

From the Elders

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GLENWOOD CHURCH OF CHRIST / SPRING 2016

Statement of Purpose

This is part of the ongoing communication from the elders to the congregation. This document focuses on Glenwood's study of the role of women in worship and provides responses to a number of questions from the congregation. Although these have been answered orally in individual settings, this document provides the responses in writing.

These responses express the general sense of the elders and are intended to help you learn more about these issues and to encourage input from you.

Elders as leaders: Can't they decide?

Question: "I thought the elders were supposed to be our leaders. Why don't the elders just decide these issues and tell us what they have decided? How do elders make decisions?"

We could have decided this issue and saved us all a great deal of time. But this is not the way we've made decisions in recent history at Glenwood, and we do not believe this is the way to handle this important decision. While the elders realize they are ultimately responsible for spiritual oversight and leadership, we don't want to make decisions in an autocratic manner.

Rather than acting as a board of directors, the elders seek to be true spiritual leaders. We take this role very seriously. The elders have no desire to force decisions upon the congregation when members have not had an opportunity to consider the matters. The elders are Christians saved by the same grace that saves everyone else and feel there are congregational perspectives and opinions that are pivotal to the life of the congregation. For example, many activities and qualities of the Glenwood church are the result of congregational initiatives rather than elder initiatives. In fact, over the course of the last decade, many members of Glenwood have petitioned the elders to study this issue in a deeper way. Our upcoming study comes, therefore, as a result of careful consideration and prayer from the Glenwood eldership as well as from the

heartfelt requests of our family members who would prefer us to reconsider the role of women at Glenwood.

Furthermore, we believe it would be an abdication of leadership not to involve the congregation in decisions. All Christians, not just elders, are responsible for trying to live as God's people through prayer, study and growth. Christianity has both a personal and a community aspect—and both must be healthy. We believe that personal considerations by every member of the congregation (including ourselves) are absolutely necessary in a healthy community and, in fact, are expected by God.

Why discuss an issue that could be divisive?

Question: "Glenwood seems to be healthy and a church at peace. Why are we discussing an issue that could divide our church?"

Every important issue should be considered—even if the issue is controversial. The history of the church, including the Glenwood congregation, is that people have tried to seek God's will in their lives personally and as members of a Christian community. Glenwood is, indeed, healthy and strong. New families are being added continually, and many ministries are having great effect in our city and around the world. Lives are being changed within the congregation and outside it.

A vibrant congregation like Glenwood should welcome the exploration of new ways that God might work. Glenwood has never been afraid to ask questions about God's will in any circumstance. Such seeking is a part of being a healthy and growing church.

This issue is not being driven by one person or a small group of people. It is important for all of us to gain a proper perspective. It is true that some people feel strongly about this—on both sides of the issue. This is precisely why we call this a disputable matter; there are differing opinions about it. Therefore, we believe it requires careful study and prayer by all.

Has a decision already been made?

Question: "If the elders have already reached a consensus, why does the church need to study it more? Has a decision already been made?"

No decision has been made about changes in our worship assemblies regarding the role of women.

Glenwood may go through this process and make some changes, or we may go through this process and make no changes. In any event, we will all be better informed concerning these matters. Regardless of the outcome, we understand that some people may dispute the final result.

At this stage, however, we are still in the process of working toward a decision, and we want as much input as possible from all members of the Glenwood family. The special classes we will have will be designed for the purpose of sparking thought, discussion and prayer. As we seek to understand this issue and make a decision, we want all our efforts to be guided by study and prayer.

The elders have drawn a conclusion after studying the issue over the past two years. During a worship assembly in February 2016, we announced this conclusion to the congregation: We believe Scripture does allow increased roles for women in the worship assemblies at Glenwood. Our study over this next season will help us determine as a congregation what changes, if any, that conviction might lead us toward.

Understanding and sensitivity

Question: “What would the elders like to see in terms of sensitivity and understanding before, during and after a decision has been made?”

In any decision involving multiple points of view, we should remember that all of us are rescued people and saved by the blood of Jesus. It is wishful thinking to believe that everyone in the auditorium or in a classroom feels the same way about every item related to Christianity—or any topic. Our task is not to be alike but to be moving along together toward a fuller life with God. The Scriptures indicate we are in relationship with one another as brothers and sisters—not because we chose to be this way but because God set it up this way. The thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians describes how we are to treat one another. Communities of faith have always struggled with disputable matters.

The practical implications of a life of love mean that we are called to respond sometimes in a way that is not our first impulse. We are called to refrain from criticism when we feel like criticizing. We are called to be patient when we don’t feel like it. We are called to turn the other cheek when we feel like we should attack.

We must be sensitive to one another even though we might disagree over any number of specifics. We believe we can become quick to listen and slow to anger. We can disagree, but we should disagree with a spirit in which love reigns—and with our eyes always focused on the greater good.

Why should I have to change?

Question: “The women’s ‘role in public worship’ thing just seems to be a few women wanting to be out front. I am perfectly content with my role as a Christian woman. Why should I have to change?”

This is an interesting and very reasonable question. The simplest answer is that no attempt is being made to question what anyone is already doing. There's no suggestion that you, as a Christian woman, have been doing something wrong—or that you're not doing something you should have. The question is this: "Does Scripture permit additional roles in public worship for women, and would implementation of those activities aid the growth of the body of Christ?"

The mission of the Glenwood church is to graciously help a fallen world stand up again; we are all dedicated to this mission. Many in the congregation believe that the Scriptures are much more open with reference to what a woman can do during public worship than what we have permitted in past years. So this is a relevant issue, not one driven by a few people. It is an issue worthy of in-depth study.

The question, though, is one of permission—not obligation. There are many men who are not comfortable doing some public worship activities. No one forces them into a public role. They have the option; that's all. What some Christians are asking is whether the Scriptures allow women to participate if they desire. They want to know whether women can use their spiritual gifts in this way.

Guiding principles of the Women's Roles Task Group

- Preserving unity within the body
- Glorifying God
- Seeking to understand and follow God's will on this issue
- Seeking balance of different positions and viewpoints
- Creating a climate in which members will interact in a prayerful, submissive, patient, and respectful attitude
- Providing each member a chance to speak and be heard on the issue
- Emphasizing a scriptural focus to the study