

A case for no change

Jesus was clear that hierarchy is not the way of the Kingdom (Matthew 20:25-28) though there are different ministry roles and responsibilities to be conducted as Christ conducted His ministry (Philippians 2:1-8). The Biblical model for who fills these roles and responsibilities is only ever based on calling and gifting by God (E.g. Ephesians 4:11-13). Having women eldership in the church is a legitimate Biblical view that aligns with the redeeming work of Christ that restores equality, advances the mission of God, and empowers all believers to serve according to their gifts and calling.

Reasons for continuing women elders in the PCNSW include:

- 1 – There is a valid Biblical argument to continue having women elders (see evidence below) and no Confessional reason to change.
- 2 – The Code currently allows Sessions to choose how they wish to shape their own local Session. We have a range of approaches by Sessions across PCNSW and this should be allowed to continue.
- 3 - Working with others who hold different views helps our denomination to be differentiated and mature (Ephesians 4:15-16). Narrowing practice beyond Scripture does not promote maturity.
- 4 - The position to have both male and female elders sits between the extremes of male-only eldership and female-only eldership. It maintains the greatest distance from a slippery slope to liberalism or legalism. It provides space for all to practice as their conscience allows them to.
- 5 - Women have been Elders in the PCNSW since 1967. All active elders or ministers of the PCNSW ordained since 1967 were ordained into a denomination that has female elders. If elders/ministers have done this with a clear conscience, then they should be able to continue to work in the current environment with a clear conscience.

The following is a brief overview of some of the Biblical support of equal leadership.

Old Testament:

- Genesis 1:26-27 – Both male and female are made in God's image and entrusted with shared dominion over creation.
- Genesis 2:18 – the woman is called an Ezer Kenegdo. It means "powerful ally," a word often used for God. It can also be understood as a "suitable helper" which the context of Genesis suggests is an appropriate solution to Adam's alone-ness.

- Genesis 2:23 – Adam recognizes the woman as his equal.
- Genesis 3:16 – The hierarchy introduced after the Fall is not God's design—it is the result of sin which Jesus came to address.
- Exodus 15:20 – Miriam, a prophetess, leads Israel in song prophecy and song.
- Judges 4-5 – Deborah governs as a prophet and judge.
- 2 Kings 22-23 – Huldah speaks God's word to kings.
- Joel 2:28 / Acts 2:17 – Sons and daughters will prophesy.

Gospels:

- Matthew 28:19-20 & Mark 16:15 – Everyone is to preach the Gospel everywhere.
- Luke 24:10 – Women were the first to proclaim the resurrection. The first preachers of the Gospel were women.
- John 4:39 – The Samaritan woman becomes the first evangelist to her city.

New Testament:

- Romans 16:1 – Paul honours Phoebe as a minister (diakonon)—a title Paul uses for himself and others in leadership.
- Romans 16:3 – Priscilla is named before her husband five of seven times. Paul saw her as a co-labourer.
- Romans 16:7 – Junia is called “outstanding among the apostles.”
- 1 Corinthians 11:5 – Women are described as praying and prophesying in public worship.
- Galatians 3:28 – In Christ, hierarchy dies including male/female hierarchy. Gender-based hierarchy is not God's design; it is the result of Genesis 3:16, which Christ came to address (Genesis 3:15).
- Ephesians 5:21-33 – Paul calls husbands and wives to mutual submission. Christ does not dominate the Church; He dies for her. Husbands are never asked to lead their wives.
- Philippians 4:3 – Euodia and Syntyche are named by Paul as co-workers, struggling alongside him in the gospel.
- 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 & 1 Timothy 2:11-12 – Paul was addressing specific dysfunction in specific churches. In both passages Paul states he *does not permit* women to teach/have authority or speak. The term he uses in both passages is not an imperative (command) and is only ever used in reference to specific time limited situations (E.g. Luke 8:32 when the unclean spirits ask *permission* to enter the pigs).

- 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul supports women elders when he presents a trustworthy saying that encourages 'whoever' aspires to be an elder. The 'whoever' is the same 'whoever' used in John 3:16 which we understand to be universal.

- 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6 – “One-woman man” is about marital fidelity, not gender exclusivity. Greek and Hebrew are both male gendered languages and will always express generic statements in the masculine. Hence “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife” (Exodus 20:17) is not condoning women coveting their neighbour’s husband. It is a statement about marital faithfulness for husbands and wives.

Further Resources:

The Bible vs Biblical Womanhood by Philip Payne. Zondervan 2023.

Website: margmowczko.com