

McKnight Crossings – Gender Summary (Fall 2014)

We have spent an enormous time of prayer and discussion regarding women's roles in the church, including an in-depth study and discussion this past summer.

God tells us that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love people. Put another way, the scripture teaches that its purpose is *"so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* It is important to remember the goal of scripture is to help us love God and love people better. All healthy teaching must support these priorities and outcomes, including our understanding of gender and practice of ministry.

We, the leadership, have asked ourselves whether we want to be among those contributing to the benefit of the next generation? If so, how? Our answer is that we would like to do our part to strengthen the body of Christ and the mission of God, by allowing women every role our current understanding of the Scripture will enable. Possibly, we will not see an entire wall built in our lifetime, however, we believe we can help with adding a few more bricks. We do not want to be like those who resisted change and the freedom of slaves in the 1800's.

We recognize that the societal structures in the Old Testament period and at the times of Jesus very much restricted the roles of women in many areas of life, including the faith community. Therefore, we must not be limited by the examples of Scripture, and proof-texting, but dig deeper, appreciating Biblical context, culture, and seek God's full intention for his kingdom, as part of the new creation.

God created humankind as equals, *"male and female he created them."* Sin shattered Eden and the Christian faith holds that the course of biblical history since has been the re-creation of the connections between God and human beings. Likewise, God's creation is called to oneness; oneness that encompasses all creation, animate and inanimate, and ultimately to be taken up again by God. This call to oneness is why over the course of history barriers have slowly fallen in accord with Paul's summary in Galatians 3:28: *"There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus."* The issue, therefore, is not about the "rights" of anyone, but recognizing the unfolding will of God. The abolition of slavery, for instance, provides illustration for gender concerns as well.

Next in regards to gender, what would Jesus do is a great question? We see in Jesus a remarkable ministry that recognized women, their identity, and their valuable roles in the kingdom of God, seriously shifting traditional views. Women supported Jesus, learned from the Rabbi, were early evangelists (John 4), and were the first to testify to the resurrection. The Spirit of Jesus continues into the early church with Peter's quotation from Joel that "your sons and daughters will prophesy."

Two passages of scripture most often referred to on this topic in regard to the public assembly are found in 1st Corinthians 14 and 1st Timothy 2. We believe these passages are to be understood in the context of their communities. The writers of the New Testament had specific concerns when they wrote the letters to those building the church and where

the circumstances are not replicated the commands do not hold, any more than the command for women to wear veils in worship, or the command to refuse to recognize a widow who is not more than 60 years old, or the command for men to raise holy hands in prayer are to be obeyed today. Paul's word to the Galatians, "*we are all one in Christ,*" remains the final word. With this spirit in mind, we seek to use the gifts of all in our worship to God.

Scripture specifically offers "counter cultural" examples:

- Women lead worship through prayer and prophesy (I Cor 11:5)
- Women host the church (Acts 12:12, 16:40)
- Women actively teach (Acts 18:26)
- Women serve as deacons (Rom 16:1-2)

At the same time, the MX leadership is currently conflicted, however, on what this vision of oneness exactly looks like in practice in our time and place, based upon our reading of texts for elders, like 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, Ephesians 5. Does equality necessarily mean equal roles? Can we be equal, but different?

Therefore, as a leadership, at this time, we do not believe that a woman should be the primary teaching minister (which necessarily requires leadership) for the church or serve in the role of an elder. This is not a refusal to practice what God wants, but rather indicates our lack of full understanding of what God specifically desires when certain passages of scripture, particularly for instance, the equality of Genesis 1 and the apparent male headship of Genesis 2, point in seemingly conflicting directions.

The issue is not so much about gender, but how we read scripture, particularly mutually exclusive strands of scripture, and apply it to gender. While not definitively knowing God's will in this area is unsettling, our trust remains in the Lord, not our ability to get it right. We are all products of our history, shaped by the hand of God and our unique experiences, generally more than we know or realize.

So to be as clear as possible for MX in 2014:

1. It is helpful to differentiate between our principles and our practices to implement them. It would be disingenuous to believe something and not ever put it into practice. However, determining what we believe and how we implement it are different. It may take a long time to implement some values. It has helped us to think more objectively to first focus on our principles - what do we believe God is calling us to based on the Word, our experiences, prayer, and the Holy Spirit's leading.
2. We believe there is tremendous opportunity for women's public and leadership roles to expand in our faith community. We believe women should be honored, trained, and encouraged to use their gifts to build up the body of Christ.
3. We believe teaching and leadership qualifications are based upon one's commitment to Christ, giftedness by God, and empowerment by the Holy Spirit, not by gender.
4. If our principles allow women to use their gifts more fully, what settings enable this?

- a. We can begin in kids Crossings to have both girls and boys be trained.
 - b. We will continue this in the Student/ Teen program.
 - c. We will encourage and build upon an inclusive use of gifts in the Gym worship, including leading worship and preaching a sermon.
 - d. We believe women should lead and teach small groups and Bible classes.
 - e. We will encourage gift-usage in the many ministries that serve throughout the week.
5. For the foreseeable future, we will try to keep our changes to the Auditorium worship to a minimum. There are some with long time convictions about male leadership and almost any change will be viewed as a retraction of our commitment at the time of the merger to minimize change in the traditional worship.
 6. We will continue with two worship services offering different styles. However, at times, we will have one worship assembly. We will switch off the location and the style, or both. One time we will use the Auditorium style worship, the next time we will use the Gym style of worship for these combined assemblies. We will rotate the schedule in the bulletin so members know in advance where the worship will be located and what to expect.
 7. Couples praying: In both services, whenever an elder prays or gives his greeting, his wife will be encouraged to go up with him and share the prayer or announcement, if she so desires. Leadership is teamwork; elders/ministers would not be in their role without an exemplary and spiritually mature wife. Other prayers can be co-led by couples, too.
 8. We will make an effort to offer public affirmation of women who lead certain ministries, identifying them as "Ministry Leaders" by title in the bulletin and other media. They are modern deaconesses.
 9. **Male Elders:** While we elect male elders, as much and as often as possible, we will refer to the leadership as "Elder Couples" or "Shepherding Couples." The current elders are crystal clear that we need the insight, service, and assistance of our wives to be effective in our roles.

The "answers" we have today may change tomorrow. We can only do our best with the knowledge and understanding we have at the moment. But, we need to continue to learn and grow. We cannot change our past, but we can learn from it and move forward.

We believe that McKnight Crossings is a vibrant community of faith, claiming the best our restoration tradition with a willingness to examine our faith and practices, and being open to change, not carelessly, but with care, study, reflection, and intention.

Thank you for your patience and sensitivity to God and his leading.