

Leadership and Women **Grace Community Church**

There are a number of broad principles, which are not gender-specific, but govern all leadership in the local church. Reviewing these casts an important context for discussing leadership and women.

1. Leadership, regardless of gender, is character-based. Every leader at Grace serves based on godly maturity. Leadership is not about position or power. Leaders are gentle in spirit, humble and service-oriented.
2. The final authority of the local church rests with the Elders. Any leadership, regardless of gender, which flows from this authority, is, by definition, acceptable, godly and edifying to the body. Grace asks that the Body and all leaders submit to, and follow the elders.
3. Leadership in the church is rooted in godliness in the home. The proving ground of qualification for leadership is not the marketplace but the family. Both men and women leaders in the church must fulfill their prospective roles at home.
4. Pastoral and life-oriented ministry brings unique relational temptations in cross gender situations. Therefore, generally, men should minister to men, women to women, and couples to couples. Organizational and team-based opportunities where men lead women or women lead men are expected but should be approached with wisdom and maturity.

With increasing regularity, Grace is asked about how it specifically views women in leadership. This is a legitimate question because gender roles have never changed more rapidly inside, and outside, the church than in the last three decades.

The easiest way for churches to answer this question is to take one of two extreme positions: women cannot serve in any leadership capacity; or women can serve in any leadership position. We don't think either one of these accurately reflects the teaching of the Bible or our attempt to practice it. What follows is our current thinking on this issue. It is necessarily short, designed to describe what actually happens at Grace rather than giving a full discourse of the matter.

The Bible teaches, and Jesus affirms, the equality of status and value of both genders. Salvation, maturity, and gifting know no gender bias. There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. In this regard women are encouraged to function widely at Grace; leadership included. In keeping with this understanding, women serve at just about every level of Grace's ministry life. We would not be who we are without their incredibly valuable contributions.

However, the church of Jesus Christ is not genderless. God did not make men and women interchangeable. Even a cursory reading of the Bible reveals that God asks different things of men and women. Men are commanded to love and lead their families, while wives are asked to respect and respond to their husbands (Ephesians 5). Adam was created first, then Eve for him, the Patriarchs were all men, the Judges were all men except Deborah, the Prophets were all men, Jesus chose 12 male apostles, the authors and church planters of the New Testament were all men, and Elders of local assemblies were always men. Generally, the pattern reflected in the majority of passages is that men should lead and women follow.

There are exceptions, including Miriam, Deborah, Lydia, Mary, and Priscilla. When specific situations call for it, God may operate in a manner that best helps the situation, but these exceptions do not negate the general pattern. So, our goal at Grace is to create an environment which adopts the general pattern of men leading, and embraces the particular situations where women can, should, and do lead.

We firmly believe that there are more situations where the church benefits from the leadership gifts of women than there are prohibitions against it. Grace believes that elders and teaching pastors should be men in keeping with I Timothy 2:12, where Paul "does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over men." We approach other leadership opportunities on a case-by-case basis.