

## **“Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution”: Canadian Conference (2006)**

### Resolution

It is evident that individuals and congregations practice a diversity of convictions based on different interpretations of Scripture as it regards the church’s freedom to call women to serve in ministry and pastoral leadership. On this non-confessional issue, the Board of Faith and Life recommends that the Conference bless each member church in its own discernment of Scripture, conviction and practice to call and affirm gifted men and women to serve in ministry and pastoral leadership.

### Rationale

There are several interpretive frameworks through which people arrive at their conclusions about the subject of women in ministry. We invite those who are in agreement with the resolution, those who are still searching, and those who disagree to consider the following interpretive framework that stands behind the resolution.

Jesus modelled and taught how men and women should treat one another, in life and in ministry. He challenged prevailing unjust practices towards women. He set forth a new paradigm that saw women as persons equal to men and rejected the practices of his day that devalued women (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 5:21–43; 10:11–12; 15:40–41, 47; Luke 10:38–42; 13:10–17; 24:10–11; John 4:7–42; 11:2–45; 12:1–8). Jesus had female disciples who travelled with him, supported him out of their means (Luke 8:1–3) and received spiritual instruction from our Lord (Matthew 12:46–50; 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 10:39).

Paul stated that in Christ Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female are one (Galatians 3:26–28). Paul had female co-workers in Philippi (Philippians 4:2–3) and in Rome who were commended for their leadership ministry (Romans 16:1–16). Neither Jesus nor Paul overturned the cultural norms of their day because to do so would have shifted the focus away from God’s redemptive mission (Mark 1:14–15; Luke 4:43–44; 5:12–14; Acts 16:1–3; 28:31; 1 Corinthians 7:21–24; Galatians 5:6; 6:15; Ephesians 6:5–9).

The Church is Christ’s “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:16–17), still resident in an old created order that “waits in eager anticipation” to be “liberated” and “brought into freedom” (Romans 8:19, 21). As believers we are to limit the exercise of our Christian liberty if it promotes the greater good and the advance of the gospel (Romans 14:1–23; 1 Corinthians 10:23–24; see also 1 Peter 2:16–17). There were expedient social contingencies that informed church leaders what could and could not be done in a given situation if the gospel were to proceed. Some New Testament churches in Corinth and Ephesus had their missional effectiveness threatened by false doctrine (Acts 20:29–30), inappropriate behaviour (1 Timothy 2:1–15; 2 Timothy 3:6–7), a lack of order in public worship (1 Corinthians 14:22–35) and a lack of mutual submission and respect in marriage, the home and the church (Ephesians 5:21–6:9). Thus, while affirming Christian liberty in some contexts like Galatia, Philippi and Rome, Paul gave restrictions regarding the ministry and conduct of men and women in Ephesus and Corinth because not to do so would have impeded the gospel (1 Corinthians 14:26–28; 34–40; 1 Timothy

2:11–12; 4:1–2, 7; 5:20; 6:3–5; 2 Timothy 2:14–19, 23–24; 3:1–5; Titus 1:10–11, 13–14; 3:9–11).

In our day there are church contexts where freedom granted to women in ministry and pastoral leadership would impede the gospel in that setting. In such cases, congregations are wise to heed such biblical counsel that restricts women’s leadership involvement. It is hoped that in such contexts, churches will abide by the spirit of the Wichita 1999 resolution of the General Conference of MB Churches that states:

That women be encouraged to minister in the church in every function other than the lead pastorate. The church is to invite women to exercise leadership on Conference boards, in pastoral staff positions and in our congregations, institutions, and agencies. We ask women to minister as gifted, called and affirmed. We call the church to be increasingly alert to the gifts of women and to become more active in calling them to minister. We further call people in the Spirit of Christ to relate to one another in mutual respect as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Likewise, there are church contexts where the gospel would be impeded if women were not granted the complete freedom to minister the gospel as called, gifted and affirmed, including the role of pastor. Congregations are to celebrate Christ’s gifts of leadership to his church (Ephesians 4:11–16). The Holy Spirit grants gifts to all believers irrespective of gender for diverse ministries both in the church and in the world (2 Corinthians 3:4–6).

Let it be our choice that this diversity of practice regarding the churches’ freedom to call women into ministry and pastoral leadership will not undermine our unity. This resolution is not prescriptive, but enabling. No member or member church is compelled to act outside its understanding of Scripture on the matter of women in ministry leadership. Rather, let us covenant with one another to offer encouragement, love, prayer and support for each church and its mission “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:16; Matthew 28:18–20; John 17:17–19; 20:21–23).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Board of Faith and Life: Women in Ministry Leadership Resolution,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, February 24, 2006, 15.