

AFFIRMATIONS OF THE ELDERS CONCERNING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN THE INNISFAIL ALLIANCE CHURCH

From the very beginning of the Christian and Missionary Alliance the leadership of our movement has affirmed the responsibility and privilege of men and women who serve Jesus Christ in the local church.

In 1984 our denomination presented a position statement on the role of women in local church ministry that reflected historical practice and explained the majority interpretation of Scripture with respect to this issue. It was adopted at General Assembly 1984, 1988, and last amended in 2004, and stated that women may serve in any leadership position in the local church except in the role of elder.

In the midst of the debate over the role of women in local church government, a carefully-worded compromise was introduced in 2000 which would allow local Alliance churches to vote on whether women would be permitted to serve as elders in that local congregation, and this had to be decided by a two-thirds majority vote of the membership of a local Alliance church.

The decision in 2000 created a concession point which seemed acceptable to most Alliance churches in Canada. However, at General Assembly 2012, delegates voted to offer ordination to women. "Previously, the denomination had extended ordination only to men. The Winnipeg vote changed the wording of the ordination policy from 'men' to 'persons,' thus allowing the possibility of women becoming ordained within The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada."

Since Assembly 2012 in July, there has been continuing review and conversations on this matter. We have learned that at least one other local church, in a meeting in September 2012 with the President of our denomination and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the C&MA in Canada, discovered that every local Alliance church in Canada still has the right to decide what roles men and women will play in their local assembly. Furthermore, even though all licensed workers (male and female) must now complete the required work for ordination, anyone (male or female) may choose not to be ordained once the work is completed.

Historically, Innisfail Alliance Church has encouraged women to serve in every leadership position in our church except for the role of elder. At the Annual Meeting of Innisfail Alliance Church in 2008 there was a request made of the Elders to review the historical position of Innisfail Alliance Church on women as Elders. This subject was reviewed by the Elders and a position paper was presented to the membership at the 2009 Annual Meeting.

Pastor Andrew, representing the Elder Board, presented the paper complete with scriptural documentation supporting the Board's position that Innisfail Alliance Church continue, as we have since our church began, holding to the scripturally based position that only men should serve as Elders. The following statement was made at the end of the report: "With all the above scripture in view it is the prayer of the Elders that the membership will continue to support the Board position." At that point a motion was made, seconded and carried that the Board report, on the Question of Women as Elders, be accepted as presented.

The decisions of Assembly 2012 have forced us to talk more about this and to continue to review Scripture on the issue.

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, and acting on what we believe is best for our local church, the Elders at Innisfail Alliance Church humbly affirm the teaching of the Alliance statement titled *The Role of Women in Ministry* as shown below. This document was approved by the General Assembly of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. It was adopted at General Assemblies 1984, 1988, and last amended at General Assembly 2004, and it is located on the official website of the C&MA in Canada. It is the position of the Elder Board that this document, as written here, will continue to be the stated position for Innisfail Alliance Church having regard to the Role of Women In Ministry.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

From its inception the Alliance leadership has interpreted Scripture to affirm the woman's right in the apostolic church to be the channel of spiritual gifts for the edification of the local assembly. Furthermore, Alliance leadership has historically affirmed a restraint upon the woman's role in the government of the local church. The Board recognizes that the Holy Scriptures teach the following principles.

Basic Scriptural Principles of Women in Ministry

Authority and Submission. It is recognized that God has sovereignly ordained, in the order of creation and redemption, relationships of authority and submission. "Christ is the head of every man and the man is the head of woman and God is the head of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:3). The nature of authority is modeled in the humility and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-11). The goal of authority is to build up the household of faith (II Corinthians 13:10). Submission to authority is noble and gives substance to unity (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Unity and Diversity. It is recognized that in the church, men and women share a common spiritual standing and unity in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28, I Corinthians 12:12-13). It is a unity enhanced by interdependent, complementary roles, and varied spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 11:11-12; Romans 12:3-8).

Equality and Submission. It is recognized that equality and submission are compatible as seen in Jesus Christ. He is equal to the Father and yet submissive to him. There is no inferiority implied in submission, either in the Father-Son relationship or in the man-woman relationship (John 5:16-23; Genesis 1-2).

Eldership. It is recognized that the historical and biblical pattern has been that elders in the church have been men. The weight of evidence would imply that this pattern should continue.

Ministries of Women. Alliance women are aspiring to a deep walk with God and are exploring the full dimension of ministry possibilities within the church structure worldwide and in their private lives. Therefore, it must be recognized that the responsibility of the elders in each church is to give careful attention to the encouragement, equipping and utilization of women in the accomplishment of ministry.

Affirming Actions. The licensing of women accredited for ministry in Canada shall be according to ministry function. The local church leadership is responsible to prayerfully affirm ministry functions for women in the local church.

Amendments This Statement may be amended by a majority vote of General Assembly, written notice having been given prior to General Assembly.

Adopted – General Assemblies 1984, 1988. Last Amended – General Assembly 2004 (amending formula)

As a Board of Elders, we gladly affirm the God-ordained and significant role that women play in establishing and leading the local church. We understand the Scriptures to teach that every leadership opportunity is open to women in the local church except the office of elder, and positions where they teach doctrine to men or exercise spiritual authority over men. This applies to the “church gathered,” and not to business or government or industry. The exhortation in 1 Timothy 2:12, *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man*, is an instruction given to the local church when it assembles for worship and teaching and fellowship, and not to other circles of life.

To Further enhance understanding and further solidify why we take this position the Elders have adopted a statement from The Council On Biblical Manhood And Womanhood. This statement is titled “The Danvers Statement” and is written, complete with introduction, here:

The Danvers Statement

In December, 1987, the newly-formed Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood met in Danvers, Massachusetts, to compose the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Prior to the listing of the actual affirmations that comprise the Danvers Statement, we have included a section detailing contemporary developments that serve as the rationale for these affirmations. We offer this statement to the evangelical world, knowing that it will stimulate healthy discussion, hoping that it will gain widespread assent.

Rationale

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. the tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;

3. the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
4. the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
5. the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;
6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
7. the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;
8. the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;
9. the consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
10. and behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

Affirmations

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.

- In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.

- In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
- In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).

10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

As Elders we believe this was God's plan before there was any sin in the world: sinless man, full of love, in his tender, strong leadership in relation to woman; and sinless woman, full of love, in her joyful, responsive support for man's leadership. No belittling from the man, no groveling from the woman. Two intelligent, humble, God-entranced beings living out, in beautiful harmony, their unique and different responsibilities.

Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives

should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7). In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).

The word "some" is very important. It signals that there are different kinds and levels of leading and teaching that will not be the sole responsibility of men (Titus 2:3; Proverbs 1:8; 31:26; Acts 18:26). We must seek, by prayer and study and humble obedience, to discover the pattern of ministry involvement for men and women that taps the gifts of every Christian and honours the God-given order of leadership by spiritual men. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

We have tried to be consistent and faithful in our exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:11-14, 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, 1 Tim 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9. We are aware that many sound, godly people disagree with our conclusions, but to us these texts suggest that only men can serve the local church as elders because an elder is in fact a "pastor" or "shepherd." There are other Alliance churches across Canada who have adopted the same stance theologically and practically. We deeply respect and love people who may disagree with us, but as elders who are responsible for guiding our church, we needed to make a decision in keeping with our understanding and affirmation of Scripture.

Innisfail Alliance is a wonderful family, and we are eager for family-love and family-unity to prevail. All of us are called to live under godly authority (Hebrews 13:17) and to submit to it out of reverence for Christ and unto Christ, and this does not mean that everyone will agree with every decision every time. We understand that. Therefore, if anyone in our church fellowship feels the need to express themselves in favour of our position or opposed, we humbly suggest a letter be composed, signed by the author, and delivered to any one of the pastors or elders in our church by regular mail or by e-mail.

Board of Elders
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