



## **Bishop's position paper on the role of women in the Armidale Diocese**

**Rod Chiswell - August 2024**

This paper comes in response to the Synod motion passed in September 2023 requesting that, “The bishop consider developing a Diocesan statement on the role of women in the Armidale Diocese.” Having discussed this with the archdeacons I have decided not to develop a diocesan statement, but rather a bishop’s position paper. And so, this paper represents the position I hold as the Bishop of the Armidale Diocese. As such, it is not intended as a prescriptive paper that presumes to tell Vicars how to run their parishes, but rather to inform decisions made at a diocesan level regarding the best way to support and promote the ministry of women within the diocese.

## **1. Theological Assumptions**

There are a number of theological assumptions that are foundational to arriving at a position on how men and women can partner together in ministry to build the church.

### **a) Regarding God.**

God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world and he sustains the world and all that lives in it (Revelation 4:11). He is a triune relational God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who has always existed in perfect relationship (Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Peter 1:2). He is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful) and omnipresent (present everywhere at the same time). As the creator and sustainer of the world he is the owner of it all. In Psalm 24:1-2 we read, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” As the one who made, owns, and sustains the world, he has the full right to exercise his rule over the world. He does this by his authoritative word. He is a God who spoke to bring the world into being (Genesis 1) and who continued to speak in human history, first through the prophets, then by his Son Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-2), and then through the apostles. Which brings us to the Scriptures.

### **b) Regarding Scripture.**

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament as we have them in the Bible, are the inspired word of God and authoritative in all matters relating to Christian life and doctrine. Jesus affirmed the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures (Matthew 5:17-19, 19:4-6, 26:24; John 5:35), as did the Apostle Paul. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we read, “All Scripture is God breathed and is

useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The Apostle Peter also affirmed the divine origin of biblical teaching (2 Peter 1:21; 1 Peter 1:10-12) and, by his manner of quoting, so does the writer to the Hebrews (Hebrews 1:5-13). Since the apostles’ teaching about Christ is itself revealed in God-taught words (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), the church rightly regards authentic, apostolic writings as completing the Scriptures. Already Peter refers to Paul’s letters as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16), and Paul is apparently calling Luke’s gospel Scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18, where he quotes the words of Luke 10:7. The conclusion that the Scriptures as we have them now in the Bible, are the inspired word of God, means that no part of them can be ignored, but rather we seek to obey them. There are some passages in the Scriptures concerning the roles of women and men that many will be tempted to ignore due to pressure from a culture that no longer considers God’s word authoritative. But these must be grappled with if we wish to live lives of obedience to Jesus in accordance with God’s word.

### **c) Regarding men and women.**

God made human beings in his image as the pinnacle of his creation. Male and female, he created them. Made in the image of God they were equal in His sight. God commanded the man and the woman to reproduce and to rule the world together under his authority (Genesis 1:26-28).

In Genesis 2 we discover that the man and the woman, though created equal, were also created different from one another. The man is created first and put in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:7;15). The woman is then

created from the rib of Adam, “taken out of the man”, to be a suitable helper for Adam to help him in the work given to him (Genesis 2:20-22). In this, God establishes the creation order of male headship. According to Adam, the result was very good – the woman was the perfect complement to the man (Genesis 2:23). They would do the work God had given them together, Adam as the appointed leader, Eve as the suitable helper. God’s good design in the complementarity of the man and the woman are the reason given for the marriage that results and is described in Genesis 2:24, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” This intention of God regarding marriage is affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19. When responding to a question about divorce, Jesus said, “Haven’t you read... that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So, they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together let man not separate.” In saying these things Jesus underlines the goodness of heterosexual marriage and its importance in God’s plan and purpose for humankind. Throughout the Old Testament, the human marriage relationship is used as a picture of God’s relationship with his chosen people Israel. Likewise in the New Testament, when we come to Ephesians 5, we see that the marriage between a man and a woman is to be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church, “Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now also as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” There follows

instructions for both the husband and the wife for how that should work out on the ground. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy... For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” This passage forms part of the framework for understanding the biblical authority structure both within marriage, and within the church when it comes to the roles of men and women.

Now you may be wondering how this theological background impacts single people. Of course, they are also created in God’s image, male and female. They too are members of earthly and church families. They too are given the mandate to rule the world under God’s authority. And they too fit into the authority order God established in creation. Both married and single men and women are given the further mandate by Jesus to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:16-20). However, the way single people carry out those mandates will differ from married people in that they don’t carry the same relational responsibilities. The Lord Jesus was not married and neither was the Apostle Paul. Indeed, Paul saw being single as advantageous in enabling him to get on with gospel ministry (1 Corinthians 7). The single life demonstrates to the world that Christ is enough, and being married is not essential to fulfil our purpose of bringing glory to God. In Romans 16 we see that Paul had many co-workers in gospel ministry. Some were single, others were married, but all were engaged in the work of reaching out with the good news of Jesus and building his

church. Similar observations can be made as we look at the growth of the early church in the book of Acts.

#### **d) Regarding sin.**

Understanding God's good design for the man and the woman in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 is foundational to the discussion at hand, but so too is what happened next in Genesis 3. In this account the authority structure established in creation of God → man → woman → creature, is overturned. The serpent tempts the woman to doubt God's goodness and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve makes the decision to listen to the serpent and disobeys God by eating the forbidden fruit. Adam fails to lead, by failing to teach and live according to God's word. Sadly, he remains silent as his wife eats the forbidden fruit and then follows suit by eating also. And so, sin enters the world, the God given order is overturned and the consequences begin to unfold. The relationship of mankind with God becomes one of shame and guilt, the relationship between the man and the woman becomes one of blame and power struggle, and the relationship between humankind and creation becomes one of pain and hardship. Tragically, the consequences of the fall continue to be seen today in the ongoing rejection of God's rule by human beings. The result is ongoing strife at every level of human existence – from the high rates of marital breakdown and the growing problems of domestic violence, to full scale wars between nations, and the law sanctioned murder of vulnerable people. The account of 'the fall' also forms part of the framework for understanding the instruction of God's word with regard to the roles of men and women in the church.

### **e) Regarding salvation.**

According to God's word, 'the fall' continues to have its effect in the lives of all human beings. We are just like Adam and Eve in that all of us have rejected God's right to rule our lives and deserve his just punishment. The Apostle Paul puts it like this, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). However, the good news is that because of his great love for us, God sent his Son into the world: the man Jesus Christ. Jesus always lived under God's rule. Yet by dying in our place, he took our punishment and brought forgiveness (1 Peter 3:18). Of course, the good news doesn't finish with the death of Jesus, because the Scriptures tell us that on the third day God raised Jesus to life again and appointed him both ruler and judge. This means that Jesus has conquered death, now gives new life, and will return to judge (1 Peter 1:3; Acts 17:31). The great news of the Gospel therefore, is that those who come clean with God about their failure to treat him as God, can be fully forgiven now and assured of eternal life forever. The response to Jesus required to receive such a hope is repentance and faith. Repentance means turning away from ignoring Jesus, and agreeing to live with him as Lord in every part of life. Faith means asking Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life through his death and resurrection. Salvation therefore is a gift of God which comes to us by his amazing grace. We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). Furthermore, we who are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus, are rescued for a reason. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God, not by works so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created for good works in Christ, which

God has prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8-10). This means that every Christian is called to live a life of love for God and others by doing the good works God has rescued us to do.

**f) Regarding the church.**

The church exists in, through and because of Jesus Christ. The New Testament defines the church in terms of the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and patterns, through a relationship to all three persons of the Godhead, brought about by the mediatorial ministry of Jesus Christ. The church is seen as the family and flock of God, his Israel, the body and bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit who unites us to the Father and the Son. The New Testament assumes that all Christians will share in the life of a local church, meeting with it for worship (Hebrews 10:25), accepting its nurture and discipline (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1), and sharing the work of disciple making as we look forward to Christ’s return (Matthew 28:28-30). The church is described as the body of Christ, made up of many members (1 Corinthians 12). As members of the body of Christ we belong together. Each member of Christ’s body has been given gifts to serve the body and should use them to build Christ’s church (Romans 12:4-6). The lists of gifts given in the New Testament are many and varied. Some are general gifts: encouragement, generosity, service, leadership and showing mercy. Others are word gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The latter are given to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, becoming mature and Christlike to the glory of God (Ephesians 4:11-13).



## 2. Complementarianism and orderly worship in churches

With these theological assumptions in place, we are now in a position to examine some of the specific texts that inform the way Christian men and women can partner together in ministry to grow and build Christ's church. To begin, it will be helpful to define a term commonly used in discussing the matter at hand: complementarianism.

*Complementarianism is the conviction that men and women have been designed by God to be equal and distinct – and that our differences enable us to partner together in joyful service of God's kingdom and the local church.*

In this day and age such a conviction is not popular, since secular wisdom seems increasingly keen to erase any concept of difference between males and females. But for many, the complementarian conviction is important, because it is the position they have come to as a result of what they understand the Bible to be saying. A book that I have found particularly helpful in thinking through this position is "God's Good Design – What the Bible Really Says About Men and Women" by Dr Claire Smith. I commend that to you for a much fuller treatment than what I can give in this paper. Let us proceed then by looking firstly at some Bible passages that speak of order and restrictions in the gathered assembly. Then secondly at some Bible passages that look more at the activity of teaching one another in the life of the church more generally.

### **a) Passages that speak of order and restrictions in the gathered assembly.**

(1 Timothy 2:11-15 in the light of 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-38)

Every so often, when working through the Scriptures we encounter a passage that directly challenges our culture. In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 we read, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

To Twenty-first Century ears, such instruction may seem confronting and a number of questions spring quickly to mind: What does “quietness” mean? What does “full submission” look like? Why can’t a woman teach a man or assume authority over a man in the church setting? What does the creation account have to do with all of this? Is Paul saying that women are more gullible than men? Do women actually have to bear children to be saved? Let’s take it a phrase at a time.

- **What are women to do?**

What are women to do according to verse 11? They are to learn. But how are they to learn? In quietness and full submission. Submission is a voluntary and willing acceptance of the authority of another. In the context, the submission required of women is when learning in the mixed Christian gathering. Since not all men have responsibility to teach and lead the congregation, Paul is not saying that all women are to submit themselves to all men, all the time. Rather, women are to be submissive in church, when the Bible teaching is happening, to what is taught and those men who are teaching it. So, women are to come to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel – but they are to come to that knowledge in a certain way. They are not to challenge or dispute what is taught in the

mixed gathering. They are to have minds willing to learn and hearts ready to obey. So, their manner of learning, as with their manner of dress and conduct generally (1 Timothy 2:9-10), is to display a quiet decorum. To put this in the larger frame of life in the church, it's important to remember that men who are not teaching elders are also to submit to the authority of those who teach the Scriptures to them as well (Hebrews 13:17). Now, following this instruction on what women are to do when teaching occurs in the mixed church gathering comes instruction on what they are not to do.

- **What women are not to do.**

In verse 12 we read, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." The apostle Paul tells us here that women are not to, "teach or to assume authority over a man." It would seem that authority and teaching go hand in hand. Now this may be hard to hear, but it's not hard to understand. Claire Smith in her very helpful book called "God's Good Design" tells the story of a time several years ago in the midst of a debate about the ordination of women. A young non-Christian reporter asked her if there was a verse in the Bible to support her belief that women ought not to be ordained as congregational leaders. Claire says (p30), *"I quoted her these two verses from 1 Timothy 2. She wrote them down and read them back to me. "That's what it says?", she asked me looking puzzled. "Yes, that's what it says", I replied, preparing myself to explain what it meant and why it applied to today's church and why it means that women ought not be ordained. But there was no need, because her response was, "Well, what's the argument about then? I would have thought if that's what it says, that settles it. Doesn't it?"*

*Interestingly, when the story appeared that night on the TV news, the two verses were printed out on the screen so that everyone could read them. Clearly, this reporter thought they were pretty self-explanatory.*

So, Paul's instruction here is quite clear, he's saying that when it comes to teaching in the gathered Christian community, women are to keep quiet. They are not to teach. Teaching is someone else's responsibility not theirs. Now, it's important to note that Paul is not saying in this passage that women are not competent to teach, nor that they may never teach. Elsewhere he encourages women to teach other women and children (Titus 2:3-5; Ephesians 6:1). He also commends the instruction Timothy himself received from his own mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15).

I know this as well from personal experience, my mother Betty Chiswell was a very able Bible teacher. She spoke at many women's conferences, she wrote Scripture Union notes, and she taught many children from God's word including me. But I cannot ever remember her speaking as the preacher in a mixed congregational gathering of the church. It was because she believed in the authority of God's word, and understood the apostolic teaching of passages in the same way that I have tried to explain here.

Another thing Paul is not saying here, is that women must be completely silent in church regarding other activities like praying, prophecy, reading the scriptures, or even leading the service. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he instructs women to be silent with regard to a teaching activity in Chapter 14:34, but in Chapter 11:5 he instructs them regarding the appropriate way to pray and prophesy in the church

gathering. This means they could do those things. Such speaking in church it seems, did not threaten orderly worship. But these activities are not what is on view in 1 Timothy 2, it is the teaching of the word of God to the church. In our context that is the sermon, which explains God's word to those gathered. Well, it may be a clear instruction, but what's the reason for it? Why shouldn't women teach in church?

- **Why shouldn't women teach in church?**

Let's move on then to the reasons in verses 13-14.

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Paul takes us back to the first few chapters of the Bible, to the accounts of the creation and the fall of humanity. From there he gives us two reasons.

First, Adam was formed first, then Eve. Looking at Genesis 2 confirms that Paul has got this right. God formed the man first and placed him in the garden to tend it (Genesis 2:7;15). At that point it was all good except for one thing. "The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). The helper as we know was the woman – bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Both man and woman were equally made in God's image. They were both given the task to "fill the earth and subdue it."

They were both made of the same stuff, but given different responsibilities. He was the firstborn, she was the helper. As firstborn, Adam was given leadership responsibility. He was to lead his wife according to the word God had spoken to him (Genesis 2:15-17). His failure to do so led to the eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This is why God calls Adam to account, not Eve, when it all comes unstuck after the fall in Genesis 3.

As the helper, Eve was to accompany him and help him in fulfilling their God given task. So that is the first reason Paul gives for his instructions to women regarding teaching and male authority in the church, it was an order established by God in creation.

The second reason given by Paul in verse 14 is that, “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” Again, Paul’s statement is accurate if you look at the Genesis 3 account. It was Eve who was deceived, she doubted God’s word, followed the serpent’s advice and ate the forbidden fruit, thereby sinning. She then gave some to the man who was with her, and he ate too, also sinning. So, they both sinned but in different ways. Instead of trusting the truthfulness and goodness of God’s word, Eve was deceived by the serpent and led into sin, then she also led her husband into sin. Adam on the other hand, had been given the responsibility to teach and lead his wife according to God’s word, but he failed to do so. He disobeyed God by eating the fruit God had told him not to eat, and by abdicating his responsibility of leadership to his wife. In the fall, the authority order established in creation was reversed. Instead of it being God → man → woman → creature. It became creature → woman → man → God. It seems that Paul refers to these two episodes from Genesis because the principles of God’s creation have not changed. The God given order for relationships transcends time and culture. What was ideal in the garden still applies.

Claire Smith sums it up well by saying (p36-37), *“The pattern of male leadership and female submission that God first established is to be the pattern for the Ephesian church. And*

*the disruption of that pattern seen in the Fall is not to be repeated. The women are not to usurp the male leadership God has provided. Instead, they are to accept willingly the God given differences in gender responsibilities. They are to accept male leadership (in the church) and express that in their attitude to learning and by not teaching or having authority over men.”*

If we believe that the words of Scripture are the inspired word of God and authoritative in all matters of Christian life and doctrine, then we must consider the ongoing relevance of 1 Timothy 2 for Christian women today.

It's important to note however that Paul's reasons for men teaching in church rather than women, is not because men are more capable, nor because women are more gullible. Neither of those statements are true, and neither are implied by Paul. Indeed, there are many women who are very capable Bible teachers, and they should be encouraged to develop those gifts and use them appropriately in the life of the church.

**b) Passages that look at the activity of teaching one another in the life of the church more generally.**

With regard to the opportunities for women to teach in the life of the church more generally, the “one another” passages in the Bible should be given careful consideration. Dr Peter Orr, New Testament lecturer at Moore Theological College, gave two very helpful talks a couple of years ago on this topic at the Annual Moore College Priscilla and Aquilla Conference. He said, “If the one another commands had the same weight in our congregations as in the New Testament, it would counter the false idea that women are somehow not able to do significant ministry because they can't preach to a mixed congregation... If we focus solely on the upfront ministry of preaching then we

miss a critical strand of New Testament teaching, namely that ministry can and should be done at this one another personal level.”

The one another commands apply to men and women alike. The foundational “one another” command in the New Testament is the command to love one another. In John 13 Jesus said, “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” That command is repeated often in the New Testament (Romans 12:10, 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22, 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:7-12; 2 John 1:5). Christ’s love for us is the model for how we are to love one another as Christian brothers and sisters. While “love one another” is the overarching umbrella command, speaking to one another is a particular form of loving one another. Our love for one another has its source in the love the Father has shown us in Christ, but more fundamentally, the love the Father has for the Son. The love between the Father and the Son is seen in the gift of the Spirit without limit, which leads to the Son uttering the very words of God (John 3:34-35). Theologically then, love leads to speech. When we love one another, we participate in this love, leading to speech prompted by the love the Father has for the Son.

God is a speaking God, and as human beings made in his image we too will speak. One another speech in the New Testament is commanded in various ways. In Ephesians 4:15 comes the command to “speak the truth in love.” This means more than always being prepared to speak truth rather than lies, and more than being prepared to say difficult things when required. Speaking the truth in love is gospel shaped speech. That is, we



should be speaking in a way that is constantly influenced by the gospel of God's love for us in Jesus. The goal of speaking the truth in love is Christlike maturity so that the whole body grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16). Clearly, speaking the truth in love is a vital part of Christian ministry and one in which all Christians, women and men alike, should be engaged. In Ephesians, Paul spells out what this may look like, "Speak to one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19), implying the content of our speech should be in line with received gospel truth. Other New Testament speech commands call on us to pray for one another (James 5:16), to greet one another (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Peter 5:14), to encourage one another (2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 3:13), to spur one another on to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25), and to admonish and teach one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16). Unlike the restrictions given for preachers to the mixed gathering of the congregation (1 Timothy 2), there is no restriction across the sexes given in any of these verses.

Likewise in 1 Corinthians, all of God's people are encouraged to follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. While there are various views on what prophecy looks like in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 14 it is clearly a word gift given by God to both men and women (1 Corinthians 11:5), to edify the gathered congregation. Dr Peter Orr suggests that prophecy in 1 Corinthians is a Spirit prompted application of the gospel, a form of one another speech, not spectacular like tongues, but edifying and useful for building up of others in the body of

Christ. This is why Paul says, “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in the gifts that build up the church.” (1 Corinthians 14:12).

This passage from 1 Corinthians 14, along with all the other one another speech verses scattered throughout the New Testament, prompts the question, how might opportunity be given for both women and men to obey the speech commands and exercise word ministry gifts when we gather for church? Dr Tony Payne, who wrote his PhD on the topic of “Truthing in Love” has given careful thought to the importance of one another speech in the context of the weekly church gathering. He says, “The challenge for Christian communities is to resist the tendency of congregational teaching and preaching to take up all the available space in the practice of congregational word ministry. We need an enlarged vision in which the central place of preaching and teaching is maintained, but in which other types of Spirit enabled, gospel-centred speech are given proper emphasis.”

Jane Tooher, Director of the Priscilla and Aquilla Centre at Moore College, has given very practical suggestions with regard to what this might look like in the weekly gathering. These include slots within a service where a congregation member is lined up to respond to the teaching given. Congregation members can also be encouraged to further apply what they’ve learnt through personal testimonies, interviews, book reviews, or church history spots that connect with the teaching that day. Such speaking opportunities could be taken up by women or men and lead to another level of edification. Now providing such opportunities obviously requires thoughtful forward planning, but this is the kind of proactive thinking that will help

realise the potential of hearing the voice of the women in partnership with men, edifying the body of Christ.

### **3. Challenges and opportunities for the days ahead**

So, what are the implications and challenges that come to us from the things I have considered in this Bishop's position paper?

**a) Firstly, there are implications for the ordering of our church gatherings from the passages that speak of order and restrictions in the gathered assembly.**

(1 Timothy 2:11-15 in light of 1 Corinthians 11 & 1 Corinthians 14:33-38)

It is my conviction that we must grapple with what the Bible says on matters concerning the ordering of our church gatherings with regards to the roles of men and women. I trust that these words of Scripture were given by God for the good of His church, and we are wise to order our church gatherings accordingly. Now in saying that, it's important to realize that the instructions given in the Scriptures regarding the God given authority order within the family and the church, do not apply to other institutions in our society. These instructions are not given to order human institutions like schools, or secular workplaces or local, state or federal government. I'd have no problem in light of the Scriptures with a female being Prime Minister. If I was still a Local Government Engineer, I'd have no problems in the light of Scripture, of working under a female Shire Clerk. But I would have great difficulty in the light of Scripture, working as a minister under a female bishop or a female senior minister.

- When I was directly engaged in parish ministry at St Peter's South Tamworth, I had to think through the implications of this teaching for church life in the congregations entrusted to me. I

had to carefully consider what it would mean for the way we order our weekly gatherings. My prayerful consideration of the Scriptures led me to decide that as a rule, the public preaching of God's word in the mixed congregational weekly gatherings will be done by men. This doesn't mean that a woman can never give a talk in the mixed congregational gathering.

Occasionally at St Peter's, a female missionary who returned from the field would give the main talk, sharing about the work in the light of the Scriptures. I decided that the woman giving such a talk, would not set up a disciple-teacher relationship the wrong way across the sexes, and so posed no risk of overturning the God ordained order of authority in church.

- When ministering in smaller parishes with very limited people resources, I decided that there were also other occasions that didn't pose a significant threat to the God ordained authority order in the church. Where male lay-preachers were completely absent and the parish occasionally needed to cover outlying centres, from time to time I would allow a woman to preach. Indeed, would encourage her to do the training required to do so. In the Scriptures in the book of Judges, Chapters 4 and 5, God raised up the female judge Deborah where male leadership was lacking. Perhaps such a situation might be likened to a retrieval ethic, where the ideal can't operate, it is better that a woman should preach than no one preach at all.
- With regard to the involvement of women in up front ministry in church, my decision was that women (with suitable gifts) could pray, read, do children's talks, and share their testimony in light of the Bible teaching. I decided that women could also

lead the service on the understanding that it was more a facilitating role than a teaching role, and similarly with leading the music.

- With regard to the ordering of Bible study groups, I realise that different groups operate in different ways. While at St Peter's my stated preference was that men should lead mixed bible study groups. However, it is worth noting that the context in a small group for learning from God's word is very different to that of the weekly main church gathering. The discussion forum provided by a bible study gives an ideal opportunity for one another teaching. It seems to me that most Bible study groups use prepared material, and the group leader acts as a facilitator more than a teacher. The result is that group members learn from one another as they discuss the Scriptures together, then prayerfully apply what they are learning to daily life. Perhaps the decision on male and female roles in a mixed bible study group requires consideration of the way the group operates.

- Now, I made all these decisions in accordance with my conscience after prayerful consideration of the Scriptures and in light of the principles outlined above. Having prayed for God's wisdom in the light of his word I trust that those decisions were used for the good order of the church and the promotion of the gospel in our community.

In sharing these conclusions and decisions, I am not presuming that all clergy and church leadership teams across our diocese will come to exactly the same place as me. However, I would encourage each clergyman entrusted with leadership of a congregation to study the Scriptures carefully and prayerfully on these matters and apply them in line with their conscience as well.

- Of course, applying this teaching to our church presents a challenge to both men and women. The challenge for women in our day is to accept the wisdom of God’s word in this, and trust that He has good reasons for the order He has spelt out in the Bible. Even though our culture may reject what I believe the Bible to be saying on these matters, I would urge Christian women (and men) not to do that, but rather to humble themselves and submit to God’s word.  
The challenge for Christian men in our day, is the same as it was way back in in Genesis 3, they need to step up and lead instead of abdicating their God-given responsibility. Men need to step up and lead in their families, lead in their home groups and lead in their church gatherings. Even though our culture tells us that male leadership is now unnecessary and sometimes toxic, tempting men to walk away from their God given responsibility, as Christian men we need to step up to the sort of leadership the Apostle Paul had in mind, in light of the Scriptures.

**b) Secondly there are opportunities for women to minister that flow from the Bible’s teaching on one another speaking activity that need to be explored.**

- I hope you can see that I have only scratched the surface of the thinking to be done in light of the “one another” passages in the Scriptures. Going forward though, these should bear careful consideration because our words are powerful. Speaking the truth to one another in light of the gospel, may sound insignificant, but it is not.
- Sadly, often this level of one another speech is simply not happening in the life of our churches. We need to put our minds to how we can create regular opportunities for it to happen. We must not fall into

the trap of thinking that it is only Sunday pulpit ministry to the mixed congregation that is important. If we do, we will deny many women (and men) significant ministry opportunity and fail to recognize the vital importance given in the New Testament to one-another ministry.

In light of the significant number of biblically consistent opportunities for women to be involved in ministry to the congregation, I think clergy and church leadership teams should be proactively encouraging women with word gifts to develop and use them in the life of the congregation. To that end, a book that I have found very helpful is, “Embracing Complementarianism – Turning Biblical Convictions into Positive Church Culture” by Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher. I have given a copy of this book to all clergy and encouraged them to read it and start thinking with their leadership teams more proactively into this space.

- At St Peter’s where I ministered before becoming bishop, we proactively sought to identify and train women who were apt to teach. That is why we trained and then sent two women on to full time theological study. There were times over the years at St Peter’s when we had four women employed on the staff team. A younger female gospel worker working in youth work and in one-on-one discipling of young women; a more mature female gospel worker putting her mind to encouraging families; a female MTS worker training for a broad range of ministry activities; and a female Scripture Teaching Coordinator and Trainer. We also had a small army of capable women teaching Scripture, and Sunday school, and leading Women’s Bible Study groups. For keen Christian women willing to be trained and equipped to teach the Bible, the opportunities for service were, and still are, everywhere!

- While I know in most churches financial resources are limited, I believe clergy and church leadership teams should prayerfully consider having a full-time or part-time woman on their paid ministry team, as it enriches the edification of the congregation significantly, and encourages women both to train, and to serve in the life of the church.
- The reality is, that when women are serving alongside men in the weekly mixed gathering, whether in paid or voluntary ministry roles, the whole church family is greatly enriched. Proactively seeking to fan into flame the whole spectrum of gifts given to both women and men in the body of Christ, will see the church built up into Christlike maturity to the glory of God.

### **Responding to the 2023 Synod request for the Bishop and Diocesan council to employ an Archdeacon for Women**

This bishop's position paper has sought to explore the way Christian men and women can partner together in ministry, to grow and build Christ's church in accordance with the Scriptures. In the light of these thoughts, I trust that you can see that there are both ongoing challenges and wonderful opportunities for the fruitful partnership of women and men in gospel ministry.

In order to explore these opportunities further, I believe that it would be of great benefit to have a suitably qualified and experienced woman ordained as the Diocesan Deacon for Women. While I have no problem theologically with ordaining a woman as deacon to do that job, there may be confusion in a diocese as small as ours if they were to be called an "Archdeacon for Women". The role of archdeacon under our current ordinances carries with it a



degree of delegated authority from the bishop over other clergy within a deanery area. And while the role of an Archdeacon for Women could be defined differently to that of male archdeacons through a change to the ordinance, the perception I think would remain.

That being said, I think if the title were Diocesan Deacon for Women, it would still be valuable for that person to attend archdeacons' meetings to ensure we have a woman's voice in the think-tank that seeks to support and promote good gospel work in parishes across our diocese.

The report presented to Synod last year by the Diocesan Women's Ministry Working Group identified a number of areas that such a person could work on to help us move forward in the training of women for ministry in churches, and the support of women already employed in ministry by parishes. To explore this exciting possibility further I have, in consultation with Kara Hartley from the Sydney Diocese and others in our own diocese, drafted a job description for the Armidale Diocesan Deacon for Women.

My hope and prayer is that this possibility can become a reality at the start of 2025, with a half-time position being created and funded by the diocese for an initial period of three years, with a review towards the end of that time. I already have a suitable person in mind who is currently considering the opportunity.

Thank you for persevering to the end of this bishop's position paper. I trust that it will prove helpful in encouraging us to become more proactive in exploring how men and women can work together, in accordance with God's good design, to build Christ's church as we look forward to his return.

With love in Christ,  
Rod Chiswell.