

**A Study of the
Issue of
Women
Serving as
Ordained Bishops**



Position Papers

The four position papers contained in this booklet were presented to the International Executive Council in January 2006 by the Doctrine and Polity Committee. The International Executive Council approved this material for presentation to the Ordained Bishops of the Church of God in fulfillment of the following motion that was adopted at the 2004 International General Assembly:

That the following motions be referred to a committee and that a thorough study be conducted and that a document be prepared reflecting all the varied views on this subject and that this study be sent to all ordained bishops prior to the 2006 General Council.

That Item 2 of the Qualifications of Ordained Bishops (S57, I) be amended by substitution of the words “the applicant” for each occasion of the word “he” so that the item would read “An applicant for ordination as bishop may be ordained when the applicant is twenty-five (25) years of age, provided the applicant has at least eight (8) years of active ministry, or when the applicant is thirty (30) years of age, provided the applicant has had at least five (5) years of active ministry, if the applicant is otherwise qualified (page 203 of the 2002 Supplement to the Minutes).

It is moved that Item 7 of the Qualifications of Ordained Bishops (S57, I) be amended by substitution of the word “spouse” for the word “wife” so that it would read “The spouse of the applicant for ordained bishop’s license must be grave, not a slanderer, sober, and faithful in all things (page 203 of the 2002 Supplement to the Minutes).”

It is moved that the Qualifications of Ordained Bishops (S57, I) be amended by the deletion of Item 8 (page 203 of the 2002 Supplement to the Minutes).

Two of these papers are written in opposition of women serving as ordained bishops and two are written in favor.

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SERVING AS ORDAINED BISHOPS
Position Papers**

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THE EXECUTIVE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

I. Clarification of the Issue

Often when the full ordination of women is discussed separate issues, ones that are not directly related to the subject, are brought in, and thereby cloud the discussion. For instance, often many examples of women ministering in the Old and New Testaments are brought to bear upon the subject. In this way the issue of women being fully empowered to be an Ordained Bishop is presented as being equivalent to ministering in the body of Christ. So the implication is that to withhold from women ordination to the level of Ordained Bishop is also to withhold from women the opportunity to minister in the church.

Of course, women have ministered in the Church of God since its inception, and are presently actively involved in ministry throughout the church today. This holds true for what may be described as “charismatic ministries” (that is, exercise of the gifts of the Spirit in the church), as well as what may be described as “official ministries”, with the word “official” being understood in the sense of the “offices” of pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries. Indeed with regard to these types of ministries in the church, the Church of God

supplies official licenses to both women and men who are called and otherwise qualified to conduct these ministries.

So the issue at hand is not about women ministering in the Church of God. Rather it is about women obtaining full executive empowerment in the Church of God so that they might help determine the agenda of the International General Assembly and to hold executive office in the denomination to direct the affairs of the church on a general level.

Having clarified that ministry does not lie at the heart of the matter, but rather the attainment of that kind of executive empowerment to affect the doctrine and polity of the church, we may proceed more deliberately. The issue is then, strictly speaking, whether the Bible, and the New Testament in particular, endorse this kind of executive empowerment of women in the church.

II. Scriptural Evidence

A. The Old Testament

The Church of God believes in the whole Bible rightly divided with the New Testament serving as the basis for doctrine and polity. For this reason, data from the Old Testament is to be interpreted through the lens of the New

Testament, and that data must be viewed as supportive, but not determinative of the doctrine and polity of the church.

So with regard to the Old Testament there can be no question that many women were used powerfully by God. Miriam is described as a prophetess (Exod. 15:20 ff.), and there can be no question that women such as Ruth and Esther were greatly used of the Lord (Ruth 1:1 ff., Esther 1:1 ff.)

Again, however, we must not confuse female ministry *among* the people of God with female leadership *over* the people of God. Again, with regard to what might be called “executive leadership” over the people of God, from Moses to Malachi, the pattern is consistent. It is males who occupy the role of authority over the assembly of believers. The patriarchs and the heads of the twelve tribes were all males (Gen 31:53, 32:9; 35:22 ff.). Moses and the elders appointed under him were all males (Exod. 18:14 ff.). All of the judges of Israel were male with the exception of Deborah (Judges 1:1 ff, 2:16 ff., 4:4-5:15). The kings of Israel, from King David onward were all male (1 Sam 16:13 ff., 2 Sam 12:24; 1 Kgs 1:17). All of the major and minor prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi were male, and the Messiah of whom they spoke would be a Son not a daughter (Isa. 7:14).

In conclusion, there can be no doubt that the predominant paradigm in the Old Testament with regard to executive leadership over the people of God is that of male leadership.

B. The New Testament

The same type of leadership model prevails in the New Testament. Again, the promised Messiah was a male (Matt 1:18 ff; Luke 2:1 ff.) and the chief witness to him, John the Baptist, was as well (Mark 1:1 ff; Luke 3:1 ff.). When Jesus began his public ministry he chose the Twelve Apostles (Matt 10:2 ff., Luke 6:13 ff.), all male and when Judas failed, candidates for his replacement were all males as well (Acts 1:23-26). When it pleased God to reveal himself through an extraordinary revelation and empower another apostle, it proved to be Paul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1 ff., Gal 1:15 ff.) Every canonical book of the New Testament that explicitly mentions its author was written by a male and the anonymous ones such as the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke are attributed by the church to males. The Pastoral Epistles, I & II Timothy and Titus, are of course addressed to male pastors.

The New Testament is strangely silent when it comes to explicitly naming pastors and leaders in the church. That is, early church leaders such as James,

Peter, Paul and John write to congregations without mentioning the names of the persons who were actually pastoring the individual churches they addressed. The lack of specificity here has led some to argue that some of the leading pastors of the early church were women. Persons such as Lydia (Acts 16:14), Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18, 26), Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11 ff.), and especially Phoebe are cited as proof (Rom 16:1) of female leadership in the church. But it should be noted that having a church meet in one's house (as was most likely the case with Lydia, Priscilla, and Chloe) is not the same thing as being the leader of the church in that house.

The case with Phoebe is a little different. Phoebe is explicitly called a "deacon" (*diakonos*), and this fact has been pointed to as proof that she had some kind of executive leadership in the church. She most certainly did carry the Epistle to the Romans to its destination in Rome and was no doubt a trusted person in Paul's team of ministers. However, it must be remembered that the same word (*diakonos*) is used to describe the appointing of Stephen and the Seven, whose job it was to distribute financial aid to widows in the church (Acts 6:1 ff.). So overall the role of "deacon" in the early church seems to fall along the lines of a gifted helper who is officially recognized and affirmed to facilitate

ministry. In any case, if there was an established office for female deacons in the early church, one would expect that the word would be in the feminine (i.e. deaconesses), as was the case with the charismatic gift of “prophetess” *prophetis* (Luke 2:36). As it is, the word “deacon” only appears in the masculine in the New Testament.

A final case is that of the “elect lady” of 2 John. Some see this as proof that the “elect lady” is a recognized leader in the church. Indeed the literal reading of the text may point in that direction. Then again, the church may have been coming under official Roman persecution by this time, and the “elect lady” may be a code name for a local church. Since the church is referred to as a “bride” there is some merit to this interpretation as well.

C. Conclusion

The conclusion of the matter with regard to the New Testament is the same as that for the Old Testament. The predominant model for leadership is male and not female. Women in the New Testament certainly do minister, but to say that they occupied those kinds of leadership roles that determined the polity of the church is simply an argument from silence.

III. Some Cultural Considerations

The critical question at this juncture concerns why is the leadership of God's people apparently attributed to males and not females. A common rejoinder is that it is a matter of culture. Male leadership in the Bible reflects the male dominance of ancient cultures and is no longer applicable to our day. In response, we should note the following.

A. Culture and the Bible

There can be no question that the societies of both the Old and New Testaments affirmed male leadership in the community of faith and in the public arena. So it would be correct to say that culturally the biblical world reflects male dominance. But again, this fact of male dominance in the culture did not preclude the active and meaningful role of women in worship and ministry.

However, it appears that if what might be called "the divinely appointed ordering of the sexes" is challenged in the church, then the biblical writers are careful to address this challenge. This holds especially true for the Apostle Paul. It appears that some of the women in Corinth interpreted the charismatic empowering of the Spirit as a license to literally cast off the sign of their functional subordination to their husbands (that is a veil on the head) and cut

away the natural sign of their unique role in society and that is their long hair(1 Cor 11:1 ff.). Not wanting the church to be seen as social anarchists, Paul rebukes these women. Similarly, when addressing the abuse of the gifts, he commands that the women be silent in the church and save their questions for when they are at home (1 Cor. 14:34-35). It should be remembered that he does not forbid them from prophesying, so Paul cannot mean that women must be silent altogether. So again it appears that Paul is preserving the paradigm of male leadership that was so prevalent in the Old Testament and the early church.

Those that counter this interpretation argue that Paul is applying discipline to a specific church situation that is highly culturally determined. Therefore Paul's counsel cannot be transferred *carte blanc* to our situation today.

In response it should be noted, however, Paul anchors his argument in the eternal interrelationships between the members of the Trinity (1 Cor. 11:3; 12:4-6). It appears that in addressing the proper relationship of men and women in the church, he points to a principle that transcends culture and time. So his injunctions to the Corinthians then would apply to all believers regardless of culture or place in history.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the Gospel served as a liberator of women, and of all others who found themselves wanting an identity that made social categories relative to the love of God. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but that we are all one in the Lord. No doubt the great leveling effect of God's salvation entailed social implications, but the extent to which it affected the leadership structure of the church, if at all, is unclear.

B. Culture and Contemporary Society

The issue to be resolved is whether the Bible proffers a kind of wisdom that from our present perspective is nothing short of a mystery. That is, the Word speaks of a wisdom that generally favors male leadership in instances that touch the doctrine and guidance of the church. If it does then there can be no question that wisdom is diametrically opposed to the vision and values of our present culture, both within and without the church, especially in the United States. And to this degree, may I say, the issue *is* culturally determined. It is apparent that the motives that have led many western women to seek the rank of Ordained Bishop in the church are not present among women of other cultures.

So what might favor some women in America would be viewed as outrageous in other cultures.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The Bible is clear and consistent in favoring male leadership of the people of God. If the Church of God has any cause of concern in the area of women in ministry it might be in the area of consistency. That is we allow women to carry the burden of pastoral and mission work, yet they are not granted full empowerment in the affairs of the church. On one level this might appear to be inconsistent, and to that extent unjust. Admittedly, in the light of the Bible's demand for fairness, there is no apparent manner to guide us in upholding the biblical model of male leadership and at the same time be consistent with regard to the work of women in the church.

And finally, there are many young women who are genuinely called and gifted of the Lord and will minister to God's people and do the Spirit's will in the years to come. Regardless of what the polity of any denomination might be, the sovereign will of God will actualize ministry in the lives of those who are called, whether they be male or female.

SHOULD THE OFFICE OF BISHOP BE AVAILABLE TO WOMEN MINISTERS IN THE CHURCH OF GOD?

Today the Church of God finds itself at a pivotal place regarding women in ministry. In many ways there are more opportunities for women. We have abandoned some to the former restrictions. But there are also some significant limitations that continue to place women in a category that differentiates them from male ministers. Important to this position paper is the office of Ordained Bishop.

The Historical Struggle

From a very early time the Church of God has struggled with the roles of women ministers. As a movement that both considers the Word of God as our guide and has experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have attempted to remain faithful to both the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit.

We recognize that on the day of Pentecost Peter declared that the outpouring of the Spirit was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel that both sons and daughters would prophesy. Yet we have struggled with the fact that some passages of Scripture seem to affirm women ministers while other passages seemingly limit their roles. On the one hand there are passages that seem to say

women should not teach men, women should keep silent in the church, women should not usurp authority over men, and bishops should be the husband of one wife. On the other hand there are clear examples throughout the Scriptures of women who excelled in leadership and ministry. These include Deborah serving as a judge (political leader) of Israel, Huldah the prophetess advising both the high priest Hilkiah and King Josiah, Esther speaking for Jews in the presence of a secular king, Phoebe serving as a deacon (not simply “servant” as some translations imply), which was an ordained office in the early Church of God, Priscilla along with her husband being identified by Paul as “fellow workers,” Paul’s affirmation in 1 Corinthians that women can prophesy if their heads are covered, Philip’s daughters serving as prophetesses, and Junia serving as a female apostle.

A.J. Tomlinson helped resolve this tension with a creative if ultimately insufficient solution. In terms of women speaking, Tomlinson taught that Biblical references to “the church” where women are to remain silent are in fact references to business meetings. Thus women are limited in speech in terms of government but not in worship services. Tomlinson was willing to allow women to preach but would not allow them to speak in a local church conference or in

the General Assembly business meeting. (One should note here that this position had developed by 1910. There is clear evidence that women did participate in the business of the first two General Assemblies.)

The early General Assemblies recognized that women ministered in Scripture but decided not to ordain women due to what they considered the lack of an example in Scripture. They decided that women could be licensed to preach but could not participate in any governmental or priestly functions. For example, women could not set a church in order or baptize converts under their ministries. For these ministerial functions women had to call on a male overseer. The Church of God reluctantly allowed women to pastor under the supervision of a male overseer when there were either too few men and when women were willing to go to fields of ministry that men would not enter.

We have now come to a very difficult place in our history. The secular world has demonstrated that women can serve effectively in many positions including as the leading governmental official of a nation (Margaret Thatcher for example), and we readily accept the tithe dollars of women in all occupations including teaching men at our educational institutions. We have now allowed women clergy to use the designation “Ordained Minister” and to perform all of

the sacerdotal functions of ministry such as baptizing new converts, marrying couples, burying the dead, receiving members into the local church, etc. And women now participate with both voice and vote in the General Assembly and in the local church conference, which are the highest governing bodies of the Church of God on the general and local levels respectfully. Women cannot serve as bishops, and thus cannot participate in the International Executive Council or be elected to any position elected or nominated by the International Executive Council. Additionally women cannot serve on the Church and Pastors Council should a local church decide to have one. We must note here that the General Assembly has not given any guidelines for how a woman who is serving as a pastor is to moderate a Church and Pastors Council without serving on it. Of course the Church and Pastors Council is not mandated by the Assembly but is simply one option a local church can use to govern itself. Should a local church choose any other means of local church government, there is no necessity for the local church to prohibit women from full participation in that process.

Reconciling the Scriptures

The passages regarding women keeping silent in the church are not included in this paper as this is not a limitation the Church of God now applies to women. Clearly we have chosen to accept Joel and Peter's proclamation that daughters shall prophesy, along with the Biblical examples of female prophetesses, as having priority over passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 where Paul says "let the women keep silent in the churches. . . for it is improper for women to speak in church." Clearly women speak in many different ways in Churches of God at almost every place and position from the pulpit to the theological classroom to the floor of the General Assembly. Generally, we now view statements that seem to limit the speech of women as either relating to specific cultural situations or not applicable to the body of Christ universally or as having been superseded by other passages.

But what about those passages that seemingly limit the role of women in the government of the church? What about 1 Timothy 2:12, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence?" If this were a complete prohibition, why did Priscilla teach Apollos? Why were older women instructed to teach younger women? Why did Lois and Eunice teach the Scriptures to Timothy? Clearly there are occasions when women do

teach and even occasions when they taught men. And what about the issue of having authority over men? Here Paul uses a particularly strong word “authenteim” for authority when the more typical word would have been “exousia.” Paul is using a word for authority that implies the forceful taking or usurping of control--a word that in other places in Greek literature is used in situations that include violence. Paul seems to be prohibiting the taking of authority by force rather than prohibiting lawfully held authority. Thus, in light of other passages where women teach men and seem to hold a ministerial office such as deacon, this passage should not be used to prohibit women from the appropriate holding of these offices.

What about 1 Timothy 3: 2 and 10 where Paul writes that a bishop and a deacon should be the husband of one wife? Clearly Paul is not saying that a woman cannot be a deacon because he used the word deacon to refer to Phoebe in Romans. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul would not have contradicted himself. So what was he prohibiting of the officers of the church when writing to Timothy? In an age in which polygamy was common as well as were frequent divorces and abandonment of wives, Paul may have been setting a new standard for the Christian household rather than prohibiting

women from certain offices in the church. Obviously other verses in this list of qualifications for bishop and deacon do relate to the household of the bishop or deacon.

Of course many would say that women should not be involved in the government of the church because there were no female disciples and women are more susceptible to deception than are men. Both of these claims are based on an inadequate understanding of Biblical times. Regarding the twelve apostles, it is likely that this group numbered twelve men to signify the new Israel. The twelve tribes led by twelve patriarchs were being symbolically represented in the very foundation of the church. If Jesus had included a woman, the symbolism would have been lost on the nation of Israel. Thus, we can conclude that the absence of a woman is not a prohibition of women from serving in leadership.

Some have argued that women are more easily deceived than men and thus should not have a role in the government of the Church of God. It is curious that we allow women to preach, an activity in which the very souls of people are at stake, and we trust the Holy Spirit to speak through them in the pulpit, and we give them equal voice and vote in the General Assembly, but yet we do not trust them or the Holy Spirit to use women on the floor of the General Council for

fear that they might be deceived and thus corrupt the church. Once again Paul's words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2: 13-14 are often used to support this prohibition. Here the statements that Adam was created first and that Eve was deceived are emphasized. But how are we to take these verses, since it is clear that Paul recognized women as filling the offices of prophetess (Phillip's daughters), teacher (Priscilla), deacon (Phoebe) and apostle (Junia)? Additionally, if the order of creation implies a hierarchy in church government, why was Adam not created until the sixth day? Obviously it would be silly to argue that the first living creature created has priority over a later living being. The Genesis account clearly indicates that the greatest of God's creation, man and woman, were created last and created in the image of God.

It is likely that in his letter to Timothy Paul was disputing a cultic teaching that was prominent among residents of Ephesus. There is historical evidence that some worshiped an "enlightened" goddess mother and identified her with Eve. Thus, Paul is specifically attempting to discredit this cult by noting that Eve was not the first creation and that she was no more enlightened than Adam.

Summary

There are Biblical passages that have been used for centuries to limit the roles of women in the church. But if these are taken as universal prohibitions, in every case they directly contradict other passages that emphasize women in every aspect of the church. We can either consider these women who are involved in the life of the church as “exceptions” to God’s divine prohibitions, or we can consider those passages that seem to mandate prohibitions as “exceptions” due to specific cultural situations.

The Bible, certainly more than other cultures and religions, seems to move the church toward complete equality of all who are in Christ. Both Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, there is neither male nor female in Christ, and the Spirit has been poured out on both sons and daughters. Additionally, there are numerous examples of women in leadership throughout the Scriptures. With all this in mind, we must ask if our limitations on women are the result of the leading of the Holy Spirit or rather our allowing our culture to lead us to poorly interpret Scripture. May the Church of God move past the limitations of our culture and open our doors to allow women to serve in the office of bishop.

SHOULD WOMEN BE ORDAINED AS BISHOPS?

The temptation when considering the question of ordaining women as bishops is one of answering from within the scope of our current culture or from a narrow scripture perspective. Either one creates some problems. At best we develop a position with some error. While at its worst we adopt a view which qualifies as heresy. Thus to avoid the extremes while developing a sound biblical and historical position, it becomes necessary to answer three other questions.

They are as follows:

1. What is the role of women in ministry?
2. What is the nature of ordination?
3. What is the position of a bishop?

Unless consideration is given to the three preceding questions, it becomes impossible to properly address the question at hand. Though all dimensions of each question cannot be explored within the confines of this paper sufficient information will be presented thus allowing an informed answer.

First, let's review the role of women in ministry. There appears to be two extreme views. One sees the man as the head of the family with the woman in

submission to her husband and even to all men. This necessitates her maintaining silence and thus void of any public ministry. The other extreme seeks for women's rights at any cost. The cultural designs of the moment take precedent over any biblical directives which are in conflict with their desires. Both of these positions need to be avoided since they fail to perceive the broad biblical perspective.

Though Israel was a male-oriented nation like the rest of the world of that time it is important to view the aspects of women in ministry that were present. In her book, *A New Testament View of Women*, Shirley Stephans points out that "in Israel's past, women stepped out of their assigned roles and were accepted by men when it was apparent that the Spirit of God was with them in a special way"(p. 12). Deborah in her role as a judge and the prophetesses Miriam, Huldah and Anna boldly project the role of women in ministry.

Then we must look at Jesus' ministry and His inclusion of women in ministry. Luke's gospel specifically notes that a group of women traveled with him (Luke 8:1-3). Three are mentioned by name while indicating there were others in this band. It's not likely to assume that they were there just to minister to Jesus' needs, pay the bills and enjoy the benefits of His teaching and miracles.

That would seem to be inconsistent with Jesus' pattern of ministering to others and training them for service.

Jesus affirms a status of women which supersedes that of current thought. Oral Jewish law stated that the testimony of 100 women was not equal to that of one man. But in marked contrast Jesus endorses them as reliable witnesses. In Mark 16:14 he rebukes the eleven disciples for their failure to believe the resurrection witnesses. Earlier in the chapter, Mark records how Jesus specifically instructs the women to inform his disciples of his resurrection (v. 7).

An example from the early church seems to support the active ministry of women beyond the role of discipleship. As Saul avidly persecuted the Christians he requested permission to arrest both men and women (Acts 9:2). This would be highly abnormal except for the fact of women being active propagators of the gospel.

Should women be actively involved in public ministry? Yes! Absolutely! The biblical overview presents women in ministry. But, now the question remains, "In what positions?"

The second major consideration focuses on the nature of ordination. This part of the discussion is much more difficult than the previous section. We use

the concept of ordination so freely in the various systems of church government.

However, the New Testament includes no specific technical terms which describe how an individual is admitted to ministerial office.

The term ordination comes from the Latin *ordinare* and means to organize, to set in order and in later usage, to appoint. From an ecclesiastical usage of *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* describes ordination as “the act of ordination is meant to be a human affirmation of God’s setting apart of the person and not so much that special spiritual authority is bestowed by virtue of the act itself.”

Even though the intent of ordination is the setting apart for service to God the different church government systems have associated various levels of ecclesiastical responsibility and authority with that act of separation and commission. For example, until the changing of the title of the third order of ministry in the Church of God from ordained minister to bishop it held a specific right (July 2000). Ordained ministers had the right to vote in the General Council and to be voted upon or appointed to select positions of authority and responsibility. Now that privilege is associated with the level of bishop rather than solely on the issue of ordination.

Since there are no New Testament technical terms which indicate the admission to ministerial office or the rank of clergy and a great number of Hebrew and Greek words are translated as “to ordain,” it becomes imperative to look at some of the distinct events in which individuals were commissioned publicly and set apart.

In the Old Testament we begin with God’s investing the ministerial office in Aaron, his sons and the entire tribe of Levi (Exodus 28:41; 29:9; 31-30, Deuteronomy 33:8-11). Not only did they follow all the guidelines as given to Moses by God, but the entire nation of Israel participated. In an assembly of the whole community they were commissioned and established through the ceremony of laying on of hands (Numbers 8:9, 10).

The New Testament includes several varied records of individuals being appointed and set apart for the function of ministry. Jesus Himself first appoints the Twelve and then later seventy (Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-18; Luke 9:11; 10:1). None of the gospel writers includes any details of whatever ceremony or actions were part of their appointment/ordination. The selection and commissioning of the seven disciples to handle the charitable ministry of the Early Church in Jerusalem may provide some insight. After having selected men

who meet the criteria, the Apostles lay hands on them and pray over them in the presence of the other believers (Acts 6:1-6). Please note that it is the body of believers who make the selection rather than the Twelve.

No biblical overview of ordination events would be complete without including Timothy. Both of Paul's epistles to his son-in-the-Lord refer to this event (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6). Each of them includes the aspect of laying on of hands as part of the commissioning to service.

All of the selected biblical examples previously mentioned provide principles which should be applied to one's perception of ordination.

1. The purpose of being set apart or appointed is ministry.
2. None of these examples highlight positions or authority.
3. Most of them include a public ceremony with the laying on of hands.
4. In each of the settings of human generated ordination the recipients were males.

Our third major consideration reviews the position of bishop. This would initially appear to be a more difficult task than answering the two previous

questions. It is due to the evolving dimension of the position of a bishop and to the particular system of church polity in which it is being used.

The term “bishop” is a translation from the Greek word, *episkopos*, meaning overseer. The function of the office would be that of overseeing, inspecting or looking at and was generously used of secular officials. Within the New Testament it appears that the titles “bishops” and “elders” are interchangeable. Since the early congregations or churches are modeled after the Jewish synagogue, it would be reasonable for the term to be carried over. Individuals so designated would be responsible for administrating and presiding over meetings.

During the early decades of the church there is no division of believers into clergy and laity. Everyone stands as witnesses of Jesus Christ and operates in the body without a specific clerical or non-clerical designation. The first reference to this comes in 97 A.D when Clement of Rome projects the concept in his letter to the church at Corinth. From the pattern of the Jewish synagogue in which the elder didn't need to be from the priestly line and there being no division of clergy in early churches there's little doubt that the leaders of the first congregations would be laity in our terms.

Various factors contribute to the evolution of the office of a bishop. All of them seem to necessitate the need for a strong spokesman who will stand as the head of the church, first on the local level and then on a broader perspective. Clement of Rome projects clinging to the local bishops as a preventive to schism. Some ten years later at the beginning of the second century Ignatius of Antioch promotes clinging to the bishop as the means of avoiding heresy. Contributing to each of these ideas is the concept of apostolic succession. It is the theory that the bishop of each church forms a part of the unbroken line of authority back to the apostles. This makes every bishop a part of the apostolic line which guarantees the unity and doctrinal truth of the church.

Initially in the first century of the church it appears that there may have been more than one bishop in a local church. When special oversight became necessary one of them becomes the leader with the special designation of “bishop” with the others using the little title of “presbyter”. By the third century this monarchical bishop becomes the universal practice for Christian churches.

Since the entire historical development of the position of bishop would not be within the scope of this paper we skip to the era of the 16th century reformation. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* in the article

on bishops indicates the “the Calvinist churches equated the office of bishop with that of pastor or parish minister. Lutherans saw the continuance of the office of bishop (if understood as a Superintendent minister)...”It is two concepts which have continued in Protestant groups even to the present.

During the first half of the 20th century the Church of God uses the title “bishop” for the highest order of ministerial credentials. It is synonymous with being ordained and thus eligible for selected administrative positions.

Discontinuance of its use in 1948 isn’t a matter of polity but a separation of terminology to clarify or distinguish from other denominations. Our return to its usage by action of the 2000 General Assembly is to utilize a title understood by contemporary society while opening the door for expanded use of the term “ordained”.

Having considered the three preliminary questions we now reflect on the main question, “Should women be ordained as bishops?”

It is the scriptural concept that men and women were created equal in the sight of God. Both genders are of His specific design without one being inferior to the other! However this does not preclude a difference in roles and

responsibilities. It is this very difference which enables a complimentary relationship to be developed thus fulfilling God's divine purposes.

The complimentary relationship between men and women needs to be seen in the most positive light. It does not suggest in the slightest that one gender has less intellectual ability, creativity, or spiritual understanding. But rather, it reflects strengths and purposes which are of divine origin. It speaks of God's order for families and for the corporate body of church organization.

This can be seen in the initial creation of the human race. Both Adam and Eve are created in the image of God. Yet, each has a distinct responsibility. As the first human Adam is given the task of caring for the garden of Eden. He names all the animals. Still he is incomplete until Eve is created to be his helper. And together they will care for the garden and fulfill God's plan of propagating the human race. (See Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15, 20-24.)

It would seem that this complimentary aspect can be seen in the distribution of spiritual gifts. In view of the common good the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts without regard for gender or position in the church. Thus no woman is exempted from any spiritual gift. Each godly woman has the

potential to play a vital role in the edification and ministry of the local church.

(See 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.)

This complimentary role and recognition of personal spiritual qualities has been a part of the Church of God for a century. As early as the 3rd General Assembly (1908) the Church of God recognized that women who were qualified and felt called to the work should be appointed to minister. At the next General Assembly the decision was made to provide a certificate of licensing on the local level for those women. From that beginning the involvement grew until women with credentials served as evangelists and pastors. In many of the earlier decades of our denomination they filled the gap when there were an insufficient number of male ministers to reap the harvest of souls and fill the empty pastoral pulpits. This is definitely consistent with the Holy Spirit's gifting and enabling individuals for ministry regardless of gender.

The bottom line continues to center on the position of bishop. Since Church of God polity projects this office as one of leadership in terms of headship, there is no biblical basis for ordaining a woman to the position of bishop. It by no means limits women from ministry, but does follow the complimentary position previously mentioned. However, the fact remains. In

both the Old and New Testament males are given the responsibility for spiritual headship in their families and in the corporate group.

Consider these examples. Israel's High Priest is male. All of the writing prophets are men. Jesus chooses twelve men as his disciples. The bishops of the first century churches are to be men (I Timothy 3:1-7). Is this male leadership only the result of a male-dominated culture or is it God's plan for spiritual headship?

Great caution needs to be taken that our decision process does not include personalities. It becomes so easy for some individuals to look at the spiritual qualities, natural abilities and pleasing personalities of various female ministers and use that as the criteria for a decision. Care must also be taken that the ideas of a secular society or specific culture do not become imposed upon the church structure. This can creep in when ideas of the feminist movement are accepted or we adopt the patterns of other denominations that have placed spiritual directives in the background or follow a low view of Scripture.

We must also avoid the thought that equality demands involvement in the same activities and positions. True equality allows for different abilities, roles,

and responsibilities. The preceding three items must never become the criteria for equality.

There's no doubt that the percentage of women in the church has consistently been greater than the percentage of men. Their sacrificial ministry in keeping churches open through consistent attendance and continual fund raising is legendary. However, these can never be used as factors in the argument for women assuming the position of bishop in the Church of God!

We must always allow biblical principle and practice to be the precedent for our current patterns!

Women in the ministry? Yes! Absolutely. There should be no doubt! We need more women who will follow the call of God into vocational ministry in spite of the challenges and roadblocks offered by some men and certain aspects of society.

Ordination for women? Yes! If God calls and gifts them, then the church should publicly commission and credential them in the ministry. They should not be seen as secondary servants of God when fulfilling the various pastoral roles!

Women in the position of bishop? No! Within the polity structure of the Church of God this would allow for the potential breaking of the role of male spiritual headship while disregarding the principle of complimentary ministry.

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AS BISHOPS AND THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

For Pentecostal believers, any theological discussion must be informed by the biblical tradition. Often the text speaks directly to certain issues, like the doctrine of Spirit Baptism or Divine Healing. However, sometimes issues faced by contemporary interpreters are not directly addressed by Scripture, or are addressed in ways that create a certain amount of tension for the interpreter, as the text may say different things about the same issue. On those occasions, the interpreter does not have the luxury of simply restating Scripture but must construct with biblical materials, seeking to discern the biblical way forward, even though the biblical witness is complex, perhaps even striking the interpreter as though it is skewed. This is certainly the case as the church seeks to come to a biblical position on the issue of the ordination of women as Bishops.

It is manifestly clear from a reading of the Gospels that women filled important roles in the life and ministry of Jesus. They found a place as disciples who were not only taught by Jesus (Luke 10.38-42), but also ministered to him out of their means (Luke 8.1-3). Perhaps the significance of their role in the community envisioned by Jesus is signaled by the fact that a woman was chosen

and commissioned by Jesus to be the first preacher of his resurrection, clearly the most important message ever proclaimed (Mt. 28.1-10; Mk 16.1-8, 9-11; Lk. 24.1-12; Jn. 20.11-18). The significance of this choice is all the clearer when viewed against the first-century Jewish context which denied the validity of a woman's witness in a court of law. That Jesus would first entrust this most strategic message to a woman indicates that in his community, the standards of this world are turned upside down and that women would play prominent roles. Paul comes very close to this idea when he says that in Christ Jesus 'there is neither male nor female' (Gal. 4.4).

It is sometimes claimed that the absence of a woman from among the twelve apostles is an indication that women were limited in some ways with regard to their participation in ministry. However, such a view is not convincing for at least two reasons. First, the imagery of the twelve is quite obviously connected in some way with the (reconstitution of) the twelve tribes of (the new) Israel. The inclusion of a woman in the twelve would no doubt obscure this connection for some, given the patriarchal orientation of first-century Jewish society. Second, there exists good biblical evidence that at least one woman in the early church *was* identified as an **apostle**. In Romans 16.7, Paul makes

reference to Andronicus and Junia, who are identified as his relatives, as his co-prisoners, and as being believers before him. Most importantly for this discussion is that he describes them as ‘outstanding among the apostles’.

Evidence that this phrase means Andronicus and Junia were regarded as apostles in the early church comes in two forms. First, this phrase was understood in precisely this fashion by early Christian interpreters.¹ Second, later scribes sought to change the feminine Junia to the masculine Junias owing to their discomfort with the idea that there was a woman apostle. Unfortunately for this position, the masculine name Junias never occurs in antiquity! According to Paul, an apostle must have seen the resurrected Lord and been commissioned as an apostle by him. From the evidence of Romans 16.7 there seems to be little doubt that even this most significant office in earliest Christianity was open to women.

Not only is there at least one female apostle mentioned in the Bible, there are also numerous women who function prophetically or serve as **prophetesses**. The prophetic activity of Mary (Lk. 1.46-55), Elizabeth (Lk.

¹ For example, cf. the words of John Chrysostom, ‘And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But these were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!’ Cited in W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), p. 423.

1.41-45), and Anna (Lk. 2.36-38) accompany the birth of Jesus. The expectation of Acts 2 that 'sons and daughters will prophesy' finds partial fulfillment in the four daughters of Philip who are identified as having the gift of prophecy (Acts 21.9). In his admonitions with regard to decency and order in worship, Paul describes the way in which he expects women to prophesy (1 Cor. 11.2-16). Even the negative evidence of a false prophetess in Revelation (2.20) implies that the community knew of true prophetesses as well, for the false prophetess is not condemned on account of her gender but her false teaching and practice.

The Gospel according to John adds to our knowledge of the role of women in the early church. In addition to the fact that the mother of Jesus appears to possess a special understanding of Jesus' person and mission (Jn 2.3-5), other women at times demonstrate a deeper understanding of Jesus' teaching than others in the Gospel.² This positive view of women is strengthened by the fact that after all the male disciples (except the disciple whom Jesus loved) have abandoned Jesus at his crucifixion, the women disciples are found at the foot of the cross (Jn 19.25). In keeping with the other Gospels, John also records that the first witness to proclaim the message of Jesus' resurrection is a woman,

² For example, Martha is the only character in John to pick up on Jesus' teaching about the resurrection at the last day (11.24). In addition, she makes an (almost) unrivaled confession of Jesus when she says, 'Yes Lord, I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One coming into the World' (Jn 11.27).

Mary Magdalene (Jn 20.11-18). However, the Gospel also reveals that a certain Samaritan woman filled the role of **evangelist**. The primary result of her encounter with Jesus is that she comes to understand that he is the Messiah. It is her testimony/witness that results in many Samaritans believing in Jesus (Jn 4.39). It should perhaps be pointed out that aside from the witness of John, who came as a witness in order that all might believe through him (Jn 1.7), no one else in the Gospel compares with the Samaritan woman as an evangelist.

Acts 18.24-26 indicates that at least one woman in the early church functioned as a **teacher**. This text reveals that Apollos, an eloquent speaker from Alexandria who was deficient in his understanding of the way of God, was taken aside and instructed more fully by Priscilla and Aquilla. The fact that Priscilla's name precedes that of her husband, a strange occurrence in ancient documents, indicates that she was regarded as the lead teacher of the two. That she served as the teacher of a prominent male minister would appear to be quite clear from this text.

Among the many individuals mentioned by Paul at the conclusion of his letter to the Romans, is an individual named Phoebe (Rom. 16.1). The striking thing about this reference is the fact that Paul refers to her as a **deacon**

(diavkonon), using the same term that he uses elsewhere for male leaders (1 Tim. 3.8). Significantly, Phoebe is not here described as a deaconess, but as a deacon, indicating that a woman could fill the role of deacon in the early church.

To this evidence might be added the names of women who hosted (and lead?) house churches (Mary - Acts 12.12; Nympha - Col. 4.15) and the numerous women mentioned by Paul as his **co-laborers** and **fellow servants** in the ministry (cf. those mentioned in Rom. 16.1-15 [Prisca, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia, and the sister of Nereus]; Phil. 4.2 [Eudioa and Syntyche]; 2 Tim. 4.21 [Claudia]; and Phile. 2 [Apphia]).

Given the sheer quantity of the biblical evidence with regard to the participation of women in the ministry of the early church, it is somewhat surprising that there is even a debate with regard to their role in the ministry of the contemporary church. Although other issues sometimes come into the discussion, it appears that the major reason for reluctance on behalf of some as to the full participation of women in the church's ministry comes down to two passages found within the writings of Paul. These two texts appear to prohibit women from speaking, teaching, or exercising authority over a man: 1 Cor. 14.33b-36 and 1 Tim. 2.9-15. Both of these passages speak about the silence of

women and taken by themselves have been interpreted to mean that there was no place for the role of women in public worship.

The challenge then is how to construct a biblical position on the role of women in ministry that takes account of these divergent views. In other words how do we reconcile these passages?

First, whatever 1 Cor. 14.33b-36 and 1 Tim. 2.9-15 mean, they should not be allowed to nullify the vast preponderance of biblical texts dealing with women and ministry. To do so would be the equivalent of allowing Paul's words 'tongues shall cease' and 'I would rather speak five intelligible words...than ten thousand words in a tongue' to nullify all the other biblical passages with regard to speaking in tongues.

Second, while all Scripture is inspired, not all Scripture is universally applicable. Such is rather clearly the case with the 'kosher' food laws found in Acts 15.20, which never appear again in New Testament discussions regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in the church. In like fashion, although various New Testament passages include admonitions to slaves and slave owners, owing to the political realities of the Roman world, what Christian would want to argue that slavery is an institution that is pleasing to God? Rather, such texts appear to be

temporary accommodations to the fallen state in which the church ministers.

These texts are inspired and, consequently, should not be dismissed from our Bibles owing to the fact that they may still speak to believers who find themselves in such oppressive situations, but clearly they do not describe the ideal for which the church must strive.

Third, given the fact that there are so many biblical texts that affirm the role of women in ministry, is it not likely that 1 Cor. 14.33b-36 and 1 Tim. 2.9-15 are best understood as similar temporary accommodations which are not understood as representing the ideal, but rather are necessary owing to the curse incurred as a result of the fall? That such passages remain in our Bibles and continue to speak to contexts where the oppression of women is a daily reality should not be used as a license to subordinate women in other contexts, anymore than slavery texts should be used as advocating slavery where it does not exist.

Fourth, the interpretive model of the early church found in Acts 15, when faced with the question about the Gentiles, may also help guide us as we seek to make our way on the issue of women in ministry. There, the activity of the Spirit within the community led the church to a passage of Scripture that spoke about the inclusion of Gentiles, even though there were numerous Old Testament texts

that spoke of their exclusion. Perhaps we are in a similar situation now, where the Spirit must lead us in order to come to a biblical position with regard to the role of women in ministry. Given the preponderance of passages supporting the full participation of women in the leadership of the church and the fact that as Pentecostals we know first hand that God has and does anoint women to lead, are we not dangerously close to testing God (Acts 15.10) by placing barriers before our sisters who have been called by God? Are we not depriving the church and ourselves of valuable resources in the end-time harvest in which we find ourselves? Let us not send our daughters elsewhere in order for them to fulfill the call of God upon their lives. Let us empower them by removing unnecessary hindrances to their ministry.

