



# Our Beliefs About Women in Ministry

## *A Sunnybrook Position Paper*

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### **Preamble**

In 2024, the elders and pastoral staff of Sunnybrook Christian Church undertook a comprehensive study on the Role of Women in Ministry. Our commitment was to faithfully examine what the Scriptures teach on this subject, recognizing its significance and the impact our conclusions would have on our congregation and mission.

As part of this study, we consulted numerous articles and positions written by respected biblical scholars committed to teaching the Scriptures accurately and in line with traditional interpretations. Additionally, we invited three respected church leaders from different ministry contexts to share their understanding of what the Bible teaches and how it is practiced in their congregations. These conversations enabled us to engage with a breadth of biblical interpretation and practical application, deepening our understanding of the theological and pastoral implications of this issue.

Many discussions took place among our elders and ministry staff, who prayerfully considered the positions presented and sought guidance from the Holy Spirit. Our goal was not to conform to current cultural trends or our particular theological heritage but to faithfully apply Scripture in the life of our congregation. This position paper reflects the conclusions of that study and our commitment to uphold biblical truth with humility and confidence.

## **Commitments and Beliefs**

First and foremost, the Elders of Sunnybrook Christian Church are committed to rightly interpreting and applying the Bible. We affirm the inspiration and authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice. We aim to teach and apply the Scriptures with humility and confidence, ensuring our decisions are guided by biblical truth rather than cultural expectations and trends.

Where the Scriptures are clear, we teach and apply them as they are written, exhorting all under our care with confidence and grace. Where the Scriptures are less explicit or allow room for interpretation, we seek to apply biblical wisdom with discernment and humility, always striving to honor God and build up the people of God.

## **The Office of Elder**

The office of Elder, as described in Scripture, is reserved for men. This conviction is rooted in passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, where the qualifications for elders explicitly reference male leadership in the marriage and family. This aligns with the Bible's teaching on male headship in the home and is then mirrored in the church's leadership structure.

## **The Role of Minister**

We affirm that both men and women can serve as ministers. The term "minister" essentially means "servant," and we acknowledge that Scripture provides numerous examples of women serving in significant ministerial roles.

At Sunnybrook, we believe it is generally wise and best for men to disciple men and women to disciple women, following the biblical pattern seen in passages such as Titus 2:3-5. However, we also acknowledge that there are contexts where women may serve in broader teaching roles within the church.

Sunnybrook has a history of ordaining women into ministry. This has been true in roles such as ministers, Stephen Ministry leaders, and Marriage Ministry leaders. These positions are valuable expressions of God's calling for women to serve within the church.

## **Women Teaching in the Church**

We believe that the Bible does not explicitly prohibit women from ever communicating biblical, God-honoring truth where men are present. Instead, the Bible prohibits a woman from being the church's primary, ongoing teacher or preacher and anyone, male or female, from becoming disruptive within the worship context. As a result, we affirm that women, under the authority and oversight of the Elders, can instruct the congregation in various settings, including Sunday morning worship. This conviction applies across all areas of ministry, including children's, youth, college, and adult ministries.

We believe that godly women teaching Scripture can significantly benefit our congregation. This is not merely about offering a female perspective but about affirming the biblical call for all believers to handle the Word rightly. It is good and edifying for our congregation to see women pastors clearly and accurately communicating biblical truth.

## **Women Leading in Worship Services**

Scripture does not prescribe a rigid structure for corporate worship services. This allows room for discernment in determining the best practices for our congregation. Since we believe the Scriptures permit women to lead in areas such as singing, public prayer, the call to worship, and the reading of Scripture, we see it as consistent for women to participate in these ways during our gathered worship.

## **Current Practice at Sunnybrook**

Currently, women serve in teaching and leadership roles across all areas of ministry at Sunnybrook. While women predominantly teach in children's and youth ministries, they also occasionally teach in college ministries, small groups, Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and Sunday morning worship services.

Some biblical texts raise questions about whether women should be permitted to teach in the gathered church. The most commonly cited passages are 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. These texts have been the subject of much debate among faithful scholars, and we acknowledge the complexity involved in interpreting and applying them. In short, we believe these texts, when interpreted and applied correctly, do not explicitly prohibit women from speaking and teaching in every church context.

## **Our Approach to This Issue**

We understand that this is a complex subject, both biblically and culturally. We affirm that ongoing prayer, study, and discernment are necessary as we seek to lead our congregation wisely and biblically. Our aim is not to conform to modern egalitarian trends, which appear to be at odds with Scripture. While aware of the times and places God has us, we aim to be faithful to Scripture. Thus, we define our position as being one of *contextualized complementarianism*. God has made clear theological distinctions between men and women regarding roles and tasks. Men will continue to serve as the leaders of their homes and our church and fill the role of the primary preacher or lead pastor (complementarianism). Women can fill the role of minister and communicate the truth of God's Word under the authority of the Elders (contextualized). We believe this upholds the order God ordained for men and women while recognizing that God has uniquely gifted women in our congregation and in our time with his Spirit of wisdom to communicate his truth in a way that is helpful to those who hear.

We recognize that faithful believers may reach different conclusions on this issue. While we stand by our interpretation and application of Scripture for our specific context, we welcome thoughtful discussion and dialogue with those who may interpret and apply things differently.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this position paper is not to provide a complete exegesis of the relevant biblical texts but to explain our conclusions as a leadership team. We remain committed to faithfully interpreting and applying Scripture while leading Sunnybrook Christian Church with integrity and wisdom.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with members of our congregation to discuss how we arrived at these conclusions and how we have applied them within our faith community.