

CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE LCMS TODAY

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANISM IS MARKED BY PASTORS AND LAYMEN WHO:

4. In accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, hold that God has established definite and clearly distinctive roles for men and women in the Church and in the home. It is in accord with the biblical Order of Creation that women not exercise authority over men. Therefore, confessional Lutherans hold that women should not serve as pastors, elders, congregational presidents, or vice presidents, since such positions require the exercise of authority over men within the congregation. Additionally, women should not participate in the public proclamation of God's Word (e.g., reading the lessons in worship), nor in the administration of the Sacraments (distributing the elements). In order to bring all practice in our congregations into conformity with the biblical Order of Creation, this subject needs a thorough re-examination and application to the life of the Church.

(Genesis 2:18-25; Genesis 3:6, 16-17; I Corinthians 11:3-15; I Corinthians 14:33-34; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; I Timothy 2:11-13; Titus 2:3-5; I Peter 3:1, 5)

What are the Issues in Contention Today?

1. Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions are very clear that life within the Christian congregation should be governed in accord with the doctrine of the Order of Creation. Today the LCMS has condoned, and officially adopted a position in which women may serve as elders, congregational presidents and vice-presidents, may assist with communion distribution, and publicly proclaim the Word of God in worship services by reading Holy Scripture. Such changes within the LCMS represent a capitulation to the culture, deny the third use of the Law, and promote Gospel Reductionism, which our Synod previously rejected.
2. Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions clearly teach that women are not to occupy the Office of the Holy Ministry. Yet today some pastors in our Synod have been allowed to remain on our Ministers of Religion – Ordained roster while publicly stating their belief that it is proper to ordain women into the pastoral office – and this without correction or removal.

The Witness of Holy Scripture

GENESIS 2:18-25

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

GENESIS 3:6, 17

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

I CORINTHIANS 11:3-15

³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵ but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶ For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.

⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

I CORINTHIANS 14:33-36

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

EPHESIANS 5:22-33

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

COLOSSIANS 3:18

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

I TIMOTHY 2:11-13

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

TITUS 2:3-5

³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

I PETER 3:1-5

¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³ Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-- ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands,

The Witness of the Lutheran Confessions

At first glance the Lutheran Confessions might seem to be moot regarding women in the Office of the Holy Ministry. This is because there was never any such concept either in Rome or in Germany at the time. The thought of having women serving in leadership positions within congregations was likewise simply unthinkable and not at all a matter of contention. Therefore, the subject was not directly confessed in the Confessions since their purpose was to address those articles of the faith which were in contention between Rome, the Reformed, and the Lutherans.

The Witness of Church & Synodical History

1. The Old Testament Witness:

From the beginning of time God has appointed men to be the head of the woman and thus throughout the history of God's Old Testament Church, only men were to serve as leaders of God's people. Therefore, it was men who served as the forerunners of Christ: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, etc. It was only men who served as Prophets sent by God to speak God's Word directly to the people: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc. In the same way Israel and Judah only had male kings: Saul, David, Solomon, etc. Women were certainly important and some served in the Temple like Old Anna, but only within the confines of those areas and roles God deemed appropriate for them.

2. The New Testament Witness:

With the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ again, it is men who receive their rightful role as those chosen to lead in both home and Church. It was a man who served as the great forerunner of Christ – John the Baptist. When our Lord selects His apostles, He only chooses men to found His New Testament Church. When the apostles work to appoint pastors in the congregations they founded, it was only men and specifically men who were appointed by God's command.

3. The Witness of the Church Since the Time of the Apostles:

The three oldest Christian groups: Eastern Orthodox, Coptic Christian, and Roman Catholic retain the orthodox practice of reserving the Office of Pastor or Priest to men to this day. While some Protestant groups in America permitted women to lead congregations in the 1800's, no Lutheran Church body either in Europe or in America did until the 20th Century. The first Lutheran body to ordain a woman occurred in Norway in 1961 because the State demanded that it be done. In America the first church body to ordain women into the Pastorate was the United Methodist Church in 1956. The Lutheran Church in America became the first American Lutheran Body to ordain women in November, 1970. The American Lutheran Church ordained its first woman pastor the next month in December, 1970. In other words, the ordination of the first Lutheran

woman as a pastor in 1956 overturned over 4,000 years of doctrine and practice among God's people at a time when the Feminist Movement was the true cause of the change. The Church's doctrine had not changed.

4. The Witness of the History of The LCMS:

1864 – St. Louis: Dr. C.F.W. Walther writes:

All adult males members of the congregation are entitled to active participation in the transactions of such meetings by way of speaking, deliberating, voting, and resolving. But women and the young are excluded from such participation.

Dr. Walther quotes 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as his authority for this observation.

1938 – St. Louis - A committee at this convention offered a resolution that this whole matter be restudied. Fifteen years elapsed before the question came up again as an item of Synodical business.

1953 – Houston - This convention passed the following resolution:

Resolved, That the President of Synod appoint a committee of five members to prepare for the next convention a thorough exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2, and all other applicable texts as they relate to the question of woman suffrage in our congregations; and be it further Resolved, That, in the meantime, our congregations be urged to continue the present practice of our Synod in restricting the privileges of voting membership to qualified male communicants.

1956 – St. Paul - This committee prepared a report, which concluded:

We believe that Scripture fully sanctions the basic polity set up in our church, and we can foresee only evil results in any change of the polity under which our church has been so signally blessed for more than a century.

Floor committee 3 formulated a set of five resolutions which upheld the previously accepted position and practice despite the fact that the President's committee could find no "express words in the Scriptures" forbidding women's suffrage.

There was also a resolution passed to "continue to study this entire area of the place of woman in the church".

1959 – San Francisco - Floor committee 3 submitted a report, which concluded:

Any congregation in the membership of Synod now or applying for membership which grants woman suffrage is urged to reconsider this practice in the light of Scripture... and to consider the danger of offense to others and to conform to the historic position of Synod in this matter.

The following resolution was adopted at this convention:

Resolved, That we reaffirm the position of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod on the place of woman in the church.

1965 – Detroit - This convention passed the following resolution:

Resolved, That we adopt the following statement for guidance in this matter:

1. On the basis of 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 we hold that God forbids women publicly to preach and teach the Word to men and to hold any office or vote in the church where this involves exercising authority over men with respect to the public administration of the Office of the Keys. We regard this principle as of binding force also today because 1 Tim. 2:11-15 refers to what God established at creation.
2. As stated at the St. Paul convention in 1956 and at the San Francisco convention in 1959, we consider woman suffrage in the church as contrary to Scripture only when it violates the above-mentioned Scriptural principals.

1965 – New York - The convention passed a resolution that allowed women to serve on Synodical boards, commissions, and committees for the first time.

Resolved, that the Synod declare women eligible to serve as advisory on synodical boards, commissions, and committees within the framework of Scriptural principals; and be it further Resolved That women be granted such membership ... by appointment only.

1969 – Denver

Woman suffrage was officially sanctioned. Most congregations of the LC-MS church now have some form of woman suffrage.

2004 – St. Louis

Resolution 3-08A is passed declaring that women may serve as Elders, congregational presidents, and vice presidents. During this convention a question from the floor was asked whether or not this also meant that women could read the lections and assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. In both instances the question was answered in the affirmative.

1998 – Present

At every Synodical Convention since 1998 (and some prior to that), overtures in support of the ordination of women have been offered to the convention for its consideration and never have the congregations submitting such overtures been disciplined. Likewise our Synod has many pastors on its clergy roster who openly advocate and/or support women's ordination and they have not been placed under discipline by their ecclesiastical supervisor nor removed from our roster. The following is but one example:

3-67 To Restudy and Provide for Ordination of Women

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod does not currently ordain women to the holy ministry because of its interpretation of selected New Testament passages, such as I Tim. 2:11-14, which speak of women learning in silence, not teaching and having “authority” over males; and

WHEREAS, Some laypeople and pastors within the Synod are convinced that these passages address cultural issues and reflect the practice of an earlier time and are not intended to apply to the role of women in the church today, and

WHEREAS, The Gospels identify women as the first witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrection – a task assigned to the apostles (Matt. 28:28; Luke 24:9-10; John 20:18); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul speaks of unity in Christ that transcends gender among all who are baptized (Gal. 3:27-28); and

WHEREAS, Many women who serve as pastors in other denominations have demonstrated such gifts as preaching, teaching, counseling, and presiding at worship; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the LCMS gathered in convention request that CTCR to restudy the biblical and theological basis for ordaining women; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the most recent edition of a study response written by the Rev. Arnie Voigt (“Theses on Women in the Church: Resources in Dialogue with ‘Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice’ [A Report of the CTCR of the LCMS, Sept. 1985]”), which addresses biblical interpretation within the context of LCMS concerns in a careful way, be published and distributed to each pastor and congregational president of the Synod; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That the delegates at this convention affirm the desire to provide for the ordination of women as soon as possible.

Resurrection, Coronado, CA