

Creative Ways to Lovingly Invite and Receive the Input of Women Members Without Violating the Headship Principle

Pastor Dennis Broehm

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1. Introduction – Why Me?

The topic assigned to me some months ago presents one of the challenges to the ministry of our congregations in the next century. I would begin our discussion by saying that I did not volunteer for this assignment because I have some expertise in it. I too have had women angrily leave my office, accusing me of some form of arrogance when I insisted that God's principles are still applicable today. Thankfully this has happened only a very few times.

I have also had the opportunity of working with many dedicated, talented and God-fearing women who have agreed to abide by the Lord's direction. At first some of them did so with reservation. For others, it was a radical adjustment to their previous church experience and certainly to their experience in our society. As we studied the Word together and they witnessed the positive actions of the congregational leadership, they were reassured of God's wisdom in his role designations.

On every side there is the pressure to conform to the dictates of our society concerning the role of women in the church. Many mainline Christian denominations have already caved in to the pressure, opened the door and allowed the women to write their own job descriptions for involvement. There is no question that these women are talented, well educated and dedicated to their work in the church. When asked how they would reconcile the Word of God with the ordination of female pastors, they would speak freely of this being a new age in which we must find a new understanding of Paul's words. We must change our theology to keep pace with the changing regard for women in society. As a sidelight, a sad commentary on this misguided action is how often there is a reduced involvement of the men in these congregations. In fact some congregations are directed, funded and attended in large measure by women.

On the other side of the discussion is the traditionalist who remembers the day when men and women sat on separate sides of the church. If the women were involved in the church it usually had something to do with preparing and serving food, sewing something or caring for children. For them, the idea of extensive involvement of women in the church program causes some uneasiness. Some oppose it because of a genuine fear of overstepping the bounds of God's Word. Others are genuinely intimidated by the women. Others find it easier to not "rock the boat" and keep things as they always have been. After all we have operated this way for 75 years, why change now?

Like it or not the world has changed around us. Many of the women of our congregations now hold full time employment outside of the home. Whereas at one time this employment might have been limited to being secretaries, nurses or teachers. The women of the 1990's might manage a company, design nuclear power plants, sell merchandise over the internet, or perform orthopedic surgery. The women of our congregations are well educated, multi-talented and committed to their Savior. In addition we are blessed with a large number of widows who worship regularly, give freely of their wealth and pray for the health of their pastors. The Bible makes it clear that both men and women are created by God in his image. They have the same value in the eyes of God. The Father sent his Son for both of them. This value is established by the precious blood of Christ. They have equal status.

Paul's words to the Galatians make that abundantly clear - "*... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*". As children of God, we find that both men and women are gifted by the Holy Spirit to be able to serve the Lord and their fellowmen in many ways. Both have the privilege and responsibility to use their gifts to serve the Lord in a committed and faithful way. Yet as God has created them male and female, he has also assigned roles for service to them. As men and women carry out their roles to the glory of God, then God is worshiped, God's kingdom is enlarged and God's people are cared for. It is pursuing the development of the women's role that is our focus here.

II. The Place to Begin

To orient ourselves for this discussion let us briefly recall the Scripture passages that form the basis for our understanding of the role relationship of men and women in the church.

1 Cor. 11:3,8 - *3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is, God... 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man....*

This passage reminds us of the headship principle. Adam was created first and Eve from Adam. Adam is the head of his family. He is to have authority over his wife. A clear indicator of the type of authority is found in the Savior's relation to the Church. "*From Christ's example we learn that biblical headship is authority which is exercised in service, sacrifice and love and which is carried out with humility.*" (Brug, p. 2)

1 Cor. 14:34-35 - *As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

This verse speaks of the woman remaining silent and being in submission to the man in the church. "*To be in submission means to be obedient to some authority or to defer to the leadership of another.*" (Brug, p. 2) She expresses her willingness to abide by the headship of the man, by going along with his leadership. This is not a blanket condemnation of all speaking by women in the activities of the church. She certainly joins her voice in the worship of the congregation, or the singing of a choir. She may well teach in the Sunday School or share a morning welcome with arriving worshippers. Yet in the leading of the mixed assembly in worship or study, she is asked to conduct herself in quiet submission.

1 Timothy 2:11-13 - *11 A woman should learn in quietness and all submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*

Here Paul points to a key element in the discussion of roles. The woman is not to take authority over the man nor teach the men in the congregation in an authoritative way. The foundation of Paul's statement is the order of creation. Adam is created first and is appointed the head of his family. Eve is created as his helper and companion. This relationship was established by God on the sixth day of creation. When mankind fell into sin, Satan was determined to subvert this God-given order. In tempting Eve to doubt God's goodness, Satan led Eve to step out of her role. Adam also sinned as he failed to provide leadership for his wife. The pronouncements of God after the Fall detail the consequences of their sinful actions, while at the same time making it clear that the original role relationship would continue.

Sin caused the relationship of man and woman to be strained and filled with trouble. Eve would be tempted to step out of her God-given role to usurp authority and leadership from Adam. Adam would be tempted to allow her to do so, thinking that he was giving her what she really wanted and in the end handing over the difficult work of leadership for his own selfish gain.

How we use these principles and then draw specific applications from them will guide our thoughts here. Professor Brug included in his paper a series of nine points that relate to the formulation of applications. The entire list has been included at the end of this paper. Noteworthy points from the list would be the following:

- * We are not looking for loopholes in God's will.
- * Our intention is not to build fences to keep our women out.
- * We must not provide excuses to agree with society and disagree with Scripture.
- * This is not intended to be a power struggle between men and women.

God has given us principles, but He has not provided a detailed compendium of all the possible ways in which women may serve within the church. It would be unwise and impossible for us to compile such a list, given the varied situations within our various congregations. Our goal is to follow the principles, while at the same time apply them with love and consideration for the women in our congregation.

Early in my ministry in the South, one of our new pastors was having difficulty in his congregation. This congregation had proven itself to be a difficult group of people in the past. He asked for a conference paper on pastoral authority, because he felt that the people did not respect the office of the called minister. As we discussed the matter with him further, it became obvious that these people were not in wholesale rebellion against God's minister, but were reacting to the arbitrary and condescending way he had begun his ministry among them. He had done a poor job of gaining the people's trust and drawing them together as a congregational family. He was not leading them in a way that fostered a spirit of loving cooperation, It was not the office, but the implementation of his office that was causing him the problems.

As I consider this topic, I think of the words of our Lord Jesus, when he was asked by the Pharisees which commandment was the most important. Jesus narrowed it down to two:

LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND....LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF (Matt. 22:37,39)

We love God when we regard him as the most cherished part of our life. We love God when we worship Him and give him all the credit and honor for his blessings to our lives. We love God when we regard his Word and command above every other word and command and make it the guiding principle in our lives and in our church. We fail to love God when we compromise the standards of Scripture in an attempt to conform to our society. We fail to love God when our own desires and feelings take precedence over the will of God. The world is changing. People change. God's Word never changes, The second command is equally important that we love our neighbor. Our lives each day are filled with connection to God and association with the other

people whom God has created. As we know God's love in Christ, we are moved to share that love with others. Paul would tell us to consider others more important than ourselves and to be concerned for their welfare. We are our brother's keeper, as we encourage him to walk close to the Savior. Love for our neighbor leads us do all that we can for him to help him use his life to the glory and service of God.

These two points play heavily into our discussion. Love for God moves us to listen to his Word and formulate our practice in harmony with his principles. Love for our neighbor, or in this case, the women of our congregations moves us to work seriously and energetically to involve them in meaningful work in the Lord's kingdom.

III. Why make the effort to involve the women in our congregation?

The involvement of the women in our congregations in ways that fill God's designs and our women's needs, will take effort on our part. It would be easier to open the entire work of the church to the women. They could be elected to the church council, be ordained into the public ministry and lead the congregation in any way possible. Seminary enrollments in many church bodies have more women than men. Church Councils that elect women soon become increasingly filled by women leaders. It would be easier, because it would take no creative thought or careful development. But this would not be loving God and his Word. Even though these women have an unquestioned commitment to their Lord, the love of God's Word has been set aside by failure to observe his role designations. A much harder task will be to work creatively within the bounds of Scripture to find fulfilling involvement opportunities for our women.

The need to involve the women of congregations in a positive way begins with who they are. They are fellow saints and ambassadors of the Savior. They too have been charged with proclaiming the Word as witnesses and living to the glory of God in every aspect of their lives. They too are held to the standard of faithfulness in the use of their talents in the Kingdom. At times a woman, who raises a question about her role is viewed with suspicion, as though she were less spiritual than the woman who says nothing. Yet she may actually be expressing a legitimate concern about finding opportunities to use her gifts to serve the Lord Jesus.

We need to involve them because the work of the Lord in our world needs them. The church is not a place for complacent spectators, but for active participants. God fearing women provide a bold witness to the Savior, whether in their own families with their children, their unchurched husbands; or in their communities. As their faith is expressed through serving it holds tightly the gift of salvation and the freedom we have in Christ.

We need to involve them for the benefit of the whole congregational family and its overall service to the Lord. Our Lord has assigned works of service for us to do. The goal of the congregational family will be to involve all the parts of the body. Over half of those members are women, How often isn't it the widow bringing a gift to the Lord in memory of her husband that provides needed funding for special projects in the church. How often don't the women coordinate the meals and celebration that bring God's people together.

We need to involve them, because we do not live in a perfect world. Failing to provide opportunities for involvement will only serve to give the devil a foothold, so that his temptation to usurp authority will grow stronger. As a result of sin, we have divorced women, widowed women and women whose husbands are uninvolved, or spiritually dead. We will need to provide for them a primary avenue of contact to the workings of the church and all its business.

We also must be aware of the growing numbers of women who have experienced emotional and physical abuse, abuse of authority and wrongful use of headship at the hands of their husbands, fathers, church leaders or men in general. They have a love for the Lord, but practical experience has taught them to never again place themselves in a position to be hurt by a man. Making the effort to involve these women in a God pleasing way under leadership that is accountable and trustworthy, will not only produce a proper and peaceful relationship in the church, it will encourage them in their life of spiritual growth.

IV. Getting the right mind - Attitude

Years ago we needed to purchase carpeting for our small chapel in the South. One of the church council members went to get some carpet samples and came back with an assortment of colors and a recommendation for carpet in earth tone shades. As the discussion continued, we suggested that we ought to show the samples to the women of the congregation the following Sunday. The man who brought the samples disagreed and told us we would have less trouble if we didn't. We proceeded to show the samples the next Sunday. Nearly every woman chose red carpeting. We installed red carpeting in the chapel. Ironically, this man and his wife later left our church, not because of the carpeting, but because his wife no longer agreed with our doctrine of the role relationship of men and women in the church. How well do you suppose he was communicating with her at home???

The model for attitude toward others is presented by our Lord Jesus, whose life of service and self-sacrifice has provided everything for us that we will need for the rest of eternity. With Christ's attitude as our model, the male leadership of the Congregation must consider their own attitude toward the women.

The attitude begins with the pastor. Does he regard the women of his congregation as a gift of God to be nurtured? Or does the mention of the Ladies Aid meeting bring a sigh to the pastor's voice indicating that this is a part of the ministry to be endured rather than enjoyed? Does he look for ways to include the women in the church's work? Does he hold them in high regard and value their opinions? If he is condescending, lacking in empathy, or too busy to listen attentively, the openings for effective communication will be lost?

Is there a positive attitude toward the women of the congregation in general? Do we value them as a gift of God to the congregational family, just as a Christian wife and mother is a gift to the family at home? Is there a willingness on the part of the leadership to develop the variety of avenues for involvement? Or do they simply go about the business of council meetings, voters' meetings and worship services without giving much thought to it.

Does the congregation provide an atmosphere which allows women to ask hard questions about their roles, whether in Bible class or in the pastor's office, without fear of ridicule or being considered "less spiritual?" Does the congregation understand the roles of men and women from the Scriptures, or are they just going along because the pastor tells us what to do?

Is our leadership committed to the expansion of our congregational program in creative ways and in the process providing more opportunities for involvement? Or is the leadership intimidated by the women, some of whom may be more educated, earning more money and speaking more eloquently than they do?

The attitudes of the various levels of leadership will set the atmosphere for development within the congregation, This will determine whether they will be creative and thinking "outside of the box" or fall back to old, comfortable, traditional roles. The development of attitude begins and ends with Scripture study. Study of God's Word will increase understanding, empathy and motivation to put in the effort for development.

Attitude will govern our approach both to the women involved and to the task of providing the expansive structure for involvement. When the attitude of the leadership is one of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21), then there is a genuine empathy toward the women in the congregational family. Our women want someone to listen to them and take their comments and concerns seriously. They want to use their gifts for work that is challenging, meaningful and a genuine part of the church's mission. In many ways it follows the role relationship within marriage. When the male leadership displays a genuine love for their neighbor, in this case the women of the congregation, then the attitude of the women will include a respect for that leadership and a willingness to abide by God's design.

V. Control or Participation?

Do our women, as they grow in the Word of God, have a desire to lead the church or to participate in the life and ministry of the church? Because we live in a sinful world and our Old Adam always wants its own way,

there are abuses on both sides of this issue. Some women do want to lead and change the status quo. Their attempt to usurp authority must be confronted with God's law for the sin that it is. On the other hand, the male leadership has at times lacks the commitment to develop the program of ministry in order to provide more opportunities for participation in the work of the church. This is a sinful offense against an important part of the body of Christ.

With God-pleasing participation as the goal, we must begin by properly informing our women of what is happening within the congregational program. This has often not been done well. A major source of contention has been our male voters' assembly in the congregation and synod, I believe this practice to be in line with God's principles of headship and should be continued. The potential for debate within these meetings could easily compromise the authority structure and provide the temptation through debate and voting to usurp the authority of the man. The actions of calling pastors and teachers, dealing with church discipline and establishing policy for the church operation, would make this an assembly whose work is consistent with the role of the man. This is in line with God's instruction for headship.

I wonder if it is not the whole process of the voters' meetings that has raised concern, confusion and controversy. We have taken a stand as a church body against secret societies. Yet when the business before the voters' meeting is known only to those who are attending the meeting, the meeting itself takes on a secretive nature. When there is no advance information given, about the meeting, there is a sense of defensiveness both within the meeting and among those who are not attending it. When unknown issues are suddenly presented for consideration, there is hesitancy because such decisions are being made in behalf of the entire congregation and for which the entire congregation will become financially responsible.

The work of the voters' assembly ought to transparent. Everyone ought to know what is going on there, especially the women who do not have husbands attending. With the exception of occasional discipline matters concerning members or called workers, or the itemized details of a call list, all items on the agenda should be public knowledge. Advance information, opinion surveys and open forum meetings will be used to provide opportunities for thoughtful consideration by voters and opportunities for input by the women. Following the voters' meeting, reports and summaries of the business conducted should be communicated. I recently presented my voters' meeting report and a short summary of major business items to my ladies' group as part of their meeting.

The names of elders and council members should to published to all the congregation. These leaders will need to be approachable and responsible to bring comments of the women back to the meeting in an "unfiltered" form.

As we engaged our building project several years ago, we radically changed many features of our facilities and we continue to add a great deal to the program structure of our congregation. All of those changes were carefully laid out in many hours worth of information sharing. Comments of our women changed design features of our building. Other comments of the women were carefully considered, discussed with them, and rationale for change presented. In some instances, the end result was totally opposite of the women's original comments, but they were lovingly included in the discussion and I believe they grew in their trust of the leadership in their church.

I have often operated with a process that I call "thinking out loud". I might share an idea about something that we want to try and ask for input. I have often found that comments coming back from the women and others have shown either the strength or the weakness in the idea. Then I can modify it and bring it back again. I might share in March the plan to change the food procedure for the picnic in June. I take feedback and come back with the idea again in April. In May the Council sets the new procedure in place and in June the picnic happens without a problem. There were no surprises and everyone was "on board."

This process of leadership attempts to build a consensus among all the membership before a major project or change is pursued. If all the membership will be expected to support the matter with their prayers and dollars, then it is only right that they be able to offer comment before the final decision is made. The voters will then lead properly as they consider the majority opinion and proceed in a way that unites rather than divides the

congregation. If such consensus is not present, it would be far better to table the motion for future consideration.

As we work with a sense of transparency in our dealings, we take away the suspicions of hidden agendas in the church. We do not violate the Scriptural principles of male leadership by involving our women in the consideration of congregational business, leading up to the male voters actually making the final decisions. This in fact is good management practice by the leadership. We should take into account all the opinions and make use of all the gifts available to us as work to produce a positive, God-pleasing result. When that final decision does not "surprise" anyone, then a feeling of ownership, participation in the process, and support of the final decision is fostered.

For many women, the mere fact that they are heard and their comments are seriously considered is a positive form of involvement in the life of their church. As we create a two way communication with the women of the congregation, we are on the path to creative involvement.

VI. How can we accomplish a God pleasing involvement?

The congregational program of the year 2000 will be drastically different than the program of 1900. While we certainly disagree with the doctrinal and motivational aspects of the church growth movement, program diversity is one element that we can learn from them. One size does not fit everyone, While one worship service can bring all ages of worshippers into the presence of God, the same cannot be said of Bible class, recreational activities or fellowship dinners. As a diversified program appeals to individual interests, it will also provide increased opportunities for involvement. The Word is the power, but it can be presented in varied settings. Such a program of ministry that is regularly assessed, creatively expanded to match the needs and opportunities within the congregation and community, will engage the talents of our women. As the amount of kingdom work increases, we will be able to see our women applying their gifts to meaningful work for their Savior.

This involvement begins with an enthusiastic development of the Bible study opportunities within the congregation. As we gather the women for study of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will be guiding them toward God-pleasing service in the church. In Bible study, their concerns can be shared. Through Bible study, the Spirit will motivate them for service. A women's Bible study might be led by one or two women under the guidance of the pastor. Bible studies may gather women of similar life experiences, such as young mothers, widows, etc. One concern here will be dealing with the reality that the women of the church may be actively studying the Scriptures, while the men who are leading the church are not. The women may in fact be growing to a greater spiritual maturity than the men they follow. This places a serious responsibility on the male leadership to also be studying the Word. While the Church Council, Board of Christian Education and Board of Elders will be populated by men elected to a term of office by the voters' assembly, the Councilmen will serve as the chairmen of committees that are staffed by both men and women. This blending of men and women offers a larger group of potential committee members and along with new ideas, blends male and female ways of thinking in the planning process. The following is a list of possible committee and service groups within my own congregation where women are participating now or will be in the future:

Adult Education	Youth Ministry	Outreach/Evangelism	Worship
Fellowship (social not doctrinal)	Budget Development	Property Maintenance	
Communion Set-up	Altar Care	Video & audio Production	Greeters
Coffee Hosts	Pictorial Directory	Church Nursery	Counting Team
Mailing Team	Printing Team	Church Library	Computer Lab
Sunday School	VBS		
School Organizations - PTO, Athletic Boosters, Classroom assistance			

Ushering has traditionally been the work of the men of our congregations. While I do believe that this could be done by the women, as a support role, I also believe the tradition works well. I am hesitant to take something away from the men, just to involve women. This amounts to a quota system and solves nothing. The nature of men, and the temptation for them to step into the background, also demands that we, keep them involved, or they will slowly abdicate their responsibilities to the women. In the end we will accomplish nothing, because we have only replaced one with the other. Ushering also on occasion requires strength and the ability to deal with serious emergencies, such as someone collapsing during the service or an unauthorized person attempting to disrupt the service.

The music ministry of the church offers an extensive opportunity for women who are musically gifted. A listing might include: singing in Senior Choir or Treble Choir, directing choir, playing organ, singing of the psalms in worship, instrumentalists in worship, special concert presentations in worship, talent shows in the congregation.

Traditional women's activities such Ladies Aid, LWMS, Altar Guild, etc. continue to draw an older group of women to participate. There is need to explore the possibility of other women's gatherings that fit the schedule and needs of younger women. The annual women's retreats have drawn interest from a select group.

The creative involvement of women in the ministry of our churches is a process. Attitudes can open it up or shut it out. The atmosphere in which it takes place can make it a team focused development, or a competitive struggle. A proper regard for tradition tempered with creative thought will provide a gradual positive development, and a productive expansion of the congregational program. In the end may our work demonstrate our love for God and our neighbor.

VII. General Principles Concerning Applications

1. Christians who believe in the goodness of God's moral directives do not seek to stretch the outer limits of God's law. We should not be looking for loopholes in God's law or for subterfuges to evade the intent of God's law.
2. Christians do not want to build such a "fence around the law" that they deny women opportunities for service which the Lord permits.
3. Christians do not want to burden consciences unnecessarily by legalistic imposition of arbitrary applications of God's law.
4. Christians do not want to provide each other with conscience-soothing excuses for conformity to the standards of the world. We must beware of adopting the hermeneutical methods of negative higher criticism which searches for strange word meanings and obscure historical settings in order to evade the clear meaning of God's Word.
5. The church does not want to establish a detailed code of canon law which is binding on all Christians regardless of their local circumstances.
6. Because we live in a mobile society, a certain amount of mutually agreed-upon uniformity of practice is necessary to avoid confusion and offense among our members. Members of our congregations will experience less confusion if we develop carefully considered guidelines concerning practices among us. Great confusion will result "from everyone doing what is right in his own eyes."

7. Good hermeneutics requires that we base applications on principles derived from specific commands of Scripture, not from vague examples drawn from unclear incidents in Scripture.
8. Principles concerning the roles of women in the church must be derived from passages which are addressed specifically to this issue, not from passages that speak of the spiritual equality of men and women.
9. Christians should not approach this question as a power struggle between men and women, but as an attempt of all Christians to work together in service to the Lord in ways which will be in harmony with his will.

(Application of Principles: Application of the Scriptural Principles Concerning the Service of Women in the Church – Prof. John F. Brug, presented to the Minnesota District on April 24, 1990.)

VIII. Resources for Information

“Application of Principles: Application of the-Scriptural Principles -concerning the Service of Women in the Church” – Prof. John F. Brug, presented to the Minnesota District on April 24, 1990.

“The Role of Women in the Church - With Special Reference to Genesis 1-3” – Wayne Mueller, presented to the Metro South Pastoral Conference on September 15, 1980.

“The God Given Roles of Man and Woman in the Christian's Everyday Life” – David Kuske, March, 1994.

“Women's Call to Serve In the Church, the Home and Society” – Edward Fredrich III, presented to the Michigan District Pastor-Teacher Conference on June 15, 1977.

“The Roles of Men and Women in WELS-Lutherans For Life” – Edward Fredrich III, November 16,1985.

“The Role of Women in the Church” – Stephen Lawrenz, presented to the Mankato Pastoral Conference on December 7, 1976.

“Women in the Church: drawing the line between truth and tradition” – Daniel Leyrer presented to the WELS/ELS Pastor-Teacher Conference, Cannon Beach, Oregon, on October 10, 1991.

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