

**The Committee Report
on
The Role of Women
in the Church**

Presented to
Church of the Lutheran Brethren
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Committee Members

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Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Preface.....	4
1. The role of women in the church, as in all other issues facing the church, must be determined by the Bible, no matter how much the culture deviates from the Biblical norm.	5
2. God created both male and female in His image, gave them dominion over the created world, and commanded them to be fruitful and to increase in number.	7
3. In the Old Testament, the leadership offices of elder (this is not to be equated with the New Testament office of elder), chiefs of tribes and priests, were held exclusively by males.	10
4. Jesus gave value to women by interacting with them and allowing them to participate in His ministry.	12
5. The Bible teaches that the Order of Creation which provided the authority structure of the family also provides the pattern for the church (Genesis 1,2; I Corinthians 11; I Timothy 2).....	14
6. The Bible teaches that the office of overseer in the church (pastor and elder) is to be filled only by Scripturally qualified men (I Timothy 3 and Titus 1).	16
7. The Bible distinguishes between office and gift and therefore all members of the body of Christ, men and women alike, may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit wills (I Corinthians 12:11 and Romans 12, and Ephesians 4).	18
8. The Bible teaches that all members of the Body of Christ should be encouraged to discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts under the supervision and leadership of the overseers of the congregation.	20
9. The right of women’s suffrage is in harmony with the Bible, and the local congregation should have the right to elect women as well as men as duly accredited delegates to represent them at the Annual Convention of the synod.	23
Conclusion.....	24
Selected Bibliography	25

Foreword

The dedication of the members of the Committee on the Role of Women in preparing a substantial study on a difficult question within a nine month period of time while continuing their other ministries is deeply appreciated by the church.

As they say in their Preface, they are not stating the final word on the subject. Yes, but, they are stating an important, timely word in order that we as a fellowship of believers may go forward with our study.

The Executive Board is recommending the following process leading to a policy statement on this question. "That the 'Committee Report on the Role of Women in the Church' be received by the 1987 Annual Convention and be referred to the congregations for study. Further, that suggested alternate readings be considered by the Board until January 15, 1988, and that the Executive Board recommend a policy statement to the Convention of 1988."

Receiving a report does not imply endorsement by the church.

Let us encourage each other to be diligent students of the Word, considering what is taught here both prayerfully and thoughtfully. Let us trust that our future policy statement will become a statement of which we can say, "It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit."

Robert Overgaard, President
Church of the Lutheran Brethren

Preface

The Committee on the Role of Women came into being as a result of a motion at the 1986 Annual Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, held in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. That motion reads: "MMSB that the Convention concur with the synodical Executive Board that a theological commission of five members be appointed to study and establish an accepted hermeneutic base and research as carefully as possible the Biblical teaching regarding the role of women in the life of the Church. A report of their research shall be drafted in the form of a policy statement to be included in the synodical president's circular letter to the congregations prior to the 1987 Annual Convention. If grant monies are not available to fund this study, \$2500 shall be authorized as an addition to the synodical administration fund budget." (Annual Convention Minutes, 10:13)

As a result of this motion, a committee was elected by the Convention. Elected were, David Rinden, chairman, Eugene Boe, J.H. Levang, O.D. Thompson and Allen Molascon. (Annual Convention Minutes, 11:1)

The committee met five times during the year (September, November, January, March and April). These meetings ranged from one day meetings to a three day Evangelical Theological Society conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on the topic.

Committee members prepared papers for presentation at the meetings. The nine affirmations were arrived at by consensus. Each of the members wrote portions of the commentary with the entire committee taking part in the editing process.

The Committee is well aware that this is not the final word on this subject. The conclusions which follow are the way the committee sees the issue now. Further data and investigation could result in a different position. Nevertheless, the Committee is satisfied that it has fulfilled the request of the 1986 Annual Convention and recommends these affirmations to the synod.

The prayer of the Committee is that this will not be a divisive report for the church but that unity of spirit and purpose will result. Issues such as this one can derail the church from its main mission of evangelism and teaching.

Further, this report is sent to the church with the prayer that women, who make up such an important part of the body, will be able to use their gifts in a way that is consistent with God's purpose for them in the fellowship of believers called the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Praise is given to God who brought unity of spirit within the Committee during its many days of discussion. The following conclusions were not arrived at hastily. Thanks goes to each of the Committee members who gave much effort that this report could be finished on time and to the Annual Convention who placed confidence in this committee by electing them. Thanks is also expressed to Aid Association for Lutherans who provided a grant of \$3000 which enabled the Committee to do its work.

David Rinden, Chairman

The Committee Report

on

The Role of Women

in the Church

1. The role of women in the church, as in all other issues facing the church, must be determined by the Bible, no matter how much the culture deviates from the Biblical norm.

The church, by its life in the world, is continuously facing the challenge of accommodation to the culture. This affirmation asserts that the Bible is the normative authority for the church and not the culture. The Bible speaks prophetically to the aspects of all cultures that are contrary to God's Word and calls the church "in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will" ([Romans 12:1, 2](#)).

The Bible is our "final and authoritative guide for faith and conduct" (Constitution of The Church of the Lutheran Brethren, Article II, paragraph 1), because it is the inspired Word of God. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" ([II Timothy 3:16, 17](#)). And as Peter states concerning Scripture: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" ([II Peter 1:21](#)). Therefore, we must approach the Bible as servants under its authority, completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to work through it in such a way that our understanding of it will be in agreement with all that Scripture teaches.

There are some general principles that must govern our study of the Bible. The Bible must be interpreted in its original languages and in its historical and cultural contexts. These contexts include the immediate passage and surrounding passages and the entire book in which the passage is found, together with all of the author's writings and the entire Bible.

The unity of the Bible enables the reader to let Scripture interpret Scripture and requires the exegete to interpret the parts in terms of the whole thereby reaching conclusions on which all Scripture agrees. Passages that speak to an issue systematically should be used to help understand incidental references elsewhere. Therefore, the doctrinal teaching on the role of women in the church should be primarily sought in those passages that teach (didactic) on the matter rather than from those that are descriptive or historical in nature.

One of the hermeneutical difficulties that faces the reader of the Bible is how to decide what is culturally relative in a given text. For example, does [I Timothy 2:8,9](#) which says "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer" and "not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" apply to us today?

Mary Evans in [Women in The Bible](#) rightly cautions that, "It is arbitrary to dismiss any Biblical teaching as culturally conditioned without a strong indication within the context that cultural influences have been a primary consideration, and this indication is very rarely present." (Evans, 1983, p.10)

Gordon Fee suggests the helpful principle that “whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar life situations) with the first-century setting, God’s Word to us is the same as His Word to them.” (Fee, 1981, p.60)

What do we do with those texts that do not have a current-day counterpart? Fee advises that: “First, we must do our exegesis with particular care so that we hear what God’s Word to them really was. In most cases a clear principle has been articulated, which usually will transcend the historical particularity to which it was being applied ... The principle however must be applied to genuinely comparable situations.” (Fee, 1981, p.63)

What about present day situations that do not have a Biblical counterpart? We should seek to discover if there are any Biblical teachings/principles that relate to similar situations which could give some guidance. The interpretation and application of Scripture is often difficult and thus requires patience and hard work. The reader, at all times, must however remain under the authority of Scripture alone.

2. God created both male and female in His image, gave them dominion over the created world, and commanded them to be fruitful and to increase in number.

When Jesus was confronted with the traditions brought to Him by the Pharisees, He responded to them by what God had said and designed from the creation. He made them bypass all the muddle of human thinking in history and scrutinized their beliefs which had developed by changing cultures and human rationalization. So often what God had said had been altered, corroded or forgotten that Jesus, when He addressed them would say, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago ... But I tell you ...” ([Matthew 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43](#)). What these people had been hearing was not what God had said. So Jesus proceeded to clarify to them what God had said.

First of importance is that both male and female were created in the image and likeness of God. One could not be more or less than the other in the image of God and still be in His image. If so, one would have been partially in the image of God and the other in the very image of God. It would then necessitate that God would have had to create them not as one in two persons, but as two persons never being one. “... God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him (singular); male and female he created them (plural)” ([Genesis 1:27](#))

It cannot be read into [Genesis 1 and 2](#), as some have suggested, that Adam was created in God’s image and Eve was created in Adam’s image. Eve did not receive her likeness or her spiritual qualities from Adam. She received them directly from God, just as Adam did.

“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over ...’” ([Genesis 1: 28](#)).

From [Genesis 1:26-28](#) we see that both shared equally in the image and likeness of God. Both shared equally in the task of reproduction. Both shared equally in the commitment to rule over all the earth and over all created things. Both shared equally in the blessing and benediction of God. Both shared equally in the partnership as beneficiaries of God and both were equally responsible in the stewardship of these blessings. Both shared equally in the delight of God as He looked upon them. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” ([Genesis 1:31](#)).

It appears from [Genesis 1](#) that they were to rule or lead jointly as one person rather than two. Headship is simply not to be found in this chapter unless we conclude that the sentence structure of verse 27, which places the male first, implies male headship (cf. [Acts 18:18](#); [Romans 16:3](#); [II Timothy 4:19](#)). Thus we see the equality of the sexes from [Genesis 1](#). Both male and female are created in the image and likeness of God.

It is when we turn to [Genesis 2](#) that the relationship of male to female emerges. The function of each to God, to each other, and to the rest of creation, must be seen as fully under the design and direction of God as their equality in the image of God in chapter 1. They were still in the state of perfection and under the guidance of God in doing His will perfectly when the man begins to manifest leadership and the woman is called to be a helper suitable for him.

John Stott in his chapter on “Women, Men and God” says, “It is without doubt by a deliberate providence of God that we have been given two distinct creation stories, [Genesis 2](#) supplementing and enriching [Genesis 1](#).” (Stott, 1985, p.139)

[Genesis 2:18-22](#) reads, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”

“Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”

Stott, commenting on this passage says, “What is revealed in this second story of creation is that, although God made male and female equal, he also made them different. In [Genesis 1](#), masculinity and femininity are related to God’s image, while in [Genesis 2](#), they are related to each other, Eve being taken out of Adam and brought to him. [Genesis 1](#) declares equality of the sexes; [Genesis 2](#) clarifies that equality means not ‘identity but complementarity’ (including ... a certain masculine headship). It is this ‘equal but different’ which we find hard to preserve. Yet, the two parts of it are not incompatible they belong to each other.” (Stott, 1985, p.139)

It is important to notice that [Genesis 1 and 2](#) become the basis of the Apostle Paul’s teaching on masculine headship and female submission. He writes that “... The husband is the head of the wife” ([Ephesians 5:23](#)), and “... That the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God” ([I Corinthians 11:3](#)). Further, he says in [I Corinthians 11:8,9](#), “For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

We should not conclude from chapter 2 that man is in any way to act independent of woman. They are here a perfect oneness and each complements the other, for both share equally in the image and likeness of God. It is difficult for us to visualize perfect harmony of sexes in their distinctive roles as man and woman. In chapter 2 we do not see Adam dominating Eve but we do see some kind of leadership or headship given and assumed by Adam, and a certain kind of helper suitable for him in Eve.

Of Adam, God says in [Genesis 2:18](#), “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

To Adam God brings the beasts and birds he has created and Adam names them. When Eve is brought to Adam it is Adam that names her and says, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” ([Genesis 2:23](#)).

The report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (LCMS) of September 1, 1985, states, “When the New Testament talks about the origin of the subordination of woman to man, it does so on the basis of [Genesis 2](#) and not on the basis of [Genesis 3](#). The foundation of this teaching is not the curse of the Fall, but the original purpose of God in creation. (CTCR, 1985, p.24)

John Stott feels that “subordination” is too strong a word in this relationship because it is often seen in the light of man’s dominance or rule that has been tarnished by sin. He says “Nor does subordination seem to me the right word to describe her submission. It has a modern parlance unfortunate overtones of inferiority, even on military rank and discipline.” However, he does point out that “Headship definitely implies some kind of authority, to which submission is necessary. But we must be careful not to overpress this.” (Stott, 1985, p.144)

In [Genesis 2](#) we do see leadership emerging in the activities of Adam and that of a helper suitable for him in Eve. This in no way relates in their equality in creation but it does clarify their differences in the role that each is to manifest to the other and to God's creation. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for Paul's teaching in the relationship of man and woman in the church as well as husband and wife in the home.

‘However, we should not read into [Genesis 2](#) a prescribed rigidity of interpretation that does not allow for a great place of service in the church and in the home for the woman. God has given the gifts of the Holy Spirit for service to women as well as to men. The 120 were all equally filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Women as well as men were to prophesy. The gifts of the Holy Spirit recorded in the Epistles were to women as well as men. No differences can be found. Our interpretation of [Genesis 1 and 2](#) must give room for the place God gave in the ministry of Miriam as a prophetess; of Deborah as a judge and prophetess in Israel; of Hulda as a prophetess in Israel; of Esther who used her position as a queen in the salvation of a nation from total destruction. There were women who became more prominent in the Kingdom of God than their husbands; Naomi over Elimelech, Ruth over Boaz, Hannah over Elkanah, Priscilla over Aquila. Hence we conclude that their function in the Kingdom of God did not conflict with the design of God in creation or with the teaching of [Genesis 1 and 2](#) about women and men in their proper place in history and in the church.

[Genesis 3](#) is the story of the Fall and its consequences. There are some who believe that the judgment of God on the man and woman in the Fall is the reason for the rulership of the man and the submission of the woman, for does not God say, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” ([Genesis 3:16](#))?

So what is the meaning of this statement in [Genesis 3](#)? It certainly cannot mean sexual desire. Man's sexual desire is as strong for the woman and often more so. Nor can it mean that the woman would have an added desire for submission to her husband. If so, submission would be no problem if it would be enhanced by the Fall. Rather it must be the prophetic word of God's judgment about the tensions that would exist between the sexes. His leadership or rule would never again be what it ought to be and her submission would never again be what it ought to be. The sinful nature that they now acquired would make it a perennial problem. History verifies this problem of the sexes. Man would find it difficult to be a loving and understanding leader and the woman would find joyful submission a burden.

While [Genesis 1](#) teaches that woman is equal in creation, [Genesis 3](#) teaches that woman is also equal in redemption. Here God reveals the great place that woman was to have in God's redemptive work for the human race. In [Genesis 3:15](#) God says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” This was fulfilled when the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” ([Luke 1:28](#)). Of this the Apostle Paul later wrote, “... When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” ([Galatians 4:4](#)).

That woman shares equally in God's restorative grace is shown in [Genesis 3:21](#), “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” The unchanging plan and purpose of God for both is revealed in this gracious act and provision of God.

The Scriptures reveal that both are equal in creation and both are equal in redemption. God's design for the relationship of man and woman to himself and to each other is shown in [Genesis 1 and 2](#). The atonement through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in both men and women seeks to accomplish the restoration of this design revealed in creation so that each again may complement the other in their relationship and service to God and to each other.

3. In the Old Testament, the leadership offices of elder (this is not to be equated with the New Testament office of elder), chiefs of tribes and priests, were held exclusively by males.

“It is fair to say,” write the editors of The Bible Almanac, “that people in biblical Israel felt that men were more important than women. The father or oldest male in the family made the decisions that affected the whole family, while the women had very little to say about them. This patriarchal (father-centered) form of family life set the tone for the way women were treated in Israel.” (Packer, Tenney, White, 1980, p.420) There was absolute equality of personhood, although male dominance in the Old Testament era too often placed the wife in an apparent inferior position in that society.

The male, to use the Biblical expression, “took unto himself a wife..” ([Genesis 2:24](#)), and his spouse-to-be had little choice in the matter. Yet, as a wife and mother in Israel, she was supported and protected by her husband; a good wife was extolled in Hebrew literature, notably in [Proverbs, chapter 31](#). She exerted a vast influence upon her family as mother and teacher, and often upon her husband. It was at times said that no man could truly find great success in Israel unless a wise and able wife moved him in that direction.

Women’s rights were also limited. Inheritance of property normally followed the male line only. Where there were no sons in the family, the daughters could obtain the inheritance, but were to marry within the clan ([Numbers 27:1-8](#); [Joshua 17:3-6](#)). Husbands could cancel any vow made by the wife, although the disavowal must take place within a day’s time ([Numbers 30:1-8, 10-16](#)). However, “Any vow of obligation taken by a widow or divorced woman will be binding on her” ([Numbers 30:9](#)). Susan T. Foh perceptively observes; “So, it seems the principle of submission does not apply for all women under all men but only within the family structure. It is not women per se who cannot make their own vows. It is only if their position is under the God-established authority of husband or father.” (Foh, 1979, p.73)

On an occasion when Abraham was in doubt, the Lord commanded him to “Listen to whatever Sarah tells you” ([Genesis 21:12](#)). Sarah’s insight in this instance was superior to Abraham’s.

When Nabal drove away David’s messengers, Nabal’s godly wife, on her own initiative and without informing her husband or usurping his authority, assumes leadership in speaking for her husband. She confesses Nabal’s sin and helps David and his men. She later informs her husband; ten days later “the Lord struck Nabal and he died.” Her act spares the rest of the family and earns David’s praise ([I Samuel 25](#)).

Although only males were required to appear before the Lord at the great festivals, women apparently went along on some of these occasions, were welcome, and found a part in the worship ([Nehemiah 8:2](#); [Joel 2:16](#); also [Luke 2:41-42](#)). Women joined in song under the leadership of Miriam ([Exodus 15:20-21](#)), ministered at the door of the Tabernacle in the wilderness ([Exodus 38:8](#)), and were among the musicians of David who “should prophesy with harps, psalteries and cymbals and song” ([I Chronicles 25:1-7](#)). Women could also approach the sanctuary and seek God in prayer as did Hannah ([I Samuel](#)) or find a place in the Temple as did Anna in [Luke 2:36-38](#). Women were full members of the worshiping community.

The priestly office in Israel was restricted to the male descendants of Aaron. No woman could fill this office. Some scholars believe one reason for this prohibition was the monthly menstrual cycle which would make her ceremonially unclean. (Packer, Tenney, White, 1980, p.420)

Nevertheless, on occasion God called and equipped women for places of leadership, both religious and political. Miriam was both a prophetess and a song leader. She led the women in praise to God in song and instrumental music after the deliverance from Pharaoh ([Exodus 15:20-21](#)). It is evident from [Numbers 12:1-2](#) that God

spoke to Israel through her, and in [Micah 6:3-4](#) she is referred to as a leader on a par with her brothers Moses and Aaron.

Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge. The wording of the text suggests that she was a prophetess prior to her call to serve as a judge. Judge Deborah, speaking both as a prophetess and judge, commanded Barak to lead the armies against Sisera. Timorous Barak, assured that Deborah would accompany him, marched to victory over the enemy. However, the death of Sisera was at the hands of a woman, not of a general. The Song of Deborah and Barak, apparently composed by Judge Deborah ([Judges 5:7](#)), is included in Holy Scripture (Judges, chapter 5), one of many songs and messages from women in the inspired Word.

It must be observed that the judges, Deborah included, were called by God for a mission of salvation, and were endowed by the Spirit of Jehovah. Their leadership was authoritative in both political and religious realms (See [Judges 2:16-18; 3:9-10; 4:6, 14; 6: 34](#)),

Most famous of Israel's prophetesses (both with gifts and in office) was Huldah who lived during the reign of King Josiah. When the High Priest Hilkiah discovered a long lost copy of the Law of the Lord in the Temple, he sent word to King Josiah. A scribe followed and read the Law to the king. Josiah "tore his clothes" and sent word to the High Priest to inquire without delay about the meaning of the words of the Law. But the interpretation and application of the Law did not come from Israel's kingly or priestly leadership. God's mouthpiece was a woman, Huldah the prophetess. She authoritatively interpreted and applied the Law for the King and the people, using the formula "Thus saith the Lord" (King James Version) not less than three times. The king, the priests and the people repented, and Israel was spared an impending judgment (See [II Kings 22](#)).

Finally, one must not bypass the prophetic words of [Joel 2:28-29](#): "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

These prophetic words from the Old Covenant were a reminder that as Israel moved closer to the New Covenant, a greater light would be dawning through the transforming power of redemption. This word points forward to the time of the New Covenant when God would distribute His gifts to men and women alike to be used in His kingdom.

We find absolute equality between man and woman. Male dominance was normal in the Old Testament, although it was a dominance damaged by the Fall. There was, however, not an exclusive male leadership, as was noted in the several women called and equipped by God for leadership in Israel. No women, however, served as priests or as elders in Israel (not to be confused with the New Testament office of elder). Whatever the order of headship or male dominance was in the Old Testament, it was of such a nature or flexibility that it provided women the opportunities in that Old Testament structure to use their God-given gifts and callings to serve or to lead as God directed without any violation of the divine order.

4. Jesus gave value to women by interacting with them and allowing them to participate in His ministry.

Women figured more prominently in the Gospel record than in the entire Old Testament economy. Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” ([Luke 1:41](#)) and spoke aloud concerning Mary and her yet unborn child Jesus; the Magnificat follows. Both of these testimonies were given before the Savior’s birth. Anna, a “prophetess” spoke “of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” ([Luke 2:36-38](#)). Mary seems to have taken the lead in the search for Christ at age 12 when she comments to him: “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you” ([Luke 2:48](#)).

Jesus ministered to a number of women in various ways, and always with full respect for their dignity, their intelligence and their faith. He dealt with the woman of Samaria at a public well, engaging in a lengthy conversation. From this meeting with Jesus she left Him and became an effective witness to her own people ([John 4:1-39](#)). Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene. She became a faithful follower of her Lord and was present at His crucifixion ([John 19:25](#)). After His resurrection Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and commissioned her as the first post-resurrection missionary with the words: “Go ... to my brothers, and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” ([John 20:14-18](#)).

John Calvin suggests that as the apostles (male) had fled, Christ made women “on that occasion teachers of the apostles, especially Mary Magdalene, formerly captive of seven devils, who Christ raised up from the lowest depths to a place above the heavens ... Christ teaches here that God ordains those who seem good to him as his witnesses; and one should not refuse their testimony, even if they seem unlikely choices by the world’s standards.” (Douglass, 1985, pp. 58-59) He heals a woman with an issue of blood ([Mark 5:25-34](#)), and commends a Canaanite woman for her faith in Him as the Messiah, and she becomes an early Gentile convert.

Women also ministered to the Lord. He accepted the hospitality of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and dined in their home. From the context of the narrative it would seem that Martha was the head of the household. It was from the lips of this same Martha that Jesus accepted the great confession: “Yes, Lord ... I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” ([John 11:27](#)). The Bible records only Peter and Martha making this great confession of faith. Luke records that several women gave financial support to Jesus and His apostles. Several also followed Him to the cross, faithful at his death as they had been during His ministry.

Both men and women were in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples ([Acts 1:14](#)), and women spoke in tongues at Pentecost ([Acts 2:17-18](#)). Both men and women believed in Christ, both were baptized, and both suffered persecution for their faith ([Acts 5:14; 8:12; 9:2](#)). As the first post resurrection missionary was a woman, so the first recorded convert in Europe was a woman, Lydia ([Acts 16:13ff](#)).

Jesus ministered to the needs of women as well as he did to men, to Jew and Gentile, to the bond and the free. Many women were His faithful disciples, traveling companions, and witnesses of His grace and of His resurrection. Women as well as men were full Israelites, full heirs of salvation, and of equal standing in the sight of God.

It may be observed historically that Jesus included no women among the twelve apostles. This is often over-emphasized theologically. The Apostles were chosen by Jesus under the Old Covenant where only males could attain to the priesthood. However qualified a woman may have been to serve as one of the Twelve, that choice may have immediately discredited Him in the eyes of Israel’s leadership. It could also be noted that none of the Apostles had received Christian baptism, and all were unordained laymen.

Every indication from the Gospels and the Apostolic Church is to the effect that the men of the church today need to take the initiative in encouraging and supporting Christian women to become much more active than in the past and to as quickly as possible approximate their role as they did in the early church.

5. The Bible teaches that the Order of Creation which provided the authority structure of the family also provides the pattern for the church ([Genesis 1,2](#); [I Corinthians 11](#); [I Timothy 2](#)).

God created man in His image and gave them dominion over the creation. Man and woman enjoy an equality of value and at the same time a difference of function. We observe from Genesis that God created Adam first; that He created Eve out of Adam; that Adam had responsibility for Eve when he named her in [Genesis 2:23](#); and God's instruction concerning marriage, all of which seem to indicate a creation design reflecting a particular order of relationships.

[Ephesians 5:21-6:4](#) gives further teaching on the role of the husband in marriage and the home. As the head of his wife he is to love her in a sacrificial manner after the love Christ has for the church. This indicates that headship is characterized as a responsible nourishing and caring for his wife and family. The creation design does not present an order defined by authoritarianism or domination. The descriptive consequence of the Fall given in [Genesis 3:16](#), "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you," was not and is not God's original intent for husband and wife.

What is the significance of this family structure for the church? In [I Corinthians 11:2-16](#) the Apostle Paul speaks to the problem of propriety in public worship by appealing to the order of creation. Apparently women were worshiping in such a way that they were considered to be dishonoring their heads (husbands) ([I Corinthians 11:4](#)). Therefore he says, "For man did not come from woman but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" ([I Corinthians 11:8, 9](#)). Because of this order and design in the creation, the Christian women have a continuing obligation to live in such a manner that they show honor/respect for their heads (husbands). In this passage Paul bases the need for this honor and respect on the creation order.

The second major passage in the New Testament that relates the order of creation to the life of women in the church is [I Timothy 2:4-15](#). Paul begins with the positive command directed to the women that they in quietness, learn in all submission. Quietness is the teachable spirit of a self-restrained disciple that listens carefully to the teaching and does not meddle in the affairs of the teacher. [II Thessalonians 3:11,12](#), places quietness in opposition to being a busybody, i.e. one who meddles in the affairs of others. The silence commanded is not an absolute silence for [I Corinthians 11:5](#) speaks of women praying and prophesying. "In all submission" refers to the relationship of respect for the teacher that a serious student needs to have in order to maximize the learning situation.

The restriction of verse 12 must be understood in connection with verse 11. It appears from the context that "to have authority over a man" is to be seen as the opposite of "in quietness and in full submission" commanded in verse 11. This suggests that "to have authority over a man" is best understood as a type of behavior that meddles i.e. seeks to domineer or disrupt. The "or" in the New International Version in [I Timothy 1:12](#) joins "to have authority over a man" to "teach" as a second and separate thing that Paul does not permit a woman to do. However, a close examination of the grammatical structure and Paul's use of *oude* suggests that the "or" should be translated "namely." The idea then is: "I am not permitting a woman to teach, namely in a manner that domineers a man." Thus it is not a prohibition against women teaching but against teaching that domineeringly disrupts.* Paul's basis for this instruction on women learning in quietness and submission is the order of creation, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (v.13). This order, as in [I Corinthians 11](#), calls women to show the proper honor and respect to men, and especially to those from whom they are to learn. The restriction is directed to those women who were acting contrary.

The order of creation is used by Paul as the Biblical basis for the proper relationships in the church. The women are called to respect and honor the men from whom they came. The men too must recognize that they are not independent of woman. “For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman” ([I Corinthians 11:11-12](#)). This clearly indicates that men should honor and show respect for women. The order of creation which primarily is an order of prominence due to origin is the basis for the mutual honor and respect of men and women for each other, their gifts, and callings from God.

Footnote

*Five such lexically valid alternatives are listed below. The first three of these can be clearly supported in the immediate context and seem more viable than the last two. 1) “To teach autonomously;” 2) “Teach in a contentious manner;” 3) “To teach in a domineering manner;” 4) “Teach in such a way that virtues are destroyed;” C5) “To teach in a way that murders (the truth).” (All references from extra biblical sources.) (Payne, pp.109,110)

6. The Bible teaches that the office of overseer in the church (pastor and elder) is to be filled only by Scripturally qualified men ([I Timothy 3](#) and [Titus 1](#)).

The Pastoral Epistles are canonical letters addressed to a particular church leader. Timothy was left in Ephesus to supervise the churches there ([I Timothy 1:3](#)). Titus was given a similar task with respect to the churches on the island of Crete ([Titus 1:5](#)). Instructions are given to these men concerning the appointment of church leaders. The titles bishop, deacon, and elder emerge as referring to some church office.

The word bishop (episcopos) was borrowed by the Christians from the secular realm. It had the connotations of management, supervision, and protection long before it was used as a title of a leader in a Christian community. Although the noun episcopos occurs only six times in the New Testament, the Pastoral Epistles are the most specific in the use of the term. Paul describes the qualities required of a person appointed to this office.

The word elder (presbyteros) is a separate, distinct title. However, the New Testament documents do not make it clear that this represents a different office. When Paul made one last visit to the west coast of Asia, he called together the presbyters of the Ephesian Church ([Acts 20:17](#)). He reminded them that the Holy Spirit had placed them over the congregations as bishops ([Acts 20:28](#)). In the Pastoral Epistles, Titus is first instructed that his duty is to appoint presbyters and is then given guidelines concerning the qualities one should take into consideration when appointing a bishop ([Titus 1:5-9](#)). -

This groundwork is laid to focus our attention on the “who” rather than the “what.” In other words, the character qualities required of an overseer are applicable to all Christians (men and women, regardless of office) based on the holiness of God. However, these qualities are set forth as specific requirements for the overseer.

The Apostle Paul has an assumption that these overseers are to be men. The Scripture texts say that the episcopos is to be “the husband of one wife” [I Timothy 3:2](#); [Titus 1:5](#)). The meaning of this expression could be explored. For our purposes it need only be stated that (if married) the man must have one wife.

It has been argued that this is a general expression which would allow women to fill this office under different circumstances (i.e., change of cultural setting, education, etc.).

The restriction of a woman as elder is affirmed in the comparison/contrast with the office of deacon. The qualities required of a diakonos are presented in [I Timothy 3:8ff](#). All we know about deacons as they were found in Paul’s day is contained in this passage, [Romans 16:1](#) and [Philippians 1:1](#).

R.C.H.Lenski summarizes: “The fact that two offices are referred to by ‘overseers’ and ‘deacons’ is assured by our passage ([I Timothy 3](#)) and by [Philippians 1:1](#). The fact that deacons held the minor office and did not teach is also certain. What the deacons actually did is nowhere stated in detail. To say that they performed the same work as the episcopoi with the exception of teaching is not provable. They were not the overseers, did not act as pastors and spiritual leaders of the Flock. The best we can say is that they assisted the overseers by performing the minor services and attending to incidental matters collecting and distributing alms, looking after the physical needs of the sick, keeping the place of worship in order, etc. Thus there were also women deacons (v. 11); Phoebe was one of these, and she is referred to as early as [Romans 16:1](#).” (Lenski, 1961, p. 592)

In all the periods of development of the Kingdom of God, God gave the calling of overseer to men. In the New Testament, the office of overseer in the church was filled by men. Note, many (most) men were excluded as well as women. Women were not excluded because they were inferior, nor less intelligent, nor lack

spiritual gifts, nor fully redeemed ([Galatians 3:28](#)). Rather, God with all authority (given over to the Son, [Matthew 28:18](#)) has established a pattern of male overseers throughout history.

Addendum

The committee acknowledges as element within the Church of the Lutheran Brethren which would take issue with the word “only” in this affirmation. They believe that God may call and gift women for the office of overseer. In other words, Scripturally qualified women as well as men are a viable option to God for leadership in the church. A segment of the committee represents this position and rejects the word “only” in this affirmation as too restrictive.

7. The Bible distinguishes between office and gift and therefore all members of the body of Christ, men and women alike, may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit wills ([I Corinthians 12:11](#) and [Romans 12](#), and [Ephesians 4](#)).

In [John 16:7-15](#) Jesus, speaking to the eleven Apostles, foretold the coming of and the ministry of the promised Holy Spirit. In [Acts 1:8](#), He added further light on the Spirit's place in the church age: "... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Peter sees the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as the fulfillment of [Joel 2:28-29](#).

Any attempt to clarify the respective role/s of male/female in the church which omits a careful study of the Holy Spirit's calling and enabling in the life of every believer is at best a partial study. This requires a close look both at the enabling gifts of the Holy Spirit and at the offices within the church, the body of Christ on earth. The major segment of material is found in [Romans 12:3-8](#) and in [I Corinthians 12-14](#).

In Romans Paul uses the figure of the body with Christ as the head. Paul deals with functions within the body in relationship to the head, and the resulting full harmony of all believers under the headship of Jesus Christ. We see both unity and diversity, both function and ministry.

In [I Corinthians 12:4-12](#), the figure is of the body, but the emphasis is on the work of the Holy Spirit. The unity derives from the Holy Spirit (v4,8,9,11) and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The diversity of gifts within the body is seen under the headship of the Trinity, but with special emphasis on the sovereign Holy Spirit who "gives them to each one, just as he determines" ([I Corinthians 12:11b](#)).

Several observations must be made. It is the Holy Spirit (not the church) who gives gifts "just as he determines." There is no suggestion that He assigns certain gifts to males exclusively. There is no reference to sex, nor even is it suggested that it is the prerogative of the church to select or elect either to service or to office. Further, the gifts must precede the office, yet are inseparable: For the office of apostle, the gifts essential to being an apostle; For the office of prophet, the gift of prophecy; For the teacher's, the gift of teaching, etc. The institutional church may or may not choose to call or elect for office or service. The church may choose to be obedient or disobedient to the Holy Spirit in calling and using (or not calling and not using) His gifted children. But the church that refuses to recognize the gifts of the Spirit in ministry or officers certainly moves away from His administration.

One may also endeavor to distinguish between prophesying and teaching in an attempt to grant women the right of prophecy but not the right to teach (with men in mind and in reference to [I Timothy 2:12](#)). Although some may argue for this teaching as a special kind of teaching closed to women in teaching men, this scarcely is consistent with other Pauline passages. In [Colossians 3:16](#) the congregation is encouraged to "with all wisdom teaching (didaskontes) and admonishing one another"; In [I Corinthians 14:26](#), "When you assemble, each one ... has a teaching," and in [Titus 2:3](#) "Likewise teach the older women ... to teach what is good." In each instance a form of the Greek verb teach is used; references made to both men and women.

Luke records that Priscilla and Aquila both explained to Apollos the way of God, a specific incidence of a woman teaching a man and which is in harmony with the Joel/Acts passages which make no distinction in the distribution and use of the gifts to male or female.

That the gift of prophecy was given to women is indisputably clear. However, two attempts at exegetically either eliminating or minimizing it are attempted. The one is to affirm as do some dispensationalists that the

gift of prophecy ceased at the close of the Apostolic Age. This position we cannot accept. Liefeld notes: “God did not bestow the gift of prophecy on men and women as a major feature of the new church age only to withdraw it almost immediately. The gift of prophecy was, as we see in [I Corinthians 14:5,26,31](#), for the encouragement, edification, and instruction of the church.” (Liefeld, 1985, p.12)

Others would limit prophecy almost entirely to the Old Testament predictive prophecies (see also [I Peter 1:21,22](#)) which became a part of the canon, and fail to recognize that in the New Testament Church prophecy was in a limited way predictive (see [Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11](#)), but in a much fuller way a proclamation of the gospel and with it some measure of instruction. As such, the gift of prophecy, we maintain, is with us in the New Testament Church today.

It is doubtful if any of the gifts listed in Romans and I Corinthians are “pure” gifts, i.e., strictly teaching, strictly prophesying. Most missionary, evangelistic, preaching and teaching ministries are a blend of several gifts. Further, in the Apostolic Age lines of demarcation between house meetings, group gatherings or worship services are insufficiently clear to make dogmatic determinations. Twentieth century theologians are often frustrated when trying to make precise what is intentionally given in less technical and informal words in the apostolic writings.

In the Pauline writings, where the gifts and/or offices are given in an apparent order of importance, prophesying precedes teaching in the [Romans 12:6-8](#) segment. In [I Corinthians 11:7-10](#), prophecy is low in the listing, and teaching is omitted. In [I Corinthians 12:28,29](#), where there seems to be some sequence of rank in the church for the gifts/offices, apostles is placed first (probably also in sequence of time as well), prophets are listed second and teaching is listed third. The same sequence is followed in verses 28 and 29. The chapter closes with the Pauline injunction, “covet earnestly the best gifts.” We find no valid grounds for any distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit on grounds of sex.

One may, however, ask: “Does not the church, does not Scripture, provide any Biblical way of regulating the occasional use of these gifts?” The answer has to be yes: but not necessarily along the lines of sex, or for all time. It is evident from [I Corinthians 11:3-16](#) that Paul allowed women to prophesy in public, but he also expected them to be clothed in a manner that would not bring disrepute on their husbands. The gift was not the issue.

In [I Corinthians 14:28-34](#) Paul three times commands silence because of disruption in the church, not regarding the gifts of the Spirit. In verses 28 and 30 it was silence for the sake of church order. In verse 34 it was silence of certain women whose disruptive questions were damaging to the church and disrespectful to their husbands. The gift was not the issue.

The Bible distinguishes between office and gift, and all members of the body of Christ, men and women alike, may possess any of the gifts as the Holy Spirit determines. The offices in the institutional church are a calling by God through the congregation. The congregation as a body of believers is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is incumbent upon the congregation to seek out for office the men and women who best fill these offices, then elect them and support them in prayer. Any theology of either gift or office which may exclude from ministry or office one whom the Holy Spirit has gifted and called is defective.

8. The Bible teaches that all members of the Body of Christ should be encouraged to discover, develop and use their spiritual gifts under the supervision and leadership of the overseers of the congregation.

The New Testament Epistle of First Peter was written to the Christians who lived in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, places in the northern part of Asia Minor. It is a brief letter in which Peter sets forth in a gentle tone, the blessings of those who are redeemed and exhortations on how these redeemed should live in the world.

As he nears the close of this message, Peter writes about how believers should behave as “the end of all things” ([I Peter 4:7](#)) draws near. Peter lists some actions that should characterize their lives including this one, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” ([I Peter 4:10,11](#)).

The Apostle Paul in [Romans 12](#) discusses spiritual gifts in a similar manner. In this pivotal chapter, Paul discusses the practical application of all that he has said up to this point in Romans. He says, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” ([Romans 12:3-8](#)).

The thrust of the New Testament text is that all God’s people, male and female, have spiritual gifts to be used within the one body of which both sexes are a part ([Galatians 3:28](#)). And although the male gender is used in some of the word usage (notably the pronouns) the context indicates that both sexes are included in these statements about spiritual gifts. The church should not mistakenly think that these texts are only for men.

That women were given gifts and used those gifts for the larger body is seen in various references by Luke in Acts and by Paul in his epistles. They participated in all the gifts listed in [Romans 12](#), with perhaps the exception of the sixth one, that of leadership.

1. Prophecy. On their travels to Caesarea Luke writes of coming to the home of Philip the evangelist. Philip was one of the seven deacons chosen by the church. He was a man of integrity and not likely to deviate from the acceptable practices of the church. Luke reports that he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied and Luke didn’t condemn the practice’ nor did Paul ([Acts 21:9](#)).

Further, Paul, in [I Corinthians 11:2-14:40](#) gives instruction on how people should behave themselves in public worship. He has a specific instruction for women which is, “... every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head “ There is a similar instruction to men about praying or prophesying, with this exception, they are not to cover their heads. Both men and women can pray and prophesy in the public worship of the church. Both did.

The gift of prophesy is never defined. Apparently identifying it was not a problem for the church. Peter writes about prophesy ([II Peter 1:20,21](#)) and says that its origin is from God. It seems to be a Spirit-inspired testimony or witness to the Lord. The authority for it comes from God. The prophet was merely a mouthpiece for God.

2. Service. The purpose of this gift in the church was to be of assistance, particularly in a material way, to the household of faith. Paul, in [Romans 16:1-2](#), mentions Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. He asks the Christians in Rome to give her help in the same way that she has given him help. What is important to notice here is the word Paul uses to describe Phoebe. The word is [diakonon](#), a word for deacon or minister which can be used for either male or female persons in the church who held this office. It is of interest to notice that sometimes this word (in this verse) is translated servant when it refers to Phoebe, yet in other places where the context indicates men it is translated deacons.

There are references to other women who served as co-workers or fellow-workers in the work of the church: Mary ([Romans 16:6](#)); Priscilla ([Romans 16:3](#)); Junias ([Romans 16:7](#) <called here an apostle>); Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis ([Romans 16:12](#)); Euodia and Syntyche ([Philippians 4:2,3](#)). Without a doubt, women were integral members of the church. Submission for them did not mean nonparticipation in the most vital aspects of the churches' mission.

3. Teaching and 4. Encouraging. One of the most notable teachers in the New Testament is Priscilla ([Romans 16:3](#); [Acts 18](#); [I Corinthians 16:19](#); [II Timothy 4:19](#)). While it is not certain that she used her teaching and encouraging (or exhortation) gifts in a public way, she did use them, together with those of her husband, to great benefit in the church. They were well known throughout the church.

5. Giving. All members of the church are urged to give cheerfully and generously. The NIV text unfortunately translates [II Corinthians 9:7](#) as "Each man should give ...". The translation of the Revised Standard Version is to be preferred "Each one ...". Women too were included in those who had this gift.

6. Leadership. There is no reference in the New Testament to women who held positions of leadership in the church, unless it would be Junias in Romans 16. They were not bishops or overseers.

This is not to say that women did not have position and influence in the church. When Paul and Silas were released from prison in Philippi, they went to Lydia's house where the church was meeting. There they met the members of the church and encouraged them.

7. Mercy. The church of the first century had many physical needs. Life was dangerous for those Christians. Women were part of that group to whom the Lord gave the gift of mercy. Dorcas (or Tabitha) from Joppa was one such person who had this gift. It is said of her that she "was always doing good and helping the poor" ([Acts 9:36](#)).

Based upon what we believe the New Testament to teach, women are not nor should be prohibited from serving in many different functions within the congregation or the synod. As long as they come under the authority of the overseers in the congregation, they are free to do any function they are called by the congregation to carry out. In our view, the only position closed to them (and most men too) is that of overseer. We base this on the teaching of [I Timothy 2 and 3](#).

The congregation has the best organizational style to utilize the gifts of women. Overseers (Pastor and Elders) oversee the ministry. Everyone serving within the church, both men and women, serve under the authority of the overseers.

It is the opinion of the Committee that the synod structure should parallel that of the local congregation if the synod is to utilize the gifts of women to the fullest at the synod level. A board of overseers, headed by the synod president (all ordained) would be the governing board of authority for the synod's joint ministries. All other boards and their workers would serve under the authority of the board of overseers. Such a synod organization would allow women to use their gifts in any work to which the church might call them.

9. The right of women's suffrage is in harmony with the Bible, and the local congregation should have the right to elect women as well as men as duly accredited delegates to represent them at the Annual Convention of the synod.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines suffrage as “vote given by a member of body, state, or society, in assent to a proposition or in favour of the election of a person; in extended sense, a vote for or against any controverted question or nomination.”

The Commission on theology and Church Relations (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) 1969 report on “Woman Suffrage in the Church” concludes: “It is also evident from the definition of the franchise that it does not give to those who have the right of suffrage the power to lord it over others. On the contrary, the right of suffrage is given in order to prevent individuals or small groups from usurping authority over others” (page 10).

On the basis of the exegesis of [I Timothy 2:12](#) (See Affirmation 5) it is concluded that the phrase “usurping authority” does not stand on its own but is appositional to “to teach.” On the basis of the definition of suffrage, I Timothy does not speak to the question of voting.

A study of Scripture seems to indicate that there are no passages that correspond to a voter's meeting or a congregational business meeting as it is practiced today. Nor does there seem to be anything that corresponds to the synod's Annual Meeting. Some have suggested that there is a correspondence with the Jerusalem Council of [Acts 15](#). However a study of this event indicates that the decision-makers were the apostles and the elders and not believers serving as representatives from the churches. Perhaps the Jerusalem Council can provide us with a model for solving doctrinal questions and matters that pertain to the application of the Bible in various cultural situations. The doctrinal and ethical issues facing the church today are many and complex. A council such as [Acts 15](#) could provide a structure for our pastors and elders to give leadership to the church on these matters. It would therefore seem that the means of making congregational/synodical decisions by voting is a matter of adiaphora. The principles that govern such questions are to be developed by the believers in the spirit of the gospel seeking to do what is best for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

The Committee has studied the role of women in the church, particularly as the subject relates to the right of women to vote at the Annual Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren if elected as delegates by the congregations. There are still several areas relating to the subject of women in the church and family which need further study, such as: 1) The ordination of women to the Office of the Holy Ministry; 2) The ordination of women to the Office of Elder in the local congregation; and 3) The role of wife and husband in the family.

Since it is not known at this time what form the synodical organizational structure will take, the Committee has not made recommendations concerning which synod boards women may be elected to, nor has it studied this issue in depth. This will take further study by the committee drawing up the organizational structure. This Committee goes on record of recommending to the Executive Board that women's suffrage at the Annual Convention be allowed, since it is in harmony with Scripture and must be considered adiaphora.

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