

## **WOMEN IN PUBLIC MINISTRY**

A close study of the Word of God, both Old and New Testament, indicates that God has seen fit to use women in His service in virtually every way He has employed men. We, therefore, see nothing that should restrict the God-ordained and Spirit-filled ministry of women in any capacity or office the Church in keeping with the Word of God which guides men and women alike.

### **WOMEN IN ORDAINED LEADERSHIP MINISTRY**

Throughout seven decades the Foursquare Church has recognized the equality of men and women as they have served the Lord and their church as members, ministers and as leaders. The Foursquare Church has followed the biblical pattern of mutual partnership and submission in the family. It is our conviction that while men and women are equal in the sight of God, He has gifted each individual with spiritual and natural abilities as He has pleased.

These gifts differ, as do personalities and the destinies which God has placed before them. The purpose of this paper is not to present an exhaustive study of how women in ministry fulfill their calling. Rather, it is to answer a consistent stream of inquiries as to the Foursquare Church's attitude towards the biblical right of women to serve in ministry and leadership, even to the extent of holding ecclesiastical position. It will also serve as a reminder to women desiring to enter the ministry of their God-given privilege to "be all they can be," for the glory of God and the good of our Church.

The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel affirms the place of women in ordained ministry and leadership. This belief affords women positions in all capacities in the local church, on the mission field and at all levels of government in the Foursquare corporate structure.

Currently, there are extensive examples of women effectively serving at the local church level as senior pastors, associate and assistant pastors, youth and Christian education ministers, council members, elders, deacons, teachers, prophets and administrators. Through the Foursquare corporate structure, women may serve as district supervisors, district and divisional leaders and corporate officers.

The Foursquare movement has husbands and wives who each feel a distinct call, as well as those women who serve, officially and unofficially, as partners in their husband's assignment. Women, unmarried and married, serving in official Foursquare ministry and leadership, have been endorsed and encouraged by statements approved and passed as sanctioned Foursquare resolutions. The 1975 official organization statement, "Women

In Public Ministry," reads: A close study of the Word of God, both Old and New Testament, indicates that God has seen fit to use women in His service in virtually every way He has employed men. We, therefore, see nothing that should restrict God-

ordained and Spirit-filled ministry of women in any capacity or office of the Church in keeping with the Word of God which guides men and women alike.

A 1988 declaration was unanimously passed by the Board of Directors. It reads: The present and historical position of the Foursquare Church affirms the biblical truth that women are called of God to a role of leadership and public ministry. We hereby reaffirm and encourage the ministry of women throughout the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of our movement's affirmation of women in leadership roles, we will address: 1) The General Biblical Position; 2) The Ministry of Jesus; 3) The Ministry of Women in the Early Church; and 4) The Ministry of Women in the Foursquare Church.

## **1) General Biblical Position**

### **Prophets**

- Miriam (Exodus 15:20, 21; Numbers 12:1-15; 20:1; 26:59; Deuteronomy 24:9) "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Micah 6:4).
- Huldah (II Kings 22:14-20; II Chronicles 34:22-33)
- The wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3)
- Anna (Luke 2:36)
- Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9)
- Early church women (I Corinthians 11:5)

### **Judges/Military Leaders**

- Deborah (Judges 4-5)

### **Diplomats**

- Abigail (I Samuel 25:1-42; II Samuel 2:2)
- Esther (Book of Esther)
- Phoebe, deacon and minister (Romans 16:1-2)
- Junia, apostle (Romans 16:7)
- Priscilla, early church teacher (Acts 18:2, 24-26; Romans 16:3; I Corinthians 16:19)
- Euodia and Syntyche, preachers and co-workers with Paul (Philippians 4:2-3)
- Unnamed intercessors and prophetic women (I Corinthians 11:2-16)
- Nympha, pastor (Colossians 4:15)

## **2) The Ministry of Jesus**

Certainly the words "subordinate" and "inferior" could well describe the cultural status of women during the time of Jesus. Our Lord, however, by His teaching and actions, affirms the worth and value of women as persons to be included, along with men, in God's love and service. Note these example of Jesus relating to women:

- The woman at the well (John 4:4-42)
- Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)

- Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9)
- The widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
- The woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-45)
- Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39)
- Jesus' teaching about "one flesh" (Matthew 19:3-9)
- Jesus' example of ministry to women shows that He received them, cared about them and had compassion on them. Jesus gives the same spiritual privileges to women that He gives to men.
- The gospel message elevates women along with men.
- Jesus also honored women by allowing them to minister to Him.
- Mary anointed Jesus' head (John 12:1-8).
- Jesus' feet were anointed by a sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50).
- Women were followers of Jesus and ministered to Him (Luke 8:1-3).
- Women stood at the foot of the Cross and remained there until His body was taken down (Mark 15:40-41, 47).
- Women were first at the tomb on resurrection morning, for they had come to anoint His body for burial (Mark 16:1-3).
- Women were first to give the message that Jesus is raised from the dead (Matthew 28:7-8).
- Jesus models the inclusion of women; His life and teaching powerfully affirm God's view of women.

### **3) Ministry of Women in the Early Church**

The early Church included both men and women in membership and leadership ministry. There were women at the first early Church meeting (Acts 1:14-15 - most likely the women noted in

- Luke 8:1-3; 23:49,55; 24:10) where they waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 2:11 - There were women present at the Spirit's outpouring.
- Acts 2:17 - There is the prophecy about "daughters prophesying."
- Acts 9:36-41 - Tabitha (Dorcas), a devoted disciple, was raised from the dead.
- Acts 16:15; 18:1-3; 21:8-9; Philemon 22 - Hospitable women opened their homes to missionaries and as centers of outreaches.
- Acts 16:15, 40 - There were churches in women's homes.
- A text which gives validity to women in ministry is Joel 2:28, quoted in Acts 2:16-18, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy." Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the International

Church of the Foursquare Gospel, frequently referred to this text as the basis for God empowering both men and women to believe for supernatural manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit today. This text's encouragement of women to minister has served as a biblical basis for our own (and many other) denominations to include, rather than exclude, women from leadership ministry.

Women are "the redeemed of the Lord," gifted and called to minister on His behalf. Neither a prophetic call nor the anointing of the Lord are based on gender, ethnicity or

social class. God has poured out His Spirit upon all, and He is not a respecter of persons.

#### **4) The Ministry of Women in the Foursquare Church**

Because the history of the Foursquare Church is relatively short, we are privileged to have living sources to provide insight into the historic place women have held in the Foursquare Church. In reference to our founder and the men and women who served with her, there are the following observations:

It was a woman, Aimee Semple McPherson, who founded the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. God gave her the plan for the "mother" church and the faith to build the now historic landmark, Angelus Temple. Sister McPherson based her right to preach on the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 and the example of other Bible women.

While capable men and women of faith served with Sister McPherson, it was God's anointing on her that caused Angelus Temple to be a revival center where tens of thousands came to know Christ and experience the infilling of the Holy Spirit. When Sister McPherson was not preaching, she would have women and men preach in her place. Among the women were Roberta Semple (her daughter) and evangelist Reba Crawford.

The Foursquare Training Institute and later LIFE Bible College were founded by Sister McPherson. Three-fourths of the institute's first students were women. Of the institute's 16 original graduates, 14 were women. The first dean of the college was Harriet Jordan. She held that office until 1937.

Strong women of faith with unique spiritual dedication have pioneered Foursquare churches, evangelized, served as missionaries and have done administrative work. Women preachers are a definable part of the Pentecostal and Foursquare heritage (The Vine and the Branches, Nathaniel Van Cleave).

The list of Foursquare credentialed women and leaders in the present is also extensive. In recent years in the United States, women have made up approximately one third of all active credentialed Foursquare ministers, one of the highest proportions of women ministers of any Church in the world. In other nations hundreds of women also serve in Ephesians four giftings.

It must be noted that not all women ministers serve as the primary overseer of a church or ministry. Yet, the sheer number of women who have been credentialed reveals that Foursquare women regard themselves as true ministers and leaders of the gospel in every way. They hold credentials because they currently do the work of the ministry and desire to minister in an even greater manner. They are not afraid to take on the burden of serving people, nor to call themselves leaders. In fact, it is quite common today to find couples who minister together, with the church recognizing them as co-pastors.

Women in ministry have made a significant contribution to global impact. Certainly, women have contributed greatly to the spread of the Foursquare Gospel to the more than 90 nations where it thrives today. Women have served diligently in fields all over the world, some alongside their husbands, and some whose husbands are not in vocational ministry. Single women have also served with distinction, including high profile positions in Bible colleges and Christian education.

Each year, through mission's teams, hundreds of women from Foursquare churches minister in other countries as team members. Currently, in many countries, women serve on national boards, as district supervisors and as pastors, teachers, prophets and evangelists (Ephesians 4:11).

Cultural barriers to women in ministry are being addressed and women are being released to fulfill their God-given roles. They are exercising their Spirit-ordained gifts.

**Conclusion:**

There are cultural issues associated with being a woman in ministry. Our commitment to the authority of Scripture and quality biblical interpretation requires that we attempt to define what is cultural and what is biblical. Women, like men, must be diligent to study the Scriptures and understand God's calling on their lives.

Foursquare history is filled with women and men who have found productive ministry, not based on gender, but based on God's gifting and calling (Proverbs 18:16; II Peter 1:10).

*A Position Statement for the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.*