

*This sample is based on the submission of St George's Dagenham in February 2016*

**St XXXXX's Church.**  
Somewhere, In-England, AA0 OAA

DATE

Dear Bishop,

**House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests.**

We hope this letter finds you well and in good heart.

We are reassured by the House of Bishops' commitment to those like us who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests. We are equally reassured that, notwithstanding the differences of conviction which will continue to exist on this issue, the Church of England remains committed to enabling us to flourish within its life and structures.

*We were particularly encouraged by your own commitment, demonstrated by .....*

Given the opportunity under the Declaration and the Guidance Note [GS Misc 1077] the PCC wishes to take advantage of arrangements available to those whose theological conviction leads them to seek the priestly or episcopal ministry of men.

*This is consistent with St XXXXX's position for many years, where previously pastoral and sacramental ministry has been provided under Resolution A, B & C of the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993.*

Turning now to the Declaration, we have followed the procedure set out there and we are writing to inform you that at a PCC meeting held on THIS DATE the following resolution was passed:

***"This PCC requests, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests."***

Notice of this meeting was given to all PCC members on DATE together with a copy of the proposed resolution as above.

XX of the XX PCC members were physically present at the meeting on DATE.

The resolution was approved XX in favour, XX against with XX abstentions.

Furthermore, as good practice, the wider church community was invited on DATE (and reminded on subsequent Sundays) to discuss and submit views on the proposed resolution and its underlying theological conviction (attached). There followed constructive discussions with a number of church members, and we received XX written responses.

In addition, the PCC requests that arrangements be made for St XXXXX parish to come under the extended episcopal oversight of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet. We are requesting that delegated oversight now, as opposed to when a female bishop is appointed, in order to de-personalise and minimise any potential misunderstanding that we are reacting to a particular female bishop.

As required by the Declaration, a copy of this letter is being sent to our Area Bishop, the Archdeacon, and the Diocesan Registrar.

Yours faithfully,

Signed:

Signed:

# Churchwardens on behalf of the Parochial Church Council

Cc: The Area Bishop; The Archdeacon; The Diocesan Registrar.

## ST XXXXX.

### Statement of theological conviction regarding the ministry of women.

Our theological conviction is based on four principles taken from Scripture:

1. The creation order
2. The Fall of Man and its implications
3. The model of Christian marriage (indeed of the role of men and women in church) as reflecting the relationship between Christ and his Church
4. The Trinitarian model of equality and submission

These principles are explained below:

The Scriptures teach clearly that **men and women are of equal value** in God's eyes. In Genesis 1 we read that God created man and woman in his image...male and female he created them.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning, it is emphasised that **we are created equal but also different**, as two different types of human, male and female. Genesis 2:18-25 clearly points out the nature of our mutual relationship.<sup>2</sup> God creates woman from the man, and presents her to him. He names her woman. The man's response is a picture of delight and openness. **There are clues in the account that there is an order in this relationship.** The man is made first, then the woman; she is to be his helper; he names her woman, which signifies authority; it is to the man that the commandments about the Garden are given, so that he is responsible. **It is the responsibility of Adam which is emphasised in Scripture and he is held accountable**<sup>3</sup> not because he is less easily tricked, but because he has received the word of God and yet whilst present with his wife<sup>4</sup>, does nothing to protect his wife from the lies of the devil. **God gives the man the lead role** - and that is certainly how the apostle Paul understands this passage when he alludes to it in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.

Now **this does not, for a moment, imply that the woman has a status any lower than the man**: the Hebrew word for helper is also used in the Old Testament to refer to God. The clearest way of understanding the role of helper is to see it as referring to women helping men in the task of ruling over God's creation. It doesn't mean helping the man to do whatever he wants. Moreover, the very term woman sounds similar in the Hebrew to man. There is absolute equality of value; it is their roles that are different (in our power-obsessed society, some find it very hard to distinguish these). **The important point to note is this: the ordering of man and woman is written into creation, before the Fall**; it is not the result of the tragedy that follows. It is also important to recognise that the apostle Paul recognises that **this order of creation is based not solely on the nature of men and women, but also the relationship that Christ has with his church.** In quoting from Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5 he comments "this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the Church"<sup>5</sup>.

Genesis 3 tells the wretched story of the entry of sin into the world, as the first man and woman rebel against God. Significantly, the man is held responsible, even though it is the

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Christ himself understood this account to be the very words of God: see Matthew 19:4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 5:12-21

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:30-31

woman who has made the first move.<sup>6</sup> As God passes sentence on them, he addresses the woman: **“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”**<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew translated “desire” is the same word which in Genesis 4:7 is used for sin “desiring” Cain. Hence **the desire that is being spoken of, is the desire of mastery**. So it is part of the curse that Eve now desires to master Adam, and **Adam responds with tyrannical rule “he will rule over you”**. **This is not the order of creation, but the effects of coming under the condemnation of God.**

Now, **in a sinful world, headship is replaced by tyranny, and complementary roles by toxic competition**. What we see - as in all the results of the Fall - is not the establishment of a completely new pattern, but the spoiling of an existing one. There is now so much hurt and pain in the relationship between man and woman through sin that **it is only Jesus Christ who can come to redeem this relationship**, as any other. He fulfils what was always intended in the pattern of marriage, he lays down his life for his wife. It is this pattern of Christ’s self sacrifice for his bride, that is to be pictured in marriage in which as the church submits to Christ, so the wife gladly submits to the loving self sacrifice of her husband, as the church does to Christ. The second Adam succeeds in love where the first Adam failed. **So in Christ we see the creation pattern restored**. The central message of the Bible is, of course, the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. Sins are forgiven; God calls out for himself a people; they are called to walk in newness of life. What does that look like in the context of the order of the relationship between man and woman? The answer is to look back to the Creation order. Order is there - but it is of a Genesis 2 kind, not Genesis 3.

**So in Ephesians 5, we read of God’s pattern for Christian marriage**. The husband is the head of the wife; she is called to submit to him; but he is commanded to love her. The model for this is the sacred relationship between Christ and his church, of which marriage turns out not only to be a beautiful picture, but patterned on the intended redemption of the church, by Christ, the body of which he is the head.<sup>8</sup>

In his teaching **on the ordering of the church**, Paul takes a similar “headship” view. **The connection is that the church is also a family - indeed, Paul calls it God’s household.**<sup>9</sup> It is in this context that he says “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man - she must be silent”.<sup>10</sup> He is **referring to a local church, using the language of a family, and wants to see in it the same ordering that is written into creation**. The church is called, in its arrangements, to witness to God’s creation pattern. Nevertheless, we rejoice in the many other roles which women hold in church life: in leading women’s groups, the church’s prayer life, children and youth work, and in many other aspects of word & other ministry.

In the various debates that have taken place **over the years on this subject, Galatians 3:28-29 has often been quoted to support the idea of gender-neutral ministry**: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (ESV). **This is to confuse justification and belonging to God’s family, with church order which is clear from the immediate context.**

**The Bible’s teaching on male headship also appears within a different context: 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul talks about how arrangements within the church of his day**

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 3:17

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:16b

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:21-33; see also 1 Corinthians 11:3, Colossians 5:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-7.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Timothy 3:15; see also 3:5, 5:1, 2.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12. That this does not imply an absolute silence in church is suggested by women praying or prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5. See also 1 Cor 14:33-35; Titus 1.

**needed to reflect God's pattern for authority and submission.** As soon as we read the word 'submission' it can conjure up very unhelpful ideas of male dominance – and regrettably this has sometimes been all too evident in the church's history. However, **'submission' is a very godly characteristic, and is something that all Christians, men and women, should exhibit (Ephesians 5:21)** in different contexts as we seek to be filled with the Spirit and live by the humility of Christ in his submission and obedience to his heavenly Father. **Our women have a special responsibility of modelling before the whole church family what godly submission should look like (1 Peter 3:1, Ephesians 5:22), just as men have the responsibility in all humility for displaying self – sacrificing servant leadership.**

In the specific case of 1 Corinthians 11, **Paul adds the key further thought that 'the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.'** In other words, **the Trinity models both equality and submission. The Son is never less than God, yet the Father is his 'head.'** This is further emphasized in 1 Corinthians 15:28 where Paul describes Christ's triumph over all his enemies when He comes again and then says: 'When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.' The thrust of these verses is clear: men and women in both natural and church families are to be a reflection of something that is true of God himself.

**Summary:**

- male and female are equal;
- male and female are different;
- different roles are assigned to men and women in marriage, the household, and God's household the church;
- the role of 'head' is assigned to the male, following the example of Christ.