



The Executive Officers appointed a working group to create a Statement of Affirmation regarding the equality of women and men in leadership in the PAOC. This is not a new position, but rather reflects our ongoing position, summarizing our understanding of Scripture and our Fellowship's history. This Statement of Affirmation was reviewed, amended and approved by the General Executive in June 2018.¹

PAOC STATEMENT OF AFFIRMATION REGARDING THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN IN LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

In 1998 the voting members of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada adopted a resolution in the decades-long process of considering the role and place of women in credentialed and governing ministry. Women had been ordained in the PAOC since 1984. This resolution now anticipated the full and unlimited involvement of women at all levels of our Fellowship, simply providing for "...gender inclusivity in all matters relating to the credentialing process and qualifications of candidates for the elected offices of District and General Executives."

Two decades later, we recognize that although our accepted, official position is one of equality between women and men, that position has not translated to reality. Women continue to be vastly underrepresented both as vocational pastors and in governing roles at district and national levels, despite female students consistently attending our Bible colleges in significant numbers. There is a gap between our official position and our lived reality.

This paper is a Statement of Affirmation of our egalitarian position, in the context of ministry leadership, with a summary of historical and theological considerations. It is intended to provide a beginning reference point for churches and credential holders who seek clarity regarding what we believe, particularly when they are called upon to make decisions regarding who will fill leadership roles in their contexts. Suggested and referenced resources are listed below; further resources will be developed.

OUR HISTORY

Women have been included from the beginning of modern Pentecostalism. On January 1, 1901, Agnes Ozman, a Holiness preacher in Topeka, Kansas, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, ushering in modern Pentecostal history in North America. In 1906, the Pentecostal experience spread to the Azusa Street Mission, which was gender-inclusive. When the Assemblies of God (AOG) officially organized in the United States in 1914, women constituted nearly one-third of its clergy.

Ellen Hebden received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in November 1906 in Toronto. By 1910, there were 14 new congregations in Canada, most associated with Toronto's Hebden Mission. Viewed as a fulfilment of Joel's promise (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18), this new day of Pentecost conferred equal responsibility on all people to step into their callings. The January 1908 edition of *The Apostolic Faith* declared, "When our Lord poured out Pentecost, He brought all those faithful women with the other disciples into the upper room, and God baptized them all in the same room and made no difference. All women received the anointed oil of the Holy Ghost and were able to preach the same as men."² Men were encouraged to be supportive of women as ministers: "It is contrary to the Scriptures that women should not have her part in the salvation work to which God has called her. We have no right to lay a straw in her way, but to ... encourage the woman in her work."

¹ Additional resources for reference have been added as of October 25, 2023.

² "Who May Prophesy?", *Apostolic Faith* vol. 1, no. 12, 1908.

Early Pentecostal periodicals made “matter-of-fact” reference to women in ministry. In a list of 15 missionaries compiled shortly before The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) organized in 1919, seven were female. Women were evangelists, pastors, teachers and missionaries. They conducted evangelistic campaigns, planted churches, established schools, and translated Scripture—laying the groundwork for the Fellowship’s expansion throughout Canada and overseas.

In our earliest days, the return of Christ seemed imminent, evangelism was paramount, and regulations less important. However, as time progressed, order was needed to establish doctrine, missionary efforts, and Bible colleges. As organizations grow and structures are put into place, legislation usually entrenches the dominant group’s beliefs. Although women were present when the PAOC was originally chartered in 1919, the first directors were male, and the Memorandum of Agreement declared that the PAOC was to be controlled by ordained elders and pastors, all male.

The pathway to ordination for PAOC women centred on the “authority” conferred by ordination, and the amount of authority women should have. The PAOC Lady Workers credential (later the Ministerial License for Women) required the same preparation as ordination but did not confer the same status. By 1950, women with this credential could vote at General Conferences, and by 1960, could solemnize weddings.

The post-war years saw the church adopt a similar narrative to society in general: women who moved into the public work sphere in the war years were directed back to home life in the 1950s. By the early 1970s there was such concern over the lack of PAOC women in pastoral roles that a commission was struck to study the issue. Women’s ordination was debated in 1978 and 1980; each time the vote did not reach the required two-thirds majority, and additional studies were commissioned. In 1984, Resolution #6 was presented once more. The motion passed with a 90 per cent approval rate, granting ordination but with limited institutional authority. In the December 1984 *Pentecostal Testimony*, C. M. Ward declared, “This step of opening the pulpit to women is not only morally correct but morally mandatory.... It is the will of God to reach souls regardless of the gender employed.”³ The final constitutional limitation for women was removed at the 1998 General Conference.

As of January 2016, approximately six per cent of credentialed lead pastors in the PAOC are female.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Differing theological viewpoints exist within evangelicalism concerning the role of women in ministry. Some advocate restricting women’s authority in ministry leadership roles in some way (often identified as the “complementarian” position), while others maintain that women’s roles should be unrestricted in this regard (often identified as the “egalitarian” position). The PAOC celebrates the unique diversity that both women and men bring to the body of Christ, while affirming the egalitarian view that women are to be unrestricted in their role in Christian ministry and may function in equal authority with their male colleagues in leadership. The following addresses some of the more common discussion points used to support our position.

1. God uses people for positions based on ability and call, not gender (Gal. 3:28). We re-affirm that the Day of Pentecost established a “prophethood” of Spirit-empowered believers, with no restrictions on race, social position, or gender (Act 2:16-18; cf. Joel 2:28-29).
2. The creation story indicates mutuality, not hierarchy, with regard to the gender of Adam and Eve. Both were called to bear God’s image and rule creation. The word *ezer*, translated “helper” (Gen. 2:18, 20) does not indicate submission, but rather mutual partnership. It is used repeatedly to describe God as helping others, including Israel (Ex. 18:4, Ps. 124:8). Hierarchy is introduced only post-fall.
3. Women in both OT and NT serve in leadership positions. Examples include Miriam (Ex. 15:20) and Deborah (Jud 4:4) in the OT; Anna (Lk. 2:36, 38), Phoebe (Rom. 16:1,2), Priscilla (Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:3), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2), and the chosen lady who appears to be a pastor (2 John 1) in the NT. Special note should be given to Junia (Rom. 16:7) who held the office of an apostle.
4. Paul’s determination was to help churches maintain peace, truth, and reputation in their cultural context. In doing so cultural issues are introduced in Paul’s writings that appear to restrict women’s

³ Ward, C. M. “Women Preachers – The Gospel Has No Gender,” *Pentecostal Testimony*, December 1984, 14.

roles in ministry; however, these are best understood as situational to the particular cultural context, rather than universal directives. In other words, while Paul did restrict the role of women in the church in some contexts, these instances need to be understood as temporary accommodations to God's broader intention of having women and men serve as equals in church leadership. The following are examples of how a contextual understanding of some of these difficult passages help identify Paul's instructions as being restricted to particular, exceptional situations involving women in the church, but which should not be taken to mean women's leadership roles should be restricted in all times and places.

- a. 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 – In this passage some difficult issues are raised, including Paul's use of the word "head" (*kephalē*; v.3) to describe a man's relationship to a woman. While debates exist with regard to the definition "head" (i.e., does it indicate "authority" or "source"?), this term's definition is not the ultimate basis on which an interpretation should be based. Instead the overall point of the passage helps identify the cultural nature of Paul's instructions. Women were guided to prophesy with their heads covered in order to preserve appropriate modesty in worship and avoid disharmony (a significant problem in Corinth). Craig Keener notes that in this first-century context, head coverings were often worn by women as a sign of sexual modesty, but it may also be the case that wealthier women in the church were flaunting their hairstyles (with ornaments), in contrast to the hair styles of the lower-class members. In short, the congregation needed to avoid (in this case, among the women) the worldly influences of immodesty with regard to sexuality and/or wealth.

So, Paul appeals to cultural norms that would call the Corinthian women to Christ-like humility and concern for the reputation of the church and other less-privileged believers. It should also be observed that Paul does qualify the headship language in vv. 11-12, emphasizing the mutual interdependence of men and women "in the Lord." Further, it is significant that Paul does not forbid women from prophesying (an authoritative word from God to all congregation members—men and women), but only introduces a simple requirement for women desiring to speak from such a place of authority. In sum, women were not being restricted from a public, speaking ministry role in this passage.

- b. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 – Paul is instructing the church on maintaining order in corporate worship. Among the many problems in the Corinthian church, one issue was that women were causing disruptions with public questions, likely due to their lack of education on Scriptural matters. (Formal education for women was not common in the first century.) Since 1 Cor. 11 teaches that women can pray and prophesy publicly, the "be silent" instruction cannot be taken literally or applied universally—obviously Paul did allow for some women to speak on some occasions. Further, others (presumably both women and men) are also told to "keep silent" in this chapter: tongue-speakers without an interpreter, and prophets who have had their turn (1 Cor. 14:28, 30). So, Paul cannot be literally calling for some members to never open their mouths. Rather, his point was that public worship should be conducted in an orderly, profitable way, without unnecessary disruption or distraction. Finally, Paul did not restrict women from becoming educated (and perhaps then later being able to contribute publicly), since he tells wives to ask their husbands questions at home so that they might become better informed in a proper setting.
- c. 1 Timothy 2:9-15 – This passage is challenging due to the direct call for women not to teach (men), along with the appeal to the Genesis creation text for support. However, Paul's admonition here occurs in the context of significant false teaching in the Ephesian church, along with other negative cultural influences. Paul raises five issues for women, one of which was an instruction to learn quietly (the other four issues concern wearing expensive clothes, braided hair, gold and pearls—none of which are usually considered rigidly universally applicable). That the call for women to "be silent" falls within this list points to the cultural particularity of the command; to call four items "cultural" and one "universal" seems arbitrary.

So, what was the possible situation giving rise to such a restriction on women teaching? Paul's letters to

Timothy in Ephesus highlight the ever-present danger of false teaching. Especially susceptible were under-educated women, who were prone to being deceived due to their lack of knowledge (1 Tim. 1:3-20; 4:1-7; 6:6-10, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:17). Exacerbating matters was the likely negative influence of a dominant matriarchal culture in that region, which promoted female superiority, being influenced by the worship of the pagan goddess Artemis.

Artemis was thought to bring new life and to take life away if needed. During childbirth, women often called upon this goddess for preservation and relief. So, in contrast to a false pagan idea that Adam was deceived, and Eve was the superior heroine, Paul writes, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." What is being addressed, then, is not some universal hierarchy of men and women with regard to teaching; rather, what is being addressed is a distorted view that any woman can teach, despite lacking proper training.

Whereas being created or born second does not disqualify anyone from ministry leadership, being in a deceived state or easily susceptible to false teaching does—and this applies to both women and men. Ultimately both Adam and Eve transgressed, and both men and women are in need of redemption from God (and God, not Artemis, is also the one from whom women need to seek preservation during childbirth!) Nowhere does the Bible state or imply that women are more easily deceived or deceptive than men. That Paul did not believe this is demonstrated through the great value he placed on his female ministry colleagues identified elsewhere in his letters.

EXPERIENCE

Experience is not the primary or sole resource for knowing God and His will, but it is one means that God has provided. Experience has shown that women have been called and used by God in all manner of ministry leadership capacities, evidenced by their effectiveness and fruitfulness in ministry for the Lord. This has been true from the beginning of the church until now, even in times when opportunities were limited.

CONCLUSION

We recognize that other fellowships and denominations may hold a differing position regarding the role of women, and it is not our intention to cause division in the larger Body of Christ. Nevertheless, while respecting these differences, and while continuing to respond with kindness and grace, we unequivocally affirm within our Fellowship an egalitarian position that celebrates the unrestricted leadership capacity of women in the church.

In light of the position of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada that women may indeed be fully credentialed and equipped to lead in any capacity, we commit ourselves to the following actions:

- i. We will encourage local churches and members of our Fellowship to intentionally teach and implement an egalitarian position at the local church level.
- ii. We will intentionally recommend and develop resources as needed to assist our local churches in teaching and implementing an egalitarian position.
- iii. We will intentionally celebrate and welcome the anointing and call of God to vocational ministry on both women and men, at all levels of leadership.

REFERENCED RESOURCES

Boyd, Gregory A. and Paul R. Eddy. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

Keener, Craig S. "Head Coverings." In *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, 442-47. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

These resources are offered as suggestions for further understanding. However, they have not been created by nor are they under the purview of the PAOC.

Books:

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Online Resources:

www.juniaproject.com

www.cbeinternational.org

www.margmowczko.com