



Trenton Church  
of Christ

January 5, 2012

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

Over the past few years, there have been many discussions in this congregation about the role of women in the public worship services. Traditionally in churches of Christ, men have filled all of the “up front” and speaking roles in the Sunday morning assembly. The reason that has been given for this is the principle of male spiritual headship, which is taught in passages such as Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Timothy 2:8-13.

The shepherds of the Trenton Church of Christ have consistently believed and taught that God calls men to step up and lead in word and by example, both in the family and in the church. We fully support efforts like the current group of men who have signed the “Courageous” resolution, pledging to fulfill their responsibilities for setting the spiritual tone in their marriages and families. We understand that the concept of male spiritual headship is not considered politically correct in today’s world, but we do believe it is Biblically correct and we have no intention to abandon this ideal.

However, we do not believe that every speaking role in the public assembly is a position of spiritual headship. For example, women’s voices have been heard in song during our times of worship for many years. Also, at Trenton, women have sometimes made announcements, reported on mission trips and reported on their areas of ministry, all in the public assembly. Since these were done at the request of the church leadership, we do not believe any of this has violated the principle of male spiritual headship.

In particular, there are several regular roles in our public worship that we do not believe involve the exercise of any spiritual headship, as long as they are done under the direction of the church’s leadership: welcoming the congregation and guests, reading Scripture, giving a personal testimony, making an announcement, participating in a skit or drama, singing on a microphone, and passing communion trays.

For instance, in the reading of Scripture, the true headship is being exercised by the Holy Spirit, who inspired the words. The reader—whether male or female—is merely a mouthpiece for those words.

Nor is spiritual headship involved in the welcoming of the congregation, since its purpose is merely to call the church family together and provide some necessary information, especially to guests. The same would apply to making an announcement. The other roles mentioned above are clearly positions of service that do not involve the exercise of spiritual headship.

We have spent much time in prayer over this issue, and we believe that God has been faithful in answering those prayers as we have sought his direction and guidance. Accordingly, in the near future, you will occasionally hear female voices welcoming the church at the beginning of our services, and you will sometimes hear women reading Scripture and fulfilling the other roles listed above. We are doing this because we believe that we must speak where the Scriptures speak and be silent where they are silent. We will continue to believe and teach the principle of male spiritual headship. However, we do not believe we have the right to make rules where God has made none, and we can find no justification in Scripture for prohibiting these activities to women.

In implementing this, we understand that there are two groups toward which we need to exercise sensitivity. Some of you have grown up in more traditional churches and are unaccustomed to hearing women's voices in these roles. We understand that this change will be a stretch for you. We appeal to you to search the Scriptures and we are prepared to study these matters with you. We promise you that the implementation of this new policy will be gradual and occasional, especially at first.

There is another group among us whose understanding of Scripture leads them to believe that several other functions should be opened to women as well. Some in this group may also have a view of male spiritual headship that differs from ours. To this group, we want to say that we respect your study of God's Word and your dedication to Jesus. But in the interest of the unity of this body, we ask you to voluntarily submit yourselves to the shepherds' understanding of this teaching. We ask you to be patient with us, especially when you feel that the pace of implementation is hopelessly slow. We can only move at the speed and direction that we feel God calls us.

We are certainly willing to study the Bible with you as well in the interest of our mutual growth in understanding God's will. We have included at the end of this letter a list of relevant Scripture passages that we prayed for revelation about as we listened for God's direction during the past year in studying this issue.

We ask all of you to join with us in prayer that we may be faithful to God's will for us as we encourage each other to use the gifts he has given us for our mutual edification.

Sincerely,

Terry Hampton, Mike Mazmanian, Al Petri and John Vandenberg

The elders of the Trenton Church of Christ

The following Scripture references were key passages that the shepherds considered during our study of the role of women in worship at the Trenton Church. We offer them here for your own personal study and prayer as well.

**Genesis Chapters 1-3**

**Ephesians 5-6**

**1 Peter 3**

**1 Corinthians 7**

**1 Corinthians 11**

**1 Corinthians 14**

**1 Corinthians 16:19**

**Colossians 3:18-19**

**1 Timothy 2**

**1 Timothy 5:3**

**Titus 2:3-5**

**Galatians 3:28**

**Romans 16:1-5**

**John 4:1-42**

**Acts 18:1-3, 18-22, 26-28**

**Proverbs 31**