

# Official Position on Women in Leadership

Emmanuel Faith Community Church | Approved at the January 3, 2023 Elder Board Meeting  
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*This position statement approved by EFCC's lay and pastoral elders is the new written statement of our position on women's roles in leadership in our church. It supersedes and replaces all prior EFCC position papers, white papers, policies, and historic guiding statements affecting the teaching ministry of the church.*

## Introduction

Emmanuel Faith was birthed in 1939 as an independent, Bible-believing church. There are a number of subjects about which people who love Jesus and believe in the authority of the Scriptures disagree. Their primary disagreement is often about how the truth of Scripture is to be applied in our day. These are issues that aren't central to doctrine, but what some might call "non-essentials." One of those issues is the topic of women in church leadership. Some hold that women have unique roles that they are uniquely called to play within the church, and others posit that men and women are called to function in the same manner.

While the topic of women's roles within the body has been divisive in some churches, our hope is that as God moves in our midst, we might continue to have space in our church family for those who agree and disagree with Emmanuel Faith's position. Our collective hope as a body is to remember that we are bound together through our love for Jesus, one another, and in our essential doctrinal positions as a church, even though we don't always agree on secondary matters.

As we read Scripture, we see from the very beginning God created human beings male and female, and that his creation is good. Men and women were created to carry the image of God together (Genesis 1:26). They were called together to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:28) From the beginning we see that men and women are equal but different and that they are created to partner as they embrace the mandate given to them by God. We believe God's original design of men and women on mission together to fulfill God's purposes in the world also reflects the way he designed his church to function.

Below is Emmanuel Faith's position on women in leadership.

## Elders

We believe the elders are called to lead and oversee God's church. (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3) They have the authority and the responsibility to guard, govern, and guide all the affairs of the church. All ministries of the church, including its teaching, fall under the oversight and jurisdiction of the elders and every member of Emmanuel Faith is in submission to the elders' leadership. (Hebrews 13:17)

As we read through Scripture, we observe that the New Testament church only had men serving as elders. (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) While there is never a prescriptive command given in Scripture to only have male elders, and there's potential that this leadership structure simply mirrored the patriarchal society in which the church was born, male eldership indeed reflected the leadership in the early church. In the absence of a clear scriptural command, we are following the New Testament model at Emmanuel Faith, and we have made the decision that only qualified men will serve as elders, that the authority of the elders is broader than just teaching authority, and therefore all teaching and leadership authority in the church ultimately is presented under the oversight of the elder board.

## Teachers

In Scripture, we read that both men and women are given the command to teach (Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Colossians 3:16). We do not make distinctions between teaching in worship gatherings and teaching elsewhere in church ministries as we do not read the Scriptures as making such distinctions. We do not read anywhere in Scripture that there are some places where teaching is authoritative and some places it is not. We deem all teaching authoritative if it aligns with the truth and intent of Scripture. Instead of giving the teacher authority, we believe that the Scriptures are the locus of authority in the church. Therefore, at Emmanuel Faith, we permit qualified men and women to teach in worship services, classrooms, and homes. All teaching that happens as a part of Emmanuel Faith takes place under the oversight of the elders.

## Pastors

The role and responsibilities of a shepherd provide key understanding for the title "pastor" that we now use in the church. The Greek word translated "shepherd" or "pastor" is "poimén." It was used at least 18 times in the New Testament, but it was never once used as a title for any church leader other than Jesus (1 Peter 5:1-4). Therefore, we view the role of pastor as an extra-biblical role. It's a role recognized in the church today, but it was not a title used in the early church.

One important distinction to recognize is that elders were called to shepherd (or pastor) the church, but they were never given the title of "pastors." It's also important to note that while elders were called to shepherd the church, they were not the only ones called to shepherd (Ephesians 4:11-12). Emmanuel Faith has long held that elders and pastors are different. For decades we have had pastors who were not a part of the elder board and elders who were not considered pastors. Because we do not have any biblical guidelines as to who can serve as a pastor (since it is an extra-biblical role), we believe there is freedom in how a church uses the title. Therefore, at Emmanuel Faith, we have decided that both qualified and called men and women can hold the title and serve in the role of pastor.

## Conclusion

While we don't think the terms "complementarian" and "egalitarian" adequately describe the different nuances and positions that can be held within the church, we describe our position as "mutual complementarian." By that, we mean that we affirm the truth that God has created men and women with differences. Those differences are good, yet together, men and women complement each other to

reflect the complete image of God. However, unlike many complementarians, we do not believe complementarianism necessitates rigid role distinction. We believe that a better understanding of the complementary nature of God's design is that men and women are at their best when they are together. We hold that the biblical model is that only men are to serve as elders, but we believe that women have the opportunity to serve in every other role within the church. We long to create an environment where men and women can serve God by building up His church to the fullest of their ability as the Spirit leads and empowers.

As we move forward, we will intentionally apply the convictions found in this paper in a winsome and discerning way. We recognize some will have challenges with conclusions drawn, and we want to be as loving as we can as we embrace God's future for us. To that end, we will endeavor to change at a pace people can handle, trying our best to stay in step with the Spirit's leading and guidance.