

Questions and Answers Regarding Women's Freedom to Lead

1. Why did the leadership decide to make this change?
 - a. In 2016, when we announced making this same change in our Instrumental Service, we said that "*at the appropriate time*" this change would also be made in our acapella service. After four years, we have decided that now is the right time to implement this change in our acapella service.
 - b. We stand by our conviction that music is a matter of preference and tradition; therefore, we want to continue to offer those as options. We are just as convicted that God has equally gifted both men and women to serve and lead in the worship of our church. To not offer that freedom to our women in both services would be to quench the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. How can the leadership make this change in light of what Paul says in both 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12?
 - a. Our Preaching Minister, Gilbert Kerrigan, will address both of those passages in his sermon series on this topic. There is not enough space in this document to address those texts. Please know that we do not take those passages lightly. We are convinced that, read within the larger narrative of the Bible and within the context of the situations in Corinth and Ephesus, these texts are not commanding silence for all women in all churches throughout all time. Please listen to Gilbert's sermons in his upcoming series with an open heart and open mind.
3. Are women pushing for these changes?
 - a. This has been an ongoing discussion for over 20 years. The late Chris Bullard, who served as the Preaching Minister of this church in 1990s, was asked by the Elders to do an in-depth bible study on this topic (his study is on DVD and was made available for everyone). Both men and women throughout the years have been encouraging the leadership of this church to study this topic more in-depth and consider making changes.
4. Doesn't making these changes elevate the public worship roles on Sunday morning and devalue the many ways women have served outside of the Sunday morning corporate worship service?
 - a. We do not believe this to be true at all! In fact, our traditional doctrine on this matter may actually serve to elevate the public worship roles more so than they need to be. We believe all ways of serving and leading in the church are important; therefore, all ways of serving and leading should be open to both men and women. The Holy Spirit does not give every believer the same gift. Making this change allows women who are gifted in certain ways to exercise those gifts in ways that would allow them to bless and build up our church.
5. What if a woman does not want to serve or lead in our worship services?

- a. As was said in the answer above, the Holy Spirit does not gift everyone the same way. If a woman does not feel comfortable or gifted to serve and lead in our worship services, we hope to find other ways in which she can use her gifts. Many of our men have no desire to serve or lead in our worship services. I am sure the same will be true for many of our women. The goal here is to make sure we are providing as many opportunities as possible for everyone to use the gifts they feel they have been given.
6. Why make this change if you know this is going to make some people uncomfortable and maybe even decide to leave the OP Church?
 - a. First, this has been the most difficult part of this decision. It is primarily why we have waited four years to make this change. We do not want anyone to leave. That is never our intention. We want everyone to stay. If someone has concerns, we want them to talk to us. Ultimately, we want everyone to remain committed to joining us in our mission: *Joining in the work of Jesus for the good of the world.*
 - b. While we do not want anyone to leave, we ultimately cannot let the fear of people leaving stop us from making hard decisions based on our convictions. The truth is that people from both sides of the issue were already leaving. Some have left out of the fear of us possibly making this change. Some have left out of the fear of us possibly not ever making this change. We must follow our convictions and where we believe the Holy Spirit is taking us, and then do everything in our power to help everyone become more comfortable with this decision.
7. I am concerned about the reactions to this change from my family members who attend other churches. How do I deal with that?
 - a. This is a legitimate concern for some of our Missional Partners. We cannot speak for other congregations and their leaderships. The beauty of our church heritage is that we have always held strongly to the belief in local church autonomy. Each local congregation is governed by its local eldership, as opposed to a larger denominational governing body. We must make decisions that we think are in the best interest of the OP Church and our surrounding community. Our decisions may be different than the decisions made by Churches of Christ in other places. We believe that is perfectly acceptable.
8. By making this change, are you suggesting that the generations before us have been wrong?
 - a. Churches of Christ have traditionally placed a heavy emphasis on being right, as if our salvation is dependent on getting everything right. Therefore, we have often been slow to make changes because those changes would suggest that we were doing something wrong. In light of that emphasis, we can understand why this would be an important question.

- b. We believe that the church is always growing, learning new things, and changing. Our history is full of examples of this very thing. Take slavery and racism as an example. Many in the Churches of Christ defended slavery and racism using the Bible. We grew, learned new things, and made necessary changes.
9. What about Romans 14? In light of Paul's teaching there, isn't it wrong to force this change on those who are uncomfortable with it?
- a. We believe that in Romans 14, Paul is not talking about "liberal" Christians and "conservative" Christians. Taking the text at face value, Paul is talking about strong Christians and weak Christians. Our best understanding is that Paul is using the word "weak" to indicate someone who is new to their faith. These "weak" Christians can easily lose their faith altogether because of the actions of others who are "strong" or more mature in their faith.
 - b. Being more conservative does not make one weak, nor does being more liberal make one strong. Paul is not concerned about simply upsetting or offending the "weak." He is concerned that they will encounter a "stumbling block or obstacle" (Rom. 14:13) to their faith. The NIV says that the actions of the strong should not "distress" the weak. That word is not strong enough. It does not simply mean that they were made uncomfortable or upset. Rather, the "weak" are spiritually "injured" (NRSV), which leads to their spiritual destruction (14:15).
 - c. Yes, we acknowledge that this change may make some of our Missional Partners uncomfortable or upset, but this does not mean that they are "weak" and are in danger of losing their faith because of this change.
10. What do we do if we have concerns or are upset about this change?
- a. First, please do not leave. We want you to stay. We believe strongly in our mission to join in the work of Jesus for the good of the world, and we ask you to be patient and allow yourself to experience these new changes for the sake of the mission.
 - b. Second, please reach out to an elder. We would love to have healthy dialogue about these changes and your concerns.