REPORT OF THE AD INTERIM COMMITTEE ON
WOMEN SERVING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH
TO THE FORTY-FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

[Includes Recommendations, pp. 59-63, as amended and adopted by 45th General Assembly]

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The Presbyterian Church in America is joyfully and confessionally committed to the Bible's teaching on the complementarity of men and women. As a denomination, we believe that this teaching is true, good, and beautiful. We affirm the full dignity of men and women as created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). We also humbly and happily embrace Scripture’s clear teaching that the eldership is to be composed of qualified men (1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1-7; 5:17), who are entrusted by Christ with the ministry of the authoritative teaching and ruling of the church for the building up of the whole body (Eph. 4:11-13). In marriage, this mutually-edifying complementarity is displayed when a Christian husband expresses his responsibility of headship in sacrificial love to his wife (Eph. 5:23-31) and when a Christian wife welcomes her husband's headship with respect (Eph. 5:22-24, 33).

Within this framework of our common and principled commitment to complementarianism as defined by our confessional standards and polity, the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America approved the formation of a study committee on the issue of women serving in the church’s ministry in ways that are consistent with those standards. The General Assembly directed the moderator to appoint a committee of competent men and women who represent the diversity of opinions within the PCA. This diversity of opinions refers not to the inclusion of views out of accord with our confessional position but regards a number of subsidiary matters such as the role of women in diaconal ministry; the best way to promote the use of women's gifts and ministry in the church; in what settings is it appropriate for women to teach; whether deacons ought to be ordained; what the nature of the diaconal office is; whether women may serve on denominational boards and agencies, and the like.

For instance, consider the question of women’s role in diaconal ministry. All sides are agreed that there is biblical warrant for the involvement of women in the church’s diaconal work. Our Book of Church Order already allows for and encourages that (BCO 9-7). Indeed, women have been involved in the diaconal ministry of the church with apostolic benediction and encouragement from the beginning (1 Tim. 5:10). The question is, how? And, is there an appropriate title for this work? That is one place where there is a diversity of opinions in the PCA. Our BCO says: “To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.” Many embrace this view as their personal conviction. Some in our denomination believe that the office of deacon should be open to women, and thus that women should be ordained as deacons (and this would require a Book of Church Order...
change). Others favor a distinctive ordained office of deaconess (which would also require a BCO change), while some simply view deaconess as the title for a qualified, unordained woman who assists the officers of the church in their work. Still, others have installed an unordained diaconate made up of men and women (a disputed practice in our denomination).

Into these diverse opinions and out of a desire to promote the peace, purity, unity, and progress of the church, the 44th General Assembly directed this committee to give particular attention to the issues of:

1. The biblical basis, theology, history, nature, and authority of ordination,
2. The biblical nature and function of the office of deacon,
3. Clarification on the ordination or commissioning of deacons/deaconesses, and
4. Should the findings of the study committee warrant BCO changes, the study committee will propose such changes for the GA to consider.
5. Compose a Pastoral Letter to be approved by the General Assembly and to be sent to all churches, encouraging them [within the parameters of our doctrinal standards] to:

   (1) promote the practice of women in ministry,
   (2) appoint women to serve alongside elders and deacons in the pastoral work of the church, and
   (3) hire women on church staff in appropriate ministries.

In fulfilling the assignment given to the committee, our unanimous aim is not to undermine or alter our confessional commitments, but rather to foster a robust complementarian position and practice that creates a culture which welcomes and encourages the ministry of women in the PCA in ways that are consistent with the Bible's teaching, as expressed in our confession and polity. The moderator appointed seven voting members and six advisory members (five of whom were able to serve) to our committee. All members unreservedly embrace our denominational standards' affirmation of complementarianism in the home and church.

Committee members met numerous times during the year, face-to-face and electronically, supplemented by a continuous correspondence on matters of discussion and dispute, as well as about the content of our report. We debated all the matters put to us by the General Assembly and were, by the grace of God, able to arrive at an overwhelming consensus.

We present our report to you in five chapters:

1. Introduction (including our response to Overture 3)
2. A Biblical Foundation for the Roles of Women in the Church
3. Ordination - A Definition, with Special Reference to the Office of the Diaconate
4. Encouraging a Robust and Gracious Complementarian Practice
5. Pastoral Letter and Recommendations

The committee is not recommending any Book of Church Order changes. We do offer some prudential recommendations to sessions and presbyteries, and we suggest an overture that could be made by a presbytery, if one so desired. We have sought to make recommendations
Includes Recommendations as Amended and Adopted by 45th GA

that accord with the clear teaching of Scripture and our denomination's doctrinal standards, and that serve the interests of the church’s unity.

We believe that the matters the General Assembly asked us to study are timely and needed. Along with our confessional complementarian convictions, we want to champion the dignity, ability, and service of women in the church. It is important that we do both.

When the PCA was formed, objection to the ordination of women as pastors and elders was an animating issue. We agreed upon it and rallied around it (all of us, men and women), because we rightly saw that it was an issue of biblical authority. Today, that commitment remains dominantly embraced in the membership of the PCA, but both members and ministers are asking how to equip, encourage, and utilize women in the church’s ministry in ways that are consistent with our confessional and theological commitments to complementarianism.

When the PCA began, North American society was in flux on the issue of women's roles. Today, the society is settled on the full inclusion of women in every sphere. This presents us with a challenge and opportunity. In this moment, we need positively and persuasively to make the case for biblical complementarity in the home and church, showing that it is true, good, and beautiful. At the same time, we want actively and unhesitatingly to pursue and equip the women of the church for every biblical role of service open to them. This then is the aspiration of the report we offer.

Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Ministry of the Church:

- TE Leon Brown (Advisory Member)
- TE William Castro (Advisory Member)
- TE Jeffrey Choi (Voting Member)
- TE Dan Doriani (Advisory Member)
- TE Ligon Duncan (Voting Member)
- TE Irwyn Ince (Voting Member)
- Mrs. Lani Jones (Advisory Member)
- Mrs. Kathy Keller (Voting Member)
- Mrs. Mary Beth McGreevy (Voting Member)
- TE Bruce O’Neil (Voting Member)
- TE Harry Reeder (Voting Member)
- TE Roy Taylor (Advisory Member)

Response to Overture 3

Overture 3 from Westminster Presbytery calls on the Assembly to "Declare that the 44th General Assembly Erred in the Formation of an Ad Interim Committee on Women, that the General Assembly not Receive the Report of the Ad Interim Committee on the Role of Women as not Being Properly before the Court, and Dismiss the Ad Interim Committee with Apology."

The Rules of Assembly Operations (RAO) 11-5 directs the Stated Clerk on where to refer overtures. RAO 11-5 specifically states that “Any overture, other than an overture proposing
amendment to the Constitution, having to do with the nature or responsibilities of a permanent Committee or Agency shall be referred by the Clerk to the appropriate Committee or Agency or ad interim committee.”

It should be noted that in 2000, Westminster Presbytery sent an overture (Overture 20) regarding Covenant College (CC) and asked that it be referred to the Overtures Committee (M28GA, 2000, p. 252). The Stated Clerk reported to the Assembly that he had referred Overture 20 to CC (M28GA, 2000, p. 51). The Moderator of the Twenty-eighth General Assembly, TE Morton H. Smith, did not rule the Stated Clerk’s reference to CC to be out of order. The Stated Clerk did not refer it to the Overtures Committee; he referred it to the Board of Trustees of Covenant College (CCB), which in turn sent it with their recommendation to the Committee of Commissioners on Covenant College (CC CoC), which in turn reported it to the General Assembly. The CC CoC asked the opinion of the CCB as to whether it was in order for the CC CoC to consider Overture 20. The CCB replied that, in their opinion it was in order (M28GA, 2000, p. 249). There was no point of order raised from the floor at the time of the CC CoC report (perhaps due to the CCB opinion). The CCB, the CC CoC, and the Assembly answered Overture 20 in the negative (M28GA, 2000, pp. 250-252). Under the provisions of RAO 11-5, in keeping with past practices on reference of overtures, and in keeping with the previous constitutional advice of the CCB, this ad interim committee was, in fact, the proper place to which to refer Overture 3.

The ad interim committee is recommending to the General Assembly that Overture 3 be answered in the negative (see recommendations section of this report) and offers the following grounds for our recommendation:

The assertion that the formation of the ad interim committee originated with the Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC) and was therefore out of order (Whereas section 2) was dealt with at the 44th General Assembly.

TE David Coffin raised a point of order that Recommendation 3 was not properly before the Assembly for consideration because the matter at hand did not fall within the limits of the Cooperative Ministries Committee’s responsibilities (RAO 7-3) nor did the Administrative Committee have subject matter jurisdiction. The Moderator ruled the point of order not well taken, stating that the Permanent Committee Recommendation was in order and that the CMC had acted properly and referred the matter appropriately. The ruling was appealed, and the Moderator’s ruling was sustained (582-466-36) (M44thGA, 2016, p. 51).

The presupposition of Whereas section 2 that requests for ad interim committees must arise from presbyteries is simply erroneous. Moreover, the request was a recommendation of the Administrative Committee (AC) in accordance with RAO 7-3.c.

The citation of BCO 14-1.7 in Whereas section 3 and section 6 is erroneous because any recommendation of an ad interim committee must be approved by the General Assembly. In that way, the Assembly sets policy.
The assertion of **Whereas** section 4 that the appointment of an ad interim committee violates RAO 11-2 likewise is erroneous. The recommendation of the CMC to the AC was not a group of individuals who had to go through a session or presbytery. The CMC correctly followed RAO 7-3.c. in referring the matter to the AC. It was the AC, not the CMC, that brought the recommendation to the Assembly.

The assertion of **Whereas** section 5 that the ad interim committee urges adoption of changes to the BCO is factually incorrect. The ad interim committee is not proposing any BCO changes to the General Assembly. The assertion is also procedurally incorrect. An ad interim committee may propose BCO changes as the Ad Interim Committee to Study and Make Recommendations as to Structure and Procedure did (M14thGA, 1988, pp. 81; 103-108; 425-448).

The assertion of **Whereas** section 8 that placing women on a General Assembly ad interim committee is a violation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is erroneous because any recommendation of a committee must be approved by the church court appointing it. Moreover, a related point of order was ruled to be not well taken:

TE Wes Reynolds raised a point of order, based on BCO 14-1.9-10, that committees ought to be representative of the presbyteries and therefore the recommendation should be found out of order. The Moderator ruled the point of order not well taken, stating that this reference in the BCO is not applicable to study committees, and that Roberts Rules of Order allows for non-members to be appointed to committees (RONR [11th ed.], p. 174, ll. 31-34; p. 489, ll. 24-25).

Additionally, the General Assembly accepted as satisfactory North Georgia Presbytery's argument to reject an exception taken by the CRPR that it was improper for women to serve as voting members of a Presbytery committee (M23GA, 1995, p.199).

The assertion of **Whereas** section 9 that our culture's attitude concerning women has changed with a repudiation of God's word as the norm is correct in several respects. But it does not logically follow that an appointment of an ad interim committee to study the teaching of the Word is a repudiation of the Word of God.

The presupposition of **Whereas** section 10 that the church is to reform culture and that the church is not to conform to culture is a valid principle, but it does not follow that the establishment of an ad interim committee is conforming to the culture. There have been times in history where the culture has stirred the conscience of the church on such issues as chattel slavery, segregation, and voting rights for women and minorities.

The presupposition of the **Whereas** section 11 that the ad interim committee will propose a change on women in office is factally incorrect. The committee is not making any such proposal.

The committee has spent much time and effort in preparing a report for the General Assembly. The Assembly deserves to hear the results of the committee's labors.
CHAPTER TWO
A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE
ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The Old Testament, New Testament, and church history provide a robust foundation for the
roles of women in the ministry of the church. This chapter exegetes key scripture passages
that supply the biblical foundation for the value, dignity, and service of women in Christ’s
church. It further explores views held by church leaders when appropriate.

A SURVEY OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SCRIPTURE

Women are invaluable assets to Christ’s church. From Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs. 22:14-
20) to Mary the theotokos (Luke 2:6-7) and Phoebe a diakonos, co-laborer of the apostle
Paul (Rom. 16:1-2), their ministries are breathed into holy writ as examples of faithful
service to God and His people. Paul praised women for their assistance as he planted
churches. Euodia and Syntyche contended at Paul’s side in the cause of the gospel (Phil. 4:2-
3). He lauded Mary, Junias, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis for their singular aid (Rom.
16:6-13). Paul commended women for teaching children (2 Tim. 1:5), urged older women to
instruct younger women (Titus 2:3-4), and noted their prophetic ability during church
services (1 Cor. 11:5). Women have served for thousands of years in Christ’s church.

While women maintain significant ministries in the church, they did not fulfill every role.
Women occasionally served as judges, prophetesses, and co-laborers alongside church
planters, but they were neither apostles (Matt. 10:2-4), nor expected to be monarchs (Deut.
17:14-20; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; cf. 2 Kgs 11). Additionally, God’s law dictated that priests were
males (Exod. 29:30). Elders in the new covenant church (1 Tim. 3:1-7) and all of the
traveling companions Paul mentions in his letters are male: Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy,
Titus, John Mark, Epaphras, and Epaphroditus, among others.

Women in ministry carry out important roles, but the biblical text demonstrates that men and
women hold distinct, God-given roles in His church. The following section analyzes the
various ministries of women throughout the Scriptures. While time does not permit a full
citation of everything women do as recorded in Scripture, the list will be extensive enough
to reveal patterns and draw implications.

Women Served as Prophetesses

In Exodus 15, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, is the first Old Testament prophetess.
As an older sister, she helped save her brother’s life (cf. Exod. 2:4). In adulthood, Miriam
emerged in conjunction with her brothers’ leading. Miriam praised God for Israel’s
deliverance from suffering, slavery, and oppression, concluding a terrible history of
enslavement and assimilation to worshiping foreign gods.

Through the hand of Moses, the Lord drowned Pharaoh and his army. Then, the people of
God responded in great shouts of praise. Moses led the initial part of the worship service
(Exod. 15:1-8). Of particular interest is Moses’ response in verse 1: “I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.” In Exodus 15:20, Miriam followed Moses’ lead. “Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister,” replied by taking “a tambourine in her hand and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea’” (Exod. 15:20-21).

Miriam’s words were virtually identical to Moses’. Her purpose was the same as his. Both led Israel in praise to God. Both helped the people respond to a great event in Israel’s history. Moses led the victory and its celebration. Miriam stood beside her brother, leading the women in celebration and praise. When Miriam supported Moses, she was effective and blessed.

In contrast, Numbers 12 says Miriam and Aaron spoke against their brother Moses, asking, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?" (Num. 12:2). God rebuked them verbally and struck Miriam with leprosy for a week, so that she was sent out of the camp for seven days (Num. 12:4-15). When Miriam opposed Moses, she was rebuked.

Huldah, another prophetess, served God’s people at a peculiar point in Israel’s history. The newly installed King Josiah was just eight years old (2 Kgs. 21:1-24). He was a godly king who ordered repairs to the temple after it suffered decades of abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, as a young king, Josiah did little to reverse the sins of his father and grandfather. Josiah’s grandfather, Manasseh, defiled the temple for fifty-five years, and Josiah’s father, Amon, did evil for two more years. However, in the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah ordered a reform and restoration of the temple (2 Kgs. 22:1-7).

As the temple repairs proceeded, Hilkiah the high priest discovered the "Book of the Law," that is, Deuteronomy (2 Kgs. 22:8).¹ Hilkiah delivered it to the king’s secretary Shaphan, who read it to the king. As he listened, Josiah became so dismayed at Israel’s sins against this law that he tore his robes. Josiah said, "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people…. [For] great is the Lord's anger….because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book" (2 Kgs. 22:9-13). Josiah surmised that the law condemned Israel's misdeeds and threatened God's judgment. Still, he sought a prophet’s assessment, or rather a prophetess, named Huldah.

This occurred during the fifth year of the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah (compare Jer. 1:2 and 2 Kgs. 22:3). Although the precise dates are unknown, the prophet Zephaniah was also active around this time (Zeph. 1:1). Nevertheless, Hilkiah and other royal officials sought Huldah to hear the Lord's assessment (2 Kgs. 22:14).

If Jeremiah and perhaps Zephaniah were available to prophesy, why would the officials consult the prophetess, Huldah? Huldah’s husband was a royal official (2 Kgs. 22:14). That

¹ The phrase, "the book of the law" is almost a technical term for Deuteronomy in much of the Old Testament.
suggests the officials already knew and trusted her. Perhaps Huldah had already declared
God's judgment on the sins of Manasseh. If so, she might know if repentance could reverse
God's judgment (2 Kgs. 21:10-15).

These are mere speculations. What is clear is that the king's officials consulted Huldah, who
declared God's Word: Israel would suffer punishment for her decades of sin, "according to
everything written in the book" (2 Kgs. 22:16-17). Yet, because Josiah humbled himself and
wept in penitence, judgment would not befall Israel during his reign (2 Kgs. 22:18-20).

The outline of this event reveals helpful considerations. When he discovered the law, the
high priest took the initiative (2 Kgs. 22:8ff.). The king led the preliminary response (2 Kgs.
22:12ff.). The king also made the final decision regarding a course of action (2 Kgs. 23:1ff.).
Yet the king and his officials genuinely consulted Huldah. She influenced the course of
events. She neither initiated the action, nor determined the action, but she did influence the
action.

At both a high point (i.e., Miriam) and at a low point (i.e., Huldah) in Old Testament history,
a prophetess rose to interpret events and lead Israel's response to it.2

The Bible mentions other prophetesses. Isaiah 8:3 notes a prophetess who bore a son named
Maher Shalal Hash Baz. God sent the boy as a sign of God's coming judgment on wicked
king Ahaz. Acts 8 says Philip, a leader of the early church, had four daughters who
prophesied. Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge. Her significance will be considered
later. Sadly, some women joined men in false prophecy. Nehemiah denounces the
prophetess Noadiah who joined male prophets in trying to intimidate him (Neh. 6:14), and

In the Bible, the great majority of true prophets are male. All sixteen writing prophets, Isaiah
to Malachi, were male. Further, all known miracle-working prophets (e.g., Moses, Elijah,
and Elisha) were male. These men, with others like John the Baptist, led Israel publicly. Yet
a number of women were godly prophetesses.

**Scripture Records How Women Declared Truth and Performed Acts of Service**

While no woman wrote a book of the Bible whose author is stated, the Bible records the
words of women and regards them as inspired truth. Since several women served God
faithfully as prophetesses, God’s people would expect women’s words, such as Miriam's
song and Huldah's word of judgment, to be recorded in Scripture. The words of women
became Scripture on other occasions, too. These include the outstanding prayer of Hannah
(1 Sam. 2:1-10) and the great speech of Abigail to David in 1 Samuel 25:23-31.

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2 Although not a prophetess, Queen Esther is worthy of mention. She resembles Huldah, for she, too,
persuaded a king to take proper action. Her king was the pagan Ahasuerus, but she presented the truth wisely,
to move him to do justice and preserve Israel in a desperate hour (Esther 4-8).
Priscilla's ministry of correction is somewhat like Abigail's. Priscilla and Aquila were a husband-wife team who labored with Paul occasionally for years (Acts 18:2-19; Rom. 16:3-5). They hosted a house church in Rome and Corinth (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19). These faithful Christians received Apollos, a gifted expositor, but they noted the deficiencies in his preaching. After hearing him, "Priscilla and Aquila invited him into their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:26). Just as people puzzle over the decision to consult Huldah before Jeremiah, they wonder why Acts usually mentions Priscilla before Aquila. Did she speak more or have greater gifts? Did she have a higher social status before their marriage?3

Why Acts mentions Priscilla first is unknown, but Priscilla and Aquila privately instructed a leading Christian teacher. Apollos "spoke with great fervor" and "was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of Scripture," but "he only knew the Baptism of John" (Acts 18:24-25). Hence, when Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos, they took him into their home and taught him (Acts 18:26).

Since their craft as tent-makers allowed them to travel widely, Priscilla and Aquila assisted Paul in Rome (Rom. 16:3), Corinth (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor. 16:19), and Ephesus (Acts 18:18-26). Thus, Paul honored Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16 as fellow workers for whom the whole church gave thanks (Rom 16:3-4).

Paul also honored other women in Romans 16, which offers glimpses of the contributions women made in the early church. Paul had never visited the church in Rome when he wrote them a letter to prepare for an impending journey to Rome and beyond, but he knew many Christians there and greeted them in chapter 16. The greetings show women functioning as leaders in the church.

In Romans 16:1-2, Paul commends Phoebe, a "servant" (NIV, ESV) or "deaconess" (RSV) of the church.4 The Greek term in question, diakonos, ordinarily means a servant or helper, but it can mean deacon. When Paul calls Phoebe a servant, or deacon, of the church in Cenchrea, the close connection of diakonos to a particular person may indicate that she holds an office. However, it could also mean she was very helpful. (Additional clarity will be provided upon examination of 1 Timothy 3 below). Regardless, the phrase servant, or deacon "of the church" suggests that Phoebe had a recognized role in her local congregation.5 Clearly, Paul urges the Romans to receive Phoebe with honor, for she helped many.

In Romans 16:3, Paul calls Priscilla and Aquila his co-workers. In Romans 16:6, he commended a certain Mary who "worked very hard." In Romans 16:12, Paul mentioned three women, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, who also "worked hard" in the Lord. Paul

4 The Greek term diakonos-διάκονος can be translated "servant" or "deacon."
5 Since there is a feminine form of the noun, the fact that the masculine is here applied to a woman might indicate that an official position is in view. See also C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975-1979), 2:780-783; Douglass Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 913-914; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 786-787.
further mentioned Andronicus and Junias. They were probably married, since Andronicus is a man’s name and Junias is a woman’s. In a sentence that is difficult to translate, Paul called them prominent either “with” or “among” the apostles (Rom. 16:7).\footnote{The Greek preposition "en" [ἐν] may be used either way.} If “with” is correct, Paul means the apostles held them in high regard. If “among” is correct, he means they are prominent among the people called “apostles.”

Since Junias is a woman’s name, some propose that she is a “forgotten” apostle, but Paul did not equate either Andronicus or Junias with the Twelve. Rather, Paul used “apostle” in the less technical, more ordinary, sense of someone selected and sent out for a particular purpose. The Bible called Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), Silas (Acts 17:1ff.; cf. 1 Thess. 2:7), Titus (2 Cor. 8:13) and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) apostles in the same sense. The church sent them on missions to spread the gospel. Paul honored Andronicus and Junias for the faithful discharge of vital tasks.

\textbf{Examples in the Roles of Women in the Old Testament}

Women neither served as priests nor legitimate monarchs in Israel. Furthermore, they did not preach. However, they did serve as gifted leaders and teachers. Some had an exceptional ability to navigate situations wisely and train others to do the same. Huldah, Zipporah, Miriam, and Esther testify to the God-given talent and leadership ability of women in the Lord’s church.

As mentioned previously, in 2 Kings 22:14-20, Huldah spoke privately to the king's emissaries. Huldah did not go to the court; the court came to her. Hilkiah, Anikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah, after arriving at Huldah’s domicile, listened intently to the prophecy. Later, these men brought the word of the Lord back to the king for implementation, because he had ultimate authority (2 Kgs. 22:14, 20; 2 Kgs. 23:1-3). Huldah did not decree a course of action, but she proposed the course that king and nation followed.

Like Huldah, Deborah is a prophetess. She is also a leader or judge of Israel. As a prophetess, Deborah was “leading” (NIV) or “judging” (ESV) Israel.\footnote{Hebrew "shaphat" [שׁפַת] is traditionally translated "judge" but it can mean "lead" as well.} “She held court… between Ramah and Bethel… and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided” (Judg. 4:4-5). The disputes, which required her judgment, were difficult cases, perhaps beyond the ken of local authorities. Deborah apparently dispensed spiritual counsel and issued judgments with legal authority. Interestingly, the Book of Judges never suggests she taught or prophesied in the way that Jeremiah or Isaiah did. That is, she did not deliver sermons or publicly proclaimed oracles from God.

Perhaps most notable is Deborah’s interaction with Barak. When God determined to deliver Israel from Jabin and Sisera, He told Deborah. Through the prophetess, the Lord told Barak to gather a force of 10,000 men for battle, and God would grant victory to Israel. However, Barak was reluctant and refused to go alone. He insisted that Deborah go with him. Despite Barak’s reluctance, Deborah did not lead Israel into battle. She consented to go with Barak into battle (Judg. 4:9), but did not lead the troops.
Prophets with Limited Authority

God used many prophets who lacked official, ongoing leadership. The companies of prophets mentioned in 2 Kings had no visible authority. Other prophets simply delivered messages without continuing ministries. In Israel, regular teaching authority resided with the law, not prophecy. Thus, the words of prophets always had to be tested (Deut. 13:1-5; Deut. 18:20-22; 1 Cor. 14:29). If a prophecy urged disobedience to God’s law, it was false. Death resulted. When God gave the law in Egypt and during Israel’s exodus, He required obedience but did not require testing to prove its validity, as He did with prophecy.

Malachi wrote, “The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should receive instruction” (Mal. 2:7). Confirmed in Deuteronomy 33:10, priests and Levites—not prophets—taught God’s law. This is further verified in Jeremiah 18:18 and Ezekiel 7:26. The teaching capacity remained with priests, and priests were men. The authoritative function to proclaim God’s law, regardless of the audience and whether in public or private, resided in God’s revealed will for men to maintain that office. Since prophets did not necessarily have the same responsibilities, that position was open to both women and men. Therefore, while women filled the office of prophetess, they did not hold the permanent, public teaching office of priest.

Conclusions

Women instructed men, but often in limited and private settings. They advised and rebuked men, great and small. Women counseled men, who listened and adopted their ideas. They taught and prophesied, giving messages with theological content. Nonetheless, scripture has no example of a woman preaching (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). Women led beside men in Israel and the church, but no woman held the rank of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Peter, or Paul as a principal leader. In fact, when Miriam aspired to equality with Moses, God rebuked her. When Barak tried to avoid leadership, Deborah urged him to accept it.

THE ROLES OF WOMEN DURING THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS

Jesus chose twelve male apostles, yet women held vital roles in Jesus’ ministry (Luke 1:46-56). Wealthy women not only supported his ministry, but they accompanied Him (Luke 8:1-3). Faithful women remained with Him at His crucifixion (John 19:25-27). Women were the first to witness His resurrection (John 20:1-18) and to carry His instructions to His disciples. A woman witnessed to the goodness of God in Christ to her townsmen (John 4:29).

Jesus’ disregard for Jewish traditions also led Him to associate freely with women. In Luke, for example, Jesus encounters a grieving widow and mother (Luke 7:11-15), lets a sinful woman anoint His feet (Luke 7:36-50), seeks out a long-suffering woman who touched His cloak amidst a throng of people (Luke 8:43-48, cf. 13:10-16), engages a marginalized Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-26), and cares about poor women (Luke 2:24, 21:1-4). Going to His crucifixion, Jesus took a moment to address a group of women who mourned His impending death (Luke 23:27-31). Jesus' willingness to ignore custom is part of His resolve to minister to all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social status, or personal moral history.

Jesus refused to allow the traditions of men to restrain His ministry to and with women. He never denigrates the service of women in the home, though Jesus does prioritize their roles as His disciples (Luke 10:38-42). There is no conflict between service in the home and discipleship, but sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear His teaching takes priority (cf. Luke 11:27-28).

THE ROLES OF WOMEN DURING THE APOSTOLIC ERA

Priscilla was a theologically astute disciple. Together with her husband, Aquila, she observed the doctrinal inaccuracy of Apollos’ teaching, took him aside, and “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Priscilla’s gifts were also utilized alongside and under the authority of the apostle Paul. In fact, she and her husband traveled with Paul during one of his missionary journeys (Acts 18:18-19). Further, Priscilla is among the many faithful and gifted women whom Paul praised for their dedicated work in Romans 16.

Since women are called to be disciples who faithfully utilize their gifts, how does that affect their service as church members? How can women utilize their gifts to glorify God in the worship and ministry of the church? Can women become church officers (1 Tim. 3:1-13; cf. Acts 6:1-7)? Should they be involved in the liturgy of Sunday service? The following section addresses key passages in the Pauline Epistles concerning women’s roles in the church: 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Acts 6, and 1 Timothy 3:8-11.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Christ has ascended and has poured out the Holy Spirit on both men and women, in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29. God’s people are utilizing the good gifts He has given, which extended to corporate worship gatherings. The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth, encouraged believers to employ their gifts, and to ensure the church is edified, the gifts must operate decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). Part of proper order is that women must remain silent, at least for a time (1 Cor. 14:34). How can this be? How can Paul expect women to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), expect everyone to offer a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, or an interpretation (1 Cor. 14:26), and yet tell women to remain silent (1 Cor. 14:34)?

There are two plausible options.

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8 Paul says this to the "brothers," but "brothers" includes male and female Christians in his epistles.
9 There are four unlikely ways to resolve Paul's apparent contradiction: 1) Paul did contradict himself, saying one thing in 11:5 and another in 14:34. 2) Paul never permitted women to speak in 1 Corinthians 11:5. He
Option one maintains there are two kinds of worship in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. In chapter 11, women pray and prophesy during private or informal worship in which everyone shared. Their prophecy may be roughly correlated with what many today call testimony or sharing. In chapter 14, the worship is more structured. It may be like the synagogue worship (Luke 4; Acts 13), where one person is invited to bring the main exhortation. A few others may speak, and none of them may be women.

This view makes several plausible points: there must be structure within worship services, and certain leaders would expound the Scriptures. However, it does not adequately harmonize 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 14:35. How can Paul say that everyone has a hymn or a word in instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:26, then state that women must be silent in 14:35 if there is no qualification or limit on that silence?  

Option two harmonizes 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 14:35 by proposing a limit on the command of silence in 14:35. Specifically, when Paul says women must remain silent, he means either silent by not preaching (espoused by Calvin, and other older interpreters) or he means silent during the testing of prophecy (espoused by Carson, Grudem, and other more recent interpreters). The testing of prophecy is the theme of 14:29-35. Paul wanted women to use their gifts, but he also wanted all teaching to be tested. That task belonged to elders (or overseers). Close analysis of 1 Corinthians 14 supports the view that women may prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) but must remain silent when prophecy is tested (1 Cor. 14:34). Consider Hurley’s observations:

Theme (14:26)  
When you come together, everything must be done to edify the church.  

Issue 1: Tongues  
The number: Two or at most three should speak.  
(14:27-28)  
Why? To edify the church: Let one interpret. If there is no interpreter, let him keep silent.

merely entertains the possibility; if they spoke and did so without a head covering, it would be a disgrace. 3) 14:34-35 is not from Paul; they are an explanatory note added by an early copyist (Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 699-705. 4) 11:5 is a general principle for all churches; 14:34-5 is temporary counsel for Corinth, where women were quite uneducated or unruly. The problems with some of these are obvious. For detailed critique of these views, see the exhaustive work of D. A. Carson, "Silent in the Churches: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," in Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway 1991); and Anthony Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1150-8.

10 Someone might object that option 1 requires "prophecy" to have one sense in 11:5 – informal sharing – and another in 14:26 – formal instruction. But the term "prophecy" had a wide range of meanings in Greek and Biblical literature, so it could well have two different meanings when used several chapters apart.

11 If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently, prohibited from authority to teach in public.” John Calvin, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:34), trans. John Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 468.


Issue 2a: Prophecy

(14:29)
The number revisited: Two or three prophets should speak.
Why? To edify the church: Let the others weigh what is said.

Issue 2b: Additional note on the number that prophesy.

(14:30-33a)
On speaking: If a revelation is made to one, let the first be silent.
You can prophesy one by one.
The goal
Everyone will be instructed and encouraged.
Reason 1
The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.
Reason 2
God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

Issue 2c: Additional note on the weighing of prophecy (14:33b-35)

On weighing
As in all congregations, women should remain silent.

On woman's silence
They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission. If they want to inquire, they should ask their husbands at home.

Reason
For it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

This outline shows how the silence of women applies to the weighing of prophecies. When leaders sift prophecy, then women must “be in submission, as the Law says” (1 Cor. 14:35). “The Law” Paul cites in 14:35 may be God’s will, given at creation, that Adam must lead Eve. If women wish to inquire about the testing, they may ask at home; they must be silent during the testing itself (1 Cor. 14:35-36). This is the order “in all the congregations of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33b). If anyone disagrees, Paul notes ironically, they must think God has spoken to them alone, because every church does it his way, or rather, that this is how it is to be done in all the churches (1 Cor. 14:36-38).

The term Paul chooses for silence suggests the women's silence is not absolute. Greek words for silence overlap, and share many similarities. However, Paul uses the word, σιγαω – σιγαω, which rarely means total speechlessness. It can mean to keep something to oneself (Luke 9:36), to listen (Acts 15:12), or to be silent after speaking (Luke 20:26; Acts 15:13). The word appears in 1 Corinthians 14:28, 14:30, 14:34. In Corinthians 14:28, Paul said that if someone who is speaking in tongues has no interpreter, they should be silent (σιγαω) – temporarily stop speaking. In verse 30, the apostle said that if one prophet is speaking and something is revealed to another, the first should be silent (σιγαω) – temporarily stop speaking. Lastly, in verse 34, while prophecy is tested, Paul required that women should temporarily stop speaking. Outside the testing, women may pray, prophesy, sing, and provide a lesson (1 Cor. 14:26).

Additional Considerations

Some may ask why Paul let women prophesy but not test prophecy. Prophets like Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah were prophets and authority figures. With this conception of prophet, it seems Paul gave women high authority when he let them prophesy. However, many prophets were outsiders, prone to appear on occasion without ongoing office or formalized training (1 Kgs. 17:1; 1 Kgs. 18:12). They were voices in the wilderness, some lacking official, ongoing leadership. Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and John the Baptist
were ignored or abused, not honored (Matt. 23:29-37). Priests were the regular, authoritative teachers (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 21:5; 33:10; Mal. 2:6-7).

Furthermore, apostles and elders, not prophets, are the primary authorities in the New Testament. Prophets were God’s principal spokesmen in the old covenant, but apostles are the principal spokesmen in the new. For example, in Acts 15, apostles and elders determined the proper response to a theological crisis; then they deputized prophets to carry the message (Acts 15:2-6, 22-32). Paul also subordinated prophets to himself, which indicates apostles outranked prophets (1 Corinthians 14:37-38). Moreover, Paul assumed elders, not prophets, would succeed the apostles when they die (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). Therefore, prophets do not bear primary authority in the church.

Concerning 1 Corinthians 14, there are two dangers. First, there may be chaos if several prophets spoke at once or if someone speaks in a tongue but has no interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27-28). Second, false teaching may go unchecked if someone erroneously claims to speak at God’s direction. To prevent chaos, Paul commends self-control. The Corinthians must stifle an impulse to speak if another is already speaking or if there is a tongue but no interpreter. Each must speak in turn. Even so, there must be no more than two or three tongues (1 Cor. 14:27-8) and no more than three prophecies for a session (1 Cor. 14:30-33).

To prevent false teaching, “the others should weigh carefully” what the prophets say, for not everyone who thinks he speaks God’s word does so (1 Cor. 14:29). It is necessary to weigh or sift speeches that claim to come from God.

Who are “the others” who test prophecy? They could be other prophets, but that is unlikely. First, Greek writers would use the term “the rest” [of the prophets], not “the others” if they wanted to say the remaining prophets do the testing. Second, the gift of discernment is separate from prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10). Third, God appointed teachers to evaluate prophetic words delivered to the church.

Some may ask why these “others” have the right to test a prophet’s speech. The answer is vital to a proper grasp of women’s roles. It is necessary to test prophecy because people can falsely claim to speak for God. Moses warned about false prophets (Deut. 13:1-10) and insisted that Israel investigate when they heard of prophets who led the people astray (Deut. 13:14). Prophets might also believe they speak for God yet merely voice their impressions (1 Kgs. 22:1-37). Believers must test all things (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1), for there are many false prophets (Matt. 7:15; Matt. 24:11, 24; 1 John 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:1). Many teachers seek only to please men (2 Tim. 4:3).

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14 Some, like Elijah, came and went rapidly. Others, like Jeremiah and Amos, were rejected by Israel's leaders.  
15 More evidence that prophets have limited authority: 1) 1 Corinthians 14 assumes the words of even recognized prophets must be tested. 2) Prophecy cuts such a low profile that Paul must tell the Thessalonians not to hold it in contempt (1 Thess. 5:20). 3) Church leaders such as Tertullian, Origen, Aquinas and Calvin agreed that prophecy must be tested.  
Everyone should be discerning (Job 34:2-6; Ps. 19:12; Matt. 16:3; Phil. 1:10; Heb. 5:14), but elders are especially responsible to guide the church to true doctrine (Acts 15:1-35; Acts 20:17-31). Among elders, some especially “labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). Whether they label them pastors, teachers, preachers, ministers, or even priests, churches know God calls some men to proclaim and guard the truth. Paul wanted every church to have men who labor in the Word, teach, and discern (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 29). He appointed such men—elders—in every church (Acts 14:23) and told church planters to do the same (Titus 1:5). Thus it is fitting for women to prophesy but neither to preach nor to test prophecy.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

The apostle Paul stated his purpose in writing Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:14-15: “I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.” One may examine Paul’s thesis under several categories: pure doctrine and good conduct (1 Tim. 1:4-5, 18; 1 Tim. 2:8, 11-15), proper gender relations in the church (1 Tim. 2:9-15; 1 Tim. 5:1-16), and proper leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-13). There are reasons to believe 1 Timothy 2:9-15 especially guides believers who gather for worship. Hence, the church faces threats of heresy by standing firm in the gospel, maintaining good conduct, retaining proper gender roles, and following qualified leaders, especially in worship.


19 The rationale: 1) The topic and mode of prayer fit worship. They pray for authorities and "lift holy hands" (2:1-4, 8). 2) 2:8 says men should pray (literally) "in every place." "In every place" means "places of worship" in 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 2:14, 1 Thess 1:8). "The place" is also a circumlocution for God's temple in the gospels (Matt 24:15, John 4:20, 11:48). 3) Paul says males should pray, not using the word for mankind (anthropos – ἄνθρωπος), but the one for adult males (aner – ἀνήρ), and we know men normally led in prayer in Jewish worship (J. N. D. Kelly, The Pastoral Epistles (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963), 65; Keener, Paul, Women and Wives, 126, note 67). 4) The modest apparel of women fits worship, since prominent Greco-Roman women displayed their social status with costly clothes and elaborate coiffures. 5) The command that women learn in silence fits worship, since women may speak at home or in private meetings (1 Cor 14:34).
1 Timothy 2:9-10 – Apparel

“I want women”²⁰ to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”

“I want women to dress modestly” indicates women should adorn themselves with good deeds, not immodest clothes.²¹ Expensive clothes might display a high social rank or a desire to rise in status. Greeks and Jews also viewed extravagant dress as a sign of promiscuity and disregard of a husbands’ authority.²² In the early church, “the rejection of external adornment was part of a woman’s submission to her husband and a recognition of her place among men in general,” but ostentatious adornment indicated “sexual infidelity and materialistic extravagance.”²³

Modesty is the principle. When Paul cited braided hair, gold, and pearls, the point is not that pigtails are sinful, but that elaborate displays of wealth take attention from God who is worshipped and place the attention upon a well-dressed worshiper. If men were prone to disrupt the church through angry disputes, women were prone to disrupt it through physical displays.²⁴

1 Timothy 2:11-12 – Learning, Submission, and Permission

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”

This passage both liberates and restrains. First century Greek and Jewish cultures generally considered women mentally inferior. They judged women's education a waste of time at best and a cause of temptation at worst. The Mishnah advised men not to talk with women frequently, lest they bring evil on themselves, neglect the law, and inherit damnation. Near Jesus’ day, Philo, a Jewish philosopher influenced by Greek thought, said Satan wisely

²⁰ A few scholars believe the Greek term γυνή – gune, rendered "women" in almost all English translations, should be translated "wives." (Gordon Hugenberger, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Timothy 2:8-15," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 35 (1992: 341-60.) Greek does use the same word for women and wives, but "women" seems right since 1) When Paul wants γυνή – gune to indicate a wife, he mentions marriage or their husbands in the context; 2) Paul would hardly forbid wives to dress ostentatiously, but permit single women to do so. See Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15," 115-7.

²¹ "I want" indicates Paul's command, not his mere desire. The Greek means "I counsel," not "I wish." One may call it stereotyping, but Paul warns men about anger (2:1) and warns women about ostentation.


²⁴ Paul does not ban all hair styling, as if tangles signified godliness. Hair braids could be simple. The problem is elaborate, expensive hairstyles. See James Hurley, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); Keener, Paul, Women and Wives, 104-5.
attacked Eve through her senses, “For in us mind corresponds to man, the senses to woman.”

He also said the masculine soul devotes itself to God the Creator, while the feminine soul
attends to things created. Paul believed otherwise. He did not acquire Philo’s philosophies
neither did he rank the capabilities of one’s soul based on gender. Paul rightly understood
that women—image-bearers of God—should learn and be taught.

Since no one can learn if noisy and insubordinate, it is sensible that Paul would request
women to learn quietly, which is an indication of their submission. To learn quietly is meant
to portray a woman learning in a quiet manner. It does not mean absolute silence. Submission means that women should accept the doctrine taught by the church leaders (1 Tim. 3:2). Quiet and submissive dispositions demonstrate that women respect their teachers
and accept biblical doctrine.

Some say that after women learn enough, they will begin to teach. Some reason that when
Paul prohibits women from teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12, it is a temporary ban, which applies
only until women are well instructed. It is true that women can impart what they know to
others, but this line of reasoning often believes well-instructed women should hold the
教学 office, as elders or preachers. This view rests in part on a distinctive interpretation
of the phrase, "I do not permit" in verse 12.

Paul’s counsel is clear: women may learn, but may not teach or exercise authority over men.
Yet, almost every word of verse 12 is contested. Paul sometimes lets women teach men. He
permitted female prophets to speak in Corinth and listed female coworkers, who must have
described their toils. He declared that all Christians have gifts they must exercise
for the common good, knowing one must speak to exercise most gifts. How is Paul’s
prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 reconciled with his permission elsewhere? There are two
possibilities: the prohibition may be temporary or it may be partial.

Egalitarianism suggests the prohibition is temporary. Adherents note that the verb “permit”
is in the present tense. Therefore, they say, Paul only prohibited teaching in the present,
when women were uneducated. When that was remedied, women could teach. This
argument fails in that the next sentence declares why women may not teach. Paul cites the

26 The term hesuchia – ἡσυχία – can mean total silence, but more often describes a quiet attitude. All the terms
for silence and quietness overlap with each other somewhat, but the family of siopao, sige and sigao – σιόπαω, σιγη, σιγάω - is more likely to denote speechlessness, perhaps by choice (Luke 9:36, Acts 15:13). The term
phimoo – φιμώω can mean to be silenced by an order (Mark 1:25, 4:39) by being ashamed (Matt 22:12) or by a
refutation (Matt 22:34). Epistomizo – ἐπιστομίζω means to keep someone from speaking (Titus 1:11). We must
not exaggerate the difference between these words, but our term seems apt to describe the relative silence that
is a virtue for students. See Aida Besançon Spencer, Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry (Grand
Rapids, MI: Baker), 75-81.
27 Spencer, Beyond the Curse, 84-6; Keener, Paul, Women and Wives, 109-13; Gilbert Bilezikian, Beyond Sex
Roles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 179.
order of creation, not a lack of education. Further, some wealthier women were educated.\textsuperscript{28}
Simply put, if the problem was a lack of education, Paul could have written, “Women may not teach until they are educated.”

Complementarianism suggests Paul's prohibition is permanent but partial. Thus, women may teach privately, informally, and occasionally, as Priscilla and others did, but they should not present the doctrines of the faith as authoritative church leaders in the assembly of the saints. This task (e.g., guarding the gospel) occupied Paul's letters to Timothy and was given to elders or overseers who are male and “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12-14).\textsuperscript{29}

Three factors indicate that Paul forbids only authoritative instruction in doctrine. First, the Bible indicates that women taught. The Scriptures do not, however, describe women preaching or teaching the assembly of Christians. Second, the context of 1 Timothy is worship in the church. During the corporate gathering, church officers teach bindingly and have been given the task to do so (1 Tim. 3:2). Third and finally, Paul's language suggests that he forbids women to teach doctrine and to exercise ruling authority in the church. That language will now be considered.

The verb translated “teach” (διδάσκω - didasko) means to teach or instruct someone, but in Paul's letters, especially 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, what is taught is usually the foundational doctrine of the faith.\textsuperscript{30} Timothy and Titus were Paul's most trusted pastoral representatives; the three letters to them form a cluster called the Pastoral Epistles. A clear example of teaching that has doctrine as its content is found in 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” Similarly, in Titus 1:9 Paul wrote elders must “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict.”

The noun “teaching” is very similar. For example, Paul said that God called believers through the gospel, to share in the glory of Jesus, then adds, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:14-5). The teachings or “traditions” (ESV) are the message of the apostles, carefully handed down by spoken words and letters (Gal. 1:6-12).


\textsuperscript{29} The terms elder and overseer are interchangeable in Titus 1:5-7 and Acts 20:17, 28.

\textsuperscript{30} By my estimate, in the fifteen verses that use the verb “teach,” three certainly refer to basic doctrine (1 Cor 4:17, Gal 1:12, 2 Thess 2:15) and six almost certainly do (Rom 12:7; Eph 4:21; Col 1:28, 2:7; 1 Tim 2:12, 4:11), leaving six that refer to other teaching. There are two cognate nouns for teaching, didache – διδαχή and didaskalia – διδακσαλία. The first word, didache, refers to Christian doctrine in four of its six uses in the New Testament (Rom 6:17, 16:17; 2 Tim 4:2 and Titus 1:9, but not 1 Cor 14:6, 26). The second word typically refers to false teaching (Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7; Eph 4:14, Col 2:22, but not Rom 15:4), until we get to the Pastoral Epistles. There Paul specifies if it is sound doctrine or not (1 Tim 1:10). See also o George W Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 88-9, 140-1; J. N. D. Kelly, The Pastoral Epistles (London: A & C Black, 1963), 50; Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2," 127-8.
Hence, when Paul said, “I do not permit a woman to teach,” he has as his background the doctrines of our most holy religion and the men, specifically, elders who are charged to teach and preach these truths. Those called must be apt to teach and lead exemplary lives, proving their ability to lead by caring for their wives and children (1 Tim. 3:1-5). Some elders work hard in the Word, preaching, teaching, and defending the gospel (1 Tim. 5:17). The point is not that men must do all the teaching or women must never teach men anything. Rather, Paul wrote that the primary calling of men who are tested, approved, and consecrated by the church (i.e., elders) must preach, teach, and defend the gospel of Christ (2 Tim. 2:24-6; cf. Acts 6:2).

Paul also says women must not “exercise authority.” The significance of the Greek word (αὐθηντεῖν - authenteo) is difficult to articulate because it is rare, appearing just once in the New Testament and approximately 100 times in all ancient literature. It sometimes has negative connotations. Some say Paul means women must not “usurp authority over men” or “abuse their authority over men,” but evidence indicates “rule” or “exercise authority” is the best definition. John Chrysostom says women must not teach men because Eve “once taught Adam wrongly” and women must not exercise authority over man because “she once exercised authority wrongly.” When Chrysostom utilized the term, he added “wrongly,” which indicates that he felt the phrase, “exercise authority,” did not, by itself, have a negative force. If authenteo does not intrinsically mean to abuse or usurp authority, then Paul is forbidding women to rule or govern the church.

Third, the grammatical structure also points to the translation “exercise authority.” The terms “teach” and “exercise authority” are joined by the Greek conjunction oude (οὐδὲ). Oude is a word that negates. It means “and not,” “neither,” or “nor.” Oude also has an interesting grammatical feature. When it links two verbs, both are bad in themselves or both are good in themselves. It never links a negative and a positive verb. Consider these sentences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“You may neither eat your food nor drink your juice until we pray.”</th>
<th>“Eat” and “drink” are both positive. They will be linked, in Greek, by oude.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither steal nor destroy your brother’s toys.</td>
<td>“Steal” and “destroy” are both negative. They will be linked, in Greek, by oude.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither call nor bother me.</td>
<td>“Call” is positive; “bother” is negative. They would not be linked in Greek by oude.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul links “teach” and “exercise authority” with oude. This means both are positive or both are negative. Since “teach” is clearly positive, “exercise authority” must, likewise, be positive. Therefore, it is correct to translate 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” Paul is not merely forbidding women to rule wickedly – by domineering, or usurping authority. Paul is forbidding that they rule in a church context. Women may lead in various ways, but just as men bear final responsibility for the doctrine of the church, so men bear final responsibility for the direction of the church.

Regarding authoritative teaching, this apostolic mandate is to be implemented consistently in the life and leadership of the local church. The implementation begins with, but is not limited to, the called services of divine worship. There are differences of opinion in the PCA on the proper definition and exercise of “authoritative teaching.” The committee urges presbyteries and sessions to study this matter diligently and to practice their convictions (Rom. 14:1-8).

1 Timothy 2:13 – Reasons for Male Leadership

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”

God implemented male leadership in the Garden of Eden, prior to the fall. By highlighting God’s creative acts in the beginning of time, Paul appeals to first principles. Likewise, Jesus reasoned from creation when he was questioned concerning marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:3-9; cf. Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:24). Further, Paul cited Genesis to explain male-female roles in 1 Corinthians 11. This citation to creation indicates a proto-rubric for the church, which is further unfolded in the Pauline Epistles. This does not indicate, however, that women are subservient ontologically or in terms of their capabilities. Moreover, as Christians, women and men are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Men and women are equal in value and in purpose; nevertheless, equality in Christ does not eradicate the different roles men and women maintain.

1 Timothy 2:13-15 – Roles of Women

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through child-bearing - if they continue in faith, love and holiness with self-control.”

This is a notoriously difficult passage and interpretations vary, but it is clear that Paul affirms the continuing validity and blessing of the creation ordinance of procreation (Gen. 1:28; Gen. 3:20; Gen. 4:1), and the mitigation of the curse of the fall for believing women (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:15). At the very least, God blesses and preserves women in the roles of wife and mother.

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34 Paul uses a distinct word for false teaching (heterodidaskaleo) in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3.
Why does Paul suddenly shift from the subject of women not teaching authoritatively or preaching and exercising the authority of elders to that of salvation and childbirth? Perhaps he is drawing attention to the second of two role-reversals of creation in the fall (man/animals and Adam/Eve).

Adam and Eve were to have dominion over the animals (Gen. 1:28), but in the fall, an animal not only tells them what to do, but calls God a liar and urges them to disobey God (Gen. 3:4-5). When they succumb to this role reversal (obeying an animal they were supposed to have dominion over), the world is plunged into sin and misery: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 1:25).

In 1 Timothy 2:14, Paul draws attention to a second role reversal in Genesis 2. Eve is deceived by the serpent, because, in part, Adam failed to play his role as husband and covenant keeper. Though Adam was created first (1 Tim. 2:13) and was personally given the command/prohibition by God before Eve was created (Gen. 2:15-17), Adam listened to his wife’s voice instead of God’s command. Moses explicitly explains: “Then [God] said to Adam, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it”; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life’” (Gen. 3:17). Paul’s whole discussion in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is squarely based on Genesis 1-3. Eve was deceived, but Adam is responsible (Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22) because he failed in his role as covenant keeper and federal head. Adam listened to Eve, even when she contradicted the word God had personally spoken to him. Eve was deceived, but Adam disobeyed an explicit command. His was high-handed sin.

Thus, Paul’s argument in 1 Timothy 2:13-15 explains the basis of his command in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, and warns of the consequences when it is disobeyed. Paul is calling attention to the fact that abandonment of God’s order inevitably creates disorder and error, while embracing that order is attendant with blessings (1 Tim. 2:15).

Incidentally, Paul both affirms women in their roles of service in the home and family, as well as beyond them. Lydia, the businesswoman (Acts 16:14-15), and Phoebe, the patron (Rom. 16:1-2) are highly regarded by Paul. There is no hint of rebuke or impropriety regarding their professional vocation or standing, just as Proverbs 31:16-24 celebrates a woman who manages an estate. Furthermore, Paul has a high view of Christian singleness (see 1 Corinthians 7:32).

Conclusions for Male-Female Partnership

Because 1 Timothy 2 occupies a central place in all discussions of women and ministry, it was examined in detail. Women should learn the faith, and share their knowledge in some settings (Titus 2:4). They should not become the principal instructors and defenders of the faith in the institutional church. This has been God's plan and order from the beginning, one in which women thrive as they live out their faith.
Deacons: A Consideration of Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3

As the number of disciples in the early church multiplied, some in need of assistance were inevitably overlooked. The Grecian Jews—those who were neglected—grumbled until their complaint reached the apostles. Previously, people brought their gifts to the apostles, who had authority and responsibility to distribute them, but the church was growing too big. Teaching and prayer are the apostles' essential calling. Therefore, others needed to take responsibility to serve the needy: “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4).

Acts 6: Gifted Men Serve the Needs That Arise in Faithful Churches

The apostles presented criteria for the men who would take responsibility for serving the needy. The church must choose wise, Spirit-filled men who will know how to love and care for the needy. All seven names were Greek, perhaps easing their work with Greek widows. Seven was a customary number for boards or committees in that day so the apostles advocated normal cultural procedure. Still, the apostles asked the congregation to select its next leaders. Pleased with the apostles’ proposal, the people chose seven men and presented their choices to the apostles. In Acts 6, the chosen men seem accountable to the apostles and the whole church. Although the seven were not called deacons (diakonos), they served (diakoneo), which leads some to believe that Acts 6 marks the basics of diaconal work: caring for widows, caring for the neglected.

Of further concern is Acts 21:8. While Acts 6 does not call the seven chosen men, “deacons,” Acts 21:8 calls Philip, who was chosen in Acts 6, “one of the seven.” J. M. Ross argues that recourse to Acts 6 confuses study of the diaconate. Edmund Clowney, among others, argues that the seven in Acts 6 were “assistants to the ministers of the word” but not “officers.” Many in the Presbyterian tradition disagree. Those who affirm Acts 6 as a paradigm for the deaconate mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 observe that it is pedantic to insist on the noun diakonos when the cognate verb is present. More importantly, it is clear that the men 1) distributed material resources to meet ongoing needs in the church, 2) met spiritual qualifications, 3) were set apart by prayer and by the laying on of hands, and 4) received the blessing of the apostles and the whole church. While some disagree over whether Acts 6 describes the first commissioned deacons, the PCA BCO employs the aforementioned insights to describe the roles of deacons.

1 Timothy 3:8-11 – An Overview

All Christians are called to a life of service “because the Lord himself has come in the form of a servant.” It is both a spontaneous expression of love and a command of Christ. Every Christian is a slave of Christ and therefore a servant (diakonos) of others. Some Christians,

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however, have a special authority and commission to serve. Service is essential to all; the commission to lead and to organize service, however, is for some.36

The first clue that some are set apart for organized service is that the character traits for deacons are similar to that of elders. While the skill set is different, the character required for commission is similar.

Second, deacons are tested. Jesus first stated this principle: “You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much” (Matt. 25:21). Testing is not mentioned explicitly for the overseer, but it is implied in 1 Timothy 3:7. 1 Timothy 3:10 is therefore rightly translated, “Let them also be tested.”

Third, deacons are not teachers, but they hold the mysteries of the faith with a clear conscience. Deacons must know how to make sound ministry decisions, how to explain their work as they do it, and how to articulate the faith, even if they are not suited for public teaching.

Fourth, 1 Timothy 3 has implicit, not explicit teaching about the work of a deacon; Paul addresses character. Acts 6, therefore, serves by default as a model and judge that diaconal work is chiefly mercy ministry. Organizational aspects (tending funds and buildings) of diaconal work are largely traditional. While not necessarily misguided (i.e., ushering, greeting, and caring for finances are real services that let apostles and pastors focus on their ministries), the New Testament never names these tasks. Deacons first care for mercy among the poor and the marginalized. Customary practices should not be read into the New Testament.

1 Timothy 3:8:37 “Likewise” signals that Paul is not changing topics completely.38 He is moving from the overseer (episkopos, singular in 1 Timothy 3:1-2 and Titus 1:7) to “deacons” (plural). The shift from singular to plural raises questions that stand outside the scope of this study. Still, the plural is no mystery. A congregation might require many deacons to meet the material needs of a congregation. This interpretation assumes that Acts 6 defines diaconal work.

To define the term diakonos in Paul’s usage, Yarbrough has listed uses of diakonos in Paul. Diakonos (servant, minister, deacon) in Paul.39
For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good…

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth…

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae…

What, after all, is Apollos? And Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe.

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant

his [the devil’s] servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.

is Christ then a servant of sin? (ESV)

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace

Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons

Epaphras our beloved fellow servant [syndoulou]… is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.

the gospel… of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Tychicus is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant [syndoulos].

Deacons likewise must be… Let deacons each be the husband of one wife

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ

Diakonos means someone who performs a service or ministry, but the term does not normally label someone appointed to church office. A magistrate, Christ, Apollos, Paul, his opponents, Tychicus, Epaphras, and Timothy are all called “deacon” in a non-technical, or non-church-office use of the term.

A few uses of deacon seem like more technical or official uses. These include the officials at Philippi and the deacons of 1 Timothy 3. Some would include Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). The official uses refer to someone occupying a recognized position or ongoing role in the church. Even with Acts 6, little is known about official deacon’s work. Many practices rise from church custom, often recent church custom. Still, the practice at Philippi, where there were both “overseers and deacons” is in view in 1 Timothy 3. A church has two classes of leader – elder/overseer and deacon.

Paul first lists two desirable and two undesirable qualities of deacons. Deacons should be “dignified” or “worthy of respect” (semmos). The term can mean dignified, noble, or honorable (Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 2:2). Character and conduct go together.

They are also "not double-tongued." The Greek is mê dilogous - not double-talkers, who say one thing and believe another. They do not lie or play the hypocrite. Integrity of speech is a great emphasis in Proverbs, the Synoptics (Matt. 5:33-37; Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45), James, and Paul (Eph. 4:15, 25, 29; Eph. 5:4; Rom. 3:13-14). Harmful talk is a recurrent theme of the Pastoral Epistles.\(^{41}\) Sadly, pastors, elders, and deacons lack this trait with remarkable frequency, to the great harm of the church.

"Not addicted to much wine" and "not greedy for dishonest gain" are close to traits for elders in Titus 1:7, 23. Greed is often condemned in the Scriptures.\(^{42}\) Deacons must be generous, not mercenary. They should like to give resources to the needy. The tight-fisted deacon may be a familiar church experience, but not to the New Testament deacons.

1 Timothy 3:9: Deacons "must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Yarbrough points out that this sounds like Stephen in Acts 6. He spoke with the Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5, 10, 55) with wisdom (Acts 6:3, 10), in deep faith (Acts 6:5), and by "God’s grace and power" (Acts 6:8, 60).

Paul’s term, “mystery,” signifies redemptive truths formerly concealed but now revealed at Jesus' coming.\(^{43}\) Paul’s counsel to Timothy assumes that deacons know Scripture and doctrine. To hold the truth with a "clear conscience" requires that experiential and cognitive faith unite. Deacons need theological understanding and personal integrity.

1 Timothy 3:10: "And let them also be tested first." dokimazô, translated “tested,” means test and approve (apodokimazô means test and find wanting). Deacons are "also tested;" the "also" refers to the implication that overseers are tested too. Like overseers, deacons are tested both by groups\(^{44}\) and individuals.\(^{45}\) Timothy must make "full inquiry" to discern the work and the character of deacons,\(^{46}\) no easy matter since deceivers abound (1 Thess. 5:21).

"First" and "then" in 1 Timothy 3:10 point to a process of assessment: If they are blameless, then Timothy can consider them eligible. "Blameless" translates anenklêtos, which (negatively) means innocent of charges. Positively, deacons should display the range and depth of Christian faith and practice. If Timothy establishes that they are mature, he can "let them serve as deacons" (from the verb diakoneô).

1 Timothy 3:11: The NIV and ESV render 1 Timothy 3:11 as a series of qualifications for "their wives." But other translations (ASV, RSV, NASB, NRSV, CEV) translate gune as "the women."\(^{47}\) The root of the uncertainty lies with the Greek word gune – γυνή which can

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\(^{41}\) 1 Tim 1:7; 3:11; 5:13; 6:4; Titus 1:10; 2:9.
\(^{42}\) Rom 1:29; Eph 4:19; 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 2:5.
\(^{43}\) See, e.g., Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:26.
\(^{44}\) E.g., 2 Cor 13:5: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?"
\(^{45}\) E.g., Gal 6:4: "Each one should test their own actions."
\(^{46}\) John Calvin, The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, trans. T. A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 229.
\(^{47}\) Also, "the" or "their" which appear in most translations is not present in the Greek.
mean either "woman" or "wife." The comparable masculine noun can mean either "man" or "husband." Does 1 Timothy 3:11 mean "women likewise" or "wives likewise"?

Phil Ryken notes that "woman/wife" is such a common term "that it hardly seems sufficient to designate an office in the church." If Paul wanted to indicate deaconesses, he chose an extraordinarily minimal way to say so. On the other hand, the failure to mention qualities of overseers' wives in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 seems to count against 1 Timothy 3:11 speaking of deacon's wives in 3:11. At a minimum, the word is open to more than one interpretation. The flow of thought is also difficult. Does Paul move from deacons to deaconesses, or from deacons to their wives, and possibly overseer's wives as well?

Warfield, although an advocate of female deacons, says he "cannot believe" that Paul meant "to speak of deaconesses" in 1 Timothy 3:11, "since this would require us to assume... a double transition from one subject to another, of the harshest and most incredible kind." He believes the office of deacon for women rests on the "narrow" and uncertain case of Phoebe in Romans 16:1, and the record of female deacons in the early church.

Warfield favors female deacons because Romans 16:1 probably indicates that Phoebe was a deacon, but Guy Waters draws the opposite conclusion from the same data. No one doubts that Paul lists the "qualifications for a certain group of women," but if 1 Timothy 3:11 does not describe female deacons, and if Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) might be a woman known for her service or might be a deacon, then nothing is established. Warfield thinks the early church's use of deaconesses proves his interpretation of Romans 16:1, but to base interpretation of the New Testament on early church practices is a perilous move. Since the evidence is so thin, Waters judges that women should serve as "female assistants" to the deacons, not ordained deacons. Even if the office of deacon is one of service rather than rule (per the BCO), it "is an office" which "necessarily entails the possession and exercise of authority."

Interpretations throughout Church History

Since many translations render 1 Timothy 3:11 with "wives," many exegetes believe Paul refers to wives of deacons, not deaconesses. On the other hand, those who advocate female deacons point out a long history of deaconesses, with supporters such as John Calvin, B. B. Warfield, and other conservative Presbyterians, including the RPCNA. The history of the question, however, is complex. Calvin’s claims must be qualified, and Warfield’s advocacy of female deacons requires comment. The following traces key church leaders and their interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:8-11, beginning earlier in church history.

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52 Waters, *Jesus Runs the Church*, 114-115.
54 The next paragraph follows Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 132-3.
In the second century, "church women provided nursing mothers who sat in the public squares," while other women scoured the streets "to collect the unwanted babies abandoned in the night." They "nursed, bathed, and raised babies" who would otherwise have died of exposure or become slaves. This was representative diaconal work in the early church. J. M. Ross's survey of women's ministry in the early church concludes that they paralleled a number of tasks performed by male deacons. They visited the sick, acted as doorkeepers (for a women's entrance?) in the church, assisted in the baptism of women, catechized women, and sponsored orphans.

Chrysostom, of the fourth century, also described an "order" of deaconesses that is "necessary and useful and honorable in the Church." Calvin is claimed, by those who promote deaconesses, as an advocate for their position, but his teaching is complex. He had deaconesses in Geneva, but he limited their role: "Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor." He placed them in the second of two types of deacon. The first group must "distribute the alms," the second "devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick." Men (Acts 6) did the administration, women as well as men performed the service. In Calvin's commentary on 1 Timothy 3:11, he says the wives of deacons and overseers perform this service, saying, "He refers here to the wives of both bishops and deacons." In his commentary on Romans 16:1, however, Calvin says of Phoebe, "Paul commends her on account of her office." Readers cannot simply conclude Calvin wanted to ordain women as deacons, both because of the remarks in the Institutes, his most settled, authoritative work, and because his comments on Romans 16:1 also call Phoebe "a helper to all the godly" and "an assistant of the Cenchrean church."

Warfield also advocated for a recognized group of women, which he calls either deacons or (more commonly) deaconesses. His argument rests on the status of Phoebe, the servant (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1) and the reference to a primitive order of deaconesses in the letter from Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, to Emperor Trajan, in 112 A.D. Pliny says, "I judged it... necessary to find out what the truth [about Christianity] was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing." Warfield judges the women to be members of a servant office. They "constituted a female diaconate similar to and of like standing with the board of deacons which, in the New

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55 Ray Bakke, A Theology as Big as the City (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 192.
Testament, we find in every church." Warfield surveyed and criticized various ways to organize deaconesses. He concluded that "the church has a distinct right to organize the work of women" in a variety of ways as long as there is "some sufficient form of ecclesiastical oversight" that created "adequate points of union with the official church machinery" and guarded against the dangers inherent in independent associations.

1 Timothy 3:8-11: Possible Interpretations

It seems that there are four ways to understand Paul in 1 Timothy 3:11.

First, the women may be part of the general order of deacons. This is unlikely since they are set apart from deacons by the term “likewise” (ὁσαυτῷς), just as deacons are set apart from elders by “likewise” (ὁσαυτῷς) in 1 Timothy 3:8, and by a somewhat different set of qualifications. It also seems unlikely that a new order would be 1) so short and 2) embedded in the description of another office.

Second, the women are female deacons or deaconesses who correspond somehow to the male deacons. This is doubtful for two reasons. First, the statement about the wives or women is embedded in a larger section that describes the duties of male deacons. If deaconesses are a distinct group, why is their character, in 1 Timothy 3:11, sandwiched between three verses that describe the qualities of a deacon (3:8-10) and two that comment on their family life and reputation (3:12-13)? Second, outside this passage, no clear Scripture references an office of deaconess. In Romans 16:1 Phoebe may be a deaconess, but it is unclear whether she held an office, since Romans 16 does not focus on church order, and since the word diakonos – διάκονος is generally nontechnical in the New Testament.

Third, Paul has a separate office in view. “Likewise" marked a new category in 1 Timothy 3:8, so it could do the same here. Furthermore, the Greek does not have a possessive pronoun–their wives—or even a definite article–the wives–possibly suggesting that the women are a separate group, not simply deacons' wives. On the other hand, the absence of the possessive pronoun or definite article may signify that Paul omitted the definite article, as he often did when referring to people in this section (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1, 8, 12). Finally, why should deacons' wives be singled out for a separate list of qualities, when no qualities are required for the wives of elders? On the other hand, Yarbrough detects a possible nod to wives of overseers when Paul says, "In the same way, deacons" (1 Tim. 3:8). The similarity "affirms a close parallel between the two—and if deacons’ wives are critical to the diaconal ministry, that holds no less true for the wives of pastoral church leaders."

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62 Ibid., 292-3.
63 Again, Romans 15:8 calls Jesus a diakonos. In 1 Corinthians 3:5 it is Paul and Apollos. Paul is again diakonos in 2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4. In Ephesians 6:21 Tychicus is diakonos, in Colossians 1:7 it is Epaphras, and so on.
64 Robert Yarbrough, I-2 Timothy, Titus.
In this interpretation, women are assistants to deacons, perhaps taking on duties that especially pertain to ministry to women. Kelly summarizes the testimony of the practices of deaconesses in the early church, "female officiants were required for duties in connexion [sic] with women." This is plausible for two reasons. First, some of women's needs could be handled more appropriately by women than by men. Second, there may be a hint that women have special, recognized tasks elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles. For example, Paul takes note of exemplary widows in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 and blesses older women who train younger women in Titus 2:3-5. (As an aside connecting to application, if option three is correct, then churches might have women's advisory committees that regularly work with deacons to consult on policy and serve the needy. See Chapter Four for further discussion on application.)

A fourth interpretation is that the women are indeed the wives of deacons. Given that γυνή can mean woman or wife, twice in the context, the term clearly means "wife" (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Tim. 3:12). It is very unlikely that a term would shift meanings from 3:11 to 3:12. Also, Paul's failure to mention this person's marital status, prominent as marriage was with elders and deacons, indicates that it refers to deacons' wives. Finally, if the women are wives, it would explain why 1 Timothy 3:10 is embedded in the section on deacons: one requirement for deacons is that their wives be able to assist them. The very brevity of 1 Timothy 3:11 also points toward "wives" as the right translation. Would Paul say so little if he were instituting a new class of officer?

Interpretations three and four stand on firmer exegetical ground than one and two, and number four stands most firmly of all. Whichever view is correct, Paul anticipates that women will have a hand in diaconal work. Yarbrough says, "If indeed Paul has deacons' (and overseers') wives in mind, this is another indication of his concern for the full engagement and benefit of women in the ministry of the church."

Even if Paul does not have deaconesses in mind in 1 Timothy 3:11, many will point to Romans 16:1, which says Phoebe was a diakonos of the church. But again, as the chart on Paul's use of diakonos indicates, it normally has a non-technical sense, so that the term by itself proves nothing regarding office. On the other hand, Romans 16:1 shows women are recognized for something. To say it differently, whatever one's stand on women in the office of deacon, there is widespread agreement that women are essential servants in the church, and some level of screening, recognition, and regular service are in view.

All four positions agree women should be involved in diaconal work. How their work should be construed ecclesiastically is another matter. If deacons have authority in the church, roughly on par with elders, so that church members rightly promise to submit to them and obey them, then 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibits female deacons. If deacons do not

65 Kelly, Pastorals, 84.
66 George Knight, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, 171.
67 Ryken, 1 Timothy, 130-1.
68 Robert Yarbrough, 1-2 Timothy, Titus.
exercise authority, if they lead by example and by service, then female deacons or deaconesses are conceivable. Most leadership occurs by service and example, by experience and persuasion.

If deacons are leaders by way of service, and not by way of rule, the office of deacon may be shared by both men and women. Yet "service, not rule" may be an inadequate description of deacons. *BCO* 9-2 says of deacons, "It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people." These points sound authoritative, overlapping somewhat with the role of elders. The authoritative note may also appear in *BCO* 9-5. Calvin apparently bent his thought to some version of this issue when he distinguished two types of deacon, one more administrative and financial, held by men. Meanwhile women were to be devoted to "caring for the poor themselves." On the other hand, he calls this service a "public office." 69

1 Timothy 3:11: Character Traits

Regardless of whether Paul envisions women or wives in 1 Timothy 3, he still sets forth traits that qualify people for service. First then, they must be "dignified," which translates *semmos*, a term already discussed at 1 Timothy 3:8. Second, they are "not slanderers," which translates *diabolous*, a term for malicious speech, false accusations, and slander (2 Tim. 3:3). The term is used for the Devil in Revelation 12:9-10. At a minimum, all officers and servants must know how to keep quiet about the needs of the people they serve. What a betrayal to speak maliciously or falsely about the people in need. Third, they are "sober-minded," translating *nephalious*. Paul also requires sobriety or temperance of elders in 1 Timothy 3:2 and of older men in Titus 2:2. Fourth, they should be "faithful in all things." "Faithful," translating *pistos*, is a common term in the Pastoral Epistles, one used to describe doctrines (1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Tim. 3:1) as well as people.

If indeed Paul describes the wives of deacons and elders, his decision to describe their traits needs to be weighed. Clearly, Paul expects husbands and wives to operate together; he saw them "as integral to ministry infrastructure and execution." Even if the wives "did not hold formal office," they still constituted a major force in the ministry of the congregations of Ephesus, and in the ministry of congregations today. 70 With privilege and position, formal or informal, comes responsibility. Just as men can and do face shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19) through doctrinal deviation or moral turpitude, so women can and do wound their families and their churches if they are slanderous, unfaithful, or frivolous. On the other hand, faithful wives enjoy the same rewards as faithful deacons and elders, described in 1 Timothy 3:13 and 1 Peter 5:4, "an unfading crown of glory."

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70 Robert Yarbrough, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*. 
COHERENCE BETWEEN THE ROLES OF WOMEN  
DURING THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS  
AND THE PAULINE EPISTLES

Jesus chose twelve males as his apostles: Simon (called Peter), Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Thadaeus, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 10:2-4). Jesus appointed the apostles as his foundational witnesses. He trained them to testify to what their ears heard, their eyes saw, and their hands touched during His ministry (1 John 1:1-4; John 1:14; Acts 1:8; Acts 4:20). After His resurrection, they saw the wounds on Jesus’ hands and feet. They touched, saw, believed, and testified (Luke 24:39; John 20:20-5; Acts 4:20). They preached and wrote down the church's foundational message.

Evangelical egalitarians do not deny this, but they do try to minimize its significance. They claim Jesus’ choice of male leaders set no precedent for Christian leadership today. They reason that temporary conditions, related to ancient cultures, prevented Jesus from appointing female apostles. Since those conditions belong to the distant past, Jesus' choice of male leadership allegedly belongs to the past as well.

Would Jesus refrain from choosing women as disciples and traveling companions because that choice would have offended social sensibility of His day? Jesus violated cultural conventions whenever He saw fit. He touched lepers. He called tax-collectors and prostitutes His friends. He healed Gentiles. He violated customs for the Sabbath. He tossed recognized businessmen out of the temple. Jesus violated convention by talking to women, discipling them, and letting them travel with Him (Luke 8:1-2). He shattered so many conventions; why should he quail at one more? Besides, "when moral issues were at stake, Jesus did not bend to social pressure."75

Were women uneducated, intellectually inferior, and, therefore, unacceptable as public leaders? The Twelve were not highly educated either (Matt. 13:54-57; John 7:15; Acts 4:13) and early Christians accepted their leadership. Formal education is not a requirement for ministry.

72 Non-evangelical Christian feminists do deny the veracity of the gospel accounts. They allege that there were many female leaders in the early church and that a male-dominated hierarchical church later suppressed information about early female leadership. See chapter 9 for more on non-evangelical feminists.
73 On finding precedents in Scripture, see chapter 2, "A Note on Method."
75 Borland, "Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus," 120-3.
Was travel too dangerous for women? Travel was dangerous for men, too. Paul was
imprisoned, lashed, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, sleepless, hungry, thirsty, cold, and naked
(2 Cor. 12:23-27). Furthermore, the apostles' wives sometimes traveled with them, dangers
notwithstanding (1 Cor. 9:5).

Many also reason that if Jesus' choice of male disciples signifies that only males can lead,
then the choice of twelve Jewish disciples should signify that only Jews can lead. That is,
if the gender of the choice is normative, then so is the ethnicity. Since Jesus' choice of
Jewish leaders does not set a precedent, egalitarians argue His choice of males does not set a
precedent either.

This argument rests on an analogy. Jesus' decision to choose men first is the same as his
decision to choose Jews first. Since the appointment of Jewish leaders was temporary, they
reason, the appointment of males is temporary too. But the analogy fails historically and
biblically. The appointment of Israelites is different from the appointment of males.
Historically, the appointment of Israelite disciples is a unique element in God's plan of
salvation. Scripture shows that Israel's privileges were temporary. When the gospel went to
the Gentiles, Gentiles soon began to lead. See Titus, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, and Luke
(2 Cor. 8:16-23; Phil. 2:25-30; Col. 4:7-14; Eph. 6:21-22; Philemon 23-34). Men, such as
Titus, exercised great authority. Paul left Titus in Crete to straighten out Paul's unfinished
business and to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). No woman is given such a charge.

The apostles saw Jesus' choice of twelve male apostles as a precedent. When they replaced
Judas, they said a male must take his place: "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the
two men who have been with us the whole time" (Acts 1:21). The word for "men" is not
anthropos, a human, but aner, a male. Later, the apostles followed the precedent again and
had the church choose seven males (aner) to oversee the church's mercy ministry (Acts 6:1-6).

**Ephesians 5 and Subordination**

Few texts are more controversial than, "Wives submit to your husbands" (Eph. 5:22). Why?
Many men abuse Paul's command, citing it as a pretext for selfish domination of women.
The submission of wives does not imply domination by husbands, as Ephesians shows.
Also, in an age that resists the concept of submission to authority, many women (like many
men) resent the idea that they should submit to anyone, including their husbands.

In context, the command, "wives submit," develops two broader imperatives. Ephesians 5:1-2
reads, "Be imitators of God… and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself
up for us." Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine…. Instead, be filled in the
Spirit." Grammatically, the next five verbal nouns are participles that describe the character
of a Spirit-filled life. Spirit-filled people will demonstrate His influence by "addressing one
another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with
all your heart, giving thanks always… submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"
(Eph. 5:18-20, ESV).

76 Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 45
77 Most men found in New Testament leadership lists have Gentile names. In Colossians 4:11-14, Paul records
several, then adds that Barnabas and Jesus-Justus are "the only Jews among my fellow workers."
The phrase "submitting to one another" stands as a banner over Ephesians 5:22-6:9, which is one of the longer descriptions of family life in the Bible. "Submitting to one another" is a striking phrase, an apparent oxymoron. Submission is one-directional in New Testament and extrabiblical Greek usage. People submit (hypotasso) to authorities—to God, king, governor, or officer. People submit to parents and laws. Submission means one person yields to the will of another. But how can two people submit to each other? They cannot both outrank the other. Should parents submit to children? Can a husband and wife each submit to the other? There are two possible answers.

The first possibility is that believers should submit to whatever authority is over them. On this view, the command to submit to each other does not mean, everyone should submit to everyone, as if all authority structures cease. Rather, Paul means that Christians should yield whenever someone has proper authority over them (with the necessary caveat from Acts 5:29—one must disobey if an authority commands sinful acts or sinful inaction). "Submit to one another" does not mean parents should submit to their children just as children submit to parents. Parents should serve their children so selflessly that it may appear that the parents are submitting, but irreversible authority structures remain. Parents can still tell children when to go to bed, but children may not reply, "Fine, but you should go to bed too."

A second possibility is that all fixed authority relations are relativized, so that no one has the right to exercise authority over anyone else except by temporary necessity or mutual agreement. So husbands have no general duty to lead their wives, pastors have no intrinsic authority over their church and employers have no objective authority over employees.

There are several reasons to favor and affirm the first possibility: "Submit to one another" means all Christians should submit to the relevant authorities, not "Everyone submits to everyone." If the following arguments are valid, then authority structures remain at home and church.78

Reason 1: The term "submit" (hypotasso – ὑποτάσσω) means to subject, subordinate, bring under control or obey. Excluding Ephesians 5, submission is one-directional in all New Testament uses. Hypotasso normally refers to one person, who is lower in position or power, yielding to a person of higher position or power. Therefore, to "submit to one another" does not mean all Christians submit to everyone, it means they submit to whatever authorities are appropriate. That is, "submit to one another" means submit whenever there is a rightful authority.

Reason 2: The chief reason to speak of mutual submission is the pronoun "to each other." The phrase "to one another" translates one Greek pronoun, “ἀλλήλως.” In English, "one another" implies full reciprocity, but the Greek does not. There is full reciprocity in Philippians 2:3, "Consider one another better than yourselves," and in Mark 9:50, "Be at peace with one another." Other times, it is not fully reciprocal. In Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens," does not mean everyone trades burdens with everyone else. Rather, some

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78 Hurley, Man and Woman, 139-41.
should help others as Galatians 6:5 shows, "Each one should carry his own load." Paul does not envision total reciprocity. Rather, those who have lighter burdens carry others' burdens when appropriate. Similarly, Christians should submit when appropriate. Similarly, Ephesians 5 commands that people submit to whomever exercises proper authority over them. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 does not teach full reciprocity of submission. Children obey parents and slaves submit to masters, but not visa versa. The presumption, therefore, is that absolute reciprocity is not the norm for marriage either – Wives submit, husbands love sacrificially. Again, a husband should serve his wife so selflessly that it may appear that he submits to her needs or wishes, but selflessness is actually a form of leadership, according to Paul.

The text also limits the extent of the submission, so that it falls short of total mutuality. Thus, wives are not told to submit to all men but to their own husbands. Further, Paul tells children to obey and slaves to submit, but he never tells husbands, parents, and masters to submit to wives, children, or slaves.

Reason 3: Paul's other writings show that authority structures remain. Paul commands Christians in Rome to submit to governing authorities. Paul orders the church to submit to their overseers. He neither commands the government to submit to the people, nor tells overseers to submit to the people (1 Thess. 5:12). Ephesians 5 neither teaches full reciprocity nor ends authority structures. Wives submit to husbands, children obey parents, and slaves obey masters, but not vice versa.

Paul's directions do alter the concept of authority. If husbands sacrifice for their wives, if parents do nothing to exasperate their children, if masters never threaten but treat slaves respectfully (Eph. 5:25; Eph. 6:4; Eph. 6:9), if authorities wield power for others, the spirit has changed, even if structure has not.

Authorities remain. Yet, if they lead benevolently, their authority will appear to fade. When a husband loves his wife, when parents nurture their children, when masters forgo threats, when authorities bend to the needs of their subordinates, casual observers might think they have abdicated. In the world, the powerful lord it over others for their benefit. Not so in the family of faith. To a widow newly married to a Christian husband, to an orphan newly adopted by a Christian father, all would seem new, if they left the sway of a typically self-indulgent lord. Their needs matter. Arbitrary demands wane. Christians should exercise authority with enough love that all life seems new. Still, Christians are not free to create whatever arrangement seems workable. Men still bear responsibility to direct the family, for its good.

Of course marriage is different from other authority relations. Paul tells children and slaves to obey; he tells wives to submit, not obey, suggesting the husband-wife relationship is more nearly reciprocal. Remember that parents can tell children to go to bed. Yet, marriage is so nearly reciprocal that a wife can summon her husband to bed (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Further, submission as understood in Greco-Roman culture allowed a certain level of freedom to order affairs within the parameters established by a leader (although today, submission is an intensively pejorative term).
CHAPTER THREE
ORDINATION — A DEFINITION, WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE OFFICE OF THE DIACONATE

The Book of Church Order defines ordination as “the authoritative admission of one duly
called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of
hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship” (BCO 17-2).

Within the church universal, ordination has been viewed in two distinct ways:

1. The authoritative act of the church inducting one into an ecclesiastical office which
gives to the ordinand the authority to exercise ecclesiastical office, or
2. The authoritative act of the church inducting one into an ecclesiastical office which
gives to the ordinand the authority to exercise ecclesiastical office and also, through
the act of ordination, the spiritual gifts to exercise the ecclesiastical office. Proof
texts for the idea of ordination conveying spiritual gifts include John 20:22-23;
1 Timothy 1:18; 1 Timothy 4:14. Communions such as the Roman Catholic Church
and Eastern Orthodox Churches regard ordination as conveying both authority and
spiritual gifts. They also consider ordination to Holy Orders to be a sacrament.

Most Protestants, including those within the Reformed tradition, hold to the authority-only
view and not the authority-plus-spiritual-gifts view, and do not regard ordination as a
sacrament.

BCO 7-2 lays out the traditional Reformed view of ordination to the eldership that involves a
personal sense of divine calling to service, evidence of providential enablement and spiritual
gifts, and the approbation of the church as necessary pre-requisites for ordination. It
recognizes two ordinary and perpetual offices in the church, elders and deacons.

Further, the PCA’s branch of Reformed and Presbyterian churches formally expresses that
the Scriptures and history reserve ordination for sent and qualified men. Other branches of
Reformed and Presbyterian churches permit that women may be ordained to the diaconate,
according to their understanding of biblical texts and historical precedent.

While the committee members hold to the authority-only view of ordination, there is still a
diversity of views on the definition. The majority of members agree with the definition
below:

Ordination, biblically, historically, and with specificity in Reformed and Presbyterian
evangelical churches, is the formal setting aside of a called, sent, and qualified man from
the fellowship of an ecclesiastical assembly consisting of God’s covenant people to a
specific office, with vows affirming the responsibilities, power, and authority necessary for
the fulfillment of the specified, ecclesiastical office.
ORDINATION AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS:
A BRIEF BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL SURVEY

In Book IV of his Institutes, Calvin writes:

It remains to consider the form of ordination, to which we have assigned the last place in the call, (see chap. iv., sec. 14, 15.) It is certain, that when the apostles appointed any one to the ministry, they used no other ceremony than the laying on of hands. This form was derived, I think, from the custom of the Jews, who, by the laying on of hands, in a manner presented to God whatever they wished to be blessed and consecrated… In this way they consecrated pastors and teachers; in this way they consecrated deacons. 79

What follows is a brief80 overview of the biblical basis for ordination in the church, examining particular words and passages that display elements relevant to the doctrine. The overview specifically examines how these particular words and passages relate to someone or something being set apart or appointed to sacred work accompanied by the laying on of hands. While the elements of being set apart and the laying on of hands are not visible in every passage that looks like consecration for God’s work, one or more of the following components will be present: 1) divine gifting 2) God’s presence to empower ministry; 3) recognition by human authority. This recognition by human authority is often, but by no means always, said to occur with the laying on of hands.

The most common definition in the ESV for epitithemi is “to place something on or transfer to (a place or object).” In the New Testament, epitithemi is commonly used to express the laying on of hands. The Synoptic Gospel writers often use this word to indicate Jesus’ healing of people by the laying on of hands (Matt. 9:18; Mk. 5:23; Mk. 6:5; Mk. 7:32; Mk. 8:23, 25; Lk. 4:40; Lk.13:13). On two occasions in Acts, it is used to refer to the receiving of or filling of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:19; Acts 9:17 [also includes Paul receiving his sight]).

Επιτίθημι

Also occurs frequently in the Septuagint. Most of those occurrences are in the Torah with particular concentration in Exodus and Leviticus. It is the verb of choice when the writer wants to indicate the laying on of hands (e.g., Exod. 29:10, 15, 19; Lev. 1:4; Lev. 4:4). In these cases, a transfer of some sort is occurring. Thus, in the New Testament, the apostles would have been accustomed to this practice of the laying on of hands to signify a transfer with liturgical or ecclesial significance.

80 Time does not permit the committee to provide an exhaustive study. However, we believe that the brief overview provides enough information to draw certain conclusions.
In 1 Timothy 5:17ff Paul addresses Timothy regarding the way elders are to be honored and held accountable in the church. In that context, he instructs Timothy not to be hasty in the laying (ἐπιτίθημι) on of hands. That is, not to be hasty in ordaining men to the office of elder. The nominal form of ἐπιτίθημι (ἐπίθεσις) is found in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6 to refer to Timothy’s ordination to ecclesiastic office.

In the case of Acts 13:1-3, prophets and teachers at Antioch, at the Holy Spirit’s direction, set apart Barnabas and Saul to the work to which he had called them. After prayer and fasting, the prophets and teachers laid (ἐπιτίθημι) their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them off. This is clearly not an ordination in an ecclesiastical sense since Saul, also called Paul, is already an apostle. Rather, the leaders of the church in Antioch commissioned Barnabas and Saul for their task.

**Καθίστημι**

The relevant English definition for kathistemi is “to assign someone to a position of authority, appoint, put in charge.” This definition is the sense of the verb in most of its New Testament occurrences (Matt. 24:45, 47; Matt. 25:21, 23; Lk. 12:14, 42, 44; Acts 6:3; 7:10, 27, 35; Titus 1:5; Heb. 5:1; Heb. 7:28; Heb. 8:3). When it is used in the Septuagint, it also regularly carries the sense of being set in authority over someone or something.

Thus, it is not surprising that when the apostles instruct the congregation in Acts 6 to select seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, they use kathistemi (Acts 6:3) to indicate that they will appoint these men to the duty of serving the need that had arisen. The seven were “in charge of the tables.” They were appointed to this duty by prayer and the laying on of hands (ἐπιτίθημι). As stated in Chapter Two, although the seven are not called deacons (diakonos), they do serve (diakoneo), so that Acts 6 marks the basis of diaconal work—caring for widows, caring for the neglected.81

Additionally, Paul left Titus in Crete so that Titus would put what remained in order: to appoint (kathistemi) elders in every town (Titus 1:5). Those elders would hold authority as overseers in the churches (Titus 1:6).

**Ποιέω**

Among the most frequently utilized verbs in the New Testament, ποιέω is also very common in the Septuagint. Its most common English glosses are to produce/make something material, or to undertake to do something that brings about an event, state, or condition. It is rarely glossed as “appointed” in the New Testament (Mark 3:14, 16; Heb. 3:2). In the Old Testament, the ESV gloss for the Hebrew verb נָשָׁה (šāh) is “appointed” in 1 Samuel 12:6, and the Septuagint gloss is ποιέω. In 1 Samuel 12:6, Samuel is speaking to the people of Israel, telling them that the Lord appointed Moses and Aaron [to their “offices”]. In Mark

81 There are varying conclusions on the committee as to whether the seven men appointed in Acts 6 are the first deacons. The men are ordained, but they are not referred to as deacons. However, the committee is in agreement that this passage helps to form a pattern for diaconal ministry.
3:14 and 16, Mark is relating Jesus’ appointing the twelve apostles. In Hebrews 3:2, the writer declares that Jesus was appointed by the Father to His office of “apostle and high priest of our confession.”

\[\text{\textit{Χειροτονεω}}\]

This word occurs twice in the New Testament, and has no occurrences in the Septuagint. The English gloss is “to elect or choose someone for definite offices or tasks.” In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appoint \(\textit{cheirotoneo}\) elders in the churches they planted. In 2 Corinthians 8:19, Paul tells the Corinthians that Titus was appointed \(\textit{cheirotoneo}\) by the churches to travel with Paul as he collected money for the needy believers in Jerusalem. The word indicates the congregation members stretched forth their hands.

There are also examples of its use in extra-biblical church literature. For example, the Didache uses the word to indicate that congregations are to elect their own overseers \(\textit{episcopoi}\) and deacons \(\textit{diakonoi}\): “Therefore appoint \(\textit{cheirotoneo}\) for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. (2) You must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honored men, along with the prophets and teachers.”

The apostolic father, Ignatius, uses this word (IPhld. 10:1; I Sm. 11:2) when he writes to the Philadelphians that they are to appoint a deacon to bring congratulations to the church at Antioch: “Since it has been reported to me that in answer to your prayer and the compassion which you have in Christ Jesus the church at Antioch in Syria is at peace, it is appropriate for you, as a church of God, to appoint a deacon to go there on a mission as God’s ambassador, to congratulate them when they have assembled together and to glorify the Name.”

Conclusion

Clearly, in Scripture, the laying on of hands includes more than ordination and the appointing of people to roles. It denotes several other functions, such as:

1. Consecrating animals for sacrifice, ritual identification of sins, or sinners with the sacrificial animal (Exod. 29:10, 15, 19; Lev. 1:4; Lev. 3:1, 2, 8., 13; Lev. 4:15, 24, 29, 33);
2. Commissioning a leader ([Joshua as successor to Moses commissioned by him] Num. 27:23; Deut. 34:9);
3. Identifying a blasphemer before stoning him (Lev. 24:14);
4. Blessing children (Matt. 19:13; Mk. 10:16);
5. Setting apart Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey (Acts. 13:1-3);

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6. Praying for believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; Acts 9:19; Acts 19:9);
7. Praying for healing (Matt. 5:23; Matt. 8:23, 25; Mk. 6:5; Mk. 7:32; Mk. 16:18; Lk. 4:40; Lk. 13:33; Acts 28:8).

At the same time, the biblical data indicates that the BCO definition of ordination as, “the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship,” is on sure footing. Elders are ordained to an authoritative office within the church. Furthermore, not all servants of the church are ordained. Some may be commissioned to specific tasks. The ordination of deacons in Scripture rests heavily on whether the seven men in Acts 6 are the first deacons. The Westminster Assembly evidently considered them to be so, since it cited Acts 6 as a proof text for the office of deacon in the Form of Government adopted by the Assembly. If the seven are deacons, then deacons are also ordained to authoritative office as stewards of resources and mercy in the church.

What must be considered is the way Christ’s church has applied the Scripture’s described and prescribed instruction on the diaconate as it relates to ordination and service.

THE DIACONATE:
ORDINATION AND SERVICE

The present perspective on ordination in the PCA’s Constitution has been shaped by several factors, including:

1. The Old Testament Scriptures, particularly those related to the respective roles of men and women, and the roles of priests, elders, and prophets.
2. The New Testament Scriptures, particularly those that deal with the roles of men and women in the life of the ministry of the early church, both the prescriptive passages and the descriptive passages.
3. The theological-historical development of the church, particularly the PCA’s branch of the church. Of special interest are the documents of the early church, the mediaeval Western church, the Protestant Reformation, the restoration of Presbyterian polity among Reformed churches, and Presbyterianism in America leading up to the founding of the PCA.
4. The interaction between Christianity, the church, and the historical-cultural situation throughout history. Unfortunately, examples abound of how portions of the church at particular periods have allowed their surrounding culture to supersede the Scriptures on some issues. Two regrettable examples from Presbyterian history are the justification of chattel slavery and racial segregation in America. When it comes to the role of women in society and in the church, the committee desires to evaluate today’s culture by the Scriptures and realizes that Christians are susceptible to interpreting Scripture through a cultural lens instead of interpreting culture through Scripture’s lens.

A thorough examination of the Scriptures is detailed in Chapter Two of this report, with an additional analysis in the first part of Chapter Three. What follows is a brief examination of the theological-historical development of the diaconate in the church, with an emphasis on
the role of women in that ministry. Although the word “deaconess” is not found in Scripture, it has been the most common word in the history of the church to identify women serving in diaconate ministry. The text below follows that utilization.

The Role of Deaconesses in the History of the Church

The ancient church era offers helpful information and insights. Several documents instruct on the existence, duties, and ministry of deaconesses in the ancient church.

One of the earliest extra-biblical references to women serving as deaconesses in the church is Letter 96 from Pliny the Younger (d. AD 113) to the Emperor Trajan. Pliny was a Roman government official who wrote to the emperor regarding the growth of Christianity in Bithynia and attempted to suppress Christianity by torturing believers. He wrote, “I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.”

The Apostolic Constitutions, compiled from the second to the early fifth centuries (showing dependence upon the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, from the late first to early second century) mentions deaconesses in several places.

Book II, Section IV addresses the management of resources collected for the support of the clergy and the relief of the poor. Chapter XXVI explains the pattern and dignity God appoints to every order of the clergy. The bishop is the minister of the word, who presides as one honored with the authority of God. Then:

let the deacon minister to him, as Christ does to His Father; and let him serve him blamelessly in all things, as Christ does nothing of Himself, but does always those things that please His Father. Let also the deaconess be honoured by you in the place of the Holy Ghost, and not do or say anything without the deacon; as neither does the Comforter say or do anything of Himself, but gives glory to Christ by waiting for His pleasure. And as we cannot believe on Christ without the teaching of the Spirit, so let not any woman address herself to the deacon or bishop without the deaconess.

Book II, Section VII—On Assembling in the Church—describes the church, the clergy, and the responsibilities people have in worship services. The bishop sits in the middle. The presbyters sit on each side of him. The deacons “stand near at hand.”

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86 Ibid., 421.
quietly and in good order. The women sit by themselves in the same manner. Then, as the aspects of the service are described, it says:

And while the Gospel is read, let all the presbyters and deacons, and all the people, stand up in great silence; for it is written: “Be silent, and hear, O Israel.” And again: “But do thou stand there, and hear.” In the next place, let the presbyters one by one, not all together, exhort the people, and the bishop in the last place, as being the commander. Let the porters stand at the entries of the men, and observe them. Let the deaconesses also stand at those of the women, like shipmen. For the same description and pattern was both in the tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple of God.\textsuperscript{87}

Presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, men, women, and young people stood as groups while the aged and infirm were allowed to sit.

Further, in Book III, Section II of the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions}, instructions are given on the ordination of deaconesses, specifying that they baptize other women for modesty’s sake as baptism evidently involved disrobing, total immersion, and receiving a white robe:

Ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for ministrations toward women. For sometimes [the bishop] cannot send a deacon, who is a man, to the women, on account of unbelievers. Thou shalt therefore send a woman, a deaconess, on account of the imaginations of the bad. For we stand in need of a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities; and first in the baptism of women, the deacon shall anoint only their forehead with the holy oil, and after him the deaconess shall anoint them: for there is no necessity that women should be seen by men.\textsuperscript{88}

Deaconesses ministered to other women and even baptized them. The same section describes the actual baptism:

After that [anointing with oil], either thou, O bishop, or a presbyter that is under thee, shall in the solemn form name over them the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, shall dip them in the water; and let a deacon receive the man, and a deaconess the woman, that so the conferring of this inviolable seal may take place with a becoming decency. And after that, let the bishop anoint those that are baptized with ointment.\textsuperscript{89}

Evidently, women were baptized out of the sight of men. Women then went into the room where the church was assembled, and the presiding minister received them into the church.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 431.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
In Book VIII, Section III, chs. XIX and XX of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, instructions are given on procedures for ordaining a deaconess and the wording of the prayer, after instructions on ordaining a deacon are given:

Concerning a deaconesses, I Bartholomew make this constitution: O bishop, thou shalt lay thy hands upon her in the presence of the presbytery, and of the deacons and the deaconesses and shalt say:— O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah; who did not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be the keepers of Thy holy gates, : —do Thou now look upon this Thy servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit and, “cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” that she may worthily discharge the work that is committed to her to Thy glory, and the praise of Thy Christ, with whom glory and adoration be to Thee and the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.⁹⁰

Though the committee believes that Presbyterian polity has roots in the Old Testament, the synagogue, and the New Testament, most church historians recognize that nascent episcopacy arose quite early in the life of the ancient church and developed in stages because of several factors over the first five centuries of the church, and that Presbyterian polity was not restored until the Reformation in the 16th century.  

The New Testament uses the terms elder/presbyter and bishop/overseer as synonyms. An Anglican bishop and New Testament and patristics scholar, J. B. Lightfoot argues, in an appendix to his commentary on the Greek text of Philippians, for the synonymous use of the terms.⁹¹

Elder/bishop, a term more familiar to Jews, indicated spiritual maturity and bishop/overseer, a term more familiar to Gentiles for civil servants, was descriptive of function. Over time, a hierarchal system developed with three levels of ministers: deacon, presbyter, and bishop, eventuating with the bishop of Rome functioning as a pope (Damasus, r. A.D. 366-384). Leo the Great was the first to use the title of pope (r. 440-461). The deacon of the New Testament era soon became an entry-level clergy position as hierarchy began developing in the second century. Yet, as previously evidenced in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, deaconesses arose early in the life of the church and continued, especially in the eastern churches. Although it died out over time, in the Reformation, the role of deaconess was revived.

Different church traditions in various eras determined how deaconesses were to be ordained. In the history of the church, there were definite instances of deaconesses being ordained in the early centuries, and yet, later there were direct prohibitions of the ordination of deaconesses.

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⁹⁰ Ibid., 492.
deacons. This may be explained by the development of hierarchal polity, by the
sacerdotal understanding of presbyter/priest and bishop that evolved, and by the esteem
celibacy enjoyed resulting in more women becoming nuns.

The exact meaning of the ordination of deaconesses and when it took place is somewhat
uncertain. The clergy lists from the first three centuries include deacons, presbyters, and
bishops but also sub-deacons, deaconesses, exorcists, readers, musicians, and porters.
Eventually, deacons, presbyters, and bishops were considered the major clergy, and sub-
deacons, deaconesses, exorcists, readers, musicians, and porters were considered the minor
clergy (recognized servants of the church).

The regional and ecumenical councils of the church and the gatherings of colleges of
bishops dealt with doctrinal issues, dealt with practical issues, and issued canons. The First
Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (AD 325) produced a creed and a number of canons. Canon 19
dealt with deaconesses: “And we mean by deaconesses such as have assumed the habit, but
who, since they have no imposition of hands, are to be numbered among the laity.”
Evidently, “habit” was an early reference to nuns who began to wear distinctive clothing.

A regional council, the Council of Orange (AD 441) in Gaul (France), issued thirty canons
(one canon encouraged celibacy for deacons, presbyters, and bishops). Canon 26 explicitly
forbade the ordination of deaconesses. The Synods of Arles affirmed the Council of
Orange’s canons in 443.

The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), the Fourth Ecumenical Council mostly known for its
definition of the person of Christ, also issued a canon (Canon XV) that a woman must be at
least forty-years-old to be ordained as a deaconess.

In the Arabian Peninsula, as Christianity flourished before the rise of Islam, Dr. Robert L.
Wilkens points out, “By the sixth century there was a well-established Arabic-speaking
Christian community in Najran with a full ecclesiastical organization, bishop, presbyters,
deacons, and deaconesses.”

By the time of the Emperor Justinian (d. 565), the Hagia Sophia listed forty deaconesses
who served the church.

The regional Council of Trullo, held in Constantinople in 692, issued a canon on age
requirements for ordination. Canon 14 says, “Let the canon of our holy God-bearing Fathers
be confirmed in this particular also; that a presbyter be not ordained before he is thirty years
of age, even if he be a very worthy man, but let him be kept back. For our Lord Jesus Christ

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92 Henry R. Percival, “The Canons of the 318 Holy Fathers Assembled in the City of Nice, in Bithynia,” in The
Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 14:40.
93 Ibid., 42.
94 Ibid., 279.
95 Robert L. Wilken, The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity, (New Haven, CT and London,
was baptized and began to teach when he was thirty. In like manner let no deacon be ordained before he is twenty-five, nor a deaconess before she is forty.”

The position of deaconesses died out over time, particularly in the Western church, for several reasons: 1) the rise of hierarchy (episcopacy) in which deacon became an entry-level office leading to presbyter; 2) the rise of a sacerdotal (priestly) view of the role of clergy and a resultant categorization of major and minor clergy with deaconesses being minor; 3) the growth of the role of nuns doing many of the mercy ministries formerly done by deaconesses as celibacy became more highly esteemed, particularly in the Western church; 4) with the spread of Christianity, most baptisms became infant baptisms, coupled with the preference for effusion (without a change of clothing) over immersion (which involved a change of clothing), so that deaconesses no longer baptized women for modesty’s sake.

The Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Church (1545-1563) forbade the ordination of deaconesses because they did not have priestly functions. In May of 2017, however, Pope Francis announced that he was establishing a commission to study the possible reintroduction of deaconesses into the Roman Catholic Church.

When John Calvin revived Presbyterian polity in sixteenth-century Geneva, he restored the collegial government of a plurality of elders, and restored the office of deacon to its New Testament nature as a ministry of mercy. The church at Geneva also had deaconesses who served under the deacons and ministered especially to women and children. Calvin saw deacons as having two primary tasks based on Romans 12:8: 1) distribution of alms and financial management, and 2) care for the poor and the sick. Calvin viewed deaconesses as enrolled widows, based on 1 Timothy 5. There is no indication that the deaconesses of Geneva were ordained, though they had official ecclesiastical roles and evidently served under the leadership of the ordained, male deacons.

In nineteenth century Germany, there was a renewal of unordained deaconesses in the Lutheran tradition. In 1836 the Rev. Theodore Fleidner and his wife opened a deaconess mother house in Kaiser Werth on the Rhine. Scandinavian Lutherans then established deaconesses. American Lutherans followed suit and began to encourage deaconess service. Clara Barton used Lutheran deaconess nurses in the Civil War. In 1888, Deaconess Hospital was established in Cincinnati. In 1895, a Lutheran deaconess training center was established in Baltimore.

In the Church of England, Elizabeth Catherine Ferard visited Kaiser Werth. With the Bishop of London’s approval, she founded the North London Deaconess Institution, and received (unordained) deaconess License Number One from the Bishop of London. In 1887, Isabelle Gilmore founded an order of Anglican deaconesses not living in community. Lady Grissel Baillie was recognized as a deaconess Church of Scotland (unordained) in the Church of Scotland in 1888. Deaconess Hospital was opened in Edinburgh in 1894 to honor her.  

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96 See Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 4: Ch. 3: Sec. 9; and 4:13:15-19.
97 https://forallsaints.wordpress.com/2011/07/18/elizabeth-ferard-deaconess-1883
In 1889 Lucy Rider Meyer M.D. led in the reviving of the office of unordained deaconess in the American Methodist Episcopal Church that eventually founded New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston in 1896.\(^9^9\)

Further:
- In 1901, Mennonites founded Bethel Deaconess Home and Hospital Society in Beatrice, Kansas, that continues to this day.\(^1^0^0\)
- After the 19th century resurgence, deaconesses both declined and diversified from primarily medical roles in the 20th century. The decline was due to several factors:
  - An increase in professional nurses’ schools in state colleges and universities, and nursing schools associated with secular hospitals.
  - An increase in state-run schools of social work and the professionalization of social work.
  - The “Great Reversal” or conservative withdrawal from many aspects of social service in reaction to the social gospel movement during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy between WWI and WWII.
  - The growth of women’s ordination to all offices in the mainline denominations.
- The diversification occurred in the 20th century as unordained deaconesses moved beyond being nurses or social workers. For example, unordained deaconesses in the Lutheran Deaconess Association (LCMS and ELCA) serve in a number of functions to express the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ.\(^1^0^1\) For example:
  - Medical service as physicians, nurses, midwives, physical therapists, and occupational therapists.
  - Teaching from pre-K to the professional and graduate levels.
  - Music ministry.
  - Administration in the local church or non-profit organizations.
  - Campus ministry to women.
  - Institutional ministry in hospitals, hospices, jails, and prisons.
  - Legal services to and advocacy for the poor as lawyers or paralegals.
  - Cross-cultural or inner-city missionaries in the US and abroad.
  - Educational mentors to the disadvantaged.
  - Geriatric care.

This brief survey from the ancient church era to the twentieth century demonstrates that in the various branches of Christ’s church, women have served a vital, necessary, and varied role in diaconate ministry. While there have been periods and denominations when women were ordained to this service, what has been most consistent is that they were recognized, screened, and set apart for it.

\(^9^9\) https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucy-Jane-Rider-Meyer
\(^1^0^0\) https://www.bethelks.edu/alumni/alumni-association/bethel-college-nursing-alumni-association/history-of-the-bethel-deaconess-hospital/
\(^1^0^1\) http://www.thelda.org/about/history.php
It is a commendable and necessary task to identify, encourage, equip, and empower women to the full use of their gifts in the gathered assembly of God’s people and the scattered ministry of God’s people as the church fulfills both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Additionally, the full use of gifts must not be defined or implemented in any way that undermines the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the church and the family or contradicts biblical exhortations and prohibitions. In a word, the biblically defined complementarian relationship of men and women in the family and church is to be embraced (including ordination as the PCA has defined it), and inconsistent practices should not undermine or contradict it.
CHAPTER FOUR
ENCOURAGING A ROBUST AND
GRACIOUS COMPLEMENTARIAN PRACTICE

Gen. 1:27-30 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

Gal. 3:27-28 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The infallible rule for the church’s faith and practice is the Word of God. The first thing the Bible declares about human beings is that they are made in the image of God. God speaks in Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” God’s church gladly confesses that by the renewal of the Spirit, she ever more reflects the glory of God (Eph. 3:19; Eph. 4:23-24), who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Indeed, the confession of the Trinity is the heartbeat of the Christian religion.102 No analogies in the surrounding world adequately convey the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.103 The most fitting analogy available is God’s declaration that humanity is made in His image.

The declaration in Genesis 1 establishes humanity’s unique place in God’s kingdom. God has given people the unique role of image-bearer.104 This means that individual human beings possess inherent dignity and worth. Further, this inherent dignity and worth is particularly declared of humanity as male and female. Herman Bavinck reinforces this high position of men and women when he highlights, “in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed confession, the idea that a human being does not bear or have the image of God but that he or she is the image of God.”105 Men and women are truly and essentially human only because they are the image of God. For Bavinck, all other creatures display vestiges of God. Only a human being is the image of God:

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105 Bavinck, 554.
The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members. Just as the traces of God (vestigia Dei) are spread over many, many works, in both space and time, so also the image of God can only be displayed in all its dimensions and characteristic features in a humanity whose members exist both successively one after the other and contemporaneously side by side...Only humanity in its entirety—as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth, as prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation—only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God.\(^{106}\)

Human beings image God individually but most strikingly as a community. The commands of Genesis 1:28-30 are tied to how humanity images God. To multiply and fill the earth and to exercise dominion are all impossible to carry out as solitary individuals. In creation, human destiny is in community because humanity images the triune God who lives in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nonna Harrison rightly points this truth out when she says, “The unity of humankind is an important facet of the image of God, who is one. Humankind is a multiplicity of persons who are united in one body, just as God is three persons united in one essence.”\(^{107}\) Thus, when humanity is united in loving community, it reflects the inner life of the triune God.

God’s first and primary example of a united, loving community imaging Him was male and female together. They are equal in value, worth, and dignity while simultaneously different. Genesis 1:26-27 records the distinction between male and female, before sin permeated their being and wrought corruption. Therefore, the difference between male and female is a gift to be celebrated, not a handicap to be hidden. Further, because men and women are meant to complement one another in the creation order, each must be able to flourish in the context of covenant community.

Some have argued that, in the new covenant community, those complementarian differences are dissolved. This conclusion is drawn from texts like Galatians 3:28. While Paul’s words are central to understanding the equality of all believers in Christ as “sons of God,” they do not obliterate distinctions and differences. The “RPCES Study Committee Report on the Role of Women in the Church (1976)” summarized the concept well:

Because all are thus shut up to sin and can be saved only by faith, all come before God on equal footing, their race, sex, or state of bondage (Jew/Greek, male/female, bond/free) having no effect whatsoever on their right to stand before God. It is in this frame of reference that Paul declares, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ, for as many of you as were baptized into

\(^{106}\) Ibid.

Includes Recommendations as Amended and Adopted by 45th GA

Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

The new covenant does not seek to overcome the distinctions between men and women. Rather, it affirms, as does all of Scripture, that all people come before God on equal footing by faith with no privileges afforded by race, gender, or ethnicity. The oneness that the apostle speaks to here and elsewhere (cf. Eph. 4:4-7; Col. 3:11) is to be demonstrated in practice within the church.

From the beginning, man and woman, who were designed to be God worshipers (Gen. 2:3, 16, 17; Exod. 20:11), enjoyed perfect harmony with God and with one another. The act of disobedience to God’s command (non-worship of God, worship of self) brought about immediate and devastating effects. Though still recognizable, the image of God in sinful man and woman was shattered. God’s law is perfect, and is meant to regulate people’s thoughts, words, and actions. When people obey God’s commands, that obedience is an expression of and in harmony with God’s perfection. This standard of behavior, found in the image of God, “makes it possible for [us] to have [our] life and conduct patterned after the exemplar which the attitude and actions of God provide, that is, an intrinsic affinity, depraved and perverted by the fall, yet not obliterated.” Since the fall, every relationship has evidence of brokenness. Every image-bearer has need of a Savior.

Geerhardus Vos explains that the doctrine of the image of God “is of the utmost moment for soteriology—… God’s work of grace … must renovate the image in man.” The grace-wrought restoration of the image of God is an important part of salvation. In Christ, there is hope of renewal. People are reconciled to God. He is actively restoring that broken image of Himself in every believer. He is at work making relationships whole and healthy, “[a]nd we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Redeemed men and women with equal value, worth, and standing in the covenant community of God are privileged to live out distinctive male and female roles with responsibilities which complement one another and bring glory to Creator God. Part of the way this occurs is as the gifts God gives to men and women are given room to flourish within the bounds of the distinctions declared in His Word. By following God’s design, men and women find both personal fulfillment and spiritual growth because it is His goal to make them like their Savior: “Thus the process of sanctification can be described in its richest meaning as transformation into the image of Christ.”

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111 “Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory.” John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion, 1:690.
112 Murray, 2:310.
restored through His commitment to remake men and women in His image: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom.12:1).

Various Complementarian Practices in the PCA

While upholding a complementarian view of women’s role in the church’s ministries, practices within the PCA vary as sessions wrestle with this question of biblical fidelity and encouraging women in their churches to use their gifts to God’s glory and for the church’s edification. Though many ministries among women and children exist where women have universal opportunities to use their gifts, a variety of practices are available to women in teaching ministries, through diaconal work, and in public worship.

The Teaching Ministries

Generally, churches within the PCA fall into one of three different practices with regard to women teaching in the church. (1) Some churches provide qualified women teaching opportunities only to women and/or children and under the session’s authority. (2) Some churches permit qualified women to teach mixed gender groups with her husband or an elder and under the session’s authority. (3) Some churches permit qualified women to teach mixed adult gender groups under the session’s authority.

The Diaconal Work

Again, churches within the PCA generally fall into one of three different practices with regard to the involvement of women in diaconal work. (1) Some churches only permit ordained men to perform diaconal work in the church in any formal way. This does not mean these churches exclude women from coming alongside deacons while ministering to single women, mercy ministries, etc. However, there is no formal role or intentional process to encourage women to serve in diaconal work. (2) Some churches have created a formal role for qualified women to serve in diaconal work. These churches’ sessions either appoint and/or commission qualified women for this work. These women are often given the title “deacon assistant” or “deaconess.” This practice is already permitted in the BCO. (3) Some churches have chosen not to have a formal diaconate and instead have qualified lay men and women serve together performing the diaconal work in their churches. Though this practice is not specifically prohibited by the BCO, it seems poorly aligned with the spirit of the two offices of the church outlined in the BCO.

Public Worship

And finally, churches within the PCA generally fall into one of three different practices with regard to the involvement of women in the public worship services of the local churches. (1) Some churches have no leadership roles for the laity, and thus their women, in their worship services. (2) Some churches open some roles in their public worship service to laity, and thus their women, including leading the congregation in singing, taking up

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offerings, reading Scripture, distributing elements in the Lord’s Supper, leading in prayers, making announcements, et cetera. (3) Some churches open roles for women in their worship services by restricting the preaching, and sometimes the reading of the Scriptures, to ordained men and then stating that all other roles in public worship are open to the church’s qualified men and women members.

Identifying and Making Room for Women’s Gifts and Abilities to Flourish

The committee is hopeful that faithful elders are already exerting themselves to identify and find ways to utilize the gifts and abilities of women in their congregation. Doing so contributes to their personal flourishing, and also the health of entire body. However, at least two disturbing trends cause the committee to conclude that more pastors and sessions need to be intentional about focusing on women’s spiritual lives and ministries in their congregations.

The Problem

As one example, some on social media have asserted that women's ministries can be seen as a relegation of women to a secondary place, rather than a healthy functioning as part of the whole. The local church’s women’s ministry can therefore be marginalized, causing their efforts to be trivialized. The vision and mission of women’s ministries should “reflect the total philosophy, purpose, and goals” of the local church. But, instead of being “intentional and strategic” in this mission, women’s meetings often become social clubs which neither “teach women to think biblically” nor “build community with other members, age groups and ministries of the church.”

Further, women are increasingly turning to para-church ministries, both for instruction (which is often theologically suspect) and to exercise their gifts (with no oversight from elders.) In fact, it is the rare pastor who knows the names of the women who loom large in para-church “women’s ministries,” much less the conferences, websites, blogs, and curriculum that women are turning to in the absence of intentional oversight and nourishment from their sessions. This lack of shepherding and oversight can also be the result of failed women’s ministry as mentioned previously. Women will seek a relational context for their faith, and if they do not find substance in the context of their local church, they will seek it elsewhere. This applies to women of ethnic minority and majority cultures alike. For example, one African American woman explained,

I have credible seminal ideas, built on sound orthodoxy. I'm under no suspicion of heresy. I write freely for a number of publications. And yet, I've since decided to go into government think tanks and foreign policy - there's more freedom there than is afforded me by my own denomination.

114 Ibid.
115 This was part of a response to the committee’s survey question, “What have been your primary blessings and challenges as an African American woman in the PCA?”
It is important to note that the ethnic minority women whom the committee contacted expressed gratitude for the PCA’s doctrinal integrity, the polity which allows for checks and balances in church governance, the emphasis on the doctrines of God’s glorious grace, and the ability to make relationships with Christian sisters from various cultures and economic standings. Yet, they encouraged the denomination to do more than simply “allow” or “tolerate” women in ministry. Rather, they encouraged the PCA to invite and involve women to participate wherever and whenever possible.

Finally, women in the PCA may face an identity crisis. This identity crisis is related to the spiritual characteristic of a woman’s role of submission. Unless her submission to the session’s headship is treated with honor and tenderness, she begins to lose sight of its worth and her Lord’s delight in her exercise of it.

The Solution

Remember the foundational structure. The Creator God has designed His people to flourish in certain environments, and they will struggle in environments not designed for them. In order for women in the church to flourish, and the church as a whole to flourish, its officers and its members (in this case particularly, its women) must support and encourage one another, with adherence to the order and structure determined for the church. With Christ as the Shepherd and Oversee of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25), our Head (Eph. 1:22-23), and our King (Rev. 19:16), men and women must strive together in grace-driven obedience (Rom. 6:14) and allegiance to His rule. Male and female interdependence is a key element of the structure of the local church, for “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God” (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

For the sake of Christ and His church, the committee encourages all women in the local church, as an exhibition of their love of God and neighbor (1 John 5:2-3), intentionally to:

- recognize and honor the authority and rule given to the elders of the church and strive to support, help, and obey them as God has placed these male leaders over them (Heb. 13:7, 9, 17).
- avoid contempt for or disparagement toward the male leadership (Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:14; Titus 2:3).
- commit themselves to humble service, doing what is needed in every area of service which Scripture allows, seeking to honor their Master who came "not to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28; Gal. 5:13; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 2:16).
- develop and utilize their God-given gifts in ways that uphold the structure of the church and the family, express love and unity with others, and undergird the pulpit ministry (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 13:1-14:1; Eph. 4:1-16; Eph. 5:22-24).

For the sake of Christ and His church (which church includes the women who are committed to fulfill their role in the above exhortation), the committee encourages the elders in each local church, as an exhibition of their love for God and neighbor, intentionally to:
includes recommendations as amended and adopted by 45th ga

- recognize and honor the women who are under their authority as vital members of the body of Christ, leading them as shepherds who must give an account (1 Cor. 11:11; Gal. 3:28; Heb. 13:17).
- feed them sound doctrine and provide direction and nourishment for their souls (John 21:15-17; Titus 1:9; Titus 2:1).
- protect them from false doctrine and false teaching (Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1).
- neither demean nor discourage them (Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:26).
- provide opportunities for the development and utilization of women’s gifts in every area of service that Scripture allows (Eph. 4:15-16).
- foster an atmosphere of trust and respect for their office under Christ by living trustworthily and honorably, showing true concern and gentle care for those entrusted to them (Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

the process

as with any person in the church, in order to identify gifts that a layman or laywoman may have for the nourishment of Christ’s body, that person must have an opportunity to exhibit giftedness in an area by ministering in it. quite often, a person’s gifts may be discovered through an intentional training process that is a further opportunity to foster community.

many women and men are understandably reluctant to attempt something they have never done previously, so the committee suggests that invitations to participate in some area of church ministry be given a specific time frame. for instance, “would you be willing to give the talks to children’s church for the month of april?” or “would you volunteer to meet with the deacons 3 or 4 times to help them with some of the people they are working with, using your financial planning (or nutritional/education/whatever) expertise?”

there are a great number of books and articles available that lay out the way a pastor (or a manager, in a secular setting) can discover and promote the gifts of those of whom he is in charge. the ground is well trodden.

next, women whose gifts are already identified, and especially those who have had theological training, experience on the mission field, or other ministry experience, need their pastors and elders to find appropriate ways for those gifts to be used within their churches. the committee would like to stem the tide of women gravitating toward para-church ministries or personal blogs rather than finding a place within their own churches to minister. this may entail hiring a woman for a non-ordained staff position, or inviting women to advisory positions, to give announcements, or to participate other ways in the worship service. women should also be encouraged to grow in their knowledge of god and the church through seminary courses and training sessions offered by cdm.116 while each session must determine what the non-negotiable biblical guidelines are, the committee

116 women who have seminary training should also be trained to counsel women. equipped women could handle more effectively many of the unique problems women are facing. hunt and hutcheson, leadership for women in the church (grand rapids, mi: zondervan, 1991), 143.
encourages ruling and teaching elders to observe faithfully all the biblical teaching about the range of ways in which women may use their gifts, and not to be bound by traditions that may be merely cultural.

**Encouraging Staff Roles for Qualified Women Working with the Church’s Session**

Any women holding staff positions in a church would have the same relationship to the session as non-ordained men who fill staff positions, such as but not limited to: attending session meetings to report or receive instruction; executing the session’s vision in the positions for which they have been hired; managing the budgets allocated to them and reporting on disbursement of funds...in short, fulfilling whatever is required of any person in a staff position.

Good leadership involves utilizing the best resources in deliberations and decision-making. When sessions include women staff members—such as directors of women's ministries and directors of children's ministries, to name only two—in their meetings, the large majority of the people in churches are then represented by someone who knows and represents them—someone who can give insight into their needs and spiritual maturity, knows how decisions will affect them, and can speak for them. Elders of the session need the help of women staff members, and elders are fulfilling their God-ordained role by encouraging women to offer their gifts to complement the session in their leadership by being present to help them.

Since the *BCO* permits any member to attend and observe session meetings when they are not in executive session, technically women can choose to attend session meetings on their own initiative and for no higher motivation than curiosity, though very, very few would do so. It is far better to issue invitations to those women (and laymen) who can actually assist the session by offering gifts such as communication, financial planning, real estate development, and human resources expertise, to name only a few. Invitations to women filling staff positions would of course be expected and encouraged, along with laymen who fill staff positions.

The committee cannot and does not desire to legislate the working of individual sessions or their relationship with their staff and members. However, the committee encourages sessions in churches that have unordained staff positions to consider hiring qualified women, possibly even before qualified men. The church staff will of necessity have primarily ordained men, and women will never be ordained. Thus, the committee encourages preferring women for non-ordained staff positions, such as director of children’s ministry, director of women’s ministry, director of adult education/discipleship, treasurer/accountant, administrator, or director of assimilation. This could be desirable for these reasons: it gives qualified women an outlet for their gifts; it encourages PCA women to pursue theological education, knowing that there will be employment options for them to serve; it gives visibility to women who can model mature female leadership; it demonstrates before the watching world that the church is a body that practices biblical inclusion and women are co-heirs of grace.
How Can We Affirm Women Who Have Obvious Bible-Teaching Skills?

When some of the early Christians witnessed the fulfillment of Joel 2:29, “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days,” on Pentecost (and subsequent fillings of the Spirit in Acts), their response was to adopt a unisex approach to life and ministry. Paul addresses correctively this approach in his first letter to the Corinthians. God created and continues to uphold the dual gendered roles that He made at creation—male and female. God has also poured out His Spirit on “both men and women” and given gifts meant for the flourishing of Christ’s body and the spread of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet, many of the gifts given to women have been overlooked and neglected in their own churches, forcing women either to bury the “talent” that has been given them, or go outside the church to para-church ministries in order to use their gifts.

While gifts must always be used appropriately within the roles to which women have been called, the local church should actively seek ways to identify and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit that exist within its midst.

That some of these gifts may be the ability to explain scriptural teaching or theological truth should not surprise or threaten the church leadership where these women attend. There are two schools of thought within the committee:

1) If women are teaching men at the invitation and under the correction of their sessions, the women’s gifts will only enrich the congregation. Some of the committee members do not believe that teaching the Bible carries any juridical authority, since no lay person has the ability to place a person under discipline if they disagree with what is being taught.

2) There are some who believe that women are not allowed to teach men in a formal, ongoing role of teacher in the local church, but that there are isolated and informal circumstances in which women may share biblical truths with men that will edify the body (e.g., Aquila and Priscilla informally teaching Apollos in Acts 18:26). They also believe that because of that restriction, God’s Word would not allow sessions to permit women to teach men in the formal role of teacher in the local church.

However, within each school of thought, there is agreement that the local session would have oversight to determine the extent and circumstances that they deem appropriate.

Churches should consider creative ways in which to utilize the teaching gifts of laymen and laywomen in their midst, such as (but not limited to):

• a “Skeptics Welcome” café wherein, once a week, church members invite non-believers to bring their questions for informal discussion. A permanent and/or rotating team of apologetically trained men and women who are comfortable
talking to unbelievers would be a good place for lay women to assist pastors, elders, or other trained men. In fact, they would be necessary if women attending were to feel comfortable and heard.

- homeless shelters, refuges for battered women, hospital wards, nursing homes, Christian schools, college fellowships, Mom’s groups
- kids community groups: large group weeknight fellowship for elementary and middle school kids, with music, small group Bible study, crafts, et cetera
- Women, chosen and supervised by the session, can teach Sunday school classes to adults, midweek Bible study classes (at the church or in homes), or other venues
- Vacation Bible School and other children's ministries like Fun with Faith and Backyard Bible Clubs
- Train women to give their personal testimonies as well as to teach the Bible for women's retreats, luncheons, teas, Christmas events, and so forth.

The primary need is the encouragement and respect of the church’s male leadership who can either nourish or break the heart of a woman who is trying to serve God. Encouragement and respect can take the form of ongoing training in teaching, Bible, and theology, sending women to the yearly PCA women's leadership training conferences, and/or encouraging women to take seminary courses, and earn seminary degrees, including offering financial help if possible.

There is additional benefit to churches finding ways to deploy gifted women teachers in their midst. In a connected world, gifted men and women regularly develop websites and blogs as a platform for instruction. When churches recognize a gifted woman’s teaching ministry and incorporate it into the church’s ministry, the expansion of that ministry is an expansion of that church. Her web presence could be incorporated into or linked to her church’s, where she is blessed to have oversight by a small group of mature men and women advisers from the church who would help her set her schedule, review her teaching, and give her accountability for her ministry.

Finally, women should find great encouragement in the valuable role of weekly teaching children through Sunday school classes, catechism classes (such as Kid’s Quest, etc.), and regular women’s Bible studies. These venues of teaching offer inestimable benefit to the kingdom and the growth of believers.
CHAPTER FIVE
PASTORAL LETTER AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In His inexhaustible creativity and unfailing purposes, God created man as male and female in His image and after His likeness (Gen. 1:26). As image bearers, humanity has the great privilege and high honor to glorify God by ruling over creation, being fruitful, filling the earth, and cultivating its potential (WSC Q/A 1; Gen. 1:28).

Although sin has marred the image of God in man (Gen. 5:3), the Lord continues to uphold the dual gendered roles that He marvelously made: male and female. This creation order enables humanity to employ its complementary gifts that quite obviously could not be obeyed by a single gender. After all, why else did God say, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18)?

While the fall has touched and twisted all of creation, God has never revoked His blessings on men and women working together to glorify Him with their obedience, creativity, productivity, and union. In fact, as part of His redemption, God has poured out His Spirit on “both men and women” (Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17) and has given gifts meant for the flourishing of the body of Christ and the spread of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

While gifts must always be used appropriately within the roles to which women have been called, it is the committee’s hope that at the local, regional, and national levels, the church would actively seek ways to identify and use all the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given within their midst.

Sadly, not all the women of the PCA have experienced affirmation of their gifts and encouragement to serve the church within the parameters of biblical teaching. Many who fully embrace the Bible's teaching about complementary gender roles have experienced a climate in the local church more focused on what women cannot do rather than one fostering a biblically informed culture of what women are called to do.

The committee affirms wholeheartedly that the Bible requires women's gifts to be fully employed within biblical parameters. Anything to the contrary has only wounded the body of Christ, robbed it of many of God’s gifts, and caused outsiders to question the church’s devotion to the Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice. Moving forward, the committee desires to see churches utilize women’s gifts and abilities so that they may, as Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1 says, "Glorify God and enjoy him forever."

In this letter, the committee hopes to give practical suggestions and encouragement for how ruling and teaching elders, as those with God-ordained headship, may encourage women to use their gifts and talents to serve in biblical ways in the various ministries of their congregation and our denomination, making it possible both for women and for the church to fulfill their callings from the Lord.
Recommendations [as adopted by the 45th General Assembly]:

1. That Overture 3 from Westminster Presbytery, “Declare that the 44th General Assembly Erred in the Formation of an Ad Interim Committee on the Role of Women as not Being Properly before the Court, and Dismiss the Ad Interim Committee with Apology,” be answered in the negative. Adopted

2. That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly recognize that, from the founding of the PCA, there has been a variety of views and practices regarding the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church within scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination, and that such mutual respect for said views and practices continues. Adopted

Rationale: The Scriptures and the constitution of the PCA state that offices of the church are only open to qualified and ordained men. But the committee also recognizes that the Scriptures and the constitution of the PCA give freedom to its churches with regard to varying views and practices by its churches in the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church. This freedom of view and practice has also been part of the PCA’s history. For instance, regarding millennial and creation views, the PCA has enjoyed liberty within confessional parameters. In other denominations, these differences would have been grounds for separation.

Therefore, the committee recommends that ruling and teaching elders continue this recognition of freedom within PCA churches to utilize women’s gifts within the scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination. The committee recommends that such mutual respect for views and practices within these parameters continue. The committee believes this freedom of views and practices within PCA churches where Scripture and the constitution allow for freedom is a strength of the denomination and should be valued by the whole church.

3. That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly strive to develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of godly women in the local, regional, and national church, and particularly consider overtures that would allow qualified women to serve on appropriate committees and agencies within the church. Adopted

Rationale: The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit has given gifts to the church for the glory of God and the edification of the church (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:11-16). Churches should strive to identify, develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of all their members. The committee encourages all PCA churches to do so particularly and especially among their godly women members. The committee further encourages PCA churches to utilize the gifts, skills, and knowledge of women by particularly and especially promoting and recruiting qualified women to serve on appropriate committees within the church. Commissions, unlike committees, are
elected by governing courts to act on behalf of the governing court and should remain open only to members of the governing court.

The committee recognizes that many PCA churches, as well as some presbyteries, already strive to utilize qualified women on their committees. Currently, membership of the Committees and Agencies of the PCA’s General Assembly are only open to ordained men. Some denominational Boards have women advisory committees. The General Assembly has appointed women to study committees, like the one compiling this report. Currently, however, the PCA’s Committees, Boards, and Agencies are only open to ordained men. The committee advises sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly to consider making overtures to the General Assembly identifying appropriate Committees and Agencies in which women should serve as members and amending *The Book of Church Order* to allow women to do so.

4. **That sessions, if possible, establish a diaconate of qualified ordained men.**

   **Adopted As Amended**

   **Rationale:** There is at least anecdotal evidence that some PCA churches are choosing not to establish an ordained diaconate, even with qualified candidates, because the church wishes to be free to establish a body of unordained servants, both male and female (*BCO* 9-7). Yet, the absence of a body of ordained deacons appears to miss the Lord's will for His church, named in several New Testament texts and described in the PCA *Book of Church Order*.

   First, in Philippians 1:1, Paul addresses the saints, overseers, and deacons of the Philippian church because overseers and deacons led the church together. Second, 1 Timothy 3 describes the qualifications of elders and deacons, assuming that a church will have both elders and deacons. He states, regarding deacons, "those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." Third, in his discussion of elders and deacons, Paul said he wrote that they "may know how one ought to behave [or "conduct oneself"] in the household of God." Finally, the New Testament gift lists mention the gift of service, which a body of seven men had and exercised to great effect in the life of the apostolic church (Acts 6:1-7).

   Therefore, with sound biblical warrant, *BCO* 9-4 begins, "The deacons of a particular church shall be organized as a Board." The imperative sense of the verb has historically been construed as a mandate with a limited caveat: a new or small church may not have enough trained leaders to ordain both elders and deacons. But the PCA’s agreed upon polity acknowledges the importance of the work of the deacon in the local church.
5. That sessions consider how to include non-ordained men and women in the worship of the church so as to maintain faithfulness to Scripture, as well as utilizing the gifts God has poured out to His entire church (see exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26 in Chapter Two).

Rationale: Within a complementarian framework, there is substantial, non-controversial opportunity for non-ordained men and women to participate in the leadership of a worship service, in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14:26.

Some examples of how a session might implement this follow. First, in music, a session might allow men and women to lead congregational or choral singing. Second, men and women may "stir up one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24) by describing the value of upcoming ministries of mercy and disciple-making. Third, men and women might promote corporate worship by testifying or praising God for the favor He shows to ministries of the church. Fourth, granting that many sessions are convinced that a pastoral prayer and a prayer for the illumination of Scripture are reserved for elders, men and women might lead other prayers of petition or praise. Fifth, within the parameters of Larger Catechism 156, the session might authorize various persons to read Scripture. Granting that many sessions are convinced that the reading of the Scripture before the sermon is part of the sermon, there are other occasions to read Scripture in worship liturgies, such as responsive readings. Sixth, non-ordained men and women might make doxological announcements (praise for the work of God in a local congregation) or bring greetings that encourage the body (Heb. 3:13).

6. 

BCO 9-7 says: “It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (BCO 17).” Thus, for the well-being of the church, the committee recommends that sessions and presbyteries select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the ordained diaconate.

Rationale: BCO 9-7 presently provides for sessions to recognize the unordained women laboring in diaconal work alongside ordained deacons. These women have been given a variety of names, job descriptions, and roles (within the parameters of Scripture and the confession), and thus, it is appropriate for sessions to establish the role of unordained deaconess to assist the deacons in their labors.

A way to recognize these women, following training and testing, is through commissioning. Commissioning is a general term, used for occasions when people are set apart for a particular task, usually accompanied by public prayer.

This action is practiced already in many, if not most, PCA churches, to set apart and pray for those embarking on missionary endeavors, (life-time or short-term) or anyone being
sent out for a particular task, such as an evangelistic team, Vacation Bible School leaders, or other occasions.

The minutes of the PCA’s First General Assembly in 1973 record the commissioning of six missionaries, three men and three women. The minutes record:

The following new National Presbyterian Church missionaries were presented and commissioned in a service in which Ruling Elder Gerald Sovereign led in prayer, Ruling Elder Roger DeHaven read Scripture, and Teaching Elder Will McIlwaine pronounced the benediction: Mr. and Mrs. [Marie] John Lynch, Rev. Cecilio Woody Lajara, Dr. and Mrs. [Rebecca] Peter Jones, and Miss Ellen [Sue] Barnett (MIGA, 1973, item 1-56, p. 37).

Note that the term “commissioned” is used. Messrs. Lajara and Jones were already ordained teaching elders. The minutes do not reflect whether Mr. Lynch was unordained, or if he were an ordained ruling elder or deacon. Mrs. Lynch, Mrs. Jones, and Miss Barnett were not ordained. The General Assembly publicly commissioned all six people as missionaries, those who were ordained along with those who were not ordained.

7. That presbyteries and the General Assembly consider an overture that would establish formally the right of sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly to establish the position of commissioned church worker within the PCA for qualified and gifted unordained men and women. Adopted

Rationale: Presbyterianism in America has, in the past, recognized the need to set apart qualified women and men for service in the church outside of licensure and ordination. This was accomplished by establishing the category of commissioned church worker. For example, the 1938 PCUSA Digest describes the qualifications and requirements for people desiring to serve as a commissioned church worker in similar manner to licensure and ordination candidates. However, it clearly states, “the status of Commissioned Church Worker is never to be considered as having any relationship to or association with licensure, or ordination…nor does this status, when received, confer any ministerial rights and privileges.”

The committee believes that this category could potentially address a number of issues in the PCA. While it would not represent an office, it would recognize those whose lives have been given in service to the body. An unordained man or woman would have to receive advanced training and experience appropriate to their area of service.

This category would be a way to recognize trained and committed staff members who were making service to the church their life’s work. This benefit for commissioned church workers may redress an inequity in compensation that mostly affects women, who are in non-licensed and non-ordained full-time ministry (https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc417.html).
The commissioning service for this work could be done in a manner distinct from an ordination service, in order to emphasize deliberately that it is NOT ordination, thus protecting ordination to ruling and teaching elders as a qualified-male-only calling.

The committee believes that commissioned church worker is a category that is long overdue in the PCA. Again, while it would not represent an office, it would recognize people whose lives have been given to serve in the body. The committee favors adding this as a category in the PCA, not an office. The category would carry no authority, merely recognition. No BCO changes would be necessary. The category could apply to deaconesses, women staff members who have theological degrees, or others as determined by the General Assembly.

8. That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly consider how they can affirm and include underprivileged and underrepresented women in the PCA. Adopted

Rationale: After Jesus rose from the dead, He commanded His apostles: “Therefore, go make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18). Jesus, our great King, prescribes the mission of His church, which, in part, is to ensure the nations become His disciples (cf. WCF 7.6). The overflow of the Great Commission is revealed in Acts. The names in Acts 13:1 demonstrate that Jesus’ disciples took His commission seriously. Indeed, people from different ethnic backgrounds were coming to faith in Christ. Unfortunately, the PCA, though it upholds the mandate to make disciples of the nations, has yet to see the demographics in diverse communities reflected in local churches. Therefore, as the PCA considers the Great Commission afresh, local churches should affirm that intentionally reaching the nations in their communities is not an addition to the church’s ministry. It is a demand, even command, by Jesus as a principle part of their church’s ministry.

Acts 6:1-7 sets precedent for affirming the underprivileged. Whether male or female, everyone deserved equal treatment in Christ’s church (cf. Jas. 2:1-13). Perhaps one of the greatest examples of the underprivileged being included and affirmed in God’s kingdom is seen in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 2:24). To use today’s language, her family was not middle class, yet she participated in the church in a unique, yet honorable and God-glorifying manner (cf. 1 Tim. 2:15). The committee affirms, therefore, that even if women are in a lower tax bracket, they are to be embraced as valuable, of equal dignity and worth, and included in various ministries of the church.

9. The committee humbly requests to be dismissed with thanks. Adopted

NOTE: The Study Committee adopted the original report and recommendations by a vote of 6-1, with the dissenting vote by TE Jeffrey Choi.