

## Equip Women!

There are some issues which never seem to go away. Women's ministry is one of them. Much has been said, and much has been written on this subject. Even as a woman, I find myself experiencing a heart sink when the conversation turns yet again to how churches can employ more women, how churches should treat female employees, what training opportunities are there for women and how badly women have been treated in the past. Some women complain that there aren't ministry jobs for them, yet simultaneously, I hear of Churches struggling to fill posts. This subject always seems to stay and is frequently accompanied by low-level and not-so-low-level grumbling.

I want to address the elephant in the room. This is the elephant, in case you miss it - ministry is not a career. Following Christ and taking up our cross is the call for everyone<sup>1</sup>. How this works out in each individual's life will vary enormously through circumstances and life stages, but all men and women are called to live radically and sacrificially for Christ. All need equipping. When this happens, all types of people serve in multiple ways, and it is a joy to behold. The New Testament does not recognise categories of professional workers and volunteers - it teaches we are one body, each with a responsibility to serve according to the gifts we have been given<sup>2</sup>. The Church will financially support some to enable them to be free to serve, particularly the elders<sup>3</sup>. However, others won't be financially supported for various reasons, and Paul even gave up on that right at times for the gospel's sake<sup>4</sup>.

Most women's ministry happens in an unpaid context. I conducted a simple audit within the AMiE network and discovered the following:

### **Women in our formal leadership structures have roles in the following areas:**

*Trustees, Church Leadership Council, Treasurer, Safeguarding, Administrating, Part of the team that plans and reviews Sunday preaching, Small group ministry, Children and youth ministry, Student Ministry, Women's Ministry, Music Ministry, Mercy Ministry Coordinator.*

### **In our public services:**

*Welcoming, leading, reading, praying, leading the music ministry, Church family teaching slots in services, interviews, testimonies, interpreting/translating.*

### **General Ministries:**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Matthew 28:18

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 2:10, 4:1, 1 Peter 4:10-11

<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 5:17-18, 1 Corinthians 9:6-12, Philippians 4:15-18

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:6,11-12, 18, 2 Corinthians 11:7, Acts 18:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8,

*Women's bible study, meeting people 1 to 1, one-anothering, personal evangelism and apologetic conversations, cross-cultural evangelism, toddler groups and children outreach, pastoral ministry and pastoral care visitation, pastoral ministry training for the whole Church, hospitality, book groups, pregnancy counselling services, foodbank coordinator, CAP debt centre ministry.*

Most of these women are unpaid, with a handful of exceptions who receive a part-time salary. They juggle acts of service with their family responsibilities and secular employment. It is not new that women serve in these multiple ways. Women have served in various ways throughout the history of the Church. Paul rejoiced in the hardworking women he knew in the Church in Rome<sup>5</sup>. This is the normal Christian life. This should be true for all believers, men and women.

In the twenty-first century, modern lifestyles have meant that many feel the pressure of being time-poor and finding people willing and free to serve in the Church is difficult<sup>6</sup>. One response to this has been the increased professionalisation of ministry, employing Church teams to do all kinds of roles. This can work well, but it also can backfire; it can disempower 'lay' people and establish a service-user mentality in our churches. It may also encourage ambitions among some to become a professional Christian worker and cause resentment when paid jobs are not available<sup>7</sup>. However, the Church is not a gathering of staff and volunteers; even the word 'lay' to describe those not formally ordained can undermine faithful disciples of Christ. The Church is God's people, coming together with various gifts to build each other up and reach out with the gospel for His glory. We serve not to get jobs done, run events and keep our organisations running but because we belong to Christ and seek to honour Him. Not only do we belong to Christ, but we also belong to each other<sup>8</sup>. Ministry is not my career.

Although all of God's people are called to acts of service, some, including women, are to be identified as teachers. Paul encouraged Titus to teach the older women so that they could teach the younger women<sup>9</sup>. It is the pastor's responsibility to equip mature women so that that can happen. This means teaching sound doctrine to women because maturity comes through the teaching of the word<sup>10</sup>.

## **Models of women's ministry**

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 16,1-3,6,7,12,13

<sup>6</sup> Possibly people are more busy but when I look back at my grandfather who was born in 1900 and see his example of working as a tradesman six days a week and serving as a church treasurer with responsibility for the up keep of the church building I don't think he ever had spare time or 'me' time.

<sup>7</sup> I think this is a particular danger for a generation of women whose expectations for careers in the secular world have been encouraged.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 12:5

<sup>9</sup> Titus 2:3-5

<sup>10</sup> Titus 1:1, 2:11-12, 2 Timothy 3:14-17

1. Some churches will set apart a mature woman to teach other women and pay her appropriately<sup>11</sup>. (If this is the case, they must be paid in parity with their male counterparts. Ministry is not a career - we should provide appropriate stipends for all those set apart for this work, men and women.)
2. Some women may be able to serve as they juggle part-time secular work, i.e. tent making.
3. Some women will be able to offer their time without pay. They may be married and may be able to live off their husband's salary or have other means, e.g., they may have taken early retirement.

### **Key issues**

- The pastor has a responsibility to teach these women as they serve<sup>12</sup>. He should meet with them regularly, offering support and accountability.
- There needs to be a place where mature women who are pastoring others can provide feedback and share their wisdom with the eldership.
- The ministry of these women (paid or unpaid) needs to be championed and acknowledged by the Church's leadership so that others acknowledge the role they have been given<sup>13</sup>.
- If a woman is not receiving a stipend from the Church, how can her ministry be financially supported, e.g., by paying for training courses, conferences, travel expenses, etc.?

### **Equip!**

Most churches are small and far from employing a woman, but women's ministry is essential. All churches can ask the question - what women's ministry is happening? How can it be supported more? Even if nothing is happening, is there one woman who can be trained? Can you identify a godly woman who has a heart for Jesus? Many women need encouragement to get started and have not had the confidence to think they could ever teach the bible. Perhaps inviting her to be part of a small group alongside some similarly able men could be the beginning of encouraging her ministry, helping her to have good bible handling skills<sup>14</sup>.

Some women may be able to access formal theological training, but most will learn in a more piecemeal way. Can the Church fund a woman for a regional ministry training course? Could the

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 5:17-18,

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 5:2-3, Titus 2:3-5

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

<sup>14</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2,15

Church fund her to attend the Proclamation Trust Women in Ministry Conference every year or something similar?

This is my basic list for training women to teach others. It is also a great list for men!

- Strong knowledge of one gospel
- Understanding the big picture of the bible - biblical theology
- Skills - read a gospel one-to-one both in discipleship as well as evangelistically
- Read the bible one-on-one in a pastoral relationship
- Be able to pray publicly and with others.
- Prepare and lead a small group bible study
- Prepare and do a short evangelistic talk

In conclusion, the fundamental issues that matter whenever we think about women's ministry are these: Are they being equipped for acts of service<sup>15</sup>? And how can we help women teach other women more? Ministry is not a career; it is far more than that!

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<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13,