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5  
6  
7

8 A SERVING PEOPLE

9  
10  
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12 Introduction

13  
14 The title of this paper (and the subject headings) was determined by  
15 the Board of Reference and Counsel of the General Conference. Four topics  
16 are engaged to create a framework for discussion. The first establishes the  
17 biblical base for service in the church and the next three topics deal with  
18 tensions in our church community.  
19

20 The intent of this paper is not to present final answers to difficult  
21 issues, but rather to give direction to dialogue and discussion.  
22

23 I. THE WAY WE SERVE (the biblical language of service)  
24

25 Each society has a way of ordering work so that by its ranking we know  
26 which is noble and which is demeaning. The service language of the New  
27 Testament is notoriously paradoxical in that it ranks as highest and most  
28 noble those qualities which, in the Roman world, are seen to be the most  
29 base and ignoble. The parade of New Testament service words is long. Allow  
30 me to highlight some of them.  
31

32 A. The Dignity of Service (diakonos, latreia)  
33

34 The New Testament uses two words to describe service, and it uses them  
35 often. The first word is diakonos from which we get our English word  
36 deacon. The second word is latreia. These two words are closely akin to  
37 each other. Diakonos has moved through an interesting pattern of meaning in  
38 the Greek/Roman world. The first meaning of the word was simply "table  
39 waiter"; then it came to mean "to care for household needs"; and finally, it  
40 developed a general meaning "to serve people."  
41

42 The second word latreia, means much the same, except it has the added  
43 nuance of meaning "service without pay." At the center of this word is the  
44 idea that something must be sacrificed for the sake of the Gospel. Twice,  
45 in the book of Hebrews, this word is used to describe Jesus, who served God  
46 without demanding something in return.

1 So, now let's pull these two words together. Diakonos means to serve;  
2 to wait on tables; to do menial household tasks; and latreia means to do it  
3 without wanting something in return.

4  
5 We must, however, make a distinction between how we see "waiting on  
6 tables" and how the Greek/Roman word saw it.

7  
8 Let me illustrate. In our first year in Winnipeg, I met an older man  
9 in a sandwich and soup coffee shop who told me that he had been a waiter for  
10 twenty-nine years. He loved his work and he earned a fine living often  
11 earning more through tips than through salary.

12  
13 This is not the flavor of the word in New Testament times. This kind  
14 of work was considered unworthy and dishonoring to the free person. Only  
15 the lowest of classes were table waiters--people who had no rights and no  
16 strength to improve their lot in life. It is this word that is used to  
17 describe Jesus--he was a servant. Jesus said, ". . . the Son of Man did not  
18 come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many"  
19 (Mark 10:45).

20  
21 Sixty-five times this word appears in the New Testament. Paul calls us  
22 to be servants of the gospel, servants of the church, servants of  
23 righteousness, servants of God, and servants of Jesus Christ.

24  
25 In other words, to be servants of Christ means that we voluntarily  
26 stoop to the task of table-waiting for the sake of the Good News. To be  
27 servants of the church means we serve others and wait on them as the  
28 table-waiters would obediently and properly wait on the tables of the  
29 master. Indeed, to be Christian means to be servant. The opposite of being  
30 servant is to be master; and there is only one master--Jesus Christ.

31  
32 There is a constant tension between what we know and how we live, and  
33 nowhere is this illustrated more forcefully than in this area of life.  
34 Servanthood is a great New Testament concept which is more easily spoken  
35 about than lived.

36  
37 The magic of the early church isn't magic at all--they simply outserved  
38 the resistance to the Gospel, and the church multiplied and grew! There is  
39 dignity in service.

#### 40 41 B. The Grandeur of Slavery (desmois, doulos)

42  
43 If the words just reviewed have a ring of servitude attached to them,  
44 then these next two words describe, in their natural world, the baseness to  
45 which humanity can sink. Desmios is a very strong word. It literally means  
46 to bind, to imprison, to take away the right of free movement. The word was  
47 used to describe the binding of a sheaf of wheat, or a bundle of sticks. No  
48 longer are they free to be by themselves, they are "bound together", and  
49 there is nothing they can do about it. A thief, when he is captured, is  
50 bound so that his freedom is restricted and he no longer can do what he  
51 wants to do. A person who has a serious illness is bound by the restraints  
52 of that illness. The blind are bound because they do not have the freedom  
53 to see.

1        Doulos, the second word, is a noun which described the condition of  
2 60,000,000 people at the zenith of the Roman Empire. They were slaves.  
3 These people had no rights, no privileges and certainly no collective  
4 strength. They could be bought and sold at the whim of the owner. Their  
5 work earned them no profit, they only did what was expected of them as  
6 slaves. The master had unlimited control over them--for good, or for  
7 unmerciful punishment of some fault or mistake. To be a slave was to be at  
8 the lowest level of humanity possible. To be a slave was to be, barely,  
9 above the level of animal.

10  
11        Paul takes these two words, which have such a negative ring, and uses  
12 them to describe our relationship to God. Frequently, he opens his letters  
13 with the standard line, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ . . . ." And to the  
14 Colossians he writes, "And above all these, put on love which binds  
15 (desmios) everything together in perfect harmony" (3:14). Herein lies the  
16 great paradox of the gospel; that is, we are no longer bound, we are free,  
17 and yet still we are bound. We are no longer slaves, we are sons and  
18 daughters and yet, still we are slaves.

19  
20 } Elizabeth Achtemeier has summed up this paradox well: "There is no  
21 } such thing as absolute freedom; either you are a slave to sin, or you have  
22 } been set free to be a slave of Jesus Christ."

23  
24        Every generation struggles with servanthood. Each generation must  
25 affirm anew that Jesus, and not mammon, is Lord. Servanthood runs so  
26 counter to our socially-conditioned way of thinking. We are taught  
27 self-expression, self-actualization, self-development. We speak about a  
28 good self-image, self-esteem and self-awareness. All these, in their place,  
29 are fine--but strangely absent in our language is the concept of slavery.  
30 We need to rediscover the concepts of doulos and desmios, and be prepared to  
31 live as Christ's bondservants and slaves.

### 32 33 C. The Grace of Demanded Service (aggareuein)

34  
35        "There are some words," writes William Barclay, "which carry in their  
36 history the story of a nation's triumph or a nation's tragedy." Aggaruein  
37 is such a word. It is used only three times in the New Testament and each  
38 time it is translated "to compel." The central meaning of this word is that  
39 one is forced to do something which is distasteful and which one would not  
40 do, unless compelled. The first time this word is used (Matt. 5:41), Jesus  
41 tells his followers that if only one mile is compelled, they are to go two.  
42 The other two times are the synoptic accounts in Mark and Matthew about how  
43 Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry Christ's cross to Calvary.

44  
45        This word, "to compel" is a very interesting word with a substantial  
46 history. Cyrus the Great was ruler of the far-flung Persian Empire. He  
47 needed to be in touch so he formed a kind of Pony Express to carry messages  
48 across the empire. This required many men and horses. His generals  
49 calculated how far a horse could run without breaking down and established  
50 posts at such points. Horses were then changed and the message continued on  
51 its way. If no army horses were available, or a horse was lame, then

1 privately owned horses could be impressed into service. This is where this  
2 word finds its origin. Soon, this became the law of the ruling nations.  
3 And the Romans, in Jesus' day, used it fully. This action of impressing  
4 into service either horses or man-power was the bitterest and most  
5 humiliating evidence of servitude. It was a constant reminder to the Hebrew  
6 nation that they were slaves, a vanquished people. And what made matters  
7 worse was that the petty officials and minor bureaucrats abused the system  
8 for their own gain. Grudgingly, the Jews gave this service. Roman law  
9 demanded one mile and that is what they would give.

10  
11 Then Jesus came along to blow this sensitive issue wide open. He said,  
12 "If someone exacts from you the most distasteful and humiliating service, if  
13 someone compels you to do that which you would never offer, if you are  
14 treated like a defenseless victim in an occupied country, don't resent it.  
15 Do what you are asked, and do even more, and do it with grace and  
16 good-will."

17  
18 What this text does not teach is that we are to be workaholics who  
19 spend all of life running. God knows, too many families have been ignored  
20 by men and women who were too busy serving God to help their families. But  
21 what this word does say and confront is our mischievous ability to avoid  
22 doing the difficult work. Being a lay person or a pastor is fulfilling  
23 until aggareuein is encountered. Then we know what it means to be impressed  
24 into service.

25  
26 In summary, the New Testament teaches that we have been set free from  
27 slavery to sin to become slaves of Jesus Christ. We do well to reaffirm  
28 servanthood as the only way to live within the kingdom.

## 29 30 II. THE RESOURCES FOR SERVICE (the gifts of the Spirit)

31  
32 There was a time when the Holy Spirit was called the neglected person  
33 of the trinity. But things have changed. Beginning during the mid '60's  
34 and sweeping into the '70's a tidal wave of enthusiasm regarding the work  
35 and person of the Holy Spirit injected new life into many of our  
36 congregations.

37  
38 As with any new movement, excesses in enthusiasm soon lead to divisive-  
39 ness and difficult church situations. However, one of the positive results  
40 for the MB church was that many persons rediscovered the texts which speak  
41 about the gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Romans 12). From that  
42 initial burst of interest, when everyone seemed to be using the language of  
43 the gifts of the Spirit, either to find meaningful service opportunities, or  
44 to rationalize a lack of interest in service opportunities, a settling down  
45 has become evident.

46  
47 We have learned from painful experience that love (I Cor. 13) is the  
48 milieu in which gifts flourish best, both in terms of receptivity to a  
49 person with a gift by the congregation and the practice of it by an  
50 individual. We know and affirm that gifts are given by the sovereign will  
51 of an all-knowing God; that they are given to keep the body of Christ  
52 functioning rightly; and that they are given for the common good and not for  
53 individual glory.

1 We have read the plethora of literature--everything from the  
2 "touchy-feely" stuff to the hard, critiquing material--telling us how to  
3 find and nurture the latent gifts of the Spirit, and have come to the  
4 conclusion that through the affirmation of the body the gifts present among  
5 us are best recognized and utilized. We also know from experience that  
6 affirmation of gifts comes more readily to those active in service than to  
7 those not actively serving.

8  
9 In spite of all the richness that the gifts of the Spirit have given to  
10 us, there remain some lessons for us to learn and relearn. Three points  
11 deserve comment.

12  
13 First, we need to affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are given equally  
14 to men and women. Though I Cor. 12:1 addresses the matter of gifts to  
15 "brethren" ("Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to  
16 be uninformed") as well as Eph. 4:8 (" . . . and he gave gifts to men."), it  
17 must not be assumed that men only have received gifts from God. The  
18 inclusive language of I Cor. 12:7 ("To each is given the manifestation of  
19 the Spirit for the common good") includes all of God's children in the  
20 gifts of the Spirit. In other words, men and women are both given gifts in  
21 the diversity of gifts which Christ has given to his bride, the church.

22  
23 Furthermore, a quick glance through the lists of gifts, and the  
24 membership of our churches, assures us that both men and women are equally  
25 gifted by the Spirit. Though the degree to which the gift is exercised, or  
26 the quality with which it is practiced, may vary from person to person, it  
27 is, nonetheless, given widely and generously to both sexes.

28  
29 Let me illustrate. Many persons, both men and women, have the gift of  
30 teaching. However, some are better teachers than others. There are degrees  
31 in "gifting" just as there are degrees in ability. This does not mean that  
32 only those who are excellent teachers have that gift, but rather there is a  
33 great diversity in giftedness. Jesus taught that to some are given five  
34 talents; to others are given two talents; and some receive one talent (Matt.  
35 25:11ff.)

36  
37 One phrase in Eph. 4:8 (" . . . and he gave gifts to men") has  
38 sometimes been used to mean that the gifts of apostles, prophets,  
39 evangelists, pastors and teachers are given solely to men. The argument is  
40 constructed that those are the formal leadership positions in the church and  
41 therefore are not open to women.

42  
43 However, it is very difficult from this text to separate between, for  
44 example, the gift of evangelism (which many women in our churches possess)  
45 and the office of evangelist; or, to make a distinction between the gift of  
46 pastoral care (which, again, many fine godly women in our congregations  
47 possess) and the formal office of pastor (shepherd).

48  
49 It seems that the phrase "to men" is best read in the generic sense to  
50 mean "to persons" (though in its original intent, since Ephesians was  
51 addressed to a church in a patriarchal society, it was naturally addressed  
52 to men). More on this subject later.

1 Second, there is no distinction in giftedness between "clergy" and  
2 "laity." Indeed, we, as anabaptists, who celebrate the priesthood of all  
3 believers, are adamant that the division between clergy and laity, in terms  
4 of spirituality, vitality, giftedness and standing before God, is  
5 artificial. The difference lies, not in giftedness, but in calling and  
6 vocation. (More on this subject later.)  
7

8 And third, since Paul instructs us to ". . . earnestly desire the  
9 higher (greater) gifts" (I Cor. 12:31), we ought to be sensitive to the  
10 primary needs of the church and foster those gifts which meet such needs.  
11 Though these needs may vary somewhat in each congregation, the list of  
12 basic, foundational needs remains discernible. We always need the speaking  
13 gifts (prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, teaching and exhortation) and the  
14 serving gifts (helps, giving, showing mercy, administration, hospitality  
15 and discernment). The sign gifts (healing, miracles, tongues and  
16 interpretation), though important and part of God's richness to his church,  
17 are not as critical to the life of the church as the earlier noted ones.  
18

19 In a day when voices in the religious world are suggesting that the  
20 integrity of the gospel is authenticated by the miraculous and if such  
21 evidences are not present then a truncated, incomplete gospel is being  
22 proclaimed, we need to once again affirm that some gifts of the Spirit are  
23 more critical to the wholesome life of the church than others.  
24

25 In conclusion, the presence of the Holy Spirit and his rich gifts  
26 within the church are the resources necessary for continued vitality and  
27 growth of the church. We affirm that the Holy Spirit gives his gifts  
28 equally to male and female, to clergy and laity, and that some gifts are  
29 more important to the life of the congregation than others.  
30

### 31 III. CALLING ALL PERSONS TO SERVE

#### 32 A. The Clergy/Laity Tension

33 The trend toward a professional, salaried ministry has had both a  
34 positive and negative effect on the Mennonite Brethren church. Through the  
35 professionalization of leadership a degree of specialization and expertise  
36 has begun to emerge which has brought many of our congregations to the  
37 forefront in their communities.  
38  
39

40 New programs, to meet the needs of the community, have been initiated;  
41 worship services are carefully put together; music and other platform  
42 functions are in the hands of competent, well-trained persons; counseling  
43 services which draw on specialized training and experience are available;  
44 youth, evangelism, visitation, singles and a host of other specialities are  
45 present in many of our churches.  
46  
47

48 All in all, the MB church has tried hard to keep abreast with a rapidly  
49 changing environment. And indeed, if it doesn't change with the times, it  
50 will soon be addressing the issues of the past.

1 But there has also been a negative effect on the church. As our  
2 churches increase in size, and as programs develop and become more  
3 sophisticated, they have become more dependent on professional ministers.  
4

5 Two trends, in particular, seem to be developing. First,  
6 decision-making, which was once congregationally based, has tended to move  
7 toward a from-the-top-down motif. And second, going hand in hand with this  
8 trend, is the tendency to have the vision of the church formulated and  
9 articulated by fewer persons.

10  
11 In practical terms, this means that not only is the vision of the  
12 church held most strongly by fewer persons (and frequently centered in the  
13 professional clergy), but that the calling of new leaders from the  
14 congregation (or outside the congregation) is, in fact, a leadership  
15 function since it is designed to fill leadership gaps in the total program.  
16

17 The congregation, which once determined the direction of the church and  
18 processed the candidates to fulfill this direction, seem to be less involved  
19 in such process.  
20

21 It seems almost axiomatic, but nonetheless necessary to note that the  
22 broader the base for the vision of the church (that is, the more the people  
23 are participants in forging vision and leading in that direction), the  
24 deeper the commitment to that vision by the whole congregation; and  
25 conversely, the more centralized and narrow the base of the vision, the  
26 harder laity must be driven to support that vision.  
27

28 A further matter needs to be noted. Any attempt to broaden the base of  
29 the vision in the congregation is usually accompanied by frustration because  
30 it is difficult to arrive at a consensus in a large group. Furthermore,  
31 movement forward is usually slow. Centralized leadership makes  
32 decision-making much more rapid and usually smoother.  
33

34 So the church body frequently finds itself in a dilemma. On the one  
35 hand, the pressures of society (and often the pressures from within the  
36 congregation itself) demand a swift response to changing needs. This tends  
37 to make pragmatists out of leaders in that they are charged to find ways to  
38 make church "happen"--and the surest way to make a church "go" is to  
39 centralize decision-making usually around the professional staff who do much  
40 of the work themselves.  
41

42 On the other hand, however, lies our understanding of scripture that  
43 all believers are equally gifted by the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the  
44 Spirit are not different for clergy than for laity. Moreover, the  
45 priesthood of all believers, a doctrine to which we subscribe tenaciously,  
46 means that all are equal before God.  
47

48 There appears to be a distinct correlation between the model of  
49 leadership chosen and the utilization of gifted lay persons. Some of our  
50 churches have opted for "strong leadership" (frequently a euphemism for  
51 pyramidal, centralized, top-down decision-making) where lay involvement in  
52 leadership is seen mostly in support ministries. Other churches have opted

1 for congregationally-based decision-making style. They tend to move slowly,  
2 and lay leaders frequently occupy key leadership positions.

3  
4 ✓ We must guard carefully against allowing extremes to develop. We must  
5 not over-react to slowness of congregational church government by giving all  
6 decision-making power to the growing professional clergy class in our  
7 churches and denomination; nor must we tie the hands of salaried leadership  
8 by putting endless procedural roadblocks in the way of movement and change.

9  
10 If there is a danger in all of this, it might well be that with a  
11 growing, professional clergy class, lay persons will begin to think in terms  
12 of a two-class system--"there are ministers and then there is us," as one  
13 lay person put it recently. Our present practice of ordination seems to be  
14 reinforcing this tension within our denomination. (More about this later.)

15  
16 In summary, there must be balance. Gifted lay persons, both men and  
17 women, must be nurtured, trained and released to become competent worship  
18 leaders, evangelists, pastoral care persons, educators, youth sponsors,  
19 administrators and a host of other ministering people. It must remain the  
20 primary concern of the professional clergy to train and equip lay persons  
21 for such service (Eph. 4:11).

22  
23 Professional ministry need not be a negative force among us, but the  
24 present trend of putting greater ministry responsibility into its hands will  
25 not serve us well in the long run. We need to once again affirm the  
26 importance of wide involvement by lay persons in the life of our  
27 congregations and the need to set our leaders free to equip lay persons for  
28 ministry.

#### 29 30 B. The Role of Women in the Church

31  
32 At the 1980 Clearbrook study conference a paper on the role of women in  
33 the church was prepared by David Ewert. A comprehensive resolution flowing  
34 from that paper was brought by BORAC to the 1981 St. Catharines convention,  
35 which was again modified at the 1984 Reedley convention. Presently a paper  
36 on the same topic by Edmund Janzen and Clarence Hiebert is being processed  
37 by BORAC for publication.

38  
39 The resolution accepted at the convention sessions does not reflect a  
40 male chauvinistic attitude toward women, but rather an attempt to grapple  
41 seriously with the biblical texts (usually known as the "restrictive"  
42 passages).

43  
44 At present all ministry functions are open to women except "leading  
45 pastor." Ordination of women is also not practiced. In the minutes of  
46 BORAC meetings, Dec. 13-15, 1985, the following notion appears: "We counsel  
47 our congregations not to appoint a woman as the "leading pastor." When  
48 discerning the women who speak of being 'called' to pastoral or preaching  
49 ministries, our counsel must be faithfully biblical, honest and wise."

50  
51 In all likelihood the current resolutions will not be substantively  
52 changed. Therefore, it seems repetitive and unnecessary to review and



1 re-study all of the passages which deal with the role of women in the  
2 church.

3  
4 However, it might be profitable to address the matter from another  
5 perspective, that is, the matter of consistency. The problem of consistency  
6 is made much more difficult in that it appears to come down to a matter of  
7 degree of where the boundary for service is drawn. Frequently, these  
8 boundaries are set, not arbitrarily as some argue, but rather at the  
9 farthest possible point where unity and consensus can still be maintained.  
10 While we want to remain biblical in our discussion we still have  
11 considerable difficulty being consistent.

12  
13 For example, just what does I Timothy 2:11ff. mean? ("Let a women learn  
14 in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no women to teach or to have  
15 authority over men; she is to keep silent.")

16  
17 Does this mean that women can't teach a Bible class or Bible study  
18 where men are present? Does this mean that the word of exhortation given by  
19 a woman, to a man who is in error, isn't proper? Does this mean that a  
20 quorum at a business meeting must necessarily have a majority of men?

21  
22 If we absolutize this passage and enforce its obviously clearly stated  
23 prohibition, then a major revision of current MB church practice is  
24 necessary both in our local congregations as well as in our support agencies  
25 (MBM/S and MBBS).

26  
27 John Redekop, in an Opinion column (MB Herald, April 18/86), addresses  
28 this matter. He writes: ". . . how can we justify having one set of  
29 'rules' for women in ministry in overseas mission and another for women in  
30 ministry in the sending conferences? It seems to me that either it is  
31 proper for women to preach or it isn't, either it is proper for women to  
32 lead congregations, or it isn't."

33  
34 Redekop is both right and wrong. He is right in that women  
35 missionaries have had considerably more latitude in ministry abroad than  
36 women in the home church. (As a matter of fact, Peter Hamm points out that  
37 at one time women were ordained for missionary ministry, but the practice  
38 has been abandoned in recent years.)

39  
40 But Redekop is also wrong. Hamm reports that no woman missionary has  
41 ever been the leader of a congregation anywhere in MBM/S fields. (It is  
42 noted, however, that women are active in leadership in denominations with  
43 whom we co-operate.)

44  
45 Let me propose, for discussion, another way of thinking in this matter.  
46 It has basically to do with our understanding of ordination.

47  
48 John E. Toews, in two very helpful articles (Christian Leader, Aug.  
49 28/79; Sept. 11/79) suggests that recent studies show that the distinction  
50 between the Hebrew word samakh, which means "investing the recipient with  
51 particular authority and communication power" by the laying on of hands, and  
52 the Hebrew word sim which means "to touch or to bless", may have been lost  
53 by the Septuagint translating both words with the Greek word epitithemi.

1 In other words, what do we mean by ordination? Do we mean a  
2 transference of authority and power (samakh); or, do we mean the  
3 communication of blessing for a task (sim)? John E. Toews concludes that it  
4 is the latter rather than the former.  
5

6 In one sense it is very difficult to separate "blessing" from  
7 "authority" because blessing for ministry gives authority in service.  
8 However, this authority has limits and is not an end in itself.  
9 Furthermore, we reject the sacramental view of ordination (see the 1981  
10 General Conference Yearbook, resolution on ordination) that grace or gifts  
11 are imparted through the ordination act.  
12

13 Though we understand ordination, in theory, to be blessing, we tend to  
14 treat it as the transference of authority and power. Why else do we ordain  
15 for life? Or, why do we do it almost exclusively to pastors? And why else  
16 do we "defrock" those who betray its sanctity?  
17

18 The laying on of hands is a biblical concept and is connected with  
19 initiation into ministry in the church (Acts 6:6; 13:2; I Tim. 4:14; II Tim.  
20 1:6).  
21

22 In both the Acts texts, as Toews points out, it is clear that the laying  
23 on of hands did not impart spiritual gifts or status, but rather, simply  
24 recognized the gift as present.  
25

26 In the I Tim. 4:14 text, the gift is given by prophetic utterance and  
27 the laying on of hands is blessing for ministry with that gift. In II Tim  
28 1:6 the grace (gift) given by Paul's laying on of hands is to encourage and  
29 not let the gift die "which is in you."  
30

31 In summary, the laying on of hands is a sign of favor, of a  
32 personalized marking out of an individual as an object for blessing by God  
33 It is significant that the laying on of hands is for the particular purpose  
34 of blessing those already gifted for ministry in the body, and is not a  
35 transference of authority, power and status. Nor is it to be used to  
36 establish and give credentials to a professional clergy class. In summary,  
37 if the laying on of hands means blessing for a task, and if it does not mean  
38 a seal for ministry and leadership for life (as it now seems to mean); or,  
39 it is something we do mainly to pastors, regardless of age or experience;  
40 then we ought to be laying hands on many more persons in our congregations.  
41

42 I would like to propose that we drop the language of ordination and  
43 ~~commissioning~~ entirely and speak only in the New Testament terms of "laying  
44 on of hands." We ought to lay hands on our significant leaders: pastors,  
45 teachers, missionaries, pastoral care persons, elders, counselors and other  
46 persons whom the church calls forward to ministry.  
47

48 By laying on of hands we invoke the blessing of God on their ministry  
49 and give them authority to fulfill the task to which the church and God has  
50 called them.

1           At this point in our collective understanding on the role of women, we  
2 have drawn the line at "leading pastor" and ordination. We allow women to  
3 teach, to counsel, to work in pastoral care, to administer programs, to lead  
4 congregations in worship, to preach (in some congregations) but not to be  
5 "leading ministers" or to be ordained.

6  
7           If we can unwind the idea that the laying on of hands is to establish a  
8 clergy for the church, and retrain ourselves to think it to be a way of  
9 blessing persons for ministry, then we can accept and bless gifted persons  
10 on the merit of their giftedness and integrity, and not on the basis of  
11 gender.

12  
13 Conclusion

14  
15           With this paper I have attempted to address old issues in a fresh way.  
16 May God grant us wisdom, insight and charity as we continue to search  
17 Scriptures together to address the issues of this decade.