is a multiplicity of persons who are united in one body, just as God is three persons united in one essence.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, when humanity is united in loving community, it reflects the inner life of the triune God.

God’s first and primary example of a united, loving community imaging Him was male and female together. They are equal in value, worth, and dignity while simultaneously different. Genesis 1:26-27 records the distinction between male and female, before sin permeated their being and wrought corruption. Therefore, the difference between male and female is a gift to be celebrated, not a handicap to be hidden. Further, because men and women are meant to complement one another in the creation order, each must be able to flourish in the context of covenant community.

Some have argued that, in the new covenant community, those complementarian differences are dissolved. This conclusion is drawn from texts like Galatians 3:28. While Paul’s words are central to understanding the equality of all believers in Christ as “sons of God,” they do not obliterate distinctions and differences. The “RPCES Study Committee Report on the Role of Women in the Church (1976)” summarized the concept well:

Because *all* are thus shut up to sin and can be saved only by faith, *all* come before God on equal footing, their race, sex, or state of bondage (Jew/Greek, male/female, bond/free) having no effect whatsoever on their right to stand before God. It is in this frame of reference that Paul declares, “You are *all* sons of God through faith in Christ, for as many of you as were baptized into

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Nonna Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 173.

1 Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither  
2 bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ  
3 Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according  
4 to the promise.<sup>108</sup>

5  
6 The new covenant does not seek to overcome the distinctions between men and women.  
7 Rather, it affirms, as does all of Scripture, that all people come before God on equal footing  
8 by faith with no privileges afforded by race, gender, or ethnicity. The oneness that the  
9 apostle speaks to here and elsewhere (cf. Eph. 4:4-7; Col. 3:11) is to be demonstrated in  
10 practice within the church.

11  
12 From the beginning, man and woman, who were designed to be God worshipers (Gen. 2:3,  
13 16, 17; Exod. 20:11), enjoyed perfect harmony with God and with one another. The act of  
14 disobedience to God's command (non-worship of God, worship of self) brought about  
15 immediate and devastating effects. Though still recognizable, the image of God in sinful  
16 man and woman was shattered. God's law is perfect, and is meant to regulate people's  
17 thoughts, words, and actions. When people obey God's commands, that obedience is an  
18 expression of and in harmony with God's perfection. This standard of behavior, found in the  
19 image of God, "makes it possible for [us] to have [our] life and conduct patterned after the  
20 exemplar which the attitude and actions of God provide, that is, an intrinsic affinity, depraved  
21 and perverted by the fall, yet not obliterated."<sup>109</sup> Since the fall, every relationship has  
22 evidence of brokenness. Every image-bearer has need of a Savior.

23  
24 Geerhardus Vos explains that the doctrine of the image of God "is of the utmost moment for  
25 soteriology—... God's work of grace ... must renovate the image in man."<sup>110</sup> The grace-  
26 wrought restoration of the image of God is an important part of salvation. In Christ, there is  
27 hope of renewal. People are reconciled to God. He is actively restoring that broken image of  
28 Himself in every believer. He is at work making relationships whole and healthy, "[a]nd we  
29 all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
30 image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18).

31  
32 Redeemed men and women with equal value, worth, and standing in the covenant community  
33 of God are privileged to live out distinctive male and female roles with responsibilities  
34 which complement one another and bring glory to Creator God.<sup>111</sup> Part of the way this  
35 occurs is as the gifts God gives to men and women are given room to flourish within the  
36 bounds of the distinctions declared in His Word. By following God's design, men and  
37 women find both personal fulfillment and spiritual growth because it is His goal to make  
38 them like their Savior: "Thus the process of sanctification can be described in its richest  
39 meaning as transformation into the image of Christ."<sup>112</sup> What was broken at the fall is being

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<sup>108</sup> "RPCES Study Committee Report on the Role of Women in the Church (1976)," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.pcahistory.org/findingaids/rpces/docsynod/390.html>, 4.

<sup>109</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Systematic Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1982), 2:38.

<sup>110</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: Anthropology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 2:15.

<sup>111</sup> "Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory." John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 1:690.

<sup>112</sup> Murray, 2:310.

1 restored through His commitment to remake men and women in His image: “I appeal to you  
2 therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy  
3 and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom.12:1).

4

### 5                   **Various Complementarian Practices in the PCA**

6

7 While upholding a complementarian view of women’s role in the church’s ministries,  
8 practices within the PCA vary as sessions wrestle with this question of biblical fidelity and  
9 encouraging women in their churches to use their gifts to God’s glory and for the church’s  
10 edification. Though many ministries among women and children exist where women have  
11 universal opportunities to use their gifts, a variety of practices are available to women in  
12 teaching ministries, through diaconal work, and in public worship.

13

#### 14                  **The Teaching Ministries**

15

16 Generally, churches within the PCA fall into one of three different practices with regard to  
17 women teaching in the church. (1) Some churches provide qualified women teaching  
18 opportunities only to women and/or children and under the session’s authority. (2) Some  
19 churches permit qualified women to teach mixed gender groups with her husband or an elder  
20 and under the session’s authority. (3) Some churches permit qualified women to teach mixed  
21 adult gender groups under the session’s authority.

22

#### 23                  **The Diaconal Work**

24

25 Again, churches within the PCA generally fall into one of three different practices with  
26 regard to the involvement of women in diaconal work. (1) Some churches only permit  
27 ordained men to perform diaconal work in the church in any formal way. This does not  
28 mean these churches exclude women from coming alongside deacons while ministering to  
29 single women, mercy ministries, et cetera. However, there is no formal role or intentional  
30 process to encourage women to serve in diaconal work. (2) Some churches have created a  
31 formal role for qualified women to serve in diaconal work. These churches’ sessions either  
32 appoint and/or commission qualified women for this work. These women are often given the  
33 title “deacon assistant” or “deaconess.” This practice is already permitted in the *BCO*.  
34 (3) Some churches have chosen not to have a formal diaconate and instead have qualified  
35 lay men and women serve together performing the diaconal work in their churches. Though  
36 this practice is not specifically prohibited by the *BCO*, it seems poorly aligned with the spirit  
37 of the two offices of the church outlined in the *BCO*.

38

#### 39                  **Public Worship**

40

41 And finally, churches within the PCA generally fall into one of three different practices with  
42 regard to the involvement of women in the public worship services of the local churches.  
43 (1) Some churches have no leadership roles for the laity, and thus their women, in their  
44 worship services. (2) Some churches open some roles in their public worship service to  
45 laity, and thus their women, including leading the congregation in singing, taking up

offerings, reading Scripture, distributing elements in the Lord's Supper, leading in prayers, making announcements, et cetera. (3) Some churches open roles for women in their worship services by restricting the preaching, and sometimes the reading of the Scriptures, to ordained men and then stating that all other roles in public worship are open to the church's qualified men and women members.

## **Identifying and Making Room for Women's Gifts and Abilities to Flourish**

The committee is hopeful that faithful elders are already exerting themselves to identify and find ways to utilize the gifts and abilities of women in their congregation. Doing so contributes to their personal flourishing, and also the health of entire body. However, at least two disturbing trends cause the committee to conclude that more pastors and sessions need to be intentional about focusing on women's spiritual lives and ministries in their congregations.

### **The Problem**

As one example, some on social media have asserted that women's ministries can be seen as a relegation of women to a secondary place, rather than a healthy functioning as part of the whole. The local church's women's ministry can therefore be marginalized, causing their efforts to be trivialized. The vision and mission of women's ministries should "reflect the total philosophy, purpose, and goals"<sup>113</sup> of the local church. But, instead of being "intentional and strategic" in this mission, women's meetings often become social clubs which neither "teach women to think biblically" nor "build community with other members, age groups and ministries of the church."<sup>114</sup>

Further, women are increasingly turning to para-church ministries, both for instruction (which is often theologically suspect) and to exercise their gifts (with no oversight from elders.) In fact, it is the rare pastor who knows the names of the women who loom large in para-church "women's ministries," much less the conferences, websites, blogs, and curriculum that women are turning to in the absence of intentional oversight and nourishment from their sessions. This lack of shepherding and oversight can also be the result of failed women's ministry as mentioned previously. Women will seek a relational context for their faith, and if they do not find substance in the context of their local church, they will seek it elsewhere. This applies to women of ethnic minority and majority cultures alike. For example, one African American woman explained,

I have credible seminal ideas, built on sound orthodoxy. I'm under no suspicion of heresy. I write freely for a number of publications. And yet, I've since decided to go into government think tanks and foreign policy - there's more freedom there than is afforded me by my own denomination.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Susan Hunt, *Women's Ministry Training and Resource Guide* (CE&P, 2007), 110-111.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> This was part of a response to the committee's survey question, "What have been your primary blessings and challenges as an African American woman in the PCA?"

1 It is important to note that the ethnic minority women whom the committee contacted  
2 expressed gratitude for the PCA's doctrinal integrity, the polity which allows for checks and  
3 balances in church governance, the emphasis on the doctrines of God's glorious grace, and  
4 the ability to make relationships with Christian sisters from various cultures and economic  
5 standings. Yet, they encouraged the denomination to do more than simply "allow" or  
6 "tolerate" women in ministry. Rather, they encouraged the PCA to invite and involve  
7 women to participate wherever and whenever possible.

8  
9 Finally, women in the PCA may face an identity crisis. This identity crisis is related to the  
10 spiritual characteristic of a woman's role of submission. Unless her submission to the  
11 session's headship is treated with honor and tenderness, she begins to lose sight of its worth  
12 and her Lord's delight in her exercise of it.

13  
**The Solution**

14 Remember the foundational structure. The Creator God has designed His people to flourish  
15 in certain environments, and they will struggle in environments not designed for them. In  
16 order for women in the church to flourish, and the church as a whole to flourish, its officers  
17 and its members (in this case particularly, its women) must support and encourage one  
18 another, with adherence to the order and structure determined for the church. With Christ as  
19 the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25), our Head (Eph. 1:22-23), and our King  
20 (Rev. 19:16), men and women must strive together in grace-driven obedience (Rom. 6:14)  
21 and allegiance to His rule. Male and female interdependence is a key element of the  
22 structure of the local church, for "in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of  
23 woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things  
24 are from God" (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

25  
26 For the sake of Christ and His church, the committee encourages all women in the local  
27 church, as an exhibition of their love of God and neighbor (1 John 5:2-3), intentionally to:

- 28
- 31     ● recognize and honor the authority and rule given to the elders of the church and  
32       strive to support, help, and obey them as God has placed these male leaders over  
33       them (Heb. 13:7, 9, 17).
  - 34     ● avoid contempt for or disparagement toward the male leadership (Eph. 4:29; 2  
35       Tim. 2:14; Titus 2:3).
  - 36     ● commit themselves to humble service, doing what is needed in every area of  
37       service which Scripture allows, seeking to honor their Master who came "not to  
38       be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28; Gal. 5:13; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 2:16).
  - 39     ● develop and utilize their God-given gifts in ways that uphold the structure of the  
40       church and the family, express love and unity with others, and undergird the  
41       pulpit ministry (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 13:1-14:1; Eph. 4:1-16; Eph. 5:22-24).

42  
43 For the sake of Christ and His church (which church includes the women who are committed  
44       to fulfill their role in the above exhortation), the committee encourages the elders in each  
45       local church, as an exhibition of their love for God and neighbor, intentionally to:

- 1      • recognize and honor the women who are under their authority as vital members  
2      of the body of Christ, leading them as shepherds who must give an account (1  
3      Cor.11:11; Gal. 3:28; Heb. 13:17).
- 4      • feed them sound doctrine and provide direction and nourishment for their souls  
5      (John 21:15-17; Titus 1:9; Titus 2:1).
- 6      • protect them from false doctrine and false teaching (Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1).
- 7      • neither demean nor discourage them (Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:26).
- 8      • provide opportunities for the development and utilization of women's gifts in  
9      every area of service that Scripture allows (Eph. 4:15-16).
- 10     • foster an atmosphere of trust and respect for their office under Christ by living  
11     trustworthily and honorably, showing true concern and gentle care for those  
12     entrusted to them (Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

## 14     **The Process**

15     As with any person in the church, in order to identify gifts that a layman or laywoman may  
16     have for the nourishment of Christ's body, that person must have an opportunity to exhibit  
17     giftedness in an area by ministering in it. Quite often, a person's gifts may be discovered  
18     through an intentional training process that is a further opportunity to foster community.

21     Many women and men are understandably reluctant to attempt something they have never  
22     done previously, so the committee suggests that invitations to participate in some area of  
23     church ministry be given a specific time frame. For instance, "Would you be willing to give  
24     the talks to children's church for the month of April?" or "Would you volunteer to meet with  
25     the deacons 3 or 4 times to help them with some of the people they are working with, using  
26     your financial planning (or nutritional/education/whatever) expertise?"

28     There are a great number of books and articles available that lay out the way a pastor (or a  
29     manager, in a secular setting) can discover and promote the gifts of those of whom he is in  
30     charge. The ground is well trodden.

32     Next, women whose gifts are already identified, and especially those who have had  
33     theological training, experience on the mission field, or other ministry experience, need their  
34     pastors and elders to find appropriate ways for those gifts to be used within their churches.  
35     The committee would like to stem the tide of women gravitating toward para-church  
36     ministries or personal blogs rather than finding a place within their own churches to  
37     minister. This may entail hiring a woman for a non-ordained staff position, or inviting  
38     women to advisory positions, to give announcements, or to participate other ways in the  
39     worship service. Women should also be encouraged to grow in their knowledge of God and  
40     the church through seminary courses and training sessions offered by CDM.<sup>116</sup> While each  
41     session must determine what the non-negotiable biblical guidelines are, the committee  
42

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<sup>116</sup> Women who have seminary training should also be trained to counsel women. Equipped women could handle more effectively many of the unique problems women are facing. Hunt and Hutcheson, *Leadership for Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 143.

1 encourages ruling and teaching elders to observe faithfully all the biblical teaching about the  
2 range of ways in which women may use their gifts, and not to be bound by traditions that  
3 may be merely cultural.

4

5 **Encouraging Staff Roles for Qualified Women Working with the Church's Session**

6

7 Any women holding staff positions in a church would have the same relationship to the  
8 session as non-ordained men who fill staff positions, such as but not limited to: attending  
9 session meetings to report or receive instruction; executing the session's vision in the  
10 positions for which they have been hired; managing the budgets allocated to them and  
11 reporting on disbursement of funds...in short, fulfilling whatever is required of any person in  
12 a staff position.

13

14 Good leadership involves utilizing the best resources in deliberations and decision-making.  
15 When sessions include women staff members—such as directors of women's ministries and  
16 directors of children's ministries, to name only two—in their meetings, the large majority of  
17 the people in churches are then represented by someone who knows and represents them—  
18 someone who can give insight into their needs and spiritual maturity, knows how decisions  
19 will affect them, and can speak for them. Elders of the session need the help of women staff  
20 members, and elders are fulfilling their God-ordained role by encouraging women to offer  
21 their gifts to complement the session in their leadership by being present to help them.

22

23 Since the *BCO* permits any member to attend and observe session meetings when they are  
24 not in executive session, technically women can choose to attend session meetings on their  
25 own initiative and for no higher motivation than curiosity, though very, very few would do  
26 so. It is far better to issue invitations to those women (and laymen) who can actually assist  
27 the session by offering gifts such as communication, financial planning, real estate  
28 development, and human resources expertise, to name only a few. Invitations to women  
29 filling staff positions would of course be expected and encouraged, along with laymen who  
30 fill staff positions.

31

32 The committee cannot and does not desire to legislate the working of individual sessions or  
33 their relationship with their staff and members. However, the committee encourages sessions  
34 in churches that have unordained staff positions to consider hiring qualified women,  
35 possibly even before qualified men. The church staff will of necessity have primarily  
36 ordained men, and women will never be ordained. Thus, the committee encourages  
37 preferring women for non-ordained staff positions, such as director of children's ministry,  
38 director of women's ministry, director of adult education/discipleship, treasurer/accountant,  
39 administrator, or director of assimilation. This could be desirable for these reasons: it gives  
40 qualified women an outlet for their gifts; it encourages PCA women to pursue theological  
41 education, knowing that there will be employment options for them to serve; it gives  
42 visibility to women who can model mature female leadership; it demonstrates before the  
43 watching world that the church is a body that practices biblical inclusion and women are co-  
44 heirs of grace.

1   **How Can We Affirm Women Who Have Obvious Bible-Teaching Skills?**

2  
3   When some of the early Christians witnessed the fulfillment of Joel 2:29, “Even on my  
4   servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days,” on Pentecost (and  
5   subsequent fillings of the Spirit in Acts), their response was to adopt a unisex approach to  
6   life and ministry. Paul addresses correctively this approach in his first letter to the  
7   Corinthians. God created and continues to uphold the dual gendered roles that He made at  
8   creation—male and female. God has also poured out His Spirit on “both men and women”  
9   and given gifts meant for the flourishing of Christ’s body and the spread of the good news of  
10   the gospel of Jesus Christ.

11  
12   Yet, many of the gifts given to women have been overlooked and neglected in their own  
13   churches, forcing women either to bury the “talent” that has been given them, or go outside  
14   the church to para-church ministries in order to use their gifts.

15  
16   While gifts must always be used appropriately within the roles to which women have been  
17   called, the local church should actively seek ways to identify and use the gifts of the Holy  
18   Spirit that exist within its midst.

19  
20   That some of these gifts may be the ability to explain scriptural teaching or theological truth  
21   should not surprise or threaten the church leadership where these women attend. There are  
22   two schools of thought within the committee:

- 23  
24     1) If women are teaching men at the invitation and under the correction of their  
25       sessions, the women’s gifts will only enrich the congregation. Some of the  
26       committee members do not believe that teaching the Bible carries any juridical  
27       authority, since no lay person has the ability to place a person under discipline if  
28       they disagree with what is being taught.  
29     2) There are some who believe that women are not allowed to teach men in a formal,  
30       ongoing role of teacher in the local church, but that there are isolated and  
31       informal circumstances in which women may share biblical truths with men that  
32       will edify the body (e.g., Aquila and Priscilla informally teaching Apollos in Acts  
33       18:26). They also believe that because of that restriction, God’s Word would not  
34       allow sessions to permit women to teach men in the formal role of teacher in the  
35       local church.

36  
37   However, within each school of thought, there is agreement that the local session would  
38   have oversight to determine the extent and circumstances that they deem appropriate.

39  
40   Churches should consider creative ways in which to utilize the teaching gifts of laymen and  
41   laywomen in their midst, such as (but not limited to):

- 42  
43     • a “Skeptics Welcome” café wherein, once a week, church members invite non-  
44       believers to bring their questions for informal discussion. A permanent and/or  
45       rotating team of apologetically trained men and women who are comfortable

1 talking to unbelievers would be a good place for lay women to assist pastors,  
2 elders, or other trained men. In fact, they would be necessary if women attending  
3 were to feel comfortable and heard.

- 4 • homeless shelters, refuges for battered women, hospital wards, nursing homes,  
5 Christian schools, college fellowships, Mom's groups  
6 • kids community groups: large group weeknight fellowship for elementary and  
7 middle school kids, with music, small group Bible study, crafts, et cetera  
8 • Women, chosen and supervised by the session, can teach Sunday school classes  
9 to adults, midweek Bible study classes (at the church or in homes), or other  
10 venues  
11 • Vacation Bible School and other children's ministries like Fun with Faith and  
12 Backyard Bible Clubs  
13 • Train women to give their personal testimonies as well as to teach the Bible for  
14 women's retreats, luncheons, teas, Christmas events, and so forth.

15 The primary need is the encouragement and respect of the church's male leadership who can  
16 either nourish or break the heart of a woman who is trying to serve God. Encouragement and  
17 respect can take the form of ongoing training in teaching, Bible, and theology, sending  
18 women to the yearly PCA women's leadership training conferences, and/or encouraging  
19 women to take seminary courses, and earn seminary degrees, including offering financial  
20 help if possible.

21 There is additional benefit to churches finding ways to deploy gifted women teachers in  
22 their midst. In a connected world, gifted men and women regularly develop websites and  
23 blogs as a platform for instruction. When churches recognize a gifted woman's teaching  
24 ministry and incorporate it into the church's ministry, the expansion of that ministry is an  
25 expansion of that church. Her web presence could be incorporated into or linked to her  
26 church's, where she is blessed to have oversight by a small group of mature men and women  
27 advisers from the church who would help her set her schedule, review her teaching, and give  
28 her accountability for her ministry.

29 Finally, women should find great encouragement in the valuable role of weekly teaching  
30 children through Sunday school classes, catechism classes (such as Kid's Quest, etc.), and  
31 regular women's Bible studies. These venues of teaching offer inestimable benefit to the  
32 kingdom and the growth of believers.

33

## CHAPTER FIVE PASTORAL LETTER AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In His inexhaustible creativity and unfailing purposes, God created man as male and female in His image and after His likeness (Gen. 1:26). As image bearers, humanity has the great privilege and high honor to glorify God by ruling over creation, being fruitful, filling the earth, and cultivating its potential (WSC Q/A 1; Gen. 1:28).

Although sin has marred the image of God in man (Gen. 5:3), the Lord continues to uphold the dual gendered roles that He marvelously made: male and female. This creation order enables humanity to employ its complementary gifts that quite obviously could not be obeyed by a single gender. After all, why else did God say, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18)?

While the fall has touched and twisted all of creation, God has never revoked His blessings on men and women working together to glorify Him with their obedience, creativity, productivity, and union. In fact, as part of His redemption, God has poured out His Spirit on “both men and women” (Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17) and has given gifts meant for the flourishing of the body of Christ and the spread of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

While gifts must always be used appropriately within the roles to which women have been called, it is the committee’s hope that at the local, regional, and national levels, the church would actively seek ways to identify and use all the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given within their midst.

Sadly, not all the women of the PCA have experienced affirmation of their gifts and encouragement to serve the church within the parameters of biblical teaching. Many who fully embrace the Bible’s teaching about complementary gender roles have experienced a climate in the local church more focused on *what women cannot do* rather than one fostering a biblically informed culture of *what women are called to do*.

The committee affirms wholeheartedly that the Bible requires women’s gifts to be fully employed within biblical parameters. Anything to the contrary has only wounded the body of Christ, robbed it of many of God’s gifts, and caused outsiders to question the church’s devotion to the Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice. Moving forward, the committee desires to see churches utilize women’s gifts and abilities so that they may, as Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1 says, “Glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

In this letter, the committee hopes to give practical suggestions and encouragement for how ruling and teaching elders, as those with God-ordained headship, may encourage women to use their gifts and talents to serve in biblical ways in the various ministries of their congregation and our denomination, making it possible both for women and for the church to fulfill their callings from the Lord.

#### **Recommendations [as adopted by the 45<sup>th</sup> General Assembly]:**

1. That Overture 3 from Westminster Presbytery, “Declare that the 44<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Erred in the Formation of an Ad Interim Committee on the Role of Women as not Being Properly before the Court, and Dismiss the Ad Interim Committee with Apology,” be answered in the negative. Adopted
  2. That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly recognize that, from the founding of the PCA, there has been a variety of views and practices regarding the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church within scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination, and that such mutual respect for said views and practices continues. Adopted

Rationale: The Scriptures and the constitution of the PCA state that offices of the church are only open to qualified and ordained men. But the committee also recognizes that the Scriptures and the constitution of the PCA give freedom to its churches with regard to varying views and practices by its churches in the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church. This freedom of view and practice has also been part of the PCA's history. For instance, regarding millennial and creation views, the PCA has enjoyed liberty within confessional parameters. In other denominations, these differences would have been grounds for separation.

Therefore, the committee recommends that ruling and teaching elders continue this recognition of freedom within PCA churches to utilize women's gifts within the scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination. The committee recommends that such mutual respect for views and practices within these parameters continue. The committee believes this freedom of views and practices within PCA churches where Scripture and the constitution allow for freedom is a strength of the denomination and should be valued by the whole church.

3. That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly strive to develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of godly women in the local, regional, and national church, and particularly consider overtures that would allow qualified women to serve on appropriate committees and agencies within the church.

Rationale: The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit has given gifts to the church for the glory of God and the edification of the church (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:11-16). Churches should strive to identify, develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of all their members. The committee encourages all PCA churches to do so particularly and especially among their godly women members. The committee further encourages PCA churches to utilize the gifts, skills, and knowledge of women by particularly and especially promoting and recruiting qualified women to serve on appropriate committees within the church. Commissions, unlike committees, are

1 elected by governing courts to act on behalf of the governing court and should remain  
2 open only to members of the governing court.

3  
4 The committee recognizes that many PCA churches, as well as some presbyteries,  
5 already strive to utilize qualified women on their committees. Currently, membership of  
6 the Committees and Agencies of the PCA's General Assembly are only open to ordained  
7 men. Some denominational Boards have women advisory committees. The General  
8 Assembly has appointed women to study committees, like the one compiling this report.  
9 Currently, however, the PCA's Committees, Boards, and Agencies are only open to  
10 ordained men. The committee advises sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly  
11 to consider making overtures to the General Assembly identifying appropriate  
12 Committees and Agencies in which women should serve as members and amending *The*  
13 *Book of Church Order* to allow women to do so.

14  
15 **4. That sessions, if possible, establish a diaconate of qualified ordained men.**

16 **Adopted As Amended**

17  
18 Rationale: There is at least anecdotal evidence that some PCA churches are choosing not  
19 to establish an ordained diaconate, even with qualified candidates, because the church  
20 wishes to be free to establish a body of unordained servants, both male and female (*BCO*  
21 9-7). Yet, the absence of a body of ordained deacons appears to miss the Lord's will for  
22 His church, named in several New Testament texts and described in the PCA *Book of*  
23 *Church Order*.

24  
25 First, in Philippians 1:1, Paul addresses the saints, overseers, and deacons of the Philippian  
26 church because overseers and deacons led the church together. Second, 1 Timothy 3  
27 describes the qualifications of elders and deacons, assuming that a church will have both  
28 elders and deacons. He states, regarding deacons, "those who serve well as deacons gain  
29 a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ  
30 Jesus." Third, in his discussion of elders and deacons, Paul said he wrote that they "may  
31 know how one ought to behave [or "conduct oneself"] in the household of God." Finally,  
32 the New Testament gift lists mention the gift of service, which a body of seven men had  
33 and exercised to great effect in the life of the apostolic church (Acts 6:1-7).

34  
35 Therefore, with sound biblical warrant, *BCO* 9-4 begins, "The deacons of a particular  
36 church shall be organized as a Board." The imperative sense of the verb has historically  
37 been construed as a mandate with a limited caveat: a new or small church may not have  
38 enough trained leaders to ordain both elders and deacons. But the PCA's agreed upon  
39 polity acknowledges the importance of the work of the deacon in the local church.

5. That sessions consider how to include non-ordained men and women in the worship of the church so as to maintain faithfulness to Scripture, as well as utilizing the gifts God has poured out to His entire church (see exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26 in Chapter Two). Adopted

Rationale: Within a complementarian framework, there is substantial, non-controversial opportunity for non-ordained men and women to participate in the leadership of a worship service, in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14:26.

Some examples of how a session might implement this follow. First, in music, a session might allow men and women to lead congregational or choral singing. Second, men and women may "stir up one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24) by describing the value of upcoming ministries of mercy and disciple-making. Third, men and women might promote corporate worship by testifying or praising God for the favor He shows to ministries of the church. Fourth, granting that many sessions are convinced that a pastoral prayer and a prayer for the illumination of Scripture are reserved for elders, men and women might lead other prayers of petition or praise. Fifth, within the parameters of Larger Catechism 156, the session might authorize various persons to read Scripture. Granting that many sessions are convinced that the reading of the Scripture before the sermon is part of the sermon, there are other occasions to read Scripture in worship liturgies, such as responsive readings. Sixth, non-ordained men and women might make doxological announcements (praise for the work of God in a local congregation) or bring greetings that encourage the body (Heb. 3:13).

6. *BCO* 9-7 says: "It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (*BCO* 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (*BCO* 17)." Thus, for the well-being of the church, the committee recommends **that sessions and presbyteries select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the ordained diaconate.**

## **Adopted As Amended**

Rationale: *BCO* 9-7 presently provides for sessions to recognize the unordained women laboring in diaconal work alongside ordained deacons. These women have been given a variety of names, job descriptions, and roles (within the parameters of Scripture and the confession), and thus, it is appropriate for sessions to establish the role of unordained deaconess to assist the deacons in their labors.

A way to recognize these women, following training and testing, is through commissioning. Commissioning is a general term, used for occasions when people are set apart for a particular task, usually accompanied by public prayer.

This action is practiced already in many, if not most, PCA churches, to set apart and pray for those embarking on missionary endeavors, (life-time or short-term) or anyone being

1 sent out for a particular task, such as an evangelistic team, Vacation Bible School  
2 leaders, or other occasions.

3  
4 The minutes of the PCA's First General Assembly in 1973 record the commissioning of  
5 six missionaries, three men and three women. The minutes record:

6  
7 The following new National Presbyterian Church missionaries were  
8 presented and commissioned in a service in which Ruling Elder Gerald  
9 Sovereign led in prayer, Ruling Elder Roger DeHaven read Scripture, and  
10 Teaching Elder Will McIlwaine pronounced the benediction: Mr. and Mrs.  
11 [Marie] John Lynch, Rev. Cecilio Woody Lajara, Dr. and Mrs. [Rebecca]  
12 Peter Jones, and Miss Ellen [Sue] Barnett (*MIGA*, 1973, item 1-56, p. 37).

13  
14 Note that the term "commissioned" is used. Messrs. Lajara and Jones were already ordained  
15 teaching elders. The minutes do not reflect whether Mr. Lynch was unordained, or if he  
16 were an ordained ruling elder or deacon. Mrs. Lynch, Mrs. Jones, and Miss Barnett were  
17 not ordained. The General Assembly publicly commissioned all six people as  
18 missionaries, those who were ordained along with those who were not ordained.

19  
20 **7. That presbyteries and the General Assembly consider an overture that would  
21 establish formally the right of sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly to  
22 establish the position of commissioned church worker within the PCA for qualified  
23 and gifted unordained men and women.** Adopted

24  
25 Rationale: Presbyterianism in America has, in the past, recognized the need to set apart  
26 qualified women and men for service in the church outside of licensure and ordination.  
27 This was accomplished by establishing the category of commissioned church worker.  
28 For example, the 1938 PCUSA *Digest* describes the qualifications and requirements for  
29 people desiring to serve as a commissioned church worker in similar manner to licensure  
30 and ordination candidates. However, it clearly states, "the status of Commissioned  
31 Church Worker is never to be considered as having any relationship to or association  
32 with licensure, or ordination...nor does this status, when received, confer any ministerial  
33 rights and privileges."

34  
35 The committee believes that this category could potentially address a number of issues in  
36 the PCA. While it would not represent an office, it would recognize those whose lives  
37 have been given in service to the body. An unordained man or woman would have to  
38 receive advanced training and experience appropriate to their area of service.

39  
40 This category would be a way to recognize trained and committed staff members who  
41 were making service to the church their life's work. This benefit for commissioned  
42 church workers may redress an inequity in compensation that mostly affects women,  
43 who are in non-licensed and non-ordained full-time ministry  
44 (<https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc417.html>).

The commissioning service for this work could be done in a manner distinct from an ordination service, in order to *emphasize deliberately that it is NOT ordination*, thus protecting ordination to ruling and teaching elders as a qualified-male-only calling.

The committee believes that commissioned church worker is a category that is long overdue in the PCA. Again, while it would not represent an office, it would recognize people whose lives have been given to serve in the body. The committee favors adding this as a category in the PCA, not an office. The category would carry no authority, merely recognition. No *BCO* changes would be necessary. The category could apply to deaconesses, women staff members who have theological degrees, or others as determined by the General Assembly.

8. That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly consider how they can affirm and include underprivileged and underrepresented women in the PCA. Adopted

Rationale: After Jesus rose from the dead, He commanded His apostles: “Therefore, go make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18). Jesus, our great King, prescribes the mission of His church, which, in part, is to ensure the nations become His disciples (cf. WCF 7.6). The overflow of the Great Commission is revealed in Acts. The names in Acts 13:1 demonstrate that Jesus’ disciples took His commission seriously. Indeed, people from different ethnic backgrounds were coming to faith in Christ. Unfortunately, the PCA, though it upholds the mandate to make disciples of the nations, has yet to see the demographics in diverse communities reflected in local churches. Therefore, as the PCA considers the Great Commission afresh, local churches should affirm that intentionally reaching the nations in their communities is not an addition to the church’s ministry. It is a demand, even command, by Jesus as a principle part of their church’s ministry.

Acts 6:1-7 sets precedent for affirming the underprivileged. Whether male or female, everyone deserved equal treatment in Christ's church (cf. Jas. 2:1-13). Perhaps one of the greatest examples of the underprivileged being included and affirmed in God's kingdom is seen in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 2:24). To use today's language, her family was not middle class, yet she participated in the church in a unique, yet honorable and God-glorifying manner (cf. 1 Tim. 2:15). The committee affirms, therefore, that even if women are in a lower tax bracket, they are to be embraced as valuable, of equal dignity and worth, and included in various ministries of the church.

9. The committee humbly requests to be dismissed with thanks.

## **Adopted**

**NOTE:** The Study Committee adopted the original report and recommendations by a vote of 6-1, with the dissenting vote by TE Jeffrey Choi.