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Position Paper:
On Headship and Leadership in the Church
Fall 2012
(Updated October 2017)
(Updated December 2020 to reflect
the decisions that were made back in 2012).

Preface

Our way is not the only way. Committed evangelical Christians who uphold the authority of Scripture disagree on how to interpret the biblical evidence pertaining to headship and the role of women in leadership and teaching in the church. Therefore, as we begin to explore this issue as a church, we openly acknowledge that *our conclusion is not the only valid position possible* for the church today. However, as a church, it is necessary to actually have a position to create a consistent and biblically based context for ministry. This position summary is the result of over a year of study, research, conversation and dialogue conducted by the elders of Community Church, together with gifted women in leadership in our community, and stands as the basis for our practices concerning headship and the role of women in leadership at our church.

We pursue unity in the global Church. Even as we come to a conclusion on this issue, our position does not limit our partnership with other churches that have landed in a different place on the spectrum of possible conclusions. We aim to handle this issue in a way that grows grace both within our church and also among those churches around us that have a different position. Our emphasis as a church is centered on the Gospel as a source of unity and partnership rather than focusing on any other issue that could prove to be a source of contention and division in the Church.

We seek unity in the local church. While this position will guide our practice of ministry here at Community Church, we also understand that not everyone who participates in the life of this church will agree with us on every aspect of this position. As an expression of love, and for the sake of unity in the gospel, we gladly extend the opportunity for full participation in our church for those who disagree with us on this issue, so long as they do not make this issue a source of contention or division. We will always welcome further conversation and open, ongoing dialogue about the issue while also guarding against this issue becoming a dominant, divisive conversation in the church.

This issue is important. The discussion of headship and women in leadership involves issues of identity, mission, and self-understanding that need to be addressed with integrity and grace. This issue dramatically affects people's lives and their sense of calling and belonging. Therefore, we have performed due diligence and invested the time required to study and discuss God's Word; we consulted theologians and scholars representing multiple and opposing points of view on the issue; we approached relevant Scriptures in their lexical, literary and biblical context as they are found within the broad scope of God's redemptive work in history; and we've given room for the Spirit to speak into our lives throughout our time of study and inquiry. This was not a quick process, but one invested with significant resources of time, energy, emotion and heart – because we love our church both as a whole and as individuals who find themselves affected dramatically by the issues under consideration.

We stand under the authority of Scripture. Our starting and ending place is the Word of God, and we recognize its authority over our lives and over our church. Our goal is not to respond to culture by reinterpreting Scripture through our cultural lens; instead, our goal is to land on the best possible interpretation of Scripture and allow it to inform how we will operate within our culture.

How we behave matters as much as where we land. In light of all of the above, as we navigate this challenging landscape of biblical interpretation, we commit to respectful, loving interaction at every level of the conversation. As the people of God, redeemed by Jesus, it is the calling on every person in this debate to approach their brothers and sisters in love and with respect, even when we find ourselves in disagreement and on opposite ends of a spectrum.

Articulation of the Position

Equality. We conclude that the Scriptures teach equality between men and women. We affirm that both women and men are created in the image of God and share equal value, worth, and dignity before Him. We have seen the broad and far-reaching teaching and leadership gifts of women throughout the biblical record, including judges and prophets, teachers and church leaders, evangelists and apostles even as they teach God's Word and fully participate in both in the life of the church and also in the gatherings of God's people for times of worship.

Headship. We also find that the Scriptures present male headship as transcultural principle. This headship is based primarily on three appeals that transcend any one time or culture and that teach us fundamental truths about the nature of our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. These appeals are: the nature of the Trinity; God's action in creation; and the relationship between Christ and the church. However, while the Scriptures say that male headship exists, the Scriptures do not spell out the mechanics of its implementation. We believe that this principle needs to be applied and contextualized with wisdom and discernment in different periods of history and within any given culture.

Tension. Therefore, a tension exists in Scripture where we find both the presence and model of gifted women serving and leading the people of God in concrete ways *and* the affirmation of male headship. It is human nature to eliminate tension wherever it is found. However, we choose to acknowledge this tension and in so doing, we believe that our conclusion must take into account both of these realities that are present in the Scriptures.

Statement of position. We affirm that male headship is a transcultural scriptural principle that needs to be applied in a concrete way in the church today in order to be obedient to Scripture. We discern that this headship exists not only to safeguard the church in matters of doctrine and discipline, but that it also exists to create an environment at the church where all believers are able to embrace and use their gifts to build up the body in ways that are not dependent on gender. At the time of writing this position paper, this view opens new opportunities, specifically for women, to use their gifts to serve the church through leadership and teaching.

Implementation

Headship of our elders. At Community Church, we are led by a team of elders that constitute the governing body that carries ultimate responsibility before God for the worship, growth, and outreach of our church. We do have a lead pastor, and he is considered a full-time paid elder who leads, not from above, but from among that team (other staff and pastoral positions are not elders by virtue of their office). As overseers, the elders at Community Church are responsible for broad oversight of the church including matters of direction, doctrine, church discipline, and staff development, and they share the responsibility for creating an environment for ministry in the church where everyone is able to use their gifts for the edification of the body of Christ. At Community Church, eldership is reserved for men – not due to any distinction of worth or ability, but as the necessary, tangible implementation of this principle of headship as found in Scripture.

Gifted to serve. At the same time, we also affirm that women have freedom within this context to serve, minister, teach and lead the church on a day-to-day basis according to their gifting. We affirm that women have been gifted to teach, and we extend the opportunity for teaching in various contexts, including Sunday School, small groups, mid-week classes and preaching on Sunday mornings. We also affirm that, while the macro level oversight for the church is the responsibility of the elders, women have also been gifted to lead. Accordingly, we also choose to invite women into all our other leadership teams, including the staff team and the role of associate pastor, according to their gifts as the Spirit has given them. We reiterate that day-to-day leadership and teaching at Community Church are both based on gifting and affirmation by the church and are not based on gender or representation.

Summary. We affirm that male headship is a transcultural biblical principle, and we apply this concept to our team of elders and reserve participation on this team to men. We believe this is a distinction in role only, not in gifting, ability or worth. We also affirm the biblical testimony of women in positions of leadership and teaching throughout biblical history, and so we strive to provide opportunities for women to use these gifts to edify the church. We apply this by welcoming women to significant leadership roles, including preaching on Sunday mornings, according to gifting and ability. It is our desire for everyone to identify, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ, regardless of gender.

Application

Leadership Team. Up until 2012, the elders board had been the base of shepherding ministry for our church, meeting monthly for individual care and for leading the church through seasons of vision and ministry. We have been confronted with limitations, both in terms of time availability and gender appropriateness, as we have sought to care for both men and women in our church. In response, we created the Leadership Team in 2012 – a team of men and women with the gifts of shepherding and leadership who will meet monthly to lead the church on a day-to-day basis as well as carry the primary shepherding responsibilities within the church. According to our position on headship, this means that women with the gifts of shepherding and leadership will be invited to participate on this Leadership Team and be involved in the casting and implementing of vision, one-on-one shepherding and discipleship, and collaborative church leadership. This was a new direction for our church, and a tangible and necessary step for effectively meeting the spiritual needs of our congregation.

Elders. We are refocusing our elders on the larger picture of life and ministry at Community Church. Every elder will be a part of the newly constituted Leadership Team, and will therefore be involved in the day-to-day shepherding and leadership of the church as they lead from among that team. In addition, however, the elders will also meet quarterly (and as needed) as a separate team to carry out their role as “overseers” – to discuss any matters of doctrine, church discipline, staff and ministry evaluation, and to carry out the various duties of eldership as described in the church bylaws. The elders are responsible for overseeing these areas, and are charged with collaboratively addressing needs as they arise, involving others as appropriate.

Teaching. At Community Church, we have a distinctive way of approaching the preaching ministry that takes place on a weekly basis. The Preaching Team is a group of men and women that work together to study, prepare for, preach and evaluate Sunday morning teaching on a series by series basis. We regularly and intentionally provide opportunity for gifted lay people to preach within this system of accountability and equipping. We have been privileged to have pastors and seminary students, elders and other gifted people from within the congregation teach at our large group Sunday morning services. It is already our practice, therefore, to view *the pulpit as a place where the gift of teaching can be employed for the edification of the church* – and not the seat of governing authority in the church. The authority for our teaching comes from the Word of God, and not from the preacher. Through the Preaching Team, there is clear and direct accountability to the elders (through the Lead Pastor) for everything that is taught by pastors and lay persons alike. As such, the application of our position means that women with the gift of teaching are encouraged to participate on the Preaching Team as both discussion participants as well as preachers. This was an historic shift for Community Church in 2012, and remains the most visible application of our position on this issue. This also extends to include women as teachers in adult Sunday School classes, Bible studies, seminars, and in other small group contexts in the church.

Now That You Know...

Grace. We have people in our church who disagree about issues like creation, baptism, communion, worship styles, church governance and eschatology. As a non-denominational church, we choose to extend grace and understanding to one another when we disagree on these kinds of issues, so long as the disagreement is based on a responsible study of God's Word. However, some of these issues affect the daily life and practice of the church more than others. Wherever possible, we encourage open and respectful dialogue rather than either heated argument or silent avoidance of the issues. And wherever possible, we encourage people to focus on Jesus and the message of the Gospel and to allow grace to flow where there is disagreement over how to interpret some of these challenging and complicated texts. It is our sincere hope that, even where there is disagreement, we can foster an environment where people who disagree can still stand side-by-side to worship Christ and work towards His purposes in the world.

Welcome. As such, we want to clearly communicate a continuing welcome to those who hold either strong complementarian or strong egalitarian views. While we invite a deeper dialogue about the biblical texts and their application in our context, we also do not require that you violate your personal convictions on this very important issue. We believe it is possible to be a full and active participant in the life of Community Church even if you disagree with our stated position and practice. Our prayer is that a spirit of unity would prevail, and that these kinds of issues would not lead to broken fellowship but would instead inspire us to study God's Word more and draw ever closer to Him.

Unity. So within this spirit of openness and dialogue, our one request is that you would partner with us in guarding our church from dissention and division based on this issue. We encourage the choosing of appropriate contexts for conversations about the various biblical positions that exist, and we desire a posture of grace and respectful interaction as discussion continues. We welcome people who disagree with our church in this area so long as they do not make this issue a point of contention within our community.

To the complementarian. As a non-denominational church, we expect that there are those among us who come from a complementarian background or conviction that will disagree with our church's position on this issue and who will be uncomfortable with women teaching and leading at Community Church. We humbly realize that, while we have affirmed male headship, ours is not the only possible or valid implementation of this headship in the church. But we do believe that we are being faithful to Scripture, and that this position is the best approach for Community Church. We ask that you would extend grace -- for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of unity in the church - - and choose to continue to partner with us in all the great things the Lord is doing in our midst. There will be times when you may be uncomfortable with a given situation, but we hope that you can in good conscience see the concrete implementation of male headship in the elders board at our church, and that you can continue to be an active part of our family here at Community Church going forward.

To the egalitarian. As a non-denominational church, we also expect there to be those among us who hold strong egalitarian convictions and who will disagree with our church's position on this issue and who will be opposed to the limitation we have put on women's participation at the elders level. And while we have affirmed male headship, we would ask you to see the concrete and far reaching opportunities that have now been opened up in our church to value, affirm and employ gifted women in our church in the areas of teaching, shepherding and leadership - most visibly demonstrated by the inclusion of women on the Leadership Team and inviting women to preach on

Sunday mornings. And while you may continue to disagree with our conclusions regarding some key biblical texts, we would ask that you extend grace – for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of unity in the church – and choose to continue to partner with us in all the great things the Lord is doing in our midst. There will be times when you might be frustrated by a particular situation, but we hope that you can in good conscience see the concrete ways we have chosen to emphasize gifting over gender and that you can continue to be an active part of our family here at Community Church going forward.

Going forward. From here, we invite ongoing conversation, especially where it leads us back into Scripture to look at God's Word ever more closely. We would love to hear your perspective on these issues, and we would love to dialogue with you about the conclusions we have come to as elders. May the Lord draw us even closer to Him as we seek Him and worship Him... together.

Annotated Biblical References

Primary biblical evidence
supporting the adoption of male headship
as a continuing, transcultural principle for the church today.

1. Evidence based on Creation (Gen 1-3)

- a. there is a dramatic emphasis on equality that stand out in stark and extreme contrast to the ancient Near Eastern culture's view of the value and role of women.
 - i. both created in the image of God
 - ii. both called "good"
 - iii. both co-laborers in God's work
- b. there are also allusions to headship that, while taken on their own with no other supporting evidence from anywhere else in Scripture, would not constitute sufficient evidence for male headship, but provide a basis for it.
 - i. the order of creation
 - ii. the act of naming
 - iii. male given work commission
 - iv. federal headship and responsibility for sin
- c. it is important to note that all the above evidence is taken from the time *before* the fall, as sin obviously and explicitly distorts male-female relationships.
- d. When taken on their own, the most we can do is *infer* male headship from these narrative accounts. However, in the New Testament, the creation account is called in as the authority behind Paul's instructions, and some of the strongest exegetical grounds that exist anywhere in the Bible are places where Scripture interprets Scripture:
 - i. the order of creation is cited as conferring governing authority in 1 Timothy 2:13
 - ii. the order of creation is cited again in 1 Corinthians 11:9 to support having a sign of authority over a woman.
- e. What is *not* clear is what the implementation of male headship *looks like* in any of these situations. It appears that the implementation of male headship is bound up in culture (geographically and historically) and it will require wisdom if it is to be implemented today.

2. Evidence based on the nature of the Trinity

- a. 1 Corinthians 11:3 compares the headship of man over woman to the headship of God over Christ; it is not spelled out in practical terms, much less well understood, given the mystery of the trinity, how God's headship and Christ's submission factor together into the nature of the Godhead. But it is present, and the larger idea of Christ submitting to God the Father is unavoidable in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 11 connects all these texts to the issue of headship.

3. Evidence based on the relationship between Christ and the Church

- a. Ephesians 5 famously (or infamously) calls the church to practice mutual submission, and then goes on to provide three specific examples of contexts where authority or headship is present: marriage, parenting, and even slaves.
- b. The call is both to submit according to Christ's own model of submission *as well as* to exercise authority like Christ did, for the benefit of those under his authority, even giving his life away for them. But men are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and women are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord. There is an explicit comparison to the relationship between Christ and the Church that expresses headship.
- c. We see a consistent message both in the family and in the church that supports a clear reading of male headship, but one that calls us to a radically countercultural understanding of authority that draws its example from Christ's self-sacrifice and humility.

Summary of the Evidence

The three categories of evidence presented above each on their own constitute *transcultural* support for male headship in the home and the church, even as they radically *redefine* what godly headship looks like in really beautiful ways.

Taken together, we believe they form a convincing case that God has ordained male headship in the home and in the church, and as such, we are called to a tangible implementation of male headship at Community Church.

However, this conclusion must also be presented side-by-side with the dramatic evidence of the broad and far reaching role of women in the life of Israel, in the life and ministry of Jesus, and in the life of the early church (see next section).

Primary biblical evidence
supporting the expansion of the role of women
in ministry and leadership for the church today.

1. Old Testament Evidence

- a. Female leadership in Israel
 - i. Miriam in the executive leadership team of the Exodus (Ex. 15) as a prophetess and national leader together with Aaron and Moses.
 - ii. Huldah the prophet (2 Kings 22) speaking as God's representative over Josiah and all of Israel, fully and accurately proclaiming an exegesis / interpretation of the written Word.
 - iii. Deborah in a position of national leadership (Judges 4-5); specifically identified as a leader, holding court, with Israel coming to her for decisions.
- b. Portrayal of Women in the Old Testament
 - i. The Woman of Noble Character (Prov 31) who has business dealings outside the home, as well as inside the home, making household-level decisions apart from her husband, with his blessing and trust, held up as an example.
- c. Prophecy about a Future Time of the Kingdom
 - i. Men and Women both confirmed as having a prophetic voice in the people of God (Joel 2) with both sons and daughters, old men and old women all hearing from God and communicating the Word of the Lord.

2. Evidence from Jesus' Life and Ministry

- a. Disciples of Jesus
 - i. while not formally recognized among the 12, women provided financially for Jesus and traveled with him (Luke 8).
 - ii. permitted and encouraged to adopt the posture of learner and disciple, traditionally reserved for men (Luke 10 and Mary/Martha)
 - iii. portrayed as the earliest evangelists, proclaiming Jesus and teaching about him (John 4)
 - iv. eyewitnesses of the resurrection were women (Matt 28/Mark 16) and they were commanded to tell what they knew to the other disciples (communicating the first words of the good news).

3. Evidence from the Early Church

- a. Narrative Accounts
 - i. at Pentecost (Acts 2), women and men both receive the Spirit equally, with the reference to the gender-inclusive prophecy in Joel 2.
 - ii. Priscilla and Aquila (with the female named first) took Apollos aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately (Acts 18), teaching a man and a teacher of men.

b. Direct Teaching

- i. Women have a speaking role in the church in both prayer and the act of prophesying, which is a speaking gift given to edify the whole church in its immediate situation. (1 Corinthians 11:5)

c. Personal Greetings

- i. Phoebe is listed as a servant or deaconess (Romans 16)
- ii. Priscilla is called a 'fellow worker', a title used exclusively for other evangelists and teachers that work in a capacity similar to Paul.
- iii. Junia is named as a woman who was a Christian before Paul, who is outstanding among the Apostles.

Summary of the Evidence

The above examples are remarkable, especially given the patriarchal cultures in which they all took place. Additional weight should be given to examples that transcend the historical, cultural limits on women in leadership.

What we see is that there is broad support in both the Old and New Testaments for women being involved in the leadership of God's people, as well as for their use of speaking and teaching gifts, even representing God himself and interpreting God's Word.

Even as we affirm that male headship is a transcultural biblical concept, we are called to make more room for women in positions of church leadership, teaching and preaching, and shepherding ministries according to the gifts God has given his people.

Difficult Scripture Passages that merit special attention
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1. Galatians 3:8

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

Sometimes seen as the ultimate declaration of gender equality, we must also read the broader context of Galatians 3 and understand the biblical and literary context of this verse. This verse speaks about the end of distinction between various social, ethnic and gender structures *as they pertain to salvation and inclusion in the people of God* -- and not about how these distinctions pertain to leadership within the church. This is not a text about spiritual gifts, authority or headship. This is a text about salvation and the beautiful, radical, countercultural unity that exists among the people of God. We affirm the power and beauty of this verse, even as we do not agree that it is relevant to the current discussion.

2. 1 Timothy 2:12

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority
over a man; she must be silent.*

We take this to be a grammatical construction called a *hendiadys*, (literally: one-through-two) which links two words into a single idea by substituting a conjunction for a subordination. As such, we understand this text could also be translated, "I do not permit a woman to teach authoritatively..." or even "I do not permit a woman to teach with governing power..." The two terms (teaching and authority) should be seen as a single conceptual unit. In our church, we understand this verse to apply to our office of Elder as one who carries teaching *and* governing authority. The following discussion presents a more thorough exploration of the text.

The Question: What does 1 Timothy 2:12 restrict?

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, Paul continues his instructions to Timothy regarding worship in the body of Christ. After a charge to pray for those in authority, Paul moves on to give specific instruction regarding the conduct of men and women in the body of Christ. In this context, Paul writes: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must remain silent." (NIV) It is clear that the text is restricting women from doing something. What exactly is being restricted, however, is more complicated.

Option One:

Does 1 Timothy 2:12 restrict women from teaching in any circumstance, whatsoever?

No. The Bible speaks of women having both the ability and the responsibility to teach.

Proverbs 31 describes the virtuous woman as one who "speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue." (Prov. 31:26)

Paul instructs older women to teach the younger women (Titus 2:3 – 4), and writes that it was Timothy’s grandmother Eunice and mother Lois (II Tim. 1:5, 3:14 – 15) that taught him the faith as a boy. Timothy was taught the Holy Scriptures by these women, and Paul urges him to continue in their teaching now that he is a grown man and church leader.

Furthermore, the Great Commission is addressed to all disciples of Jesus – male and female – and is explicitly a command to teach. Jesus commands his disciples to “teach them [newly baptized believers] to obey everything that I have commanded” (Matt. 28:19 – 20). This commission is given to all followers of Jesus, male and female, as the Holy Spirit is poured out on men and women and they are empowered to be His witnesses in all of the earth.

This teaching or discipling in the way of Jesus is what we see exemplified in Acts 18, where the gifted preacher Apollos is instructed by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24 – 28).

Women can and should teach.

Option Two:

Does I Timothy 2:12 restrict women from teaching in the gathered assembly, where both men and women are present?

No. We’ve already seen the example of Priscilla and Aquila discipling Apollos – an instance in which the man Apollos received private instruction from Priscilla (a woman, named first) and Aquila (a man). But there are also examples of women’s involvement in the worship of the gathered assembly.

We should note here, that the form of worship in the New Testament, while bearing some fundamental similarities to modern day Christian worship, also had many differences. The early Christians met together in homes, sharing their lives, sharing their food, sharing in worship, and sharing in ministry. Male and female, they learned from and instructed one another.

Hence Paul’s instruction in Colossians 3:15 – 17, where all Christians are urged, when they gather for worship, to “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (See also Eph. 4:29, II Cor. 14:26).

That women were involved in this is clear from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 11:2 – 16). We believe that I Corinthians 11 teaches a transcultural principle of male headship, which is rooted in both the nature of the Trinity and the order of creation (11:3, 8 – 10, 16), and which has particular cultural implementations (11:4-6). But the text also demonstrates that women were actively involved in the gathered worship of the church:

“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head” (11:4 – 5)

Both men and women were involved in the prayer and prophecy that was happening in the worship of the church. And whatever else prophesying was/is, we know from elsewhere in I Corinthians that prophecy is a speaking gift that edifies and builds up the church (I Cor. 14:4 – 5) – which necessarily means that it teaches. In other words, here we see evidence for both male headship *and* for women speaking and teaching in worship. With male headship in place, women can teach men and women in the gathered assembly.

But what then about I Timothy 2:12? Is there a way to reconcile the apparent contradiction between I Timothy 2:12 and the others we have seen?

Our Position:

I Timothy 2:12 discusses "teaching with authority", which it limits to the office of elder as an implementation of male headship in the church.

We take I Timothy 2:12 to be a grammatical construction called a *hendiadys*, which links two words into a single idea by substituting a conjunction for a subordination. As such, the text could also be translated, "I do not permit a woman to teach authoritatively..." or even "I do not permit a woman to teach with governing power..." The two terms (teaching and authority) should be seen as a single conceptual unit. In our church, we understand this verse to apply to our office of Elder – the office in the church in which one carries both teaching and governing authority, and the office which Paul turns to next in I Timothy chapter 3.

In other words, we believe that what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in I Corinthians 11 is entirely consistent with what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in I Timothy 2. In both we see the transcultural principle of male headship (I Cor. 11:3) or male governing authority (I Tim. 2:12), which nonetheless frees men and women to use their God-given gifts in worship to teach and build up the body of Christ.