

TenthWomen

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Leadership and Service Opportunities for Women

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The following statement expresses the position of the Session of Tenth Presbyterian Church regarding leadership and service opportunities for women at Tenth. It was adopted December 22, 1992.

Leadership and Service Opportunities for Women at Tenth Presbyterian Church

The Session of Tenth Presbyterian Church reaffirms that all positions of leadership and service at Tenth Presbyterian Church are open to women, except for the authoritative teaching and disciplinary role that the Bible, in 1 Timothy 2:12-14, reserves for men. In a Presbyterian system of government, that role is embodied solely in the Session, composed of ruling and teaching elders. Aside from that function, women are encouraged to seek out all avenues of leadership and service, including Bible teaching, leading small groups, serving on the various church boards and committees, assisting in diaconal work and by any other means fully exercising their gifts for the greater benefit of the body of Christ Jesus.

This statement is consistent with the position taken by Tenth Church when we left the United Presbyterian Church (USA) in part over this issue. At that time the old denomination had changed its book of order to require member churches to elect women to all boards of the church, including the eldership, and that compelled our Session to reexamine its view of the Bible's teaching on the role of women in the church.

The pivotal text is 1 Timothy 2:12-14, which says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

The Session believes that two errors have been made in handling that text. The first is the error of dismissing it entirely, which is the error of the liberal church for the most part. Liberals argue that the text is "Pauline" and therefore not to be taken seriously, "cultural" and therefore not to be taken seriously, or merely "non-binding" as most of the Biblical material was thought to be. We were willing to discuss what the text means and adjust our interpretation if what we believed about it could be shown to be wrong, but we were unwilling to dismiss it entirely since "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Whatever the text means, it is prohibiting something.

The second error tends to be the error of evangelicals or at least some of them, and that is the error of making the verses say more than they actually do, thereby excluding women from virtually any leadership or service roles. We believe that is also wrong if for no other reason than that women did serve admirably and in many ways even in the apostolic age.

What the text does seem to forbid, in our judgment, is what we would today call the *authoritative* teaching or disciplinary role in the local church. This is not a passage talking about women as such but is part of a letter in which rules for the operation of the churches are being passed on to Timothy by Paul. Paul is answering the question "How should the local church be run?" not "What are women allowed (or not allowed) to do?"

This authoritative teaching and disciplinary role is assigned differently in churches depending on their form of government. In a Baptist church this role is filled by deacons. In an Episcopal church it is filled by the rector alone. In a Presbyterian church it is the Session. Apart from that single function, it seems to us that every other form of leadership or service in the church should be open to women. Therefore the Session encourages the women of Tenth Presbyterian Church to seek out such roles in accordance with the gifts God has given, in response to developing needs and in obedience to any perceived call by God to serve.