BRIDGE CITY CHURCH

Women in Ministry & Ordained Leadership

A Statement from Bridge City Church

1. Our Biblical and Theological Foundation

At Bridge City Church, our understanding of women in ministry and ordained leadership is shaped by the whole story of Scripture and, particularly, by the restoring work of Jesus Christ.

We believe God created men and women in his image, equal in dignity and worth, distinct by design, and together entrusted with God's work in the world.[1] Equality does not require interchangeability. The differences between men and women are good gifts of God, intended for mutual flourishing and service.

We also believe sin distorted that good relationship. In Genesis 3, domination enters the relationship between men and women as part of humanity's fall: "he will rule over you."[2] We therefore do not understand the subjection of women to men as the goal of creation, but as one of the relationships distorted by sin and increasingly restored under the reign of Christ.

Throughout the biblical story, we see signs of this restoration, particularly in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus dignified, taught, received ministry from, and entrusted his message to women in ways that challenged the assumptions of the cultures surrounding them. Women were among his disciples and became the first witnesses entrusted with announcing his resurrection.[3] At Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out upon both "sons and daughters," who prophesy together.[4]

We see this continuing in the life of the early Church. Women pray and prophesy in gathered worship; Priscilla participates in instructing Apollos; Phoebe is commended as a servant/deacon of the church; Junia is honored in connection with the apostles; and Paul names women among his fellow laborers in the gospel.[5] As New Testament scholar Nijay Gupta observes, there is evidence within Scripture itself that women "led… taught… and ministered" among God's people.[6]

We recognize that the New Testament also contains passages that appear to restrict women's speech, teaching, or authority, particularly 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15. We receive these passages as authoritative Scripture and do not dismiss the questions they raise. We understand them, however, within their particular pastoral and

ecclesial contexts and alongside the broader witness of Scripture—including Paul's own expectation that women would pray and prophesy in the gathered Church.[7] We therefore do not understand these passages as universal prohibitions against women serving in ordained office.

2. Our Conviction on Ordained Leadership

For this reason, **Bridge City Church affirms qualified women and men for every ordained office of the Church.**

By **ordination**, we mean the Church's public recognition and setting apart of those whom Christ has called, gifted, and qualified for particular service in his Church. Ordination does not create a person's calling, nor does it make an elder a substitute for Christ. It recognizes and orders gifts Christ has already given for the building up of his body.[8]

The authority of an elder—whether male or female—is therefore **stewarded authority**. Christ alone is Head of the Church. Elders shepherd under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, accountable to Christ, Scripture, and the Church.[9] No elder is called to usurp the God-given responsibilities of another Christian or exercise authority as personal domination.

The biblical image of the Church as the **Bride of Christ** helps us understand this. An elder does not occupy Christ's place as husband over the Church. Male and female elders alike remain part of the Bride; Christ alone is her Bridegroom and Head.[10] Ordained leadership is therefore not about replacing Christ's authority, but faithfully stewarding it in service to his people.

3. Complementarity Without Hierarchy

Our position might best be described as **complementarity without hierarchy**.

We believe men and women are equal without being interchangeable. We affirm the goodness of their distinctions while rejecting the idea that complementarity necessarily requires the universal subordination of women to men. Women do not simply complement men; **men and women complement one another**. If we truly believe in complementarity, we believe the Church is strengthened when the gifts, wisdom, perspectives, and leadership of both women and men are present in its discernment, shepherding, teaching, governance, and mission.

This conviction also shapes our concern for the health of the Church. Whenever people affected by the exercise of authority are consistently absent from the places where authority and accountability are exercised, blind spots and vulnerabilities can develop.

Shared leadership does not eliminate sin or abuse, but we believe the presence and wisdom of both women and men contribute to a healthier, wiser, and more faithful Church.

4. Clarity, Charity, and Our Commitment

As a congregation of the **Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)**, we affirm that this conviction is consistent with our denomination's doctrine and polity. The EPC recognizes that faithful Christians who share a commitment to the authority of Scripture may reach different conclusions concerning the ordination of women. Accordingly, the EPC entrusts decisions concerning women serving as Ruling Elders and Deacons to local congregations, while decisions concerning Teaching Elders rest with the presbyteries. Our position reflects the freedom entrusted to congregations within our denomination and our sincere understanding of Scripture, in keeping with the EPC's guiding principle: **"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."**[11]

We have not arrived at this conviction because the question is easy, nor because we believe faithful Christians have always agreed. We recognize that brothers and sisters who share our commitment to Jesus, the authority of Scripture, and the historic Christian faith reach different conclusions. We desire, therefore, to hold our conviction with both **clarity and charity**. Our affirmation of women in ordained office does not require us to question the faithfulness of Christians who, through sincere study of Scripture, arrive elsewhere. Likewise, we ask that our position not be understood as a departure from biblical authority, but as the conclusion we have reached precisely through our commitment to it.

Preston Sprinkle describes the work required on this question as an "honest journey through Scripture that begins with questions rather than answers."[12] That posture reflects our own desire. We have sought to listen carefully to Scripture, to the Church, and to faithful voices on different sides of this conversation. We remain teachable while holding the conviction to which our study has led us.

At Bridge City Church, we believe the Church should bear witness to the restoring grace of Jesus. We want our sons **and our daughters** to grow up knowing that their gifts belong to Christ and his Church, and that if Christ calls them, we will take that calling seriously.

We will discern it. We will develop it. And where Christ has called and equipped them, we will affirm and send them.

This is part of what it means for us to **partner in the restoring grace of Jesus—as far as the curse is found.**

Notes

1. Genesis 1:26–28; 2:18–25. Both male and female bear God's image and receive the creation mandate.

2. Genesis 3:16. Our reading distinguishes God's description of relationships distorted by the fall from God's creational intention for male and female.

3. See, among others, Luke 8:1–3; 10:38–42; John 4:7–30, 39–42; Matthew 28:1–10; John 20:11–18.

4. Acts 2:17–18, citing Joel 2:28–29: "your sons and daughters will prophesy."

5. 1 Corinthians 11:5; Acts 18:24–26; Romans 16:1–7; Philippians 4:2–3; see also Acts 21:8–9. Romans 16:1 and 16:7 contain significant interpretive discussions concerning the descriptions of Phoebe and Junia. We recognize those discussions while also observing the unmistakable prominence of women among Paul's ministry coworkers.

6. Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (IVP Academic, 2023). In discussing the purpose of the book, Gupta summarizes the biblical evidence by noting women who "led (like Deborah), taught (like Prisca), and ministered (like Junia and Phoebe)."

7. 1 Corinthians 11:5 should inform the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35: whatever kind of silence Paul requires in chapter 14, chapter 11 demonstrates that Paul envisioned women praying and prophesying. See also Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Zondervan Academic, 2009), for an extensive exegetical treatment of the Pauline texts.

8. Ephesians 4:11–16; Acts 20:17–35; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9. We understand ordained office as accountable service for the building up and shepherding of Christ's Church.

9. Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22–23; 1 Peter 5:1–4. Jesus Christ remains the Head and Chief Shepherd of his Church.

10. Ephesians 5:25–32; Revelation 19:6–9; 21:2, 9. The Bride/Bridegroom image belongs ultimately to Christ and his whole Church. We therefore do not understand the sex of an elder as determining whether that elder can represent Christ's shepherding authority.

11. Evangelical Presbyterian Church, *Book of Government*, §9-2, "Ordination of Women"; and *Ordination of Women*, EPC Position Paper, adopted by the 4th General Assembly, June 1984. The EPC identifies women's ordination as a nonessential matter and reserves the respective decisions to local congregations and presbyteries.

12. Preston Sprinkle, *From Genesis to Junia: An Honest Search for What the Bible Really Says About Women in Leadership* (David C Cook, 2026). Sprinkle examines the major biblical texts while intentionally engaging both complementarian and egalitarian assumptions.

For Further Study

Preston Sprinkle, *From Genesis to Junia: An Honest Search for What the Bible Really Says About Women in Leadership*. David C Cook, 2026. An accessible, careful, and charitable examination of the major biblical texts concerning women and church leadership. Particularly helpful for readers seeking to understand the strengths and weaknesses of arguments on both sides.

Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts*. IVP Academic, 2019. A biblical-theological treatment of creation, marriage, ministry, and several of the most disputed New Testament passages. Peppiatt argues for ministry based upon "character and gifting, rather than biological sex."

Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church*. IVP Academic, 2023. A study of the women who participated in the leadership, teaching, mission, and growth of the earliest churches, with particular attention to Phoebe, Prisca, Junia, and other women named in the New Testament.

Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*. Zondervan Academic, 2009. A substantial technical treatment of Paul's teaching concerning women, including detailed work on 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, Galatians 3, Romans 16, and 1 Timothy 2–3.

These resources do not function as authorities alongside Scripture, nor does inclusion imply agreement with every conclusion of their authors. They are offered as helpful resources for those who wish to examine more deeply the biblical and theological questions that have informed our conviction.

Bridge City Church *Partnering in the Restoring Grace of Jesus*