

## GENDER ROLE STUDY POSITION PAPER

At Sycamore View Church of Christ, we are a part of the heritage and history of “The Restoration Movement.” Sycamore View remains committed to RESTORATION: restoration of hearts, relationships and communities throughout our city and the world. We want to be a Christ-following, worshipping, forgiving, and caring family that lives prompted by God’s Word and His Holy Spirit. We want to be a church where everyone can discover Jesus and know His extravagant love as we celebrate the freedom and responsibility we have in Him.

In the summer of 2012, a team of shepherds and ministers was formed to study and discern the role of women in public worship. As we considered the culture and context of early Christians, we were forced to ask difficult questions about interpretation as we sought answers from scripture. We have taken a look at how other churches have prayerfully walked through this sensitive discussion in the life of their own church. We have studied with other teachers in the Churches of Christ, seeking their study and understanding.

In Acts 2, Peter shared the prophecy of Joel, who proclaimed:

*“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”*

The apostle Paul wrote this powerful declaration to the Galatian church:

*“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

In the New Testament, and specifically in Corinth, women prayed, spoke in tongues, and even prophesied in their assemblies. Yet historically, and specifically in our heritage as a church, we have tried to make the primary test for application today to be specific verses in *1 Timothy 2* and *1 Corinthians 14*, where Paul admonishes both women and men for causing disorder in the assembly with inappropriate and interruptive speaking, praying, prophesying, tongue-speaking, and for not demonstrating an attitude committed to building up the body.

Over the past few years, Sycamore View has experienced the giftedness of women in public roles in many venues. We have all been blessed by male and female ministers. Our sons and daughters have had the opportunity to use their gifts and express themselves in worship and praise. Our Life Groups and Bible Classes have been blessed by the voices of our mothers, daughters, and sisters as they pray, read scripture, and teach. We have also been blessed in worship by their voices and hearts as they testify to what God has done and is doing in their lives.

We have concluded that before God, there is a calling, and clear examples from Scripture to move in the direction of expanding women’s roles in public worship. We believe it to be in keeping with what would have been experienced in the early church as well.

As shepherds of the Sycamore View Church of Christ, we want to honor God, and are compelled to lead and live from God’s vision of restoration. We desire to join in the work of the Holy Spirit to include, embrace, allow, and affirm all spiritual gifts. We do not want to stifle the voices in our church which are blessings from God. We want to enthusiastically and lovingly welcome women and men at Sycamore View in sharing their voices in worship.

We believe that to not move forward regarding both males and females fully participating in our worship settings, is not in keeping with the practice and spirit of the New Testament record, nor is it in keeping with the calling of the Holy Spirit. We see this as an exciting and powerful moment for Sycamore View, and pray for God to open new doors of opportunities for us to be a restoring church family here in Memphis.

We do want to clearly state that although the New Testament provides examples of women speaking, teaching, proclaiming, prophesying, and praying in the early church, we see that the specific *roles* of elder and evangelist (what we refer to as the role of our “full-time preacher”) were not open to both men and women. We will continue to follow that New Testament practice and example at Sycamore View.

We realize expanding the role of women in public worship will be a refreshing and exciting aspect of “restoring” for many here at Sycamore View, and different, challenging, and even uncomfortable for others. Yet the goal as always is to honor God and glorify Him here, so we trust that we all will be patient as the Lord has His way with us and the voices of our sisters are now welcomed here at Sycamore View.

## A NOTE FROM YOUR SHEPHERDS

### So... “What now? Where do we go from here?”

We are prayerfully discerning. Please understand, your shepherds are certainly not trying to avoid the question, nor do we have any hidden motives. We began our study with no agenda and we ended it that way. As your shepherds, we simply wanted to have an open and honest study with no set conclusion to reach except where God would lead us.

It is important to your shepherds that you know that you will not see any sudden, dramatic changes in our current worship practice as we move in this direction. Just as we did not rush into a conclusion in our study, we do not feel compelled to rush into an answer to this question. We as a leadership, and we as a church body need to spend a lot of time in prayer and discussion and carefully consider what we do next. Indeed, before year's end we want to intentionally plan and provide additional in-depth study for all who desire to look further at how God uses the voices of both men and women. We plan to invite scholars from Harding School of Theology and respected authors who have studied the roles of women in worship, and let them share their observations and findings.

Do we think things will change? Yes, we do. What changes will occur, and when? We are walking by faith. Here is what we do know. Just as the Shepherds and Ministers have invested several months in this study regarding the blessing of hearing both men's and women's voices in our assemblies, which we believe is of God, we believe it to be vitally important that we now spend the next year or so, being sensitive and caring as we gently embrace an expanding role of women's voices in worship. We have had the study, and a foundation for moving forward has now been made. But there is no hurry or even an expectation that we all now have to be at the same place in our understanding. It is our intent that expanding the roles of women in worship becomes a good and meaningful part of all that we do and share at Sycamore View, to bless, and to edify the body.

We also want to say this is not about role reversal. We are not ignoring nor diminishing the expectation that an older woman will teach the younger woman how to love her husband and children. A woman will still be expected to honor her marriage, respect her husband and teach her children to love the Lord. A man will not be absolved of the responsibility to lead his wife and children in a way that displays to them the tangible image of God, to the glory of God. We are a church dedicated to the mission of 'Helping people see Jesus' and that mission is for each individual regardless of gender or any other trait.

As your shepherds, we realize that there are legitimate interpretative differences on this issue and that should give us reason for pause. Our study has led us to believe that women's participation in worship is endorsed, not forbidden in Scripture, but we feel that we need to proceed with discernment in this area. We know we're not all going to come to the same conclusions about this and we're going to have to be patient with one another and respectful of one another's views.

We can tell you definitively that regardless of where we are on this issue or any other issue, **WE ARE STILL FAMILY**. There will be things that happen in worship that I may not always like, but it's not about me...it's about us and more importantly it's about God & Jesus & the Holy Spirit. They are the focus of our worship and the basis for our unity. We are allowed to disagree, but we must still maintain respect and love for one another.

Finally, as the shepherds here at Sycamore View, we want you to know we love the Lord and we love you very much. Just as we continually go before the Father in prayer for each of you, we ask that you keep us lifted up in prayer as well. It is our prayer that in all we do here at this place, that Jesus will be lifted up, and that many will come to know him and be his disciples.