

Women`s ministry MBM

Ministries of Men and Women at MBM

This paper seeks to outline the biblical foundation for ministry by men and women in terms of unity and equality on the one hand, and diversity on the other. It then applies this framework to outline the current policy of MBM.

The need for this has come about acknowledging the diversity and confusion that has existed in this area. We rejoice in the way so many women and men serve at MBM in such diverse ways, reflecting the way God has given gifts to us for the good of his church. Yet we are aware of the pain this issue has caused some and seeking to now bring some clarity to this sensitive area.

Our desire is to have and embody a biblical vision for men and women, to honour the Lord and organise and conduct our church life in a way that gives opportunities for women to flourish.

We must be explicit that our authority rests in God`s Word:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17

1. Theological foundation of Male and Female ministry

From the very beginning, God`s purposes for this world would be chiefly played out through humanity. However, the authority to rule, fill and care for this earth would not be entrusted to just one gender. In Genesis 1, God created humanity in his own image. The mystery, wonder and beauty of humanity as male and female, together, is on view. Part of the magnificence of humanity is the fact that they are made in God`s own image. The unity and diversity of humanity parallels the unity and diversity of the triune God. This pattern of both unity and diversity is captured in Gen 1:27 where God creates humans in his own image as male and female. Each gender would be equal co-heirs and partners in God`s mission to rule God`s world under his gracious oversight.

***So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)***

This single truth has been viewed as both radical and counter-cultural across the ages, and perhaps in the current day more than ever. It is prone to misunderstanding. On the one extreme, is the flattening of gender distinctions. On the other extreme, is the false suggestion that conflates diversity into inequality. The magnificent biblical testimony holds both unity and diversity together. God`s brief for humanity was and is to rule and manage his world under his authority by both genders working *together*. Unity and diversity, or equality and

distinction, are captured in the first chapter of the Bible and embedded into the creation of the world in a biblical truth that is to be treasured.¹

By Genesis chapter 2 the pattern of unity and diversity is played out in more detail highlighting that while the first woman came from man, every male and female after that would come from woman (1Cor 11:12). There would be the never-ending, interdependent relationship between the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve.

The union of male and female working together is seen firstly in marriage, which is also the God given vehicle for the bearing of children, which in turn is God's method by which humanity is to increase and fill the earth and subdue it (c.f Gen 1:28). Each marriage is intended to express, demonstrate and celebrate the wonder of the two becoming one flesh (Gen 2:24). Marriage is a God given union that would carry a meaning beyond itself. Later in the Bible, we learn that God's gift of marriage would function as a microcosm of Yahweh's exclusive covenantal marriage with Israel, forsaking all others (Exod 20:1, Jer 3:20). Ultimately, it would point to the long-awaited Messiah as the bridegroom who leads and lays down his life for his people who are his bride, his body, the church (Eph 5:21-31). We learn that human marriage itself points us to a more profound mystery, that of the 'marriage' between Christ and his church.

2. Equal and Different

The phrase 'Equal and Different' captures the beautiful character of the joint rule of men and women. While there is joint rule Genesis 1 -3 also establish an order in the relationship between men and women. Contrary to the common postmodern western mindset, biblical order in relationship is not at the expense of equality. Men and women are equal in essence, dignity and value. Rather, the biblical emphasis around order finds its foundation from the order within the Godhead. Ultimately, we will see that gender should not be driven by our society, but by the revealed word of God, which teaches us that men and women are not interchangeable.

2.1 Within the Triune God

To grasp this mystery of diversity in unity we start with the God in whose image all humans are made. We begin with the Jewish monotheistic creedal statement, such as in Deuteronomy 6:4:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

God is both unified and unique. He is God and there is no other.

God is one, but, as the New Testament revealed, there is more than one person within the Godhead. In the fullness of time the Word who is with God became flesh and God's one and only Son came into history (Jn 1:1-14). In turn, He would then send another advocate - the Spirit of Truth (Jn 4:6-17). As a result, God, who is One, is now fully revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence Jesus commands all disciples to be baptised ***"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** (Matt 28:19).

¹ It is also noteworthy that in the creation account gender identity is God given and is neither interchangeable nor the result of human choice nor preference. However, perhaps this topic ought to be the subject of a dedicated discussion paper.

Each person of this *Trinity* is distinct in role, but sharing a common purpose and will, as well as an equality of divine nature. In other words, each person of the Trinity is equal and distinct.

The very nature of God Himself, namely that there is order among three equal persons is profound. God the Father and God the Son are equal in nature. And, while the Father sends the Son, the Son never sends the Father. The Father and / or the Son sends the Spirit. Their roles are not interchangeable. And, while the Son obeys the Father, he never exercises authority over the Father. Jesus is quite clear, ***“...that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”*** (Jn 14:31)

Much has been written about these matters, and the purpose of this paper is not to rehearse all that has been said. It may be helpful to quote Jim Packer’s excellent summary, which helpfully notes the shared but distinct involvement in God’s redemptive plan by each member of the Triune God: *The Father initiates the plan of salvation, the Son executes the plan of salvation, and the Spirit applies the plan of salvation.*

As we reflect on how the order works within the Godhead, one of the implications is that of authority. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses language like ‘head’ to refer to this kind of authority and begins to apply the concept in the human dimension. For example:

“But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Cor 11:3)

The Bible is very clear that there can be order even in equality. Equality does not mean sameness. This order is found as early as in Genesis 2 where man names the woman (Gen 2:23). Eve is Adam’s helper or ally and he carries a ‘servant’ authority. The word ‘head’ will be used later in scripture of the husband, to convey this servant authority, and will also be used in other contexts.

2.2 In Marriage.

As we turn to consider the connection of this framework to human marriage, it is with much sadness that we note that the application of authority in marriage has so often been abused. This, in fact, goes all the way back to Adam, the very first man. He was quick to abandon his leadership first by his silence (Gen 3:6) and then by his blame of Eve, and then of God (Gen 3:12).

Even though we live outside the garden and after the fall God’s response to Adam’s failure was not to abandon order among male and female (Gen 3:16), but to clarify that ‘headship’ is ultimately to be patterned on the last Adam, Christ. The flip side of Adam’s headship is that when the Fall occurred, Adam was held responsible (Gen 3:9), and through him all humanity (Rom 5:12,17).

God’s word, rather than our fallen experience, is to give shape to this pattern. Biblical headship in marriage is defined by Paul in Ephesians 5:21-31 as a Christ-like, loving leadership which sacrificially lays down one’s life with the ultimate goal of presenting his bride holy before the Messiah. ‘Love’ would be the primary verb to describe the responsibility of headship, and ‘Respect’ would be the verb to describe the response of the bride (Eph 5:31). Interestingly, and in contrast to where the weight of the text is often put, some 170 words are addressed to husbands, imploring them to love their wives as Christ laid down his life for the church. One mark of how well a husband is fulfilling his role is seen in whether the wife feels, not just safe, and loved but whether she is flourishing.

By comparison, 54 words are addressed to wives, to help and encourage them to submit to their husbands. Submission is to be given willingly by the bride and never demanded by the husband (1 Peter 3:1). The husband is never to require his wife to submit to him. Honour and respect capture the response to the one who is head, and ultimately for Jesus' sake. Together this unity in diversity reveals the nature of the Trinitarian God in whose image both male and female are made.

With much sadness, we are very aware that biblical notions of headship have continued to be corrupted and abused by men. The result is what some have called, 'hyper headship' which can demand submission and creates unhealthy and toxic relationships through a husband's oppressive and controlling behaviour in marriage. In some cases, terms like 'headship' or 'submission' have been used to justify various forms of domestic abuse and / or manipulation. To be clear, such understandings are profoundly incorrect and not justified from the Word of God. We are committed, to providing a safe environment for all who are part of our church, or who visit our church. In addition, we are committed to maintaining safe and upright practices in our response to any reports of domestic abuse or family violence, or violence in any intimate relationship.

2.3 Ministry in the Church

As we turn to consider women's involvement in ministry, we firstly observe that Jesus welcomed women among his disciples, both teaching them (Luke 10:39) and involving them in his ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

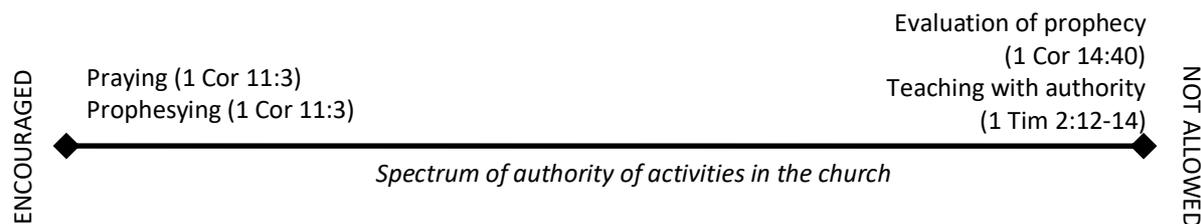
It is clear in the New Testament that both men and women contend side by side for the gospel (Phil 4:2-3). For example, Paul names women as co-workers in his wider ministry team. He identifies several women who played key roles in the church and in the gospel going to the ends of the earth (see Phoebe in Rom 16:1-2, Priscilla and Aquila in Rom 16:3 and 1 Cor 16:19, and Nympha Col 4:15). Indeed, Priscilla, with Aquila, was involved in explaining the way of God more adequately to Apollos (Acts 18:26).

An important principle of biblical complementarianism is that the equal involvement of men and women in the church does not entail interchangeable roles.

As in the home, the order in male-female relationships, deriving from the Godhead himself, is also to be expressed in the church. The role of Pastor-Elder, who direct the affairs of the church (1 Tim 5:17) and teach with authority (1 Tim 2:12-14; 3:1-7), is reserved for qualified men. Importantly, submission in these matters does not extend to all men by all women. Nor is that submission an absolute, but it only occurs under the ultimate authority of Christ himself. Furthermore, this reservation does not diminish the importance of women being involved in the life of the church, nor does it compromise their equality, nor dignity.

1 Corinthians 11-14 is a helpful place to draw some principles by which we can work out the application of these concepts in church life. 1 Cor 11:5 assumes that a woman is involved in church life by praying or prophesying. While the activity of prophesying has been the subject of much discussion for our purposes it gives evidence that women were involved in speaking in some way in the church gathering. However, by the time we get to 1 Cor 14:34, in the context of appropriate church order, it is said that women should not be involved – and the context is the evaluation of prophecy. This is not an inconsistency, but rather highlights the nature of thinking about the respective authority attached in different circumstances.

This diagram² is an attempt to demonstrate this spectrum of authority:



In 1 Tim 2:12-14, linking teaching with authority, is quite categorical:

I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. (1Tim 2:12-14)

It is instructive that these arguments go back to created order, grounding the principle in Genesis 2³. The apostle then locates the argument in Genesis 3 where Eve's deception reverses the God given order of creation (God–Man–Woman–Animal).

It's important to note that Eve's deception does not insinuate in any way that women are more 'gullible' than men. This is clear given that Paul instructs women to teach other women and children (Titus 2:2-3), prophesy and pray in the congregation (1 Cor 11:5) and engage in 'one another' word ministry to both men and women (Col 3:16, Acts 18:26).

It may also be helpful to note that single men and women are also valued and embraced in the life of our church. Sisters should be loved in ways that express sibling love, and without being patronised or victimised.

In the broadest framework, there are three levels of teaching outlined in the Bible. In one sense Jesus alone is our Teacher (Matt 23:8) and he is in a class of his own. Secondly, there is the gift of teaching (Eph 4:11, 1 Peter 4:11, Rom 12:7) which is given to some for the building up of the church and is to be used according to the terms spelled out in scripture. It is here where we see order distinction between male and female. The third level is the 'one another' teaching that has no restriction of gender in how it's conducted.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:16).

As we move to outline our policy, let's focus more on what we have outlined as the second level. While we understand that this view, known as the complementarian position, is taught in Scripture, the application of this principle varies among Christians.

3. The challenges of applying the principle today

Before we now turn to applying this framework into our church life, we must note several challenges:

² This diagram is used with kind permission by Raj Gupta.

³ In so doing distinctions among men and women are not viewed in the same as say slavery, which is a cultural defined relationship and not a timeless truth. Hence Paul's encouragement for slaves to seek their freedom (1 Cor 7:21).

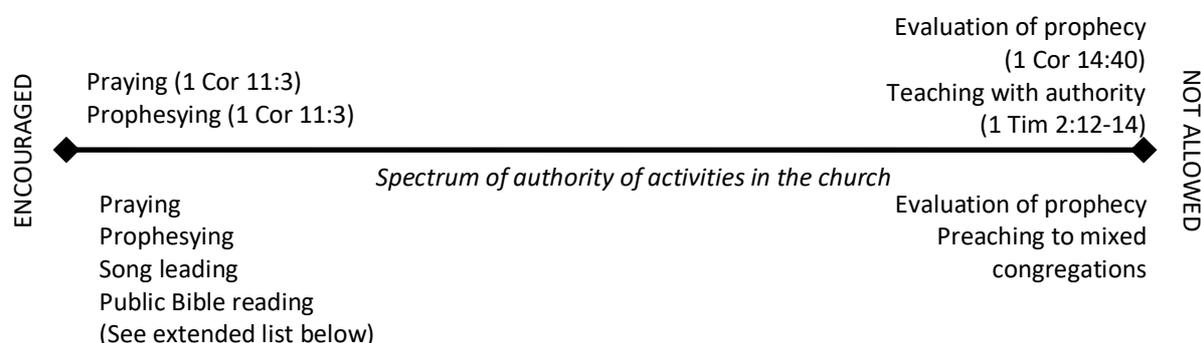
1. While activities such as praying, on the one hand, and preaching, on the other may have direct enough parallels, church life today involves several activities that do not seem to be apparent in the first century. Some of the more contentious areas where practices must be worked out include service leading, and Growth Group leading.
2. The complex reality, as we have seen countless times in history, is that different people will interpret what is permitted and modelled in different ways. On the one hand, some see any shift as 'just the start' of a slippery slope. On the other hand, leadership must be shown to help people know what a positive model of complementarian ministry looks like in the current day and age.

Despite these very real challenges, we desire to demonstrate a positive model of complementarian ministry, in which both genders can and will flourish. This desire springs from the theological foundation that God has made men and women together to be humanity and embracing the principle of men and women contending side by side for the cause of the Gospel, within a complementarian framework.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that some will find our policy too conservative, and others will find it too progressive. We would be grateful for some level of grace, realising that our church does need to have a consistent and clear policy, and also so that we can focus our energies on pursuing God's mission in our world.

4. Application⁴

As we articulate our policy in this area, it may be helpful to extend the diagram we introduced above, to begin to articulate how we see this working in the current day and age. We have listed out the less contentious areas as an extension to the diagram. Expressing a complementarian framework, it is critical that women have a clear voice and are encouraged to exercise the full range of ministry gifts given to them without which the church cannot mature. The areas in which activities are reserved for men are in no way because men are more capable than women. Rather, the rationale is to model Christ-like headship in the church as well as the family. It is also true that the opportunity to teach in the mixed congregation isn't open to all men.



Furthermore, God has gifted some women to formally teach other women and opportunities need to be given for the full expression of these gifts in one-to-one, small groups, seminars and large female gatherings. It is also understood that women are encouraged to teach children and even youth. With the difficulty of defining when children become adults, and in

⁴ This diagram and reflection on 1 Corinthians 11-14 is by kind permission of Raj Gupta.

the interests of preparing teenagers for Sunday church, we have chosen to have male preachers in senior youth activities.

We will now turn to express our policy and rationale for some of the more controversial areas, as we have sought to apply these principles into our church context. We do understand and respect that there are and will be differences in how different Christians have worked these areas through. At the same time, we must have some clarity and consistency across our church.

a) Growth Group leading

While it is clear enough that men will lead men's Growth Groups and women will lead Women's Growth Groups, mixed Growth Groups are to have a male and female co-leader. While we want our leaders to provide leadership and pastoring to those in their groups, the nature of 'teaching' in these contexts carries far less authority than is the case for Sunday preaching, being closer to facilitation in their very nature. At the same time, they are not quite akin to the third level 'one another ministry' we noted above. This is further nuanced with the reality that, in many cases, the studies are provided, even sometimes with leaders notes.

It is important to note that while our Growth Groups are a precious fellowship around the Word of God, it is not Church. Unlike Church where all are called to gather, it is a closed group which does not have elders present who teach, and administer the sacraments and nor does it have an eye to the outsider, as it is only for some members of MBM.

Accordingly, as we seek a complementarian approach to co-leading, our policy for leading of mixed Growth Groups is this:

- We will appoint a male and female co-leader. The male co-leader should bear a greater responsibility for the direction and health of the group.
- Noting where Growth Groups sit on the spectrum of authority, women may lead studies, in part or in their entirety.
- Our desire is for complementarian ministry to be apparent in various ways, even if they are relatively subtle. We would rather not be too prescriptive about what this might look like, at the risk of veering into Pharisaism, and noting that relational dynamics vary.

b) Service leading at mixed congregations

It is our conviction that a good way to practically model the complementarian position is in Sunday service leading. By having co-leaders who are male and female at each service we get to see men and women working together and not just in isolation. This pattern has already been helpfully expressed in MBM online service co-leading.

c) Other involvement in the platform of mixed congregations.

In addition to the matters listed above such as prayer, bible reading and song leading, women are involved in the 'platform' of our Sunday mixed gatherings in all kinds of other ways as we seek to innovatively model a positive view of biblical complementarian ministry, including

- participating in the sharing of wisdom, particularly with respect to application.
- interviews (both as interviewer and interviewee),

- sharing testimonies of God's work
- teaching children

d) Involvement in other aspects of church life

Finally, it is worth noting our desire for men and women to be thoroughly involved in church life, which is by no means restricted to our Sunday church meetings. This includes, but is by no means limited, to roles (formal and informal):

- in service in the purposes of Mission, Membership, Maturity, Magnification and Ministry. Furthermore, overseeing the purposes of Mission, Membership and Ministry should be open to men and women.
- Involving one-another relationship within the church and on mission to men and women.
- teaching children and youth within the church and home.
- Women serving in a wide range of mercy ministries to every member of the church.
- Women in administration roles, such as Deacons board.

In addition, we want to encourage women to be involved with teaching women (with a special focus of older to younger) including public preaching, bible study / growth groups, conferences and seminars.

5. MBM M Purpose Structure

How does this work out in MBM's model of ministry. In 2010 MBM moved from a single Pastor-Congregation model to our present model structured around 'Team pastoring' and 'Purpose' portfolios.

At present MBM ministry is ordered around the following purposes of God:

- **Magnification**-Finding our joy in God's glory
- **Mission**-Proclaiming Christ and doing good
- **Membership**-Doing life together well
- **Maturity**-Growing in our knowledge and love of God
- **Ministry**-Identifying, equipping and unleashing God's people for works of service

Each purpose is headed by a Pastor. These Pastors together form the band of elders at MBM. Each Purpose Pastor is male by virtue of being a Pastor-Elder. The church is led by these Purpose Pastors who shepherd and direct the affairs of the whole church. It is important to grasp that that these Pastors shepherd both the men and the women. Ministry to women as well as men begins here.

If Eldership was not tied to the head of purpose it may well be the case in the future that some of the M Pastors role may be filled by a woman. Certainly, we have had women head

departments such a children`s ministry in the past and there may be no reason why they cant head for example the Ministry portfolio.

At present given the role of women working alongside men in God`s plan each pastor must work closely with a staff team that includes godly and gifted men and women. That is what is presently taking place. For example, on staff Mark Boyley (Membership) works with Kim Morris, Bruce Winters (Admin Support) with Leanne Shepherd and Lynette Cain, Ray Galea (Mission) with Sarah Anderson, Ben Purdy (Children) with Sandy Galea, Maggi Ha, Amy Song and Jean Cousins, Pre Shunmugan (Magnification) with Emily Spiteri and Rehan Prins (Youth) with Josie Seto to name just a few.

6. Conclusion

Whilst we understand that various people will have varying convictions on these sensitive matters, we hope that nonetheless this policy document is helpful in providing clarity around the theology and its outworking in practice at MBM. While we too are sinful people impacted by a fallen world, we have done our best to articulate these matters in an accessible way.

We pray that God will use us all, as we partner with our Lord Jesus who promises to build his church. We are a blessed church made up of gifted male and female, young and old, rich and poor drawn from many nations.