FEB Central's Application of our Complementarian View of Men and Women in Ministry

SUMMARY:
We at FEB Central believe that Scripture is our final authority for faith and practice. Because of that conviction, we want to clearly express what we believe the Bible teaches about men and women serving together in the life of the local church.

From the beginning, God created humanity as male and female. Men and women are equal in both creation and redemption, equally bearing God's image. At the same time, God has designed us to serve together in complementary and diverse ways that display His wisdom, strengthen His church, and advance His mission in the world.

Our desire is not merely to define roles but to celebrate God's good design. Healthy churches flourish when men and women serve side by side in a Christ-like manner, each making distinctive contributions unique to their gender for the building up of Christ's body. The New Testament paints a compelling picture of brothers and sisters partnering together in gospel ministry, encouraging one another, serving one another, and pointing others to Jesus Christ.

As a Fellowship region, Complementarianism remains one of our shared theological convictions. Our position is in concert with Conservative Evangelical affirmations such as the Danvers Statement (first published in 1988). While we acknowledge that there are a variety of applications and expressions of Complementarianism, we are united in affirming that Scripture has called biblically qualified men to be the primary leaders in the church. This means that the office and function of Elder is reserved for qualified men. We believe the New Testament consistently entrusts the governing and doctrinal oversight of the local church to the Elders. This responsibility is not a statement of greater value or spiritual superiority. Rather, it reflects God's ordering of leadership within His church, just as different members of the body fulfill different functions while sharing equal importance.

God has called both men and women to meaningful and indispensable ministry partnership throughout the church. We affirm that God has generously poured out His Spirit on both men and women, equipping every believer with spiritual gifts and grace for the work of ministry. Every member of Christ's body has a vital role to play in fulfilling the Great Commission. The church is healthiest when every believer is encouraged, equipped, and empowered to lovingly serve the body and is mobilized for mission, according to God's unique design and distribution of His grace.

Throughout Scripture, we see women making significant contributions to God's mission: Priscilla helped instruct Apollos; Phoebe faithfully served the church; Lydia opened her home

for the advancement of the gospel; Euodia and Syntyche laboured alongside Paul in ministry. These examples and others remind us that faithful service is never limited by role or position but is strengthened through intentional partnership and collaboration.

We reject every distortion of Complementarianism that abuses women, or that diminishes, marginalizes, or suppresses women's unique contributions to the ministry of the church. Such attitudes contradict both the example of Christ and the teaching of Scripture. Healthy biblical leadership is marked by humility, sacrificial service, and genuine love. In the New Testament, leadership is primarily expressed not through position, power, or personality, but through godly example and trust. The relationship between men and women in the church is best understood, not through hierarchy, but through the family language of the New Testament—we are brothers and sisters united in Christ, serving together for His glory.

In summary, we call our churches to appoint only qualified men as Elders and Lead Pastors, while intentionally identifying, developing, and deploying gifted women in every area of ministry that aligns with these biblical convictions. This includes teaching, discipleship, prayer, worship, evangelism, mercy ministry, missions, hospitality, non-Elder leadership, and countless other opportunities to build up the church and reach the lost.

WHAT WE ARE SAYING:

- When God created man and woman, He created them equally to represent and reflect Him to the created order. (Genesis 1:26-28)
- Men and women are created to be heirs together of God's grace of eternal life. (Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7)
- Men and women equally receive the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts to fulfill the Great Commission and to be salt and light in the world. (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor 12:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10)
- Men and women each make diverse and unique contributions to God's kingdom work and in bringing the gospel to the world. According to the Bible, these contributions are different but complementary, similar to how our Triune God manifests God's unity in diversity in the world. (Genesis 2:18-24; Matt 19:1-12; Romans 12:3-8)
- While God's Word affirms our equality as men and women, it is clear that He distinguishes between the two sexes as seen in the created order and in the specific roles within the church. (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 11:1-12)
- The role/office of the Elder and, in particular, the overall responsibility and functions of teaching and governance of the congregation, are limited to biblically qualified men. (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; cf. 1 Timothy 2:12-13, Luke 6:12-16)
- Beyond this limit of the Elder role, women should be encouraged, equipped and empowered to serve alongside their brothers in Christ in the work of the gospel and to have a meaningful and significant voice in the ministry of the church. (Romans 16:1-15; Acts 21:8-9; 1 Corinthians 11:5; Acts 18: 24-26; Philippians 4:2-3)
- We assert that there are two official offices of the local church: the oversight office of Elders, and the support office of Deacons. Only the Elders' office is limited to biblically qualified men. The Deacons' office may include both men and women. If you translate

the "women" of 1 Timothy 3:11 as the wives of deacons, the implication is that wives are at least involved with the deacons in the functioning of the office. (Note: If a church presently has Deacons functioning in an Elders/oversight role, then it would not be appropriate to have women Deacons. (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13)

WHAT WE ARE **NOT** SAYING:

- That men have more worth because of their unique calling to serve as Elders of the church. *(No man or woman has greater significance in the church because of particular gifts or their unique calling from God.)*
- That the fall created the diversity of roles between men and women. *(They were instead instituted by God in His original order and design of creation.)*
- That women are subject to the leadership and authority of all men. *(The Bible clearly shows that outside of the Elder leadership context in the church, men and women serve equally together as brothers and sisters, united in Christ.)*
- That submission in the home and church means that women are inferior. *(Submission is modelled and celebrated in the Godhead where there is willing submission among equals.)*
- That women cannot express leadership in the church. *(Women can and should be used by God, exercising influence in many different ways under the umbrella of the Eldership office similar to how wives express leadership in the home under the overall leadership of their husbands.)*
- That there is a singular way to apply Complementarianism uniformly in every culture. *(Different settings and cultures will require nuanced and discerning application of Complementarianism in both marriage and the church.)*
- That we are overturning local, biblical church autonomy through these statements. *(We believe each church will need to apply these principles of Complementarianism in a way that is consistent with their specific and legal church governance policies and procedures.)*
- That Complementarianism is a required doctrine for salvation. *(We do not believe that it is a first-level truth related to orthodoxy but rather is a second-level truth significant to local church ministry and church partnership.)*

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US AS A REGION:

- Complementarianism is a beautiful gift from God in which He accomplishes His purposes of unity and health in His Kingdom work through a diversity of roles and functions. A small part of Complementarianism is about the limits of women in the ministry of the church. Most of this teaching concerns the unity, wholeness, and flourishing of the church, as brothers and sisters in partnership on mission for the gospel. We would encourage our FEB Central churches to celebrate the whole counsel of God in relationship to men and women in ministry, and to embrace equality and diversity in equal measure.

- There is a clear limitation in Scripture for ministry related to women in the church, and that is the office of Elder. For our FEB Central churches, this means that the Lead Pastor and the office of Elder are limited to biblically qualified men (we see the Lead Pastor as automatically a staff Elder). A woman may not serve as an Elder or carry out the functions of an Elder. The functions of an Elder relate to oversight, governance and biblical preaching ministry to the whole church. Practically, this would mean that a woman should not be

part of the regular preaching ministry to the whole church. And, regardless of title, the formal office of oversight of the whole church is for qualified males only. (The Elders may ask a woman, on a particular occasion, to speak to the gathered church under their authority. Historically we have not considered a church to be "offside" if the Elders ask a woman to speak once or twice a year.)

- In our FEB Central Region, the term "Pastor" historically (under the Pastor/Deacon model) has referred to someone who is an Elder. In more recent years with more churches adopting the multiple Elder model, this term has been used in a variety of ways to include those who are Pastor/Elder and also those who shepherd or oversee a particular area of ministry (equating the term "Pastor" with gifting or role). To reduce confusion and in light of our history, FEB Central encourages our churches, to use the title "Pastor" to refer to those functioning as staff Elders. If churches still choose to use the title as gifting or role, then we ask that they ensure that there is a clear distinction from the role that carries the functions of Eldership including spiritual oversight of the whole congregation and the preaching ministry.

- Outside of the context of the office of Elders, FEB Central will not create a list of specific responsibilities and titles that churches should or should not use related to women in ministry. This falls under the autonomy of the local church. It will be up to the congregations and leaders of our churches to establish the appropriate boundaries in their individual church ministry, within our stated Complementarian position. We would encourage as much freedom and liberty as possible (as the New Testament does) to ensure both the spiritual thriving of women and the advancement of the mission of the gospel. We must also recognize that there will be many expressions of leadership, biblical instruction and influence that will be done by the mobilized body of Christ, under the umbrella of the Elders' leadership. This means that many of the expressions of Complementarianism in individual churches will be dependent on their history, culture, polity, and policies. For example, larger churches may have many staff members who are not serving as Elders, but who serve in leadership roles and who have significant teaching responsibilities within specific areas of ministry.

- While we acknowledge that Complementarianism is not a doctrine of orthodoxy, we do believe it is an important teaching for the unity, partnership, and missional health of our churches and our movement. For this reason, we ask our FEB Central churches to comply with our Complementarian position or reconsider their membership within our Fellowship. Likewise, we also ask our churches who want an application of this teaching that is more rigid and uniform than we have outlined to respect the unity of our churches and avoid divisive behaviour and the nurturing of factions within our movement. In both situations above, our FEB Central ministry team, representing our churches, will seek to encourage and persuade those who are struggling with compliance. After an appropriate process, if there is unwillingness or failure to comply, according to our by-laws, the FEB Central ministry team will take appropriate action to ensure the unity and health of our region of churches.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

As it relates to the teaching of men and women and service in the local church, it is our desire, as God's people, to be committed to the whole counsel of God. We will seek to simultaneously stress the Bible's teaching on the equality of men and women while also underscoring the complementary and diverse roles God has given them. This commitment to the fullness of Scripture means we will define and celebrate the truth of submission and headship from God's perspective, not from our culture's. Submission is a beautiful gift from God to express our faith in Him and our love toward others. Women are called to willingly submit themselves to their husbands and in the church as part of their greater submission to Christ. Husbands and Elders are not called to demand submission to their leadership but rather to follow Christ's example and lay their life down in sacrificial love and service, providing for and protecting those under their care. They lead, not by power or position, but by example and trust.

The two truths of equality and diversity must be held together in a beautiful tension as we do with many other teachings of Scripture. This struggle for balance in our view of men and women is like the counterbalancing of truth that occurs with all sound doctrine. Illustrations of these complementary truths in Scripture include divine sovereignty and human responsibility, love and justice, immanence and transcendence, etc. One way to relieve the tension between the two doctrines is to delete or minimize one aspect of the truth, but this destroys the beauty of what God intends. It is easier to do away with the teaching of either male leadership or gender equality, but in either case we would satisfy our minds at the expense of the other side of an important biblical truth.

There is a deep, underlying unity which coexists with a diversity of function based on God's created design of male and female. The challenge in the church has been the equal and simultaneous embrace of these two truths. Some have focused on one at the expense of the other. To take one and not the other is to distort the whole counsel of God and His design for flourishing in His Kingdom. If you will, it is like trying to fly a one-winged plane; it cannot be done. We must hold them together for God's glory and our good.

Our prayer is that every church in our Fellowship would be known for raising up humble, godly Elders while cultivating an environment where gifted women and men flourish together in ministry. As we faithfully steward God's gifts together, we believe the church will more clearly display the beauty and majesty of our triune God and more effectively accomplish the mission of proclaiming the gospel to our world.