

WOMEN IN MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP

(Adopted by the General Presbytery in session August 4–5, 2025)

Summary

The Bible provides numerous examples of women serving in a variety of ministries. Their work includes both speaking and leading among God's people. And since the birth of the Assemblies of God, women gifted by the Holy Spirit have served as pastors, missionaries, teachers, and evangelists. The Assemblies of God recognizes the spiritual gifting of women in all aspects and levels of church ministry as revealed in the Scriptures.

Introduction

The Assemblies of God was founded with a powerful experience of the supernatural manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe that the outpouring of the Spirit in the early twentieth century continues the fulfillment of the prophecy, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on servants—men and women alike" (Joel 2:28–29; cf. Acts 2:16–18).¹ Joel's prophecy demonstrates the inclusion of women in the ministries of the new covenant age.

Since the earliest days of the Fellowship, spiritual gifting has been clear in the ministries of women. Outstanding female ministers pioneered and directed a broad spectrum of ministries. Some of those ministered in partnership with their husbands. At times, husbands worked secular jobs to support the active ministries of their wives. In other cases, women chose to forego marriage to better fulfill the ministries to which the Lord had called them. Brave women served locally and abroad as missionaries, evangelists, church planters, pastors, educators, and in other roles.

The Bible as Final Authority

The history and practice of the Assemblies of God show that God blesses the public ministry of women. Yet, debate continues about the proper role of women in spiritual leadership. Since the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, we must ensure that our stance is founded on Scripture. What the Bible says should be explored as carefully and objectively as possible, using established rules of exegesis and interpretation. This paper gives both historical and theological guidance. It also evaluates the usual texts used to limit or deny the ministry of women.

Exploring a text's original culture and context is needed to grasp its meaning. For instance, 1 Corinthians 7:1 starts with "Now regarding the questions you asked in your

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letter.” That phrase, “now regarding,” was repeated by Paul as he answered questions the Corinthians asked. First Corinthians holds some of Paul’s answers, but it only reveals fragments of the Corinthians’ questions. A deeper study of the letter will reconstruct the questions they asked.

For Paul’s letters to Timothy, the situation in Ephesus must be understood. Acts 19:8–41 is one key to understanding. It reveals that magic and the worship of Artemis are parts of that situation. Also, Paul told the men in Ephesus to stop arguing during prayer (1 Timothy 2:8). The Bible includes no other account of Paul giving similar instructions. This was likely a problem specific to the Ephesian church. The task of grasping the meaning of Scripture requires careful discernment. The reader must discern between timeless theological principles and advice meant for an audience in their unique context.

Some Christian groups disagree on how certain passages of Scripture should be interpreted. This has led some to deny what Pentecostalism affirms about women in ministry leadership. Charity is called for toward traditions that may disagree with our findings. We also recognize that concessions have been made to plant churches in strongly patriarchal contexts.

Biblical Examples of Women in Ministerial Leadership

The Old Testament records strong female leadership through several striking examples. Miriam was a prophet and worship leader to Israel during the Exodus alongside her brothers, Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20; Micah 6:4). Deborah, a prophet and a judge, directed Barak to lead the army into combat against Israel’s oppressors (Judges 4–5). Huldah, a prophet, verified the scroll of the Law found in the temple. She helped spark religious reform in the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:14–20; 2 Chronicles 34:22–28).

Ministry in the New Testament is charismatic in nature. That means it is made possible as the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts (*charismata*) as He chooses to each member of the body of Christ (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 27–28; Ephesians 4:7–12; 1 Peter 4:10–11). Some gifts are a spontaneous work of the Spirit. Others are recognized ministry gifts to the Body. The Spirit gives all the gifts for service without regard to sex. For example, the gift of prophecy is explicitly for both men and women: “ ‘Your sons and your daughters will prophesy’ ” (Acts 2:17). The New Testament confirms that women received and exercised this gift of the Spirit (Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5).

Women engaged in ministry and proclamation even before the Day of Pentecost. A Samaritan woman introduced her town to Jesus. Many from the woman’s town “believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39, NIV²). Women were also the first

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witnesses of the resurrection of Christ. They were instructed to share this great news with the disciples (Matthew 28:1–8).

The New Testament shows that women filled important ministry roles after the Day of Pentecost as well. Tabitha (Dorcas) started a benevolence ministry (Acts 9:36). One of the early house churches met at the home of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15, 40). Her home also seems to have become a base for the Philippian church.

A number of women are named as ministry colleagues. Paul named two women in Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, as women who “have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel” (Philippians 4:2–3, NIV). In Romans 16, Paul greeted both male and female ministry colleagues using the word *kopiaō*. This term noted the “work” or “labor” of Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:6, 12). Elsewhere, Paul uses *kopiaō* for the labor of ministry (1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17).

Priscilla is another of Paul’s “co-workers in Christ Jesus” (Romans 16:3–4, NIV). She is named with her husband, Aquila, as a teacher of Apollos. The couple “took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Acts also makes it clear that Apollos had a strong ministry of “proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah” (Acts 18:24–28, NIV). When the ministry team of Priscilla and Aquila is mentioned, she is named first when the names are paired together. This reveals that she had the leading role in correcting and instructing this recognized male leader.

Women were active in prophecy in the Early Church. The Bible points out that Philip’s four unmarried daughters were prophets (Acts 21:8–9). First Corinthians 11:2–16 also reveals that the men and women of the church were praying and prophesying.

Women were also named as deacons. Phoebe, a leader in the church at Cenchrea, is highly commended to the church at Rome by Paul (Romans 16:1–2). Unfortunately, translation biases have obscured Phoebe’s leadership position, calling her just a “servant” (KJV, NASB, ESV). Yet Phoebe was *diakonos* of the church at Cenchrea. Paul regularly uses this term for a minister or leader of a church. He also applied it to Jesus Christ, Tychicus, Epaphras, Timothy, and his own ministry.

Based on the context, *diakonos* tends to be translated as “deacon” or “minister.” Some translators choose the word “deaconess” (e.g., RSV) despite *diakonos* being a masculine noun. So, it seems that *diakonos* is the title for an official leadership position in the Early Church. And the proper translation for Phoebe’s role is “deacon” (NIV, NLT, NRSV) or “minister.” Also, some translations reveal a bias by referring to Phoebe as being “helpful” (NLT) or a “helper” (NASB) of others, including Paul (Romans 16:2). Based on new analysis of ancient Greek manuscripts, Phoebe is called either a *prostatis* or *prostatēs* by Paul. Both terms are leadership titles.

A final, key example is Paul identifying Junia as an apostle (Romans 16:7). Beginning in the thirteenth century, some scholars and translators masculinized her name to Junias. It seems they were unwilling to admit that there was a female apostle. The name *Junia* is

found more than 250 times in Rome alone. However, the masculine form *Junias* is unknown in any Greco-Roman source. This deliberate change of the Greek has now been corrected in the texts used by pastors and scholars.

Scripture clearly advocates for women as ministers and leaders. Instances of women filling leadership roles in the Bible should be taken as a divinely approved pattern. It should not be seen as an exception to divine decrees.

Historical and Global Precedent

Evidence for women leading in ministry exists beyond the New Testament. There is also archaeological evidence of female leadership from the second century.³ Yet, the third century brought changes into the Church. Leadership became less of a charismatic function and more of a formal office. This transition changed the role of women.

One theory is that women led alongside men when a church met in homes. A home was more culturally acceptable as a place for women to lead at that time. When churches began to meet in public spaces, though, leadership positions were reserved for men. In other words, the exclusion of women from leadership positions in the Early Church occurred as a concession to the greater culture.

The history of the Church has been blessed by times of revival.⁴ These moments offered renewal and strength by the power of the Holy Spirit. The early stages of most revivals are full of spiritual fervor and a focus on the Lord's return. In these moments, there tends to be more acceptance of dynamic, pioneering female ministers. Over time, young churches often embrace more structure and institutional concerns come to the forefront. This leads to the spiritual leadership of women being less readily accepted. Church leadership then becomes more dominantly male.

The experience of the Assemblies of God has been no exception. Early Pentecostal ministry featured notable women like Maria B. Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, Alice Reynolds Flower, Anna Ziese, and Marie Burgess Brown. Women had great freedom to minister in the early days of the Fellowship. Yet, there was a pronounced drop in the proportion of women leaders in the early 1920s. More recently, the number of credentialed women has been growing.

In their history, modern Pentecostals have struggled to apply the Bible's truth in widely divergent cultural contexts. Some settings accept female spiritual leadership quickly and easily. Others are less accepting. In places where women have limited ministry, leadership posts are withheld. At times, female missionaries find that the leadership role they hold in their home country differs from what they experience on the field. There may also be a discrepancy between their ministry opportunities on the field and those of women in the culture they serve. Cultures may influence the nature and extent of female leadership. However, the Church must always look to Scripture for direction beyond contextual practices.

A Survey of Disputed Passages⁵

Only two passages in the New Testament seem to prohibit the ministry of women in a church (1 Corinthians 14:34–35; 1 Timothy 2:12). When viewed in light of Paul's other

³ Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), 178–180.

⁴ See the Assemblies of God position paper on "Revival and Spiritual Renewal" (2024) at [ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Revival-and-Spiritual-Renewal](https://www.ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Revival-and-Spiritual-Renewal).

⁵ For more detail, see *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural & Practical Perspectives* (InterVarsity Press, 2021) and Waldemar Kowalski, "What Paul Really Taught about Women" (Gospel Publishing House, 2026).

statements and practices, they cannot be absolute prohibitions of the ministry of women. Instead, they dealt with specific, local problems in need of correction. So, Paul's true perspective is seen in his consistent affirmation of women who ministered and led in his churches. The content of these two passages, often subject to conflicting interpretation, must be reassessed.

First Corinthians 11:3–12

Christians have discussed the phrase “man is the head of the woman” for centuries. Some use it to justify male superiority. Others apply it to exclude women from spiritual leadership. Two possible translations for *kephalē* (“head”) are key to this discussion. Contemporary evangelical scholars debate between (1) “authority over” and (2) “source” or “origin.” Both meanings are found in the literature of Paul's time.

Taking the whole passage, the second meaning fits better than the first. This is clearly seen in the summary statement of verse 12, where *kephalē* is not used: “The first woman came from man, every other man was born from a woman, and everything comes from God.” Even the relationship between the eternal Son and the Father— “the head of Christ is God” (11:3)—is better understood as “source” than as “authority over” (cf. John 8:42). We do not find that the use of *kephalē* gives reason to deny leadership roles to women. A survey of the biblical examples of women in positions of spiritual authority and the whole counsel of Scripture makes this clear.

First Corinthians 14:34–35

It takes careful interpretation to find what Paul limited when he wrote, “Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak” (1 Corinthians 14:34). Paul addressed order in charismatic worship. He used the word *sigatō* (“silent”) three times in this chapter, including to limit the speech of women. The same word is used to limit the speech of those speaking in tongues if there is no interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:28). The second group that is limited by this word is prophets when a prophecy (or judgment of prophecy) is given to another person (verse 30). Third, that instruction is given to women. In certain circumstances, the speech of tongues speakers, prophets, and women is to be silenced in the church.

Under what circumstances, then, is the speech of women to be limited? Options given by scholars include (1) chatter in public services, (2) ecstatic disruptions, (3) authoritative speech (such as judging prophecies), and (4) asking questions during the service. However, it is clear that Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy in public worship at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:5). Paul also shared that those who prophesy, including women, should take part in judging prophecies (1 Corinthians 14:29). The limitation is this: “They should ask their own husbands at home” (verse 35, NIV). The instruction is therefore to wives, not all women.

Further, the Greek word translated as “ask” is *eperōtaō*. In the New Testament, it almost always has a sense of interrogation, not of a simple request. Wives are to judge or question their husband's prophecy at home, not in the assembly. Paul does not prohibit female leadership. He simply admonishes that “everything is done properly and in order”

(1 Corinthians 14:40). Clearly, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 continues the congregational instructions for order in charismatic worship. It is not a change of topic.

First Timothy 2:8–15

Paul's statement, "I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly" (1 Timothy 2:12), has puzzled interpreters. This puzzle led to a variety of views on what Paul intended regarding the women in Ephesus.

From the earlier survey of passages on women in ministry, one can see that Paul recognized the ministerial leadership of women. There are obvious problems in Ephesus, not just with women. Paul told the men to stop fighting during prayer (1 Timothy 2:8; see also 1 Timothy 3:3). Some of the women were given to inappropriate apparel and adornment (1 Timothy 2:9). Paul commanded that the women learn (the only command in the passage). They are to do so calmly, under self-control (1 Timothy 2:11).

A careful reading of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 makes Paul's intent clearer. He gave Timothy advice that dealt with the church at Ephesus specifically. It involved heretical teachings and practices, including aggressive and inappropriate behavior by men and women. The local cult of Artemis (Acts 19) taught that Artemis was the source of life and knowledge. First Timothy 2:13–15 makes the most sense as a direct rejection of this. Paul sent commands to the women to learn and limit them from teaching the claims of the Artemis heresy. Other passages show that the exclusion of women from ministry was not normal in Pauline churches.

The instructions for men to stop fighting were directed to Ephesus only. Apparently, other churches did not have the same struggle during prayer. The instructions that limit teaching by women relate to the content of the Ephesian heresy. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructed Timothy to find people who can teach, not just men. He also greeted Priscilla (2 Timothy 4:19). Conspicuously absent in his greeting is any instruction that Priscilla should cease her teaching for which she is known in the Book of Acts.

First Timothy 3:1–13

Some hold a view that instruction to "overseers" (NIV) and deacons confirms that all leaders in the Early Church were supposed to be males. These verses note male leadership due to the male-dominated society at the time. However, there is also strong evidence for female leaders.

The *New Living Translation* (NLT) translates verse 11, "In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do." This is typical of modern English versions. The NLT translators, like those of the NIV 1984, decided that the verse refers to the wives of deacons. However, the word translated as "wives" is the plural of the Greek word *gynē*. This term is translated as either "woman" or "wife" depending on the context. The NIV 2011, NASB, and NRSV render the plural form of *gynē* here as "women," not wives. The NLT and NIV 1984 list "deaconesses" as an alternate reading in their footnotes. Phoebe is explicitly identified as a "deacon" in Romans 16:1. It is worth noting that deacons are to be tested.

This is not required of the so-called “overseer” (1 Timothy 3:10). It may not be the case that deacons were of lower rank in the Pauline communities! First Timothy 3:11 addressed the qualifications of women in spiritual leadership who were identified as “deacons.”

The cultural milieu of the first century produced a primarily male church leadership. Yet, this passage, along with other biblical evidence (e.g., Acts 21:9; Romans 16:1–15; Philippians 4:2–3), reveals female leadership. They also show that it was neither prohibited in Paul’s day nor today. Passages that imply most leaders were male do not prove that all leaders are male. Furthermore, the biblical record speaks approvingly of many female leaders. First Timothy 3:1–13 does not disqualify women. Otherwise, that same way of reading the text could be used to disqualify unmarried men and men without children from leadership because leaders are addressed as if they are married with children.

Affirmations

A careful study of key translations and biblical passages revealed the active role of women in the church of the first century. With a desire to apply God’s Word to contemporary church practice, we conclude that there is no convincing evidence that the ministry of women is restricted by any sacred or immutable principle. Therefore, we offer the following affirmations:

1. We affirm the rejection of all prejudice and self-promotion by men or women. The existence of bigotry against women in our world, and all too often in churches, cannot be denied. But there is no place for such an attitude in the body of Christ.
2. We acknowledge that the attitudes of secular society, based on long-standing practice and tradition, have influenced the application of biblical principles to local circumstances. We desire to both respect and help redeem cultures at variance with kingdom principles. We affirm that the Great Commission takes priority over other considerations. Our task is to reach men and women for Christ, regardless of their cultural or ethnic customs.
3. We affirm that the message of redemption has been carried to remote parts of the world through the ministry of dedicated, Spirit-filled women and men. A believer’s gifts and anointing should still allow her or his ministry today.
4. We affirm that Pentecostal ministry must always be a divine calling, confirmed by the Spirit with special gifts. It is not a profession to which men or women merely aspire.
5. We affirm that the Assemblies of God has been blessed and must continue to be blessed by the ministry of God’s gifted and commissioned daughters.
6. The Bible repeatedly affirms that God pours His Spirit upon women and men. Thereby, He gifts both sexes for ministry in His Church. Therefore, we continue to affirm the gifts of women in ministry and spiritual leadership.

The Great Commission challenges us to “Go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). The size of this challenge surely requires the full deployment of all God’s Spirit-gifted ministers, whether male or female.

Guidelines

In view of these affirmations, we recommend the following guidelines:

1. Preach about the ministry and gifting of women before the church. This topic should come from a normal series on ministry or calling, not only from days given to women-specific issues like Mother's Day. Promote the biblical support of women in ministerial leadership.
2. Review the Constitution and Bylaws for your local church or ministry regarding the role of women (e.g., do they imply that only men can be pastors and board members). Update them if necessary. The General Presbytery approved in 2022 two excellent samples of local church bylaws. You can find them at <https://ag.org/About/Leadership%20Team/General%20Secretary#Bylaws>.
3. Provide policies, guidelines, and training throughout the church for all female and male leaders. Adopt policies that require morally safe boundaries that everyone practices and that are applied equally.
4. Be aware of analogies or language used in policy, trainings, and gatherings that are gender exclusive. For example, rather than use "father/son" language to describe the mentor relationship, use "mentor/mentee," use "parent church" rather than "mother church," and use "pastor's spouse" rather than "pastor's wife." Words matter.
5. Encourage God's giftings in women and men equally without steering them into traditional roles based on historical or cultural norms. If a boy and a girl feel a call to ministry, do not mentor the boy toward lead pastoring and the girl toward kids' ministry. Let them both know they can do all the above based on their calling and preparation. Where people end up in ministry has much to do with how they are mentored, affirmed, and given opportunities.
6. Men and women need to champion the advancement of women. Be prepared to open doors based on one's calling. Suggest someone's name when an opportunity arises. Get to know the skills, interests, and gifts of female colleagues to be better prepared to promote them to ministerial leadership roles when the opportunity arises.
7. Provide mentoring for men and women equally, aligned with their interests, calling, giftings, and needs within the community. Women may struggle to find a pastor willing to supervise or work with them. Efforts to "avoid the appearance of evil" do not justify ignoring the ministry or mentoring of women.

The image of God is reflected in "male and female" (Genesis 1:27). Similarly, the Church of Jesus is healthiest when women and men are empowered to fulfill their calling at every level of ministerial leadership. The Spirit empowers women and men for the glory of God and the good of the Church.

Bible Translations and Versions Abbreviations

ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
<i>NASB</i>	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i>
NIV	New International Version
<i>NLT</i>	<i>New Living Translation</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	The Revised Standard Version