

# **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

## **ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CONGREGATION**

### **Ellisville, Missouri; A Congregation of the LCMS**

St John Lutheran congregation has always been a conservative congregation of our synod in theology and practice. Even when our denomination voted to approve greater freedom in some traditional practices, St John was slow to adopt those changes. This may surprise anyone who has recently visited one of our worship services or walked through our new buildings. They are apt to confuse a progressive style of ministry with liberalism, but they would be mistaken.

The role of women in congregational ministry is just one example of this hesitancy to change traditions. Until 1995, St John did not allow girls to serve as acolytes, nor women to serve as ushers, nor read the Scripture in public. Those positions were maintained by the choice of the majority members despite synodical studies and position statements that showed gender restrictions are required only in the pastoral office and those congregational positions that exercised authority over the pastoral office. Depending on the structure of a congregation, it could be argued that all boards and committees including the entire voter's assembly, have direct authority over the pastor and therefore cannot contain women members. Our structure, by contrast, places pastoral supervision solely upon the Board of Elders and the Chairman of the Congregation, allowing women to vote and lead-or-serve in every other area of ministry.

St John remains unashamedly conservative in our theological understanding of Scripture, but has become one of our denomination's most progressive congregations in the exercise of freedoms neither forbidden nor commanded in the Bible. We will not compromise Scriptural truth when it comes to popular sentiments on such issues as abortion, homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, evolution and any number of public opinions at variance with God's Word. On the other hand neither will we restrict the exercise of Christian freedom because "we have never done it that way." We will be faithful to the Word but not "teach for doctrine the commandments of men." Matthew 15:8,9

We uphold the Scriptural position that the pastoral office is restricted by God to men. (1 Corinthians 14:34-37, 1 Timothy 2:11-15) We believe this is a role-limitation imposed by God's command. It does not mean that women are inferior, less important, or cannot serve in other leadership positions in the church. In fact, the Bible makes no distinction between the sexes or status of people as an indication of importance before the Lord. (Galatians 3:27-29) The Timothy passage (see above) reveals that God established this role-limitation (that only men could serve as pastors) on the basis of two criteria; 1.) Eve was created to assist Adam, and 2.) Woman's subordination in authority at home and in the church was a part of the judgment Eve received for succumbing to the deception of the devil in Eden. We are not free to question God's wisdom in making these declarations. We believe these two points are clearly taught and require simple obedience by the faithful despite our feelings one way or the other. The two reasons

which God provided for His position on the subject are historic fact and not culturally based, therefore this teaching will not change even though public opinion may from time to time.

Not all positions on the issue of women as established in the Bible are created equal. Some of standards were culture-tied. In other words, an over-riding principle will find one kind of expression in one time/place, but the same principle may be faithfully upheld through different customs in a different time/place. An example of this kind of change would include the wearing of hats by ladies in church. Paul explained the reason for his teaching about hats and women by saying: “Hold firmly to the traditions just as I delivered them to you...” and, “We have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” (1 Corinthians 11:1-16) This, he points out, was the proper way for a woman to worship in the culture of his day. While the over-riding principle of God-pleasing submission is still applicable, it is not necessary for women to cover their heads to show compliance by the same standards of Western culture. Head covering by women as a show of respect for men is not our tradition, nor the practice of churches in our culture.

After more than a year of examination of the Scriptures by the Board of Elders, and a lengthy study offered to the entire congregation, the Board of Directors approved the Board of Elders’ recommendation to allow and even encourage women to serve in all areas of ministry not specifically forbidden in Scripture. This means that women may serve as acolytes, ushers, read the Scriptures in worship, help distribute communion and serve as chairpersons of various committees. Women will continue to be restricted from pastoral office and from those positions that exercise authority over the pastoral office according to our structure namely, (1) the president and vice-president of the congregation, and (2) as members of the Board of Elders ~ the accountability Boards for the pastors of St John.

If you would like a more detailed study of these issues please call the church office and ask for the Commission on Theology and Church Relations study of the role of women in the church.

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Ellisville, MO  
Approved by the Board of Elders 11/8/04

**Resolution 3-08A Approved by LCMS Synodical Convention July 2004**

“This year’s convention, in Res. 3-08A, affirmed ‘that women on the basis of the clear teaching of Scripture may not serve in the office of pastor nor exercise any of its distinctive functions, and that women may serve in humanly established offices in the church as long as the functions of these offices do not make them eligible to carry out ‘official functions that would involve public accountability for the function of the pastoral office.’”