

THE SERVICE OF WOMEN IN CONGREGATIONAL OFFICES OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/PRESIDENT OR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/VICE PRESIDENT¹

Introduction

In response to a request from the Synod in 1989 (Res. 3–13A “To Study and Clarify Services of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices”), the CTCR in 1994 adopted a report titled *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices*. A dissenting opinion to this 1994 report was issued and signed by five members of the CTCR, and the CTCR Executive Committee then issued a response to the dissenting opinion.

The Commission has been requested by the Minnesota South District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to make a recommendation to the Synod regarding “the appropriateness of women serving as Executive Director or President or Assistant Director or Vice President of congregations.” Our intent is not to rehearse the contents of the reports and documents referred to above. They are available in the 1995 *Convention Workbook*. Rather, our intent is to offer the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod some further reflections for consideration as they make their decisions regarding the service of women in congregational offices.

We reaffirm the two key emphases made in the 1994 report *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices*. First, the Scriptures clearly teach that both men and women have been baptized into the one Christ and into His one body, the church (Gal. 3:18). Christ did not create a separate men’s church or a separate women’s church. All the rights, privileges and responsibilities given by Christ to His church on earth belong to the members of His church, both Jew and Greek, both slave and free, and both

¹ This opinion, adopted by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations on April 21, 2004, will be included in the Commission’s report to the 2007 convention and, together with a minority opinion, is available online at www.lcms.org/ctcr.

male and female. This means that all members, both male and female, should fully participate in the everyday life of their congregation, Christ's church in that place.

Second, "we must remain faithful to biblical teaching regarding the uniqueness of God's gift of the pastoral office, and the divinely given requirements which circumscribe it."² The Scriptures clearly teach that God has given the pastoral office and the exercise of pastoral authority to men and not to women. For over nineteen centuries Christendom has recognized this truth. Only during the twentieth century in the West have some Protestant church bodies contradicted this truth and ordained women. While the scriptural restriction may contradict the prevailing winds of the egalitarian *Zeitgeist* [spirit of the time], the church belongs to Jesus Christ and not to the world. Therefore, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by the strength of God intends to remain faithful to God's holy Word even when it contradicts public opinion.

Edifying Decisions in Matters of Adiaphora

Congregational polity is an *adiaphoron*, neither commanded nor forbidden in Holy Scripture. The New Testament is not an encyclopedia that answers all possible questions. One cannot expect these ancient documents to address the polity questions that arise 2000 years later. In fact, the New Testament does not give any mandates regarding the polity of a congregation or Synod. How a congregation sets up its daily working arrangements and organizational structure is left to the discretion of human reason and sanctified common sense. How many committees it has and how each committee operates are matters that belong to the area of Christian freedom.

But to say that polity is an *adiaphoron* is only the beginning of the discussion. For then the church has the difficult task of determining what would be wise and edifying for the church. In matters of *adiaphora*—things neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture—the church's arrangements should support and reinforce the scriptural teaching. Even regarding matters of polity, which are *adiaphora*, there should be a concern to support and reinforce the church's God-given doctrine and practice. For example, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod requires an equitable distribution between lay delegates and pastoral delegates at synodical conventions. Why? In order to support and reinforce the church's doctrine regarding both the priesthood of all believers and the pastoral office.

Therefore, a key question is this: What type of polity and organizational structure will support and reinforce doctrine and practice as taught by the Scriptures?

² *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices*, 8.

Supporting the God-Given Family Structure

In addressing the above question one consideration deserves attention. The congregation's polity should uphold the God-given family structure. It should not in effect subvert it, whether intentionally or unintentionally, by setting up a completely egalitarian arrangement that makes no distinction between husbands and wives. Instead it should reflect and reinforce the family structure.

The New Testament frequently encourages the church to strengthen the God-given family structure (See e.g., 1 Corinthians 7; 11; 14; Ephesians 5; Colossians 3; 1 Timothy 2; 1 Peter 3). In the first century there were various winds blowing in the *Zeitgeist*, such as asceticism, licentiousness, proto-gnosticism, over-realized eschatology, and others. The upshot of it all was the temptation to devalue the institutions of marriage and the family. To these temptations the apostles spoke. They reminded their Christian readers that the Gospel of Christ gives them freedom from sin so that they may serve within the Creator's design for His human creatures. The Gospel does not deliver people from the Creator's intent but for a joyful life within it. The Creator designed and established marriage and the family. These institutions are good gifts from God, to be received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4).

There is great significance in the creation of Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 2 and in the other scriptural texts dealing with creation (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:8–12). The Creator expressed His intent and design for all future "Adams and Eves" precisely by the way in which He created the first Adam and Eve. Unlike the animals, Eve was created to be a helper fit for and corresponding to Adam. Therefore the wife is not inferior to her husband but co-equal. The two become one flesh. Moreover, God created Adam first and then Eve, and He created Eve from Adam and for Adam. Thereby the Creator revealed His design for the marriage relationship. The husband serves as the head and the wife submits herself to her husband.

As Ephesians 5 shows, the Gospel does not destroy this created design but rather purifies it of sinful distortion. Therefore, the Christian husband exercises his headship in self-sacrificial love for his wife as Christ did for the church, and the Christian wife willingly and gladly submits herself to her husband as the church does to Christ.

We live in a society where the traditional view of marriage is increasingly under attack. Large segments of our culture dismiss and even ridicule notions such as these: (1) the Creator created Adam and Eve as Genesis 2 records; (2) thereby the Creator revealed His design for marriage and for all future husbands and wives; and (3) the Creator's intended design is that a husband be the head of his wife and that his wife willingly subordinate her own will under her husband. Especially in our cultural context a congregation should be concerned about what its polity says and in what way its polity supports the church's teaching.

Congregational Offices of Director/President and Assistant Director/Vice President

There is no “Thus saith the Lord” regarding positions such as executive director/president and assistant director/vice president. These are offices established by the church in Christian freedom. Scripture does not prohibit women who possess the requisite gifts from holding these humanly-established offices, assuming that the occupants of these offices do not “perform those functions that are distinctive to the public exercise of the ministry of Word and sacrament,”³ or carry out “official functions [that] would involve public accountability for the function of the pastoral office.”⁴ In filling these offices the congregation should take into account, among other things, the aforementioned family structure. Further, the Commission encourages men not to neglect their leadership responsibilities in their congregations. Since the church encourages husbands to exercise their God-given headship in a God-pleasing way at home, the church should correspondingly encourage men to exercise leadership in their congregation. Congregations are encouraged to organize themselves in ways that complement and reinforce the family, for the church is “the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Service of All

The Commission further recommends that congregations encourage all their members (male and female, single or married) to exercise their God-given responsibilities of service and leadership in their congregations.

Conclusion

It is the prayer of the Commission that these brief reflections will serve the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as they deliberate on issues of polity. May all of our decisions, even in matters of *adiaphora*, serve God’s will and the work of His church.

Adopted by the CTCR on April 21, 2004

³ *The Service of Women*, 12.

⁴ Report of the CTCR on *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, 46.