“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”
– Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)

Dear brothers and sisters,

The following is a letter that the FEB Toronto Association Executive Committee sent to the churches of FEB Toronto on Friday October 2. We are sharing it more broadly in FEB Central in the hope that it will add constructively to the conversations being held within our Fellowship regarding complementarianism. A few small errors and typos have been fixed in this version of the letter, but besides those small changes, the original letter is here presented in its entirety.

Warm greetings from the members of the FEB Toronto Association Executive Committee! By now, you hopefully have had a chance to read the Fellowship’s Complementarian Congruence Progress Report which was sent out on September 30. This report included a proposed new article on the church for our affirmation of faith and a proposed new bylaw on complementarianism. It also included a reminder to register for the online town hall meetings taking place on Tuesday October 6, from 1:00–2:30 pm.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold:
1) to thank the Complementarian Congruence Committee (CCC) for the work they have done
2) to raise concerns about the results of their work and to constructively contribute to the conversation.

It is crucially important that we take our unity in Christ seriously and obey the command to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.” We are thankful for the efforts of the CCC along those lines. We have heard from members of the committee that many prayerful, clarifying conversations took place that helped members of different convictions understand one another. For this we praise the Lord.

However, it seems that the result of the first year of the committee’s work is a compromised position that is not satisfactory and underlines the “meaningful gap” between the convictions held by the different sides of this conversation.[1]

The proposed article on the church includes an updated final sentence, which reads, “We believe that its officers are biblically qualified male pastors/elders, who oversee God’s flock, and deacons, who serve and support.” Our Fellowship is unified in reserving the office of elder/pastor for biblically qualified men. For this we are thankful. However, the meaningful gap becomes clear in the way this office is defined in the proposed bylaw. The bylaw, reaffirms that “the office of pastor/elder,” is “reserved for biblically qualified men.” But this *office* is distinguished from the *role* of “pastors who are not elders” for which no such restriction is given.

We fully affirm that men and women may shepherd in the local church in certain ways without holding the office of elder. However, recognizing a spiritual gift in an individual is not the same

[1] The phrase “meaningful gap” is used in the report itself on page 4.

as giving that individual a title in the church. We would hope that churches in our Fellowship that give individuals the title of pastor would at least ensure that these individuals fit the qualifications for elder laid out in the New Testament, even if they are not formally recognized as elders in the church. This is particularly important if these individuals are functioning in such a way that the congregation will see them as those who teach and exercise authority in the church. In contrast to this hope, the proposed bylaw puts no restriction on preaching. While we do not hope to see preaching restricted to those who hold the office of elder, we are convinced that the task of preaching in the gathered worship service must be restricted to godly men. However, as it stands, the result of this proposed bylaw would be that churches are permitted to have women as pastors who preach in the church, as long as they are not given the office of elder. We see this as a clear violation of the command given in 2 Timothy 2:12 “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man” (ESV).

To put it succinctly, the proposal appears to leave room for the very practices that prompted the concerns raised last year at FNC 2025, rather than clearly addressing them.

As we have said, we are thankful for the work that the CCC has put into these proposals, seeking to maintain the unity of the Fellowship, but we do not find the results of their effort at all satisfactory and do not believe they will bring unity. They rather seem to ignore the meaningful gap in convictions, which will only lead to further division down the road. We are further concerned that some may read the article on the church from the affirmation of faith without the clarification from the bylaw and therefore miss what the result of these proposals will be.

To their credit, the Fellowship National Council flagged some of these same concerns and “unanimously agreed further discussion was needed.” It is our hope that this letter can contribute to that further discussion and encourage other Fellowship pastors to bring their convictions to the town hall meetings on October 6 and to the National Conference on November 2-4.

In that spirit, we propose that the article on the church include more details about the nature and function of the office and role of pastor/elder/overseer. Further, we propose that the bylaw article be amended in two ways: first, to clearly reserve the office of pastor for biblically qualified men, whether or not they are recognized as elders at a particular church and second, to restrict women from preaching. Our proposed changes are outlined below.

> **Article on the Church**
> We believe in the universal church, the Body of Christ, comprised of all true believers in heaven and on earth, which is expressed on earth in local churches. We believe a properly ordered local church consists of believers, baptized by immersion upon their confession of faith, who have been called out from the world, separated to the Lord Jesus; and voluntarily associated for the ministry of the word, the mutual edification of its members, the propagation of the faith, the observance of the ordinances, and the doing of good works. We believe local churches are self-governing bodies responsible for exercising their God-given gifts, precepts and privileges, and implementing their

Spirit-guided decisions and directions under the lordship of Christ, the Head and Chief Shepherd of the church. We believe that its officers are ~~biblically qualified male pastors/elders, who oversee God's flock, and deacons, who serve and support.~~
Elders - to which the biblical titles overseer and pastor also point, who must be biblically qualified men, recognized by the church for the oversight of the doctrine and discipline of the church and for the shepherding of the flock, particularly through the preaching of God's word in the gathered worship services of the church.
Deacons - who may be biblically qualified men or women, who serve and support in the ministries of the church.

Bylaw
Notwithstanding the provisions in 1.3(c), it accepts that the office of ~~pastor/~~elder in the church is reserved for biblically qualified men recognized by the church for oversight of the doctrine and discipline of the church; further, it accepts that the title of pastor is reserved for biblically qualified men, even if a particular local church separates the title from the office of elder; ~~notwithstanding that some churches may have pastors who are not elders;~~ further, it accepts that women are restricted from the task of preaching in the gathered worship service; further, it accepts that the office of deacon is open to biblically qualified males or females, provided they are engaged in ministries of service and support. It accepts that terminology and governance structures may vary in MEMBER churches, provided that oversight of the doctrine and discipline of the church remains with those men biblically qualified for the office of pastor/elder;

Definitions
~~Pastor/e~~Elder: Those who occupy the office of overseer of the local church's doctrine and discipline reserved for biblically qualified men, notwithstanding the provisions in 1.3(c).

Deacon: A person appointed to the office of exercising a ministry of service and support in the local church.

~~Pastor: According to the practice of some local churches, a person shepherding in the local church under the oversight of pastors/elders.~~

Preaching: The heralding of God's Word for God's people as the main teaching of a gathered worship service. Preaching is distinct from the giving of missionary updates, the sharing of testimonies, the sharing of encouragement or devotional thoughts, the reading of Scripture, praying, and the like.

It is our sincere hope that these suggestions will be helpful and clarifying so that we may move together in a more robustly complementarian direction.

In Christ,
FEB Toronto Association Executive Committee