

Two Views
**ON THE USE OF
THE TITLE PASTOR**

WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE



THEALLIANCE

VIEW ONE

WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN THE TITLE PASTOR

By Mark Giacobbe, Mike Anderson, Matthew Cohen, Andrew Resh, and Tom Mathew

INTRODUCTION

We are blessed to live in an exciting time in the life of The Alliance. With more than 130 years of rich history behind us, filled with stories of countless godly men and women who have risked all for Jesus to take His gospel to the ends of the earth, we stand at something of a crossroads as we continue to grapple with the challenges of living faithfully in a rapidly changing world. These challenges come from every side; from within and without, and concern matters of Scripture, language, culture, and strategy. What we build now is what we will pass on to the next generation, and the pressure to build well is immense.

We are also blessed to be part of a denomination that prizes both biblical faithfulness and missional zeal. The Alliance, throughout its entire history, has been marked by a commitment to Bible doctrine, alongside of a commitment to Bible doing. We think if we're honest though, as individuals, as churches, and as a denomination, sometimes there can be a little bit of tension between the two. Which of us, zealous to reach the lost or serve the poor, has never set off on a new venture without fully thinking through the biblical ramifications? God loves and uses passionate people, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. What would be bad, however, would be to never take the time to step back and assess where we are at biblically in light of decisions and commitments we've made in favor of mission. This is just such a time in the life of The Alliance. There are some fine Alliance churches—filled with good and godly men and women—who have made the choice, whether consciously or not, to extend the title of “pastor” to gifted women within their churches. We can't say for sure why this decision has been made, but whatever the reasons, now is the time to step back and assess if this is actually a good thing, something that would please the Lord because it's in line with what He says in His Word. We're going to argue that it's actually not a good thing; that biblically speaking, the title of “pastor” is reserved for gifted and called men, just like “elder” is¹. We're going to make a biblical case for this, one that we hope will persuade you, not because of our words, but because of His Word. And so, it is our hope that, whoever you are reading this, you will approach what we've written with an open mind and an open heart, wanting, above all, to bring glory to God by lining up our practice as an Alliance family with what He's said in His Word. Thanks for reading!

One last comment before we dive in: the conclusions reached here concern English only. The authors of this paper are all native English speakers, and it is not our place to tell native speakers of other languages what word(s) should be used to describe various ministers of the gospel in their churches. That being said, the principles included here definitely apply to all languages. Whether Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, or any other language, one of our main points is that Christians have the responsibility to translate and use faithfully the words and concepts found in the Bible. Our hope and prayer is that all who read this will be encouraged and emboldened to do just that!

¹It is important to note that the purpose of this paper is **only** to answer the question, “Should women in the U.S. Alliance be given the title pastor?” Therefore, we will not take space in this paper to defend the biblical teaching that the office of elder is reserved for called and qualified **men**. Rather, on the basis of Scripture and Alliance policy and conviction, we will assume cheerful unity among all Alliance licensed, ordained, and consecrated workers on this point (see 1 Cor. 11-14; 1 Tim. 2:8-3:7; Titus 1:5-9; *Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance*, H1-3).

WHY WOMEN SHOULD NOT HOLD THE TITLE OF PASTOR

We Should Use Bible Words the Way the Bible Uses Them

We begin with something that we think all Alliance people can agree on: *words matter*. The words we use, and the meaning we assign to those words, especially those having to do with spiritual things, matter greatly. For example, it really matters that when we say “Jesus Christ,” we mean the true God and true man who died upon the cross, the just for the unjust, as a substitutionary sacrifice, who is now at the right hand of Majesty on high as our great High Priest and who is coming again to establish His kingdom, righteousness, and peace. If we are sharing the gospel with a Muslim friend, we simply cannot let it pass that our friend thinks of Jesus Christ merely as a great prophet who pointed the way to God. We can’t just say “well, we’ll have to agree to disagree on that.” No. It matters, and so we’ll contend for it. Where spiritual things are concerned, part of the difficult yet joyous task of faithful witness is to contend, humbly yet firmly, for biblical meanings for biblical words. We should use Bible words the way the Bible uses them.

“Pastor” in English is a Biblical Word. It is a Faithful Translation of a New Testament Word.

But is “pastor” such a word? There are some who would agree with what we just said, but who would argue that the English word “pastor” does not accurately reflect the language and usage of the Greek New Testament, or else, if it does, that it does not correspond to a biblical office. But this is simply not so. Let us consider first if “pastor” reflects the language of the Greek New Testament. This will get a little technical, but it’s important.

There are three Greek words in the New Testament, all related, that potentially have something to do with the idea of “pastor.” They are the verb *poimainō* (“to shepherd”), the noun *poimēn* (“shepherd”), and the noun *poimnion* (“flock”).² These words occur a total of thirty-nine times in the New Testament. Starting with *poimēn*, this word in its most basic sense definitely means “shepherd”—someone whose job it is to tend sheep. Sometimes in the New Testament this is exactly what it means—a literal shepherd (think Luke 2 and the shepherds at Jesus’s birth). Other times, although it still means “shepherd,” *poimēn* refers not to a literal shepherd, but to Jesus, who *acts like* a shepherd toward His people, who in turn act like sheep (as in “I am the good shepherd”; John 10:11, 14).³ In one place however—and this is where it gets important for us—the word *poimēn* clearly refers to certain people in the church whose role it is to “shepherd” others. The ESV translates Eph. 4:11–12 as “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (*poimēn*) and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Most other English versions translate the word *poimēn* in Eph. 4:11 as “pastors”: CSB, KJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV)

Besides this verse, a few other verses use words related to *poimēn* to talk about the work of certain people in the church. In Acts 20, Paul addresses the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church at Ephesus.⁴ Although he doesn’t call them “shepherds,” he uses other related words that mean the same thing.

²According to the Etymological Dictionary of Greek, underlying all of these words is an Indo-European root **peh₂-(i-)* meaning “protect.” Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 2:1217.

³Other places Jesus is described as a shepherd in the New Testament include Matt. 2:6; 25:32; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; and Rev. 7:17. In the Old Testament God is referred to as a shepherd several times, most famously in Psalm 23.

⁴In 20:28 Paul refers to this same group as “overseers” (*episkopos*). We’ll comment on this below.

For example, he tells them to “pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock (*poimnion*) in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (*poimainō*) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). In v. 29 he adds: “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock (*poimnion*). Since Paul, in these verses, is telling a group of church leaders to “shepherd” the “flock,” we should naturally conclude that Paul thinks of this group of people as “shepherds.” Similarly, in 1 Pet. 5, Peter directs the “elders (*presbuteros*) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ to “shepherd (*poimainō*) the flock (*poimnion*) of God that is among you, exercising oversight, . . . not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (*poimnion*).” (1 Pet. 5:1–3). Just like in Acts 20, here we see that Peter thinks of the work of the church elders in terms of shepherds who should shepherd the flock of God. So, it seems from Acts 20, 1 Pet. 5, and Eph. 4 that there are people in local churches whose role it is to shepherd others.⁵

In just a moment we’ll consider the question of who exactly these words are referring to in the context of local church leadership. But first, we must ask: “What should we call such people?” There are basically two options: we can either call them “shepherds,” or we can use another word in English that has been in perfectly good use for centuries to mean what *poimēn* (and the related words) means in these verses: pastor. In light of the length of time this word has been used with this meaning, and the potential confusion that might arise if we started calling such people just “shepherds” or something else, we think it’s pretty obvious that pastor is the best word in English to describe this biblical role. If you strike up a conversation with someone in line at Starbucks and tell them you are a pastor, most people in the English-speaking world will have some kind of a decent idea of what you mean: you are a member of the clergy whose job it is to give spiritual care and oversight to a church or other adherents of the Christian faith.⁷ The same wouldn’t be true if you told them you are a “shepherd.” This doesn’t mean that everyone, whether within or outside of the church, has a perfect understanding of what a “pastor” is. This shouldn’t surprise us; neither do most people have a perfect understanding of other biblical words, like God, Christ, sin, hell, etc., but “pastor” is a biblical word, and it is a good, serviceable word in English. We should keep it, and we should use it properly and help others to do the same. The English word “pastor” is a biblical word that reflects accurately the usage of the Greek New Testament in describing those who care for Christian souls, particularly in local congregations. But just who should be given the title “pastor”?

“Pastor” is a Biblical Office, Not Merely a Gift

In line with our principle above that we should use biblical words in biblical ways, our next task is to determine whether “pastor” refers to a biblical *office*—that is, a distinct role within the church that carries with it some designated authority—or merely a *gift*. The key text, again, is Eph. 4:11–12: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (*poimēn*) and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” There are some who would say that the key words in Eph. 4:11 refer not to offices, but to general *gifts* that anyone in the church

⁵Besides these verses, the only other verses that use the *poim*- word group to describe non-literal shepherds (other than Jesus) are John 21:16 and 1 Cor. 9:7, referring, respectively, to Peter and Paul in their role as apostles.

⁶According to Merriam-Webster, the word “pastor” has been used to mean “a spiritual overseer, especially a clergyman serving a local church or parish” since the 14th century. The related verb has been in use since 1623. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pastor>. “Pastor,” in turn, basically comes from the Latin word for shepherd.

⁷This does not mean that the word “pastor” will always have a good connotation for the person, or that, for missional reasons, you might be better advised to avoid identifying yourself as a “pastor,” at least at first. On the level of *denotation*, however—that is, “meaning” as we normally construe it—“pastor” is the best word to accurately communicate what it is that you do.

could conceivably have and exercise.⁸ The vast majority of scholars and commentators, however, take these words to refer not to gifts in general, but to offices within the church—or, to put it more precisely, specially-designated and gifted leaders.⁹ The main reason they think this is that careful study of the New Testament reveals that, leaving aside “pastor” for the moment, the other terms mentioned in Eph. 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher) refer to what we would consider offices.¹⁰ If this is true for the other four, then we should assume it is true for *poimēn* as well: the “shepherds” referred to in Eph. 4:11 are gifted people who hold a distinct role or office within the church.¹¹ If we are committed to using Bible words in Bible ways, then “pastor” should be used to refer to those set apart for the work of pastoral ministry, not just those who happen to have “pastoral” gifts. This is not to say that there aren’t many people in our churches who have such pastoral gifts and orientations. There certainly are; we can personally think of many fine small group leaders in our church—women as well as men—who are definitely “pastoral” in their giftings. We thank God for them and want to equip them for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). But it would be wrong to call them pastors in any official way, because the Bible doesn’t direct us to do so. “Pastor” refers to certain gifted individuals who are set apart for the work of overseeing the local church.

“Pastor” is the Same as “Elder” in the New Testament

But there’s still one more piece of the puzzle needed in order to make sure we use Bible words the way the Bible does. It’s this: “pastor”/*poimēn* doesn’t refer to just anyone whom a church may decide has a pastoral gifting and sets aside for “pastoral” ministry. Instead, Scripture informs us that the word should be applied to those who are elders of a local church. We have actually already seen the main evidence for this above: Acts 20 and 1 Pet. 5. In both places, the elders (*presbuteros*) of local churches are being addressed. In both places these elders are exhorted to “pay careful attention” (Acts 20:28) or to “shepherd” (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2) the “flock” of God. As we’ve already observed, this must mean that Peter and Paul think of the church elders as “shepherds” whose job is to shepherd the flock of God. Besides the elders (and Jesus), they never call anyone else “shepherd.” Based on the interpretive principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, we should then apply the same meaning to “shepherd” in Eph. 4:11. In other words, according to Scripture, the only people we should call “pastors” are those who are elders of the church.¹² There is simply no biblical warrant to do otherwise. As for who qualifies to be a church elder, this is found—as we all know in The Alliance—in 1 Tim. 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.¹³ In accordance with Scripture, elders are qualified men who are set apart to govern, teach, and care

⁸Perhaps the staunchest defender of this view among modern commentators is Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 538–40. However, see the following footnote.

⁹Here are just a few: Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 297; Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 388; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 273, 276; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 252; John Calvin, *Commentaries*. Harold Hoehner’s contention that offices are not in view in Eph. 4:11 falls apart when he explains what the individual terms mean. For example, *poimēn* is said to be “best translated as ‘pastor,’ one who cares for his or her flock as a shepherd cares for his or her sheep.” Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544. Leaving aside the issue of gender, this certainly sounds like what we would want to call an “office,” not merely a gift that any believer could have. On this point, Andrew T. Lincoln’s comment cuts through the confusion: “If the ordered regular nature of a ministry and its recognition by a local church makes it an office, then the ministers in 4:11 who are active in the writer’s own day are officers.” Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 252.

¹⁰See O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 298–99. “Apostles” as a distinct office is pretty straightforward. For “prophets,” see Acts 11:27–28; 13:1; Acts 21:10–11; 1 Cor. 14:29–32. For “evangelists,” see 2 Tim. 4:5 and Acts 21:8. For “teachers,” see Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28–29; Gal. 6:6; James 3:1.

¹¹A related question at this point is whether the “pastors” and “teachers” refer to the same group, or different, probably overlapping groups. Scholarly opinion is more divided on this issue and we don’t see a need to take a stand on it for the purposes of this paper.

¹²In 1 Tim. 3 Paul uses the word “overseer” (*episkopos*), not “elder.” However, these words refer to the same office. See Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5–7. See also the Alliance manual: “There is overlap between overseer, elder, and shepherd.” *Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance*, H1-3.

¹³See *Alliance Manual*, H1-2–H1-3.

for a local church. All pastors are elders, and Scripture teaches that this role is reserved for gifted and called men.¹⁴ This means that we should be very careful about who we give the title “pastor” to. We shouldn’t give this title to *anyone* who is not an elder—regardless of gender, gifting, or job description.

SUMMARY

We have now looked at what the New Testament says on the issue of who should and shouldn’t be called a pastor. Based on the bedrock assumption that we, as Alliance people, should use Bible words in Bible ways, we’ve seen that there is a Greek word in the New Testament that corresponds to the English idea of “pastor,” that this refers to an office within the local church (not just a general gifting), and that the office in question is the same as elder or overseer. This leads to the conclusion that the only people who should be given the title of “pastor” are those who are elders: qualified men within the local church. As Alliance people committed to Scripture, we should align our practice with this teaching, whatever the cost and whatever the ramifications. Although this conclusion concerns English only, we urge speakers of other languages to take the same basic approach we’ve taken here and to work out what word(s) best reflect the New Testament teaching on this point. In the following section, we’ll answer some common objections we’ve heard to this position.

COMMON OBJECTIONS & CONCLUSION

While we have done our best to cover the most pertinent exegetical and linguistic objections to our conclusion, we understand there are other objections concerning its ramifications. The ones we have most commonly heard are three-fold: Such a conclusion is bad for women, bad for missions, and bad for churches already calling women pastors.

Before attempting a brief response to each of them, it’s worth saying some things on which we trust we are all unified: These objections matter. Women matter, missions matter, and the churches already calling women pastors matter. We love the women we’re blessed to know and pastor, we love the Great Commission, and we love our fellow churches we personally know who are already calling women pastors, along with the women who bear that title in those churches. We grieve the various ways women have been pressed into cultural molds that do not come from Scripture; surely, that is and has been bad for women, AND we’re sure we’re unified on the conviction that our assessment of what is good or bad for anyone is not our ultimate authority; God is. God has spoken to us in Scripture, such that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Abraham no doubt loved his son and thought sacrificing him would hurt him, but when God told him to do it, he did it, and he was commended for it (Gen. 22:16-18, James 2:21-24). If faced with the choice between doing something we think or feel is bad for people versus doing what Scripture commands, we must, as the people God loved and bought with the precious blood of His Son, go with what Scripture commands. On this we assume we all agree.

It gets better, though. The fact is, while we do sometimes have to choose between what we think or feel will be bad for people and what Scripture commands, we never have to choose between what will actually be bad for people and what Scripture commands. Why? Because the God who spoke

¹⁴There are some who would also affirm the reverse: all elders are pastors. However, in The Alliance a distinction is maintained at this point; “A pastor is essentially a ruling elder whose primary ministry is preaching and teaching and who is therefore worthy of double honor” (1 Tim. 5:17).” *Alliance Manual*, H1-2.

the words of Scripture is 100%, unadulterated, good! His heart toward His children is love, love, love (Jer. 31:3). Therefore, when God does not permit something (e.g., a woman being called a pastor), it can only be for the good of all His children, female and male. We were made to believe this. We only started questioning it when someone suggested to us that maybe God's prohibitions were not for our good. Here's what he said: "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). In other words: "God's prohibition is not for your good; it's to hold you down. If you feel the desire for what God has prohibited, act on it." Now we all know that's a lie, right? Therefore, we conclude that if Scripture prohibits women from being called pastors, as we have argued above, then the best thing for women is to not be called pastors. For thousands of years now, the vast majority of God's people—men and women—have tasted and seen that God is good without ever bearing the title of pastor. No woman today needs it to live the fullest, most abundant life Jesus intends for them.

Our basic response to the concern about our conclusion being bad for missions and churches already calling women pastors is similar. We do not believe it is necessary to do something God does not permit in order to complete the Great Commission. We are a denomination that has gloriously celebrated our dependence on prayer and the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of missions. We do missions not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit (Zech. 4:6). Part of depending on the Spirit is trusting that as we humbly submit to the words He inspired (2 Pet. 1:21), He will accomplish the mission. To the churches we know and love who are already calling women pastors and to the women we know and love bearing those titles, we want you to keep serving the Lord where He's placed you. We are all always in a process of growing to maturity as churches (Eph. 4:15-16), and we see aligning our practice with Scripture in this area as another opportunity to do that. We trust that just as the overwhelming majority of people in your church are able to live abundant, Spirit-filled lives without bearing the title of pastor, so also will the women who currently bear that title be enabled by God's Spirit to do so if they give up that title. We thank God for the ways your churches have already helped us grow toward maturity and look forward to the ways that might continue.

We understand that in this pamphlet, another view is presented that suggests churches are free to call women pastors. We also understand that this view appeals to Scripture to make its argument; nobody questions that. But simply appealing to Scripture does nothing to commend a conclusion. To be blunt, every false teaching in the history of the Church has cited Scripture in support of its views (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses today still cite Col. 1:15 in support of their view that Christ is not one in being with the Father). The more relevant question for every Christian & Missionary Alliance church when evaluating each of these views is not: "Does it appeal to Scripture?" Rather, they are questions like: "Is what this paper says what that passage of Scripture actually means?" and "Does this conclusion follow from what the words of Scripture actually mean?" We would encourage you to slow down and ask these questions honestly after reading each piece and then to align your practice accordingly.

We should use Bible words the way the Bible uses them, and "pastor" is a faithful English translation of a New Testament word. It refers to a biblical office, not merely a gift, and all who hold the office of pastor are also elders, an office restricted to qualified men. Therefore, the answer to the specific question we've been asked to address, of whether an English-speaking Christian church should call a woman a pastor, according to Scripture, is no. Any church that does is disobeying God in so doing, and therefore, no church should do it. We are hopeful that churches currently calling women pastors will be persuaded through Scripture and change their practice accordingly. Such would be a demonstration of humility that we trust our Lord would bless. God is infinitely good and loving; let's believe that if He forbids something, it must be for the good of all His children. Let's believe that as we obey His Word, He will accomplish His mission through us, not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit.

WORKS CITED

Beekes, Robert. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Best, Ernest. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*. ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

Calvin, John. *Commentaries*.

Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Lincoln, Andrew T. *Ephesians*. WBC 42. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014.

O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Principle Authors

» **Mark Giaccobe** has served as associate pastor at Citylight Church (Manayunk) since 2017. Mark previously served as an international worker in Central Asia before moving to Philadelphia to complete his graduate studies. Mark is an accomplished musician and loves the outdoors.

» **Mike Anderson** serves as the congregational pastor for Citylight Church (Center City Philadelphia). Mike came to Citylight Church after serving for several years with The Navigators and planted Citylight Center City in 2015. Mike is married to Lorielle, and they have two young sons.

Contributors

» **Matthew Cohen** serves as the lead pastor of Citylight Church. Matt and Andrea, and a few committed friends, started Citylight Church in their apartment in 2011 after serving with Alliance Christian Fellowship at Penn State University. Matt is married to Andrea, and they have a son and a daughter.

» **Andrew Resh** serves as the congregational pastor of Citylight Church (Delco). Andy came to Citylight Church after helping to plant a church outside Nashville and planted Citylight Delco in late 2019. Andy is married to Mindy, and they have two young daughters.

» **Tom Mathew** has served as a lay pastor with Citylight Church for several years. Tom works as digital marketing & fundraising senior manager at American Bible Society. Tom is married to Blessy, and they have a son and a daughter.

VIEW TWO

WOMEN SHOULD BE GIVEN THE TITLE PASTOR

By Stephen Elliott and Jeremy Spainhour

THE FIRST VOICE: STEPHEN ELLIOTT

Two voices . . . one, a pastoral theologian and the other, a theologian who is pastor, by giftedness and practice. Two voices . . . one seasoned by time, and the other coming to the task with fresh eyes. Both voices recognize that there is an abundance of sound, thoughtful, Scriptural support on both sides of the question on the matter of ordaining women with each side bewildered why the other side cannot see what they see. Both sides feel their positions to be biblically faithful, and as the C&MA yet to date, we have not found a middle ground. But the question in this paper is not about the matter of ordaining women or making any substantive changes in the current policy regarding women in ministry; it is about the local church's authority to designate a woman as pastor.

As an architecture of thought for how we determine both orthodoxy (belief) and orthopraxis (practice), there are four helpful categories of understanding, all of which are rooted in Scripture, that are all a part of this framework. These are:

Absolutes: Orthodox belief; (e.g., the Trinity, divinity of Jesus Christ, authority and inspiration of Scripture, etc.)

Convictions: Corporate doctrinal distinctives; (e.g., Person and work of the Holy Spirit, eschatology, sanctification, healing in the atonement, etc.)

Opinions: Personal convictions; (e.g., everything from worship style preferences to Bible translations to personal matters of conscience to the nature or character of predestination, etc.)

Questions: Matters of incertitude: things to which Scripture does not give a full, complete explanation, or clear and certain direction or understanding . . . matters that we must wrestle through (e.g., cultural trends, certain moral judgments, politics, implications of modern technology, etc.)

With this model we have a workable template for sorting out where any church life issues under consideration belong. The categories help us define the consequential weight of a matter under discussion and its place in the spectrum of Christian thought and practice.

So, it follows that absolute matters of orthodox belief can never be thought of as belonging in the section on questions that are not clear, and matters on which we have questions do not belong in the section of absolutes. It is the author's opinion that designating a woman as a pastor in a local church is a matter of opinion, not an absolute, not a doctrinal conviction nor a question—an opinion that has biblical support, as we hope to present for consideration.

Pastoral Concerns for the Local Church:

I come to this conversation as an Alliance pastor of around 40 years, having served three churches over that time: one rural, one in a college town, and one in a major city. This background has brought a wide menu of women in ministry issues across my plate.

In addressing them, I have come to the conclusion that Scripture is a template, not a catalog, for determining church practice. Such Scriptural practices live within a cultural context that shapes them. If this were not so, we would not have denominations or presidents or vice presidents, etc.: they would be without Scriptural authority.

However, the Church has organized itself for effective service rooted in giftedness that is determined by God and shaped by its cultural context in every generation. Sometimes we get that right (creation of denominations and administrative authority structures) and sometimes we get that terribly wrong (as when our policy prohibited African Americans from serving in Africa).¹⁵

But our conclusions in any cultural context must align with Scripture as articulated by St. Vincent of Lerins who described the fullness of the Christian faith as “that which was believed at all times, in all places, by all peoples.”

God’s Gifting of the Church

God equips His church for Kingdom life with spiritual gifts that know no gender bias. No place in Scripture do we see gender-based *giftedness*. In Eph. 4:11, we find that He establishes four offices/roles of the church, and He has given . . . “some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists and some as pastor/teachers.” (Those who read the last office as two offices are fine and have no bearing on the discussion per se.)

God created these offices of the church (Eph. 4:11) in accord with His purposes and intentions and populates those offices according to His will. And while it is true that the office is more important than the occupant, it follows that the one who occupies the office takes on the identity and designation of that office and serves under the approbation of God.

Nowhere in Scripture does God give gender specific or explicit instruction on who should fill which office (as will be argued below). The role of the church is to recognize the spiritual giftedness and chosen-ness of a person that equips them to occupy the office and affirm that through the title or designation given them. The local church does not create a pastor through how that person is titled. The local church recognizes the reality of what God has created and joins Him in affirming that person’s calling to that office and role. To do less is to deny the authority and anointing God has given to that person.

In the practice of denominational life, the local church, in effect, “outsources” this recognition of giftedness as a gatekeeping function of the district and National Office structure: two arms lengths away from the daily ministry of the local church where the gifts are in practice. It is the author’s assertion that the local church has the primary ability to recognize giftedness through firsthand observation and ought to have the authority commensurate to that recognition to title vocational

¹⁵As an example of culture’s influence, the changing of policy on that issue was motivated in part by the Voters Registration Act in 1965.

staff accordingly. This would not be a prescriptive obligation for all churches but would be a freedom available to churches who wish to enjoin it.

Consistency of Practice

From the Manual of the C&MA, we read that: “A Consecrated Official Worker License may be issued to women who are appointed by the district superintendent to serve in church and other related ministries (except for that of pastor and/or senior pastor), **which include preaching and teaching the Word of God and administering the ordinances under the oversight of elders and/or an ordained official worker, and providing leadership to the church and its ministries.**”¹⁶ (In the authors view, it is unclear in the above exclusionary phrase in parenthesis if the intention for the word “pastor” is meant to designate a multiple staff position or a solo pastorate position. My reflective assumption is that it is the latter.)

Our current manual states that vocationally licensed women can preach, teach, administer the ordinances, and lead. This certainly is descriptive of pastoral function. Therefore, to give local churches the authority to give a woman the title of pastor would conform our current practice in many of our churches with the reality of the manual’s current permitted function. The authors recognize the intention to reserve the senior or lead or solo pastor role to men, in so far as they would be viewed as having elder authority. A woman pastor would serve under elder authority in all cases.

Concluding Remarks

Much has changed in church life over the years. The advent of the multiple staff church alone has placed any number of organizational strains and ecclesiastical puzzles before us. But we who live in an ever-evolving culture need to be a church that is organic and flexible enough in every generation to “keep in step with the Spirit” in what He is up to in the Kingdom.

In summary then, if God is calling anyone to fill the pastoral office He created, we ought to be saying yes to that and affirming their calling. Yet too often, we are so marinated in historic, denominational life that we cannot see a way forward that affirms what God is up to because we don’t have a policy to cover it . . . yet. We would want to give the local church the privilege of designating those persons, men and women, who serve with God-given gifts as pastors and let policy catch up to what God is up to.

» **Steve Elliott** has served in The Alliance as a lead pastor for almost 40 years, retiring in 2017 from First Alliance in Lexington, Kentucky. Steve currently serves on the Board of Directors and the national Theological Issues Committee for the C&MA.

¹⁶Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2020 Edition: Section E3, Sub-section B of the UNIFORM POLICY ON LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION.

THE SECOND VOICE: JEREMY SPAINHOUR

Pastoral Concerns for the Local Church

As a local church pastor in the greater Seattle region, the question of The Alliance's position on women in ministry is not uncommon, and as a pastor who knows he does not stand above the denomination in which he serves, I have consistently remained in deference to our policy on the matter. The policy states that "women may engage in any kind of ministry except that which involves *elder authority*." This includes the provision for "[licensed] women . . . to serve in church and other related ministries (except for that of pastor and/or senior pastor) which include preaching and teaching the Word of God and administering the ordinances under the oversight of elders and/or an ordained official worker, and providing leadership to the church and its ministries."

The problem I face as a pastor is understanding, and therefore being able explain to inquiring or prospective members, the biblical rationale for how The Alliance makes its distinction between what is *permitted* and what is *prohibited* with regard to women in ministry. The distinction in question can be described as permitting women to *function* as a pastor while prohibiting women from holding the *position* or title of pastor. It seems that a biblically self-consistent position on the matter will either (a) permit women to teach and preach and therefore also hold the position of pastor or (b) neither permit women to teach and preach nor hold the position of pastor.

The present concern, therefore, is not that our policy be adapted to conform to cultural trends or social demands on this matter but to a consistent and clear biblical standard. In the following discussion, I intend to show that a plain reading of the relevant biblical texts on this issue suggests that preaching and teaching in the local church is tantamount to pastoring in a local church. In so doing, I will attempt to sort out the apparent confusion in our current policy reflected in the language it uses with regard to (1) *the role of pastor*, in relation to (2) *the office elder*, and the way both relate to (3) *authority in the church*.¹⁷

1. The Role of Pastor

What is a pastor? That is the ultimate question for which we are seeking a biblically faithful answer. Some controversial issues are the result of the many and various ways a given subject is addressed in Scripture, but others result from Scripture's relative silence on an issue, leaving us to search the Scriptures together, like the Bereans, as we seek to move forward in unity as one body. This is one such issue. There is, in fact, only one verse in all of Scripture that addresses the question directly (Eph. 4:11). Beyond that, we are invited to search the Scriptures together as we indeed seek to move forward in unity as one body.

The word that gets translated "pastor" in most English Bibles is a metaphorical use of the Greek word for shepherd (*poimēn*/ποιμήν). It is a metaphor derived from the common reference to God's people in both Old and New Testament—His "sheep" or "flock." In the New Testament, it usually refers to Jesus, our "Good" or "Great Shepherd" (John 10:2-16; Heb. 13:20). The *only* time the term is used to describe an "office" in the church—in fact, the only time is used to refer to anyone other than Jesus

¹⁷Policies passed down from one generation to the next tend to become detached from their point of origin, often accruing baggage the farther they drift into the "distant country." If the following discussion sounds critical of Alliance policy at any point, just know that my only intention is to ensure that a given policy has a clear path back home, to its point of origin, in keeping with the Alliance's commitment to submit to "Scripture as the ultimate authority."

or literal shepherds—is in Eph. 4, a passage in which Christ is described as giving “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the *shepherds* and teachers” (Eph. 4:11) as “gifts” to the church (Eph. 4:8).

The gifts here refer to *gifted* people, as distinct from *spiritual gifts* (1 Cor. 12:7-11; Rom. 12:6-7) whom Christ gives according to their cooperative roles “to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). This is why it is preferable to understand the term pastor as a *role in* and not an *office of* the local church. The reason this distinction is important is because an *office* is typically understood in terms of a *position* of authority within the church, such as elder or overseer, while a *role* is understood in terms of its function in the ministries of the church.¹⁸

Scripture instructs the church to recognize and appoint persons meeting certain qualifications to the office (or position) of elder, but with regard to the roles described in Eph. 4 we are simply told that Christ himself gives gifted persons who, unless formally identified, can only be recognized as such by the role (or function) they play in equipping the saints. Christ sends apostles like Paul (Gal. 1:1) and Junia (Rom. 16:7), speaks through prophets like Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21:9), establishes Gospel-centered churches through evangelists like Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5), and calls forth teachers like Priscilla and Aquilla to correct eloquent teachers like Apollos according to sound doctrine (Acts 18:24-28).

Who, then, are the pastors Christ gives, and what is their role in the local church? Unlike apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers, the term pastor is metaphorical, not self-descriptive, so in what sense do pastors *shepherd* saints? Fortunately, the answer appears to be provided in the text itself: pastors shepherd the saints by teaching them. The pastors *are* the teachers.

In most English translations, the list distinguishes the first three roles from the last two by pairing them together with one definite article (“the”): “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.” This is intended to reflect two ways the Greek text treats pastors and teachers as a single grouping.

First, as evident in most translations, it only uses one definite article to modify both.¹⁹ Second, a common grammatical construction (a particle-conjunction: μὲν...δὲ) for which English has no equivalent, is employed in the Greek text as a “marker of correlation,” which is used in lists, such as this one, to indicate the way words in a list are *related to* and *distinguished from* one another.²⁰ Just as there is only one *article* (τοὺς) used to modify “pastors and teachers,” there is only one *particle* (δὲ) used to distinguish them *as one unit* from the other singularly modified groupings in the list.²¹

¹⁸The possible exception here is the term “apostle,” which means “sent one” or “messenger.” In the New Testament, the “apostles” typically refer to those in an authoritative office based on having seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1), whose writings constitute the “apostles’ doctrine” to which the early church was “devoted” (Acts 2:42), the same writings which eventually became canonized as the New Testament. If we are to recognize apostles in the Church beyond those formally recognized as such in the New Testament, they should obviously not be ascribed the same authority as the original apostles and New Testament authors. The role of an apostle, then, in this sense should be understood descriptively as the “sent ones” or “messengers,” perhaps what we commonly refer now to as “missionaries” or “cross-cultural witnesses.”

¹⁹Καὶ αὐτοὺς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφῆτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (Eph. 4:11).

²⁰“μὲν ... δὲ does not emphasize a contrast, but separates one thought from another in a series, so that they may be easily distinguished” (Bauer, Walter, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: a Translation*. 6th ed., University of Chicago Press, 2000.). BDAG specifically cites Eph. 4:11 as an example.

²¹The “and” (καὶ) in this case, as in many cases in the Greek New Testament, does not mark an additional item to the list as a whole but a descriptive term to qualify the metaphor with which it is grammatically paired. It could accurately be rendered “shepherds *namely* teachers.” Hence, “καὶ does not [always] mark a distinction of semantic continuity or discontinuity; it [sometimes] connects two items of equal status, constraining them to be closely related to one another” (Runge, Steven E. *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: a Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2015.)

Why would Paul pair shepherds and teachers together in this way? Since this is the only time in Scripture the metaphor of a shepherd refers to a distinct role in the church, it is not surprising that Paul would provide *a descriptive term* to qualify *an otherwise ambiguous metaphor*. Without this qualification we would be left with no concrete directive for understanding in what sense shepherds are expected to shepherd. The implication is that the two terms are, if not mutually defining, at least mutually descriptive. They are not, in any case, distinguishable in terms of a formal position (pastor) and functional role (teacher). They must be understood together as describing the function of a single role. In other words, the role of a pastor is understood in terms of the function of a teacher. Shepherds shepherd by teaching.

A pastor may be more than a teacher, but not less. The two terms are inextricably and definitionally bound. This role is given to the cooperative effort “to equip the saints” to be built up in “the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:12), in the context of a world in which they would otherwise be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14).

This observation regarding the role of a pastor is further confirmed by the way Paul uses the same metaphor in its verbal form (*poimainō/ποιμαίνω*) in his parting exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. In this passage, Paul extends the shepherding metaphor by warning the elders that after his departure “fierce wolves will come in among you . . . and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

This use of the metaphor and the context of deceitful opposition is consistent with Paul’s use of metaphor in Eph. 4, not to mention the way Jesus used it in reference to himself as the “Good Shepherd” who guards against the sheep-snatching “wolf” by leading the sheep who “hear [his] voice” (John 10:4-14). Thus, elders shepherd people, just as wolves draw people and waves drown people, with their words. **Therefore, whenever anyone is teaching the truth of Jesus Christ in the church, he or she is *precisely thereby* shepherding, indeed pastoring, the Church of Jesus Christ.**

In light of the essential the role of *pastor-as-teacher*, Alliance policy already allows women to pastor, by definition, just not to do so as pastors. The apparent inconsistency in our policy is presumably the result of a confusion in understanding the way the role of pastor relates to the office of elder in Scripture. I will attempt to explain the nature of this relationship in the following section.²²

2. The Office of Elder

The two passages discussed above provide the basis for a biblical definition of pastor (Eph. 4:11) and essential directives for pastoring (Acts 28:20). In Acts 20, however, it is only *elders* (who are never formally called pastors) who are given these directives for pastoring/shepherding.

Furthermore, 1 Tim. and Titus relay that the most distinctive qualification of an elder is the requirement to be a competent *teacher* of God’s Word. This is the only substantial distinction between the

²²The only other time Paul uses the metaphor at all, again in its verbal form, is not directly related to the issue at hand, but it is indirectly related and is instructive in an important sense. Writing to the Corinthian church about their willingness to receive his apostolic services, as it were, but unwillingness to compensate him *as an apostle*, Paul writes: “If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you . . . Who serves as a soldier at his own expense . . . or who *shepherds* a flock without getting some of the milk?” He then reminds them, “as it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox when it treads on grain’” (1 Cor. 9:1-9). Curiously, he did not specify that only male oxen should not be muzzled. Suffice it to refrain from any extrapolation from the context of this use of the term and simply to ask Paul’s concluding question: If some have “sown spiritual things among [us], is it too much if [they] reap material things from [us]” accordingly (1 Cor. 9:11)? If we have received pastoral services from women, have they received a pastor’s due?

qualifications of elders and deacons. Unlike deacons, an elder must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and must “hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Both elders and pastors are thus defined as such according to their unique role with respect to God’s Word. So how, if at all, are they different?

On the basis these connections—between pastors as teachers and elders who pastor/shepherd by teaching—it is sometimes assumed that elders and pastors are not different in terms of *position*, only in terms of *role*: all pastors are elders but not all elders are pastors. Pastors are understood as elders given the primary teaching role in the local church. As such, the male-only requisite (“husband of one wife”)²³ of elders necessarily applies also to pastors.

There is nothing inherently inconsistent with this view. It just has to be understood that it is only consistent to the degree that the male-only requisite applies not only to those who are eligible to become elders, and therefore pastors, in the local church but also, for that very reason, to those who are eligible to teach in the local church. Teaching is restricted to the office or *position* of elder, which thus becomes a prerequisite for the *role* of pastor-as-teacher, hence male-only pastors. If only elders can pastor, then only males can teach because, again, pastors *are* teachers and *pastoring is* teaching.

Alliance policy, however, suggests that the *role* of pastoring (teaching) can (and has been) detached from the *position* of both pastor and elder. Elders and pastors are understood purely in terms of *positions* of authority, stripped of their unique biblically assigned roles and responsibilities with regard to God’s Word. It is not surprising, therefore, that **Alliance policy allows women to do virtually anything a pastor is required to do (teach, preach, administer sacraments), just not as a pastor.** In candor, it would be far easier to demonstrate The Alliance’s commitment to biblical fidelity if Alliance policy prohibited women both from becoming pastors and from teaching in the local church.

Neither is it surprising that many Alliance churches make no practical distinction between what God’s Word requires of elders in the local church and what the state requires of a Governing Board in a 501(c)(3). (Indeed, when I began my current pastorate, I was shocked to discover that the status of elder was automatically revoked in our database at the end of a Governing Board member’s term.) The current policy has not only led to an apparent confusion for what constitutes a pastor or pastoring, but perhaps even more so for the role of those who assume the office of elder. Many of our elders do not understand their responsibility as such according to God’s Word. They are like shepherds without a sheep.

If it is true that teaching *is* pastoring, the critical question, then, is not whether a woman can teach in the local church without being a pastor in the local church but whether or not *only* elders can teach and, moreover, become pastors. To answer this question, and hopefully clarify one other possible source of confusion that may inform Alliance policy, it is necessary to address the restriction placed on women given our policies peculiar use of the term “elder authority.” Specifically: “women may engage in any kind of ministry except that which involves *elder authority*.” The relationship between the role of pastor and the office of elder depends entirely on how *authority in the church* is understood.

²³“An elder must be above reproach, the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2); and again, “I left you . . . to appoint elders in every city . . . if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife . . .” (Titus 1:5–6).

3. Authority in the Church²⁴

Strictly speaking, the word “authority” is never even mentioned in the New Testament with explicit reference to elders, or pastors for that matter. The concept of authority in relation to the office of elder is only inferred from those texts that describe the responsibility of the elder with respect to stewarding God’s Word, “hold[ing] fast the faithful word, which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

Elder authority thus has to be extrinsically and derivatively understood. It is nothing more or less than the authority the Word of God—*Jesus Christ Himself*—to whom all elders, pastors, and otherwise must be in submission. “*All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me*” (Matt. 28:18), Jesus said in the Great Commission, and indeed, it is “*his Word [that] possesses authority*” (Luke 4:32), as the people recognized when Jesus spoke “as one with authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29). All shepherding or teaching in the local church is merely an attempt to live and lead as an ongoing echo of the “Good Shepherd,” who shepherds His people by making His voice heard through the proclamation of His Word: “the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:4, 11).

An elder is thus responsible first for living under the authority of God’s Word (“sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable . . . not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money”) and only then for teaching and leading others to so live (1 Tim. 3:2-3). Peter “exhorted the elders among” the church not to understand authority merely in terms of a *position* of authority over members of the body but in terms of the *role* proper to the position: “exercising oversight . . . not domineering over those in [their] care, but being examples to the flock,” living under and leading others to live under the authority of “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:2-4). Stripped of the extrinsic basis of its authority, “elder authority” is liable to be conceived in the positional terms of a religious hierarchy, unaccountable to the very authority the office of elders is intended to represent, as demonstrated by the corruption of elders throughout the Gospels (Mark 7:1-23; 14:43, 53; 15:1, 31; Luke 22:66; 23:10).²⁵

When a person teaches or preaches the Word of God in a local church, he or she precisely thereby exercises the only legitimate authority in the church—*what higher exercise of authority could there possibly be?*—just as he or she thereby pastors the church. God’s Word is the basis and content according to which pastors pastor and elders give authoritative oversight. So when a person teaches or preaches, they are indeed exercising the same authority to which “elder authority” *refers*, but properly understood, “elder authority” does not refer to the elders per se, but to that authority which the office of elder represents: *the Word of God*.

Elder authority should thus be understood in the narrow sense that can be inferred from all relevant New Testament texts with regard to their responsibility as stewards of God’s Word: to live godly lives under the authority of God’s Word and teach and lead in accordance with sound doctrine. It is always and only a derivative authority that must ultimately refer back to its source in God’s Word and not, in any case, denominational policy.

²⁴See Appendix for a discussion on 1 Tim. 2:12 in relation to women and authority in the local church.

²⁵The Gospel verses cited demonstrate the danger of such a notion of elders and “elder authority,” depicted as in terms of a religious hierarchy self-selecting men, and Jesus woefully condemned the “traditions of the elders” that were used to exercise authority over God’s people instead of leading by example by living under the commands of God’s Word. The Word of God had become subject to the office of elder used as a mere proxy to validate their self-appointed “elder authority.”

While elders have a special responsibility to watch over the flock and guard against false teaching, there is no reason to be unnecessarily restrictive as regards the eligibility of a pastor and teachers on the basis of gender. God's Word simply does not demand it. Priscilla may not have been an elder, but Scripture certainly describes her "preach[ing] the Word" to Apollos, "correct[ing him] . . . with great patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). God gave her to help shepherd Apollos and so better equip him for the work of ministry. Moreover, there is good reason to think it would do more harm and cause more confusion to refuse those who teach (and therefore pastor) from being properly designated according to the role they play as defined in Scripture. If teaching is detached from the concept of pastoring, pastors may very well not understand their primary role in devoting themselves to "prayer and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4).

Whoever proves to be a competent interpreter of God's Word, faithful to sound doctrine, and able to teach effectively, should thus be eligible to be formally recognized as a pastor with the provision that all teachers and all teaching stand under "elder authority" understood the special office that represents the authority of God's Word. They are accountable to elders in precisely that sense. If an elder acts or speaks contrary to God's Word, on his own authority, his "elder authority" is thereby invalidated. **The office of elder exists to ensure that all teaching, leading, and decision-making in the local church remains accountable and that God's Word remains the standard and measure for such accountability.**

Understood in this way, it is clear that God's Word is the only authority in the Church. It is the basis and measure for anything elders and pastors teach and every decision they make. Elders have no legitimate authority apart from the Word they are responsible for stewarding any more than police officers have any legitimate authority apart from the law they are responsible for enforcing. But just as a law professor may not have the authority of a law enforcer, professors are necessary in the cooperative effort of ordering a just society through their role as educators, not enforcers, of the law.

In this way, pastors are necessary in the cooperative effort of building up the body of Christ. They educate the body through their role as teachers and preachers of God's Word, knowing however that they are accountable to the body of elders who are necessary to enforce the authority of God's Word should their teaching or conduct ever be found to contradict sound doctrine. We need to identify and appoint as many qualified and competent elders as we can to provide biblically-grounded oversight and a consistent godly example for our churches, but we also need to recognize and empower as many pastors as Christ has gifted and given to proclaim God's Word and so to equip the saints to live under its authority in a world of wolves and corrupt powers. Perhaps the critical question then has nothing to do with gender, but is simply thus: *Who among us is so gifted and whom among us has Christ so given?*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are undoubtedly some local churches within The Alliance that are prepared to recognize women as pastors and others that are not. The authors are not suggesting The Alliance take an "affirmative action" approach to hiring or designating women as pastors, but simply to allow those so gifted and given to be recognized or hired as such. Perhaps the best way forward would be to give the authority to local churches to make that determination for themselves in light of biblical convictions, as well as social and cultural considerations. This seems like an approach consistent with the method demonstrated in New Testament pastoral and church epistles, which address social and cultural issues—matters of *opinion*—in distinct ways, according to the fundamental principles of the Church's *absolutes*: "the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God."

Unfortunately, we do not have a letter to the “Universal Church” in Scripture, so we are left to search the Scriptures and examine closely the way Paul and the other New Testament authors took great care to attend to the complex issues of church and culture, from women in ministry to household codes to food sacrificed to idols to slavery and so on. As a national policy, however, giving this authority to the local church would appreciate the different expressions of the body of Christ in various cultures in churches throughout the nation, and it would do so without becoming unnecessarily restrictive to what Christ Himself may be doing in and through His people on His own initiative by His own authority.

APPENDIX

Concerning 1 Tim. 2:12

It is possible that the language used in Alliance policy that prohibits women from “engaging . . . in elder authority” is probably based on some loosely reasoned connections between the qualifications of an elder in 1 Tim. 3 and Paul’s instruction concerning gender, teaching, and authority in 1 Tim. 2. The instructions he gives are relevant because they involve certain gender-based restrictions on both teaching and exercising authority and are commonly cited in discussions of this nature.

In 1 Tim. 2:12, Paul writes: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but rather to remain silent.” The first thing that should be noted about this verse is that the word Paul uses here for “authority” (*authentēo*/αὐθεντέω) is not the word typically translated authority in Greek (*exousia*/ἐξουσία), and this use is its only occurrence in the New Testament. Whatever else might be said about this verse, it is absolutely certain that the kind of authority Paul is prohibiting here is *not* the kind of authority he expects elders to exercise over the church. The following lexicons on the Greek New Testament make this clear, defining *authentēo*/αὐθεντέω as follows: “to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to” (BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon* on the NT); “strictly, of one who acts on his own authority, hence *have control over, domineer, lord it over*” (Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, emphasis original); “to have full power over (Liddeell-Scott, *Greek Lexicon*); “have total authority, domineer over” (Gingrich, *Greek NT Lexicon*) (all emphases original).

Paul is not here prohibiting women in Ephesus from exercising “elder authority” over men or just any notion of authority in general, but specifically from a kind of domineering authority or a self-determined authority with no reference to an authority higher than self. This is precisely the opposite kind of authority that should be associated with the office of elder.

Even if it were argued that this verse applies to women exercising “elder authority,” the problem with our current policy is, again, not that it has no Scriptural basis for prohibiting women to exercise such authority, but that it has no Scriptural basis for prohibiting such while permitting women to teach men. It is perfectly reasonable to argue for or against the timelessness and universality of this command. Arguments have been made at length on both sides of the aisle, and both have hermeneutical grounds for their conclusions.²⁶ In either case, however, there is no good reason or hermeneutical basis to think that Paul imagined half of the command to be a timeless truth and the other half to be situationally bound. Women should *either* never be permitted to teach and exercise authority over

²⁶One of the oft-cited arguments in support of women not teaching or exercising authority over men and remaining silent in the church is that Paul grounds his rationale on the basis of the creation order (1 Tim. 2:13-14), but he also grounds his rationale for men and women regarding head coverings on the basis of creation and no denomination seems to be requiring adherence to those instructions (1 Cor. 11:2-16).

men in the church *or*, if they are permitted to teach men in the church, they should also be permitted to exercise authority over men in the church.

Since Alliance policy already permits women to teach and preach to men in the church, it apparently recognizes the situationally-bound nature of 1 Tim. 2:12. This does not mean that the male-only qualifications of elders should be regarded as necessarily situationally-bound as well. It just means, if The Alliance insists on using the language of “elder authority,” it need not describe such authority in negative terms (who is *not* prohibited from exercising authority), given the suggestive nature of such language, given also the tendency to extend the scope of restrictions beyond what God’s Word explicitly prohibits, erecting a so-called fence around the law.²⁷ Paul does not say, “women cannot exercise elder authority” any more than he says “women and single men cannot be pastors.” He simply says that an elder must be the “husband of one wife.” So while elders may only include those who meet the qualification “husband of one wife,” the same qualification need not be applied to apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors-and-teachers. Indeed, the New Testament itself describes women functioning in at least three of these roles (see above).

» **Jeremy Spainhour** has served in The Alliance for the past decade and is currently the lead pastor of Crossroads Neighborhood Church in Bremerton, Washington. A graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary, he is currently completing his DMin in the Beeson Scholars program there.

²⁷“You shall not eat,” rather than “You may surely eat from all the trees . . . but one,” too quickly becomes “neither shall you touch” (Gen. 2-3).

THE ALLIANCE WAY

UNITY WITHOUT UNIFORMITY

By Terry Smith

AN OVERVIEW

Now that you've read the two preceding chapters of this booklet, I say to you, "Welcome to The Alliance!" The teams of authors that wrote each of the chapters are highly committed to the authority of Scripture. They are well-studied in theology and well-versed in the original language of the New Testament. They each used Scripture to arrive at their conclusions. And yet they arrive at different conclusions on the subject at hand—should female official workers in The Alliance be eligible to receive the title pastor? These two teams represent two camps of people in The Alliance that have precipitated our conversation about our Alliance polity related to men and women in leadership. How can we possibly survive and thrive as a denomination with two different views of this issue?

From its inception, The Alliance has been difficult to buttonhole in terms of its position on women in ministry and leadership. We have mostly functioned with a male elder model, although some exceptions have been made. So we're complementarian, right? Well, not exactly. At the same time, our policy has always allowed women to preach and teach God's Word in a mixed gender public setting. So we're egalitarian, right? Well, not really. Obviously, we don't fit neatly into either category.

Already, our churches handle this issue in differing ways according to their biblical convictions. Governing boards with some elder representation were the norm in Alliance churches from at least the time of our reorganization as a denomination in the 1970s until the late 1990s. However, since Council's decision in 1999 reaffirming our male elder model and strengthening elder authority, many churches have functioned with an all-elder and therefore all-male governance authority. Other Alliance churches are functioning with a majority-elder governance authority, therefore allowing women to serve on the governance authority. Still others govern themselves with a two-board system that includes an elder board and an administrative or ministry board that often includes women. Some Alliance churches would not allow a woman to preach in the worship service or, for some, even teach in a mixed-gender Sunday School class or small group. Meanwhile, other churches welcome qualified women to preach and teach in these settings. They're all carrying out their biblical convictions of what church leadership should look like and who should be allowed to preach and teach.

What we're observing about The Alliance on this issue is really "the Alliance way" on many doctrinal and polity issues that are not foundational to the faith. There's no compromise in The Alliance on the fundamentals of the faith like the authority and inerrancy of Scripture; the Trinity; or the deity, virgin birth, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. And there's no compromise on our commitment to biblical marriage and sexuality.

However, our Alliance tent has always been much bigger on less than fundamental issues. This is somewhat the outworking of our interdenominational roots. People from a variety of denominations and theological backgrounds were drawn to the ministry of our founder A.B. Simpson—his commitment to biblical fidelity, the deeper life message and the missions emphasis. That dynamic still happens. As a result of this, we have pockets of The Alliance that are more Arminian in their

theology and other pockets that are more Calvinistic or Reformed. We all believe in salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But what is our Alliance position on the finer points of how salvation happens? I wish I had a dollar for every time over the years I've been asked about what we believe as to whether or not you can lose your salvation. We take no stance on this or the other finer points of a Wesleyan-Arminian vs. Reformed doctrine of salvation and we've always been able to peacefully coexist with both doctrinal strands represented among us.

THE ALLIANCE'S HISTORICAL FOCUS

During my tenure as pastor in Zephyrhills, FL, unfortunately a Nazarene church and a Baptist church had some issues that caused a number of people to look for another church to connect to. Several from both churches landed in our church, along with some Christian Reformed folks who wintered in town. The Alliance is often acceptable to people of a variety of church and doctrinal backgrounds because we cling to the authority of Scripture and keep the focus on Jesus without splitting hairs on the finer points of doctrine that might tend to divide us.

This interdenominational flavor that is often part of The Alliance also has a bearing on people's views regarding women in ministry. Those who come from more Baptist or Reformed backgrounds are likely to be more restrictive in relation to women in ministry and leadership. Those who connect with us out of backgrounds related to the Holiness or Pentecostal movements are likely to be more open to women in ministry and leadership. Again, these are some of the dynamics in The Alliance that produce differing views on this issue, necessitate a formal conversation, and perhaps lead us toward a resolution that gives some liberty to local churches to act on their own biblical convictions.

A review of some aspects of our Alliance history and the views of Dr. Simpson will be helpful here. In his book, *Anointed Women*, Paul King writes: "While the egalitarian vs. complementarian debate persists into the 21st century, A.B. Simpson and The Christian and Missionary Alliance of the earlier 20th century were far ahead of the times, pioneering a forgotten ingenious unifying middle path that was both intrinsically complementarian (affirming male headship) and at the same time granting virtually full freedom for women in ministry, including pastoral ministry and performance of all pastoral functions, proving latitude for both personal conscience and unity."²⁸

While Simpson's writings reveal a general commitment to male eldership and, especially in the early years of The Alliance, to male pastors, there seems to have always been an openness to the preaching and teaching ministry of women, even in mixed gender worship gatherings. Simpson is often accused of being more experientially than exegetically formed in his theology. However, when you read the breadth of material he wrote and how he included his understanding of Scripture, I believe that is a difficult accusation to prove. We may not always agree with his exegesis and that is allowable. But He was a man of the Book.

Specifically related to the issue of women preaching, Simpson first understood from 1 Cor. 11:5 that it was allowable for a woman to pray and prophesy in the public gathering of the church. When he came to passages like 1 Cor. 14:34 ("Women should remain silent in the churches") and 1 Tim. 2:12

²⁸Paul L. King, *Anointed Women*, Word and Spirit Press, Tulsa, OK, 2009, pg. 19-20

“I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man”), he believed that neither the Apostle Paul nor the Spirit who inspired him to write would contradict what had already been written in 1 Cor. 11:5. He seems to have interpreted 1 Tim. 1:12 to then mean that a woman should not speak with ecclesiastical or elder authority, but should always be under authority. “In this view, the passage might mean that a woman was not to take an official place in the ecclesiastical organization, was not to be one of its elders, its rulers, its ecclesiastical leaders.”²⁹ As he saw this verse, it didn’t prohibit a woman from preaching or teaching in a mixed gender worship gathering, but it defined how they were and were not to speak.

Leslie Andrews, a former Alliance worker now deceased, is quoted in a paper by Paul King to say, “Simpson had for many years allowed for ‘ministry by exception.’”³⁰ Andrews quoted Simpson as saying, “God’s methods in matters of outward form are flexible enough to allow for exceptions and adjustments.”³¹ Therefore, in the early decades of The Alliance, while holding to a male elder model, women were at times allowed to serve in the role and carry out the function of an elder if no qualified man was available. Likewise, Simpson’s thinking evolved on the issue of women pastors, perhaps driven by his missional heart. There were several decades in The Alliance where women did serve as pastors as an expression of “ministry by exception.” In *Anointed Women*, King cites more than 400 women who have served as pastors of local Alliance churches. A scan of King’s list on pages 211-226 of his book would tell us that a number of these women co-pastored with their husbands, or served for short periods of time (perhaps filling a gap until a male pastor was available and/or getting the church started), or served in Appalachia or the Ozarks that were perceived rightly or wrongly at the time to be more mission field-like settings.

Paul King notes that the early Alliance permitted a good deal of local autonomy on the issue of women in ministry. “Hence, the guiding principle of The Alliance became to allow local congregations to determine a women’s role and title in ministry. Women would not be ordained, but could be licensed in various capacities. Some churches called women pastors, others called them superintendents or leaders, depending on local preferences. As long as they were under authority, they could exercise great authority as well.”³² So there is historical precedent in our Alliance movement for allowing a high degree of local autonomy in the area of women in ministry, the ministries they undertake and the titles they bear.

FULFILLING THE GOSPEL

In my early years of ministry in The Alliance, I was privileged to meet Clara Lehman, a retired Alliance worker who was attending my home church in Port Charlotte, FL at the time. Clara had initially co-pastored with her husband and, at times, each of them would pastor small rural churches in close proximity to one another. At some point, her husband passed away and Clara just kept on pastoring the Alliance church in Ansonia, PA. She pastored this church for nearly 40 years. While serving as district superintendent in the Eastern PA District and working with this same church, I met people who are still in the church who were profoundly impacted by Clara’s ministry. I don’t know what they

²⁹A.B. Simpson, *Alliance Weekly*, February 9, 1898, pg. 127

³⁰Paul L. King, *Women as Pastors in The Christian and Missionary Alliance*, pg. 1

³¹Ibid, pg. 1

³²King, *Anointed Women*, pg. 27

called her or what her license said on it, but she was clearly the pastor of the church. I remember Clara as a sincere, kind, godly woman who loved God's Word.

Later, while serving as director of church planting in the Central District, I was honored to meet Florence Wilting, who pastored Alliance churches for decades in the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia, mostly in Cucumber, WV. My master's degree project was on *A Model for Church Planting in Remote Appalachian Communities*. This afforded me the opportunity to get to know Florence and become familiar with her ministry. Granted, much of her ministry was to women and children. But she preached to and pastored whoever came and connected with the church she served. Florence was a tough but tender lady who sacrificed much to pour her life into the people of her remote area. Even after she was retired by The Alliance, much to her chagrin, she continued to live and minister in the area. Florence passed away in September 2020 at the age of 99.

At times I hear that if we give any liberty to local churches in the area of titles for women, or allow for ordination of women, or continue to allow women to preach, that we are caving to cultural trends and giving into the feminist agenda. I can assure you that Clara and Florence were not governed by cultural changes and the only agenda they were pressing was the gospel agenda of Jesus. From my experience, they are typical of the gifted and servant-hearted women who serve in Alliance ministry.

Of course, we have also had hundreds of female international workers in The Alliance down through the decades—some serving alongside their husbands and some single—all devoted to fulfilling God's call on their lives. Many of those women in many places around the world have preached and taught in mixed gender gatherings and have trained nationals, including men, for the work of ministry in the local church.

THE HERE AND NOW

As decades passed and the denominational structure of The Alliance began to develop, the numbers of female pastors decreased and have now all but disappeared. Still, in 1981 Council approved a Statement on Women in Ministry that, while it may have narrowed overall ministry opportunities for women, kept open the door for women to preach in Alliance churches. In 1999, Council passed legislation affirming male elder authority. At that time, a statement on women in ministry was added to our Statement on Church Government found in H1-7 of the Manual: "Women may fulfill any function in the local church which the senior pastor and elders may choose to delegate to them consistent with the Uniform Constitution for Accredited Churches and may properly engage in any kind of ministry except that which involves elder authority." There are two things I would like you to notice about this statement. First, it provides a variety of open doors for women in ministry, including preaching and teaching where the elders deem it to be appropriate. Second, again we see a strong element of autonomy given to each local church on this issue. The ultimate answer to what women can currently do in the local church is whatever the elders of the local church believe is biblically appropriate for them to do. The exception is serving in the role of elder, which by national uniformity is reserved for qualified men.

The proposals being made would retain but lessen national uniformity on the issue of women in ministry and leadership. Related to national uniformity, we are affirming our male elder model. All of our churches will continue to operate by this model. We are planning to retain our two to three-year ministry certification process that currently has two tracks—ordination for men and consecration for women. However, since ordination is more of an ecclesiastical tradition than a specific biblical

designation, we are proposing to move from two certification tracks to one with the designation of Consecrated and Ordained for both men and women who successfully complete the process. Even here, there is local autonomy allowed as to who can use the title reverend in the local church. This would become a matter to be decided by the local church elders.

The same local autonomy is being proposed for the use of the title pastor. As you've read in the previous chapters, some in our ranks carry the biblical understanding and conviction based on Acts 20 and other passages that the title pastor always carries with it elder authority. Therefore, they do not believe that a woman should hold the title pastor. Others see the title pastor through an Eph. 4 lens as being more about function and gifting and not equated with eldership. They see no problem with a woman being referred to as pastor. Our proposal moves us toward allowing each church to function according to its own biblical convictions on this issue.

For those who function with an elder-only governance authority and have the biblical conviction that a pastor is automatically an elder, you wouldn't be required to change a thing. If your church's biblical interpretation and conviction allow for the use of the title pastor for women, you would then be allowed to do so. Can we respect one another enough to allow for this difference on an important but less than theologically essential issue? Can we accept that it's okay for Jesus-loving, Bible-believing people to arrive at different interpretations and carry out different practices on this issue?

Several have asked if having different Alliance churches with different practices on this issue will be confusing. As we've established, we already have churches that have differing biblical understanding and convictions on issues related to the finer points of how salvation happens—Calvinism vs. Arminianism. We have churches with all kinds of positions related to the timing of Jesus' return. And the history of The Alliance tells us that the issue of women in ministry has always been an area where some degree of local autonomy has been allowed. This step we are proposing really keeps us in "the Alliance way" of allowing local churches a level of freedom.

Some have said that allowing women to bear the title pastor will be a sign that The Alliance has gotten away from the authority of Scripture and that we will forfeit the blessing of God if we do so. Allow me to respond to that with two stories and I'll let you draw your own conclusions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While serving as the district superintendent in Eastern PA, I enjoyed good fellowship with the Assemblies of God superintendent for the region, as well as a few other superintendents whose denominations were part of the Wesleyan Holiness movement. We all worked on a ministry initiative together and would meet just to compare notes on what we were facing, allowing iron to sharpen iron. During that time, the Assemblies superintendent invited all of us to attend their conference's 100th anniversary celebration. It was a great evening of worship and celebration that included an ordination service. To be honest, I hadn't been all that familiar with Assemblies polity, so I was a bit surprised that several women were ordained that night as well. I later asked my colleague if women could serve in lead pastoral roles and they can. This is not a new development for the Assemblies, but apparently the way it has always been in our sister denomination. As you are aware, we have common roots with our Assemblies brothers and sisters. No, we don't see eye to eye on the evidence doctrine, but we would not doubt their commitment to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Their more open position on women in ministry has not led them down any theological slippery slope. And the Lord has blessed their ministry in the U.S. and around the world in phenomenal ways.

In 1961, when I was two years old, an evangelist by the name of Lillie Mae Hall came to preach at the Free Methodist Church in Vandalia, Illinois, where my family attended. My dad was a sporadic attender and not a believer. That Sunday morning, she preached, and my dad came to faith in Jesus Christ. His life was dramatically changed as a result of her ministry and, as a result of his changed life, my life was dramatically changed as well. My dad was kneeling beside me at the altar in that same church (different building) the night I came to faith in Jesus Christ at age 13. The influence of his faith was a big factor in me coming to faith and it all began with a woman preaching God's Word under the anointing and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

I share those two stories not necessarily to change your position, but perhaps to soften your attitude and tone in addressing the position of others. Our president has called us to theological humility. Whichever position we hold, let's admit that others who love Jesus and His Word just as much as we do may well hold the other position. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom. 15:7).

So, with all of our differences in The Alliance, what is it that has always held us together? It has been our focus on the centrality and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King and joining arms together to carry out His mission. It was in that spirit that The Alliance was birthed, and it will be in that spirit that The Alliance will continue to thrive. The enemy of our faith would love to divide us over the small stuff. Our goal must be to keep focused on the main thing—fulfilling Christ's Great Commission. These are important days in our communities, regions, nation, and around the world. There is work to be done, and that work has eternal significance. Let's stay united and fully mobilize as many people as possible—men and women—to finish the task and welcome back our King.

» **Terry Smith** is the vice president for Church Ministries for The Alliance. He and his wife, Ruth, have two married sons and five grandchildren. Terry holds degrees from Toccoa Falls College and Crown College. He is the author of *Changing Course: Leading Older Churches in a New Direction*.



THEALLIANCE

www.cmalliance.org // 8595 Explorer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920 // (719) 599-5999

