

MEN AND WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AT IRVING BIBLE CHURCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following document is an executive summary of our theological convictions on men and women in leadership at Irving Bible Church. What follows summarizes our position, our process, and our posture as a church. For a more in-depth treatment of the relevant biblical material, see our "Men and Women in Leadership" position paper. You can view that document [here](#).

Our Position

At Irving Bible Church, we believe that God created both men and women in his image, that he offers the same Holy Spirit at salvation, and that the same spiritual gifts are given to both men and women for service. We believe that the gifts and callings of God are given to both men and women and are intended for the building up of the body of Christ. Therefore, the elders of Irving Bible Church affirm that both men and women are scripturally qualified, spiritually gifted, and divinely called to serve and lead side by side in every area in the life of the church. This includes roles of teaching and spiritual leadership as they faithfully use their gifts to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom in the world.

The roles and relationships of men and women in the life and leadership of the church have long been the subject of thoughtful discussion, disagreement, and debate among faithful Christians. Across the evangelical world (and within our own congregation), there are sincere followers of Jesus, committed to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, who arrive at different conclusions on these questions. Because Irving Bible Church is committed to being formed by Scripture, our desire has been to pursue a careful, humble, culturally informed reading of the Bible, not to arrive at conclusions based on cultural pressure or personal preference. This document summarizes the conclusions reached by our elder board after an extended season of study, prayer, and discernment.

It is of the utmost importance that we make clear that the theological position articulated here does not suggest that there are no differences between men and women. Rather, it is our position that the church is better off when those differences are represented in every area of ministry and leadership. To affirm the equal gifting and calling of men and women is not to deny their differences but to recognize that God has created us as distinct and complementary, and that the church flourishes when those distinct voices, gifts, and perspectives are brought together in ministry and leadership. This theological conviction, we believe, is *biblical, practical, and missional*.

Biblical: For the reasons outlined extensively in our position paper, we believe that the Bible does not place any necessary restrictions on women's service in the church. Rather, we believe that the Bible — when read in its entirety and with careful attention to its language and cultural backgrounds — affirms that both men and women are gifted by the Spirit to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ and the advancement of the mission of God in the world. This is consistent with the entire witness of Scripture, from the account of creation and fall, through the story of

Israel, to the life and ministry of Jesus, and on to the account of the life and mission of the early church.

Practical: We believe that the full participation of both men and women in every area of ministry and leadership in the church is of tremendous practical benefit. We believe that this commitment leads to better decision making, as the full range of experiences and perspectives from both men and women in our body can be brought to bear on complex pastoral and organizational decisions. This helps us avoid potential blind spots, overlooked realities, or limitations of perspective or judgment. Further, we believe that this commitment leads to better care for the whole body as both men and women use their gifts, experiences, and perspectives to care for the needs of the congregation. Finally, diverse leadership helps us ensure that different voices and experiences are heard and valued in every area of the life of our church. It helps ensure that more people feel seen, understood, and supported by the leadership and ministries of our church family.

Missional: We believe that the full participation of both men and women side by side in every area of the church's life best positions us to faithfully and effectively pursue our mission of "helping our diverse community follow Jesus and bless the world." Our witness to the world is enhanced when the whole community is mobilized to use their gifts for the glory of God, the good of his people, and the cause of his mission. We believe that our church's witness to the world is strengthened and enhanced by the visible partnership of men and women in the work of the gospel.

Our Process

The elder board at IBC first began the process of prayer, study, and discernment around the theology of women in leadership 20 years ago. Since 2008, every area of ministry and leadership has been open to both men and women, with the exception of the role of elder. For nearly two decades, IBC has been blessed by the giftedness of godly women pastors, leaders, and teachers. We have experienced the fruitful work that comes from men and women serving side by side in the cause of Christ and his kingdom. Yet, throughout that time, questions have persisted from the congregation and among our leaders about the role of elder.

In the summer of 2023, the board began to prayerfully consider revisiting this topic through a season of dedicated prayer, study, and discernment. That season began in earnest in the summer of 2024, and the board spent the next 14 months going back through an intensive study that spanned Genesis to Revelation, reviewing theological convictions outlined in our 2008 paper and carefully studying the relevant passages that led to the reservations about the role of elder all those years ago. Those 14 months were characterized by careful examination of the biblical text, reading the best scholars representing both sides of the question, honest and open dialogue, and extensive prayer.

At the conclusion of our study, the board came to the unified decision to move forward with the position articulated in the statement above. This position is not a fundamental change in our long-held theology about women in leadership. Rather, it brings our theology into greater congruence. The biblical vision from start to finish is the "blessed alliance," men and women made in the image of God, called and gifted

to advance his mission in the world side by side in ministry and leadership. We have seen that play out powerfully in the life of our church the past two decades.

Upon the completion of our study as a board, we determined that it would be wise to bring others from our staff and congregation meaningfully into the process of prayer, study, and discernment, allowing them to ask questions, offer feedback, and join us in asking God for wisdom and guidance. We spent the next several months engaging this topic with our pastors and with an ad hoc Study Group made up of pastors, elders, deacons, staff, and congregation members. That process has been a fruitful part of our learning and discernment and has reinforced our determination to move forward with the decision to affirm godly, gifted, called, and qualified men and women in every area of ministry and leadership at IBC.

Our Posture

Theological discussions about the roles and relationships of men and women in the life and leadership of the church are not merely interesting academic exercises. They have real implications for local churches and their members. We acknowledge that there are wise, godly, Bible-believing Christians who have carefully studied these issues and passages who come to different conclusions than those laid out in this paper. There are and will continue to be those kinds of wise, godly, Bible-believing Christians within our congregation. Agreement with the convictions laid out in this paper will not be a litmus test for inclusion in the life of our church. People who differ in their conclusions on these questions are and will continue to be welcomed and vitally involved in our body. At the same time, the convictions articulated above will guide how we operate together as we move forward into the future.

The church needs the gifts of both men and women fully activated and expressed for the building up of the body of Christ and the pursuit of his mission in the world. Leadership is about gifting, character, and calling, not about gender. The kingdom advances through the “blessed alliance,” men and women serving side by side in every area of ministry and leadership. This conviction is consistent with the biblical witness from start to finish, it has enormous practical importance for the church, and it positions us best to faithfully pursue our mission of “helping our diverse community follow Jesus and bless the world.” This mission will continue to be our focus as we move forward together.