

An Open Letter to New Life Church from the Elders

We love the Body here at New Life Church!

What a great thing it is to be in a church where every believer is encouraged to use his or her gifts to minister to others! When we think about the potential impact of EVERY New Lifer serving faithfully --utilizing his or her gifts in their ministry 'sweet spot'--it's staggering! It boggles our minds!

This issue--the role of women in local church ministry—is a very important matter. We want to state right up front that it is not our intent here to limit anyone's ministry or use of their gifts at New Life. Rather, our intent is to bring clarity to the haziness that has existed regarding certain roles of spiritual authority in the local church. We know that there is widespread debate on this issue, and that there is much diversity even within the evangelical Christian community. *In crafting this position we are not claiming that we are the only ones who have it right.* We're simply doing our best under the leadership of the Spirit and the Word to present a stance for our church that seems consistent with the scriptures and is clear.

We want you to know several important things about our work over the past seven months:

- (1) *It hasn't been easy!* We've spent nearly 20 hours together—and many more individually--studying, discussing, praying, debating, seeking God to show us what His plan is for our church in this matter. Whew! If we seem a little tired out when you see us, now you know why. 😊
- (2) *We've been stretched!* We've examined the pertinent scriptures on this subject; we've read several books and delved into the meaning of Greek words... it's been a mind-expanding experience!
- (3) *We just want to be clear.* The thing we want to avoid on this issue is ambiguity. Being hazy on this topic over the years has sometimes been confusing to people. We believe we've answered the key practical questions people want to know about this issue.
- (4) *We understand.* We know this is a hot-button issue in church culture these days. We realize that some people have strong feelings about this subject. We've undertaken this work knowing what is at stake.
- (5) *There's a lot of gray.* Our study revealed that while a few pieces of this issue are black and white in scripture, many others are not. They are so-called 'gray areas' in which each of us needs to develop personal convictions to live by. That's one reason why this study has been so challenging for us—we each came into it with some convictions already formed. Looking at matters from different viewpoints stretched us.
- (6) *We've done our best to draw lines only where the scriptures clearly draw them.* In the areas where we've opened a door, we've done so because we believe the scriptures allow for the possibility. If a door remains closed, it's for the same reason.

Having said these things, we want everyone to know that we appreciate and value all the women of New Life. Our church has some of the most gifted, spiritual, mature, kingdom-building women on the planet. We praise God for you! You have added immense value to our lives as sisters in the faith. We truly do love all of you.

For the sake of His Body,

The Elders of New Life Church

Bill Robbins

Jay Aikens

Jeff Morton

Brian Robertson

Steve Benninger

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Final version

New Life Church affirms the following position with respect to women serving in local church ministry....

1. **ELDERS.** The governing authority of the church (the Elder board) is limited to qualified men (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). God's design is for men to serve in roles of spiritual authority both in the church and in the family (Eph. 5:22-24)
2. **GIFTS.** A variety of spiritual gifts are given to believers by the Holy Spirit without respect of gender (Acts 2:17-18; I Cor. 12:4-11). As such, both men and women are encouraged to exercise their gifts in the church for the good of all (I Cor 12:7). Gifts should not be confused with authority roles in the local church, however, which do seem to have certain gender restrictions (I Tim 3:1-10).
3. **PASTORS.** In the NT the term 'pastor' is most often used as a verb ("shepherd the flock of God" – I Peter 5:2). It describes one of the primary functions of an elder/overseer in the church (Acts 20:28). The term is also used in the context of spiritual gifts (Eph.4:11). As such, 'pastor' is not primarily a title or a position, but a gift and a function. Because of the common perception that 'pastor' is a position of spiritual authority in the church, New Life will not apply this title to non-elders. As a spiritual gift, we see no scriptural or visible basis for claiming that God gives this gift of shepherding only to men. Women who possess this gift are encouraged to use it in roles that are not limited by Scripture.
4. **DEACONS.** In scripture deacons are not charged with spiritual authority to govern the church. We see no Biblical basis for the traditional view of deacons functioning as a 'board' that runs the church. Deacons were initially chosen to fill a specific need in the early church, and to free the elders to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-6). It is clear in scripture that deacons were typically men (I Tim.3:8-10). It is also possible that qualified women served in this capacity as well (I Tim 3:11; Romans 16:1). As a result, the Elders are 'open but cautious' towards the appointment of women for this role. The Elders will select Biblically-qualified men or women as they deem appropriate to fulfill this function on an as-needed basis.
5. **MINISTRIES AND SMALL GROUPS.** Church Leadership is permitted to call upon mature, gifted, capable, humble women to lead mixed-gender ministries and groups provided they give evidence of being under authority, both to their husbands (when applicable) and to the Elders of the church (I Cor 11:3-10). In this role, these women serve as 'co-laborers' in the work of God (Phil.4:3).
6. **TEACHING CLASSES.** Church Leadership is permitted to call upon mature, gifted, capable, humble women to teach training classes of mixed gender provided they give evidence of being under authority, both to their husbands (when applicable) and to the Elders of the church.
7. **SPEAKING IN CELEBRATIONS.** The authoritative proclaiming of God's Word to the entire congregation appears to be scripturally limited to men (I Tim 2:11-14; I Cor.14:33-34), specifically Elders and those authorized by the Elders (I Tim 5:17). The Elders are permitted to call upon mature, gifted, capable, humble women from time to time to speak to the church for purposes of illustrating or applying scriptural truth, as they deem appropriate.