**REPORT OF THE PMV STUDY COMMITTEE**

**ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Presbytery of Mississippi Valley, with all the churches of the Presbyterian Church in America, confess with one voice that the Bible is God’s Word and is the “supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest” (WCF 1.10). We also subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms as accurate and reliable sum-maries of biblical teaching and therefore our own faith.

So committed, the Presbytery of Mississippi Valley established a commission to appoint “a Special Committee” at its 1 May 2018 meeting “to study the recommendations of GA regarding the role of women in ministry and report its recommendations” back to pres-bytery. This is that report.

Our report is offered in two parts. The first part comments on each recommendation to the sessions and presbyteries of the PCA (recommendations 2–8) proposed in the Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church and adopted by the Forty-Fifth General Assembly (hereafter, GA Report). The second part contains a set of recommendations regarding the role of women in the church generated by our study of the GA Report in light of Scripture, the Constitution of the PCA, our Standing Rules, and historical and current practices. The members of this committee consulted and were advised throughout by a panel of wise, godly, and gifted women ministry leaders in our presbytery.

**PART 1**

**Commentary on the GA Report Recommendations**

**GA Report Recommendation 2**

*That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly recognize that, from the founding of the PCA, there has been a variety of views and practices regarding the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church within scriptural and constitutional parame-ters, without ordination, and that such mutual respect for said views and practices continues.*

This recommendation requires a clear delineation of the “scriptural and constitutional parameters” within which “a variety of views and practices regarding the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church” may be permitted. To that end, we offer a brief review of the biblical support for our constitutional commitment that the offices of elder and deacon “are only open to men” (BCO 7-2) and then describe the variety of ways women serve the church in the New Testament and the apostolic principles that regulate this service.

*Ordination in the New Testament*

According to *The Book of Church Order*, ordination is“the authoritative ad-mission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands” (*BCO* 17-2). Ordinarily and constitutionally, “those who have been called to office in the Church are to be inducted by the ordination of a court” (17-1).

Contrary to sacerdotal communions, Presbyterians do not view ordination as a sacrament that conveys the requisite gifts for office. Rather, ordination is the admission to office of a man willing to serve who, duly tested and tried, has already demonstrated the requisite character and gifts for that office. The church, recognizing these gifts and desiring his service, calls the man to a definite work, authorizing him to perform that work by solemnly admitting him to office through the laying on of hands and prayer in a public worship service of the church.

The church has two “ordinary and perpetual” offices—elder and deacon—and ordination is the only means provided in Scripture to admit a person to either office or authorize someone to fulfill its functions (*BCO* 7-2). Although the biblical requirements for each office largely concern the character and spiritual maturity of the candidate, and therefore overlap considerably, they are nevertheless particular to each office. Thus, when con-sidering who may be admitted to an office we must consider these two offices separately.

*Elders*

It is clear from Scripture that only men are to be admitted to the office of elder—so clear, in fact, the GA Report devotes little space to the point. We believe it is prudent to briefly state the biblical case for restricting the ordination of elders to males only.

Addressing the proper roles of men and women in public worship Paul sets down this principle: “I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man” (1 Tim 2:12). Since the office of elder is one of teaching (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17) and exercising authority (1 Tim 3:2, 5; 5:17; Heb. 13:17) in the church, the office of elder is not open to women.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is not surprising, then, that the qualifications for the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) are male-specific; that there is no provision for female candidates; and that we meet and find no indication of female elders in the New Testament.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The office of elder is only open to men not because Scripture views women as inferior to men or incompetent to teach or lead. On the contrary, women in the church are godly and gifted and some excel as teachers and leaders. Women are called to fully exercise their gifts in the church and Scripture provides women every good and proper opportunity to do so. The office of elder is restricted to men, the apostle argues (1 Tim 3:1–7), simply because this is the order established by God at creation (1 Tim 2:13–14).[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Deacons*

The GA Report devotes substantial space in its discussion of ordination (chapter 3) to the question of the ordination of women to the office of deacon. This is largely due to three factors: the nature of diaconal ministry, differing interpretations of Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11, and the variety of opinions and practices in church history and the Reformed tradition beyond the PCA. Since our concern here is with what Scripture prescribes we will consider the first two factors.

Reflecting clear biblical teaching, the *BCO* asserts “the office of deacon is not one of rule but of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people” (BCO 7-2). Some have concluded from this that the nature of the office, as one of service rather than rule, presents no obstacle to ordaining women as deacons. Advocates of doing so generally appeal to two texts for support: Romans 16:1, where Paul describes Phoebe as “a servant [διάκονος] of the church at Cenchrea,” and 1 Timothy 3:11, where Paul parenthetically inserts qualifications for women or wives (γυναικὀς) in his description of the qualifi-cations for deacons.

Even if the nature of diaconal ministry were no barrier to admitting women to the diaco-nate, the nature of ordination still is. Acts 6:1–6 strongly suggests, for example, that ordained deacons exercise authority over the congregation.[[4]](#footnote-4) It is clear that the church in Jerusalem already engaged in diaconal ministries including a “daily distribution” of provisions to the needy. What was needed on this occasion was neither to mobilize nor authorize the congregation to engage in ministries of service but to appoint officials authorized to organize and oversee this ministry for the peace, unity, and witness of the church (cf. Acts 6:7).

The apostles therefore instructed the congregation to select seven evidently qualified and tested men to be publically appointed to oversee this work. The term translated in the ESV as “appoint” is κατασήσομεν, from καθίστημι. As the GA report notes, καθίστημι means to “put in charge of” and “regularly carries the sense of being set in authority over someone or something” (p. 38).[[5]](#footnote-5) While the authority of their office is limited to diaconal ministry and exercised under apostolic and elder oversight, these men are ordained to exercise authority in these matters over the men and women of the church.

If the precedent of Acts 6 is normative for the church, then the *BCO* is right that “these offices [i.e., elder and deacon] are open to men only” (7-2) even as it also recognizes that, given the nature of diaconal ministry, “it is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need” (9-7).

Romans 16:1–2 is considered by some Reformed scholars to be “the clearest” or even only evidence supporting the ordination of women as deacons in the New Testament.[[6]](#footnote-6) While it is possible that Paul intends to refer to Phoebe as a deacon in the official or technical sense, it seems unlikely. As the GA Report notes, διάκονος “ordinarily means a servant or helper” and may be used to commend any saint (p. 9; e.g. Matt. 20:26; 23:11; Mark 9:35; John 12:26; etc.) or even of civil magistrates (Rom. 13:4). Although it is also used in the technical sense of “deacon” (e.g. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12), there is “no clear contextual indication that the term” is used in this sense here.[[7]](#footnote-7) Therefore, even if the technical sense of deaconess is possible, it seems best to take διάκονος in its ordinary and general sense of “servant.”

It is even more doubtful that 1 Timothy 3:11 supports the ordination of women as dea-cons. Whether Paul intended γυναικὀς to mean “wives” or “women,” it is clear that the women in view do not belong to the diaconate. First, the qualifications for deacon can-didates in 1 Timothy 3:12 are male specific (“husband of one wife”). Second, as the GA Report observes, the women of 3:11 are treated as a separate class, “set apart from dea-cons by the term ‘likewise’ (ὡσαύτως), just as deacons are set apart from elders by” the same term in 3:8. Third, the qualifications for these women significantly differ from the qualifications for deacons in 3:8–10 and 12–13 and include no provision for a time of trial or testing. Fourth, though Paul treats these women distinctly, even if parenthetically, he does not style them with any official title as he does elders and deacons. Finally, though the women of 3:11 are treated distinctly, there is no evidence of an ordinary or perpetual third office of just women in the church anywhere in the New Testament.

Paul seems to have in mind a distinct body of qualified women (or wives) who have some connection to diaconal ministry but are neither candidates for ordination to the office of deacon nor constitute a distinct order of female deacons. Rather than supporting the ordination of women to church office, this passage seems to support the kind of diaconal assistants provided for in *BCO* 9-7. This makes good practical sense since, as Waters notes, “diaconal ministry would involve the deacons intimately in the lives of female members of the congregation.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Either way, this committee is persuaded from the biblical data that there is no warrant for admitting women to the office of deacon in the New Testament.

*Women Serving the Church in the New Testament*

The New Testament restriction of office to males raises important questions about how women may fully utilize their gifts to serve the church within biblical parameters. The New Testament offers several principles that promote and regulate the role of women in the work of the ministry and offers godly examples for our instruction. We must be care-ful neither to relax clear biblical constraints on how women may serve the church faith-fully nor to constrict the ministry of female saints more narrowly than Scripture requires; we err both when we are ignorant of or apathetic toward these biblical parameters and when we are so fearful of approaching them we hinder women from making a full and proper use of their gifts in the church.

The specific constitutional parameters regarding women in ministry are relatively few in number. As already noted, the *BCO* states that the offices of elder and deacon are open to men only (7-2). It also declares that it “is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need” (9-7). The *Westminster Larger Catechism* asserts that “all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation” in corporate worship (Q. 156) and that “the Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office” (Q. 158). Regarding the sacraments, the *BCO* (following the Westminster Standards) makes explicit that only ministers of the gospel lawfully ordained may administer the sacraments (56-1, 58-4/5; cf. WCF 27.4) and, by deduction, it assumes the elders are to distribute the elements of the Lord’s Supper to the communicants.[[9]](#footnote-9)

These constitutional parameters are based on scriptural parameters, and within these parameters there are many biblical examples of how women serve the church. Focusing on the New Testament, it is evident that women were active in ministry, including during the public ministry of Jesus:

1) Women learned from Jesus (Mary: Luke 10:39) and spoke to both men and women of the glories of God in Christ (e.g., Mary: Luke 1:46-55; Anna: Luke 2:36, 38; the Samaritan woman: John 4:29).

2) Women were offered as examples of great faith (e.g., Elizabeth naming her son John rather than Zechariah: Luke 1:59–60; the Syrophoenician woman: Matt. 15:21-28; Mary: Luke 1:45).

3) Women served and supported Jesus and His apostolic band (e.g., Peter’s mother-in-law: Luke 5:39; Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna were with Jesus and the apostles, and contributed to their support out of their private means: Luke 8:1-3; Martha: Luke 10:38).

4) Women accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem in His final days, anointed Jesus for His burial before He died (John 12:1-8), were present at His crucifixion (Luke 23:49; John 19:25-27) and His burial (Luke 23:55), and prepared to anoint His body further after His death (Luke 23:56).

5) Women were the first to witness the risen Christ and to announce His resurrection (and His commandment) to the disciples (John 20:1-18; Matt. 28:9-10).

After Christ’s ascension, women were similarly engaged in ministry in the church and the world:

1) Women spoke to and for the risen Christ: participating in the prayer meeting in the upper room (Acts 1:14); prophesying during the age in which the canon was still being formed and revelation had not ceased (Acts 2:17-18; 21:8; 1 Cor. 11:5); and explaining God’s truth to men in private settings (Priscilla and her husband Aquila joined Paul on one of his missionary journeys and explained the way of God more accurately to Apollos in Ephesus, Acts 18:18-26; Mary is generally recognized as an important source for Luke’s gospel).

2) Women served Jesus and His church: Paul called Priscilla one of his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked [her] neck” for his life (Romans 16:3); Phoebe was “a servant of the church at Cenchreae,” a benefactor of Paul and many others, and the likely letter-carrier for Paul’s epistle to the Romans (Romans 16:1-2); Euodia and Syntyche “labored side by side” in the gospel with Paul and the rest of his fellow workers (Phil. 4:2-3); Paul greeted several women who “worked hard” in the Lord for the church (Rom. 16:6, 12); and Nympha hosted a church in her house (Col. 4:15). Some women—perhaps the wives of deacons—must have played a role in diaconal ministries since Paul lists qualifications for them in 1 Timothy 3:11.

3) The New Testament also characterizes women as actively teaching God’s word to, and praying with and for, their households and the younger women around them (1 Tim. 5:5; 2 Tim. 3:5; Tit. 2:3-4). Paul’s description of godly widows shows the wide array of good works expected and encouraged by the gospel: “she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work” (1 Tim. 5:10). Younger widows are called to marry, to manage their households, and care for widows related to them (1 Tim. 5:14–16).

The New Testament does include several passages that restrict the ministry of women in certain areas. While encouraged to be active learners of the truth of Christ, women are not permitted “to teach or to exercise authority over a man” in public worship and thus, as argued above, are not allowed to be elders or deacons (1 Tim. 2:11-12). Even during the era of continuing revelation, when prophecy and tongues continued, women were not permitted to weigh or test what prophets declared (1 Cor. 14:29-35). These passages are an application of the general principle of male headship in the home and in the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

In summary, the Scriptures and our constitutional documents liberate women to utilize the gifts God has given them for the sake of the body of Christ within the restrictions and order He has instituted. There is a variety of ways that godly women may serve the Lord, the church, and those outside the church, and as long as these ministries fall within the guidelines mandated by the Lord, they should be encouraged as fervently as possible.

*Conclusion*

Submitting to Scripture in everything and adhering to apostolic precedent set down in the New Testament requires the Presbytery of Mississippi Valley and sessions of its member churches to continue holding, teaching, and practicing male-only ordination to the offices of elder and deacon and continue observing the clear biblical and constitutional param-eters that prevent non-officers from fulfilling the functions reserved to church officers, especially in public worship (see comments on GA Report Recommendation 5 below).

At the same time, we should study ways to promote, enable, and support the many di-verse and vital contributions godly and gifted women of this presbytery can and do make to the work of the ministry. We must also seek to remove every hindrance to the full exercise of their gifts in service to the body of Christ within these biblical and constitu-tional parameters. As elders who are to be obeyed in the Lord and must give an account to Him, we ought to diligently examine our own hearts and the current practices of the Church to discover any point where we may be captive to cultural assumptions and ex-pectations that are contrary to biblical norms. Such captivity may be evident in tendencies to conform or capitulate to unbiblical principles and practices but also may be evident in tendencies to overreact, overcorrect, or overcompensate in the face of various pressures from the world. The latter tendencies are no less unbiblical and are perhaps more com-mon whenever our concern is more focused on what women may not do in the church than supporting and facilitating all they may do (see recommendation 2 in Part 2).

**GA Report Recommendation 3**

*That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly strive to develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of godly women in the local, regional, and national church, and particularly consider overtures that would allow qualified women to serve on appropriate committees and agencies within the church.*

As the GA report notes, PCA women have served the church in a variety of ways from the founding of our denomination. The women of PMV also serve the Church at all levels (congregation, presbytery, and General Assembly) in a wide variety of ways—see the Appendix for a representative survey. The committee believes that there is no need for any overture concerning women’s service on church committees and agencies and the women who advised this committee expressed no desire or support for such an overture but welcome opportunities to serve as advisers to committees as appropriate.[[10]](#footnote-10)

*Congregations*

PMV women serve congregations in paid and volunteer positions and are active in an array of mercy and service ministries (see Appendix). PMV Women regularly teach other women and children and occasionally teach mixed-gender adult gatherings in PMV churches outside of public worship services (see Appendix).

Women fully participate with the congregation in all elements of public worship. PMV women also help prepare for public worship (see Appendix) and occasionally address the congregation during announcements, mission reports, and the like during worship services. To our knowledge, women are not permitted to read Scripture to the congregation as an element of worship in the order of service or assist in distributing the elements of communion in PMV churches nor did the women advising this committee express any interest in or desire to do so.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The women of PMV churches also take an active interest and role in promoting, supporting, and encouraging MNA and MTW missionaries and their ministries through prayer, financial and material contributions, a variety of service initiatives, correspondence and encouragement campaigns, and active participation on short and long terms mission projects.

Many PMV churches have organized women’s ministries led by a committee of women who work under and in support of the session (on the question of commissioning see comments on GA Report Recommendation 7 below). Many churches also encourage women to fully participate on other permanent and temporary church committees. PMV sessions regularly turn to godly women to advise and assist elders and deacons, especially in delicate matters related to the spiritual and physical care of women. While this practice takes a variety of forms, it appears to be widespread. A few PMV churches even maintain formal teams or lists of session-approved women assistants.

Training opportunities for women ministry leaders vary widely. At least one PMV church has women ministry leaders attend the common sessions of leadership (officer) training, with special breakout sessions for women when that training turns to the particulars of the offices of elder and deacon. Some churches include women in teacher or Sunday School training sessions. Although some women’s ministry teams organize their own training programs, many PMV churches appear to have no “in house” program for training women leaders or provision for pastor or session contributions to this training and lean heavily on training opportunities offered at the national and regional level.

Rather than feeling constrained by current PCA polity and practices, PMV women’s ministry leaders report having the freedom and support they need and desire to fully exercise their gifts in the Church. They emphatically express a strong desire for session oversight, leadership, and support as well as open communication with the session. They also consistently connect their work to the session’s rule. In the words of one leader, “the role of women in the church is to come alongside [the] session [and] diaconate to help them accomplish the overall mission and vision of the church.” As another leader notes, “my experience and observation has been that the most fruitful women’s ministries in the local church have been overwhelmingly supported by the church’s TEs and REs.”

*Presbytery*

The Standing Rules of PMV provide for the Presbytery Women’s Ministry Team. The stated purpose of PWMT is “to promote deeper relationship and connection among the women in MS Valley Churches and to encourage and equip them for ministry.” To fulfill this purpose, the five women currently serving on this ministry team make themselves available to meet with women’s ministry leaders in local churches; organize opportunities for fellowship, training, and service; generally support and connect women throughout the presbytery; and support and promote local church, PMV, and GA women’s ministry resources and opportunities.

Presbytery supports the PWMT with encouragement and oversight through CDM and with finances used to supply necessities for the work of the team and enable team mem-bers to receive further ministry training at national conferences. Presbytery’s CDM also maintains a sortable online Discipleship Ministries Database that includes women’s ministry leaders in PMV. This database is promoted and updated by the PWMT.

The women of PMV regularly inform presbytery on matters related to their work and have been invited to present women’s perspectives from time to time, such as on how elders can more effectively shepherd women. Women are sometimes invited to address or advise a presbytery committee. The presbytery’s CDM, through whom PWMT reports to PMV, appears to be the only committee with a standing invitation to a PMV woman. (Several PMV women have advised this committee in our work.)[[12]](#footnote-12)

Presbytery women frequently serve PMV at our meetings in various ways, and are ordin-arily acknowledged by the thanks committee for their work. Perhaps less noticed are the many sacrifices and acts of service demanded of the wives of teaching and ruling elders (as well as deacons, at the congregational level) who are active in the work of the pres-bytery (and PMV congregations).

*General Assembly*

Some PMV women also serve the church at the national level (see Appendix). Some PMV women also plan and host and many attend and participate in GA sponsored conferences, events, and annual leadership training. Participation is sometimes made possible through church scholarships organized by PWMT.

*Conclusion*

The women of PMV serve the Church of Christ at all levels and in a great diversity of ways that immeasurably enriches and profoundly contributes to the peace, purity, unity, joy, and witness of the Church in the world. The women who advised this committee re-port that they find the biblical and constitutional parameters outlined above liberating, rather than oppressive, and expressed a strong desire for session oversight, leadership, and support in their work as well as open communication with the session.

The committee is encouraged by the attention the churches of PMV give to the biblical and constitutional parameters for women serving in the church and the care sessions exercise in adhering to these parameters. Within these parameters we have identified six areas PMV elders may do well to give additional attention in order to support PMV women in the development and use of their gifts in serving the church (see recommendation 2 in Part 2).

**GA Report Recommendation 4**

*That sessions, if possible, establish a diaconate of qualified ordained men.*

As the rationale for this recommendation points out, anecdotal evidence suggests that in at least some churches of the PCA a non-ordained diaconal team of men and women substitutes for a diaconate of qualified ordained men. While reaffirming the duty of sessions to establish an ordained diaconate, in using the phrase “if possible” the recom-mendation acknowledges that there are some limited circumstances in which a church may be unable to do so. A particular church may have declined to a point that it no longer has suitable candidates for diaconal office. A church-plant may not yet have qualified men. Beyond these limited circumstances, however, it is the duty of sessions to establish an ordained diaconate. The rights of the congregation to have qualified ordained deacons to serve them must not be denied.

It should be remembered that the absence of deacons does not mean the absence of diaconal ministry. In Acts 6, diaconal ministry was the work of the apostles, which was then delegated to the Seven chosen by the church in Jerusalem to serve the church’s diaconal needs. In keeping with this pattern, BCO 5-9e reminds us that the duties normally assigned to the diaconate devolve to the elders of the church where no deacons can be provided. Even in such circumstances, sessions can avail themselves of the pro-visions of BCO 9-7 to appoint godly, non-ordained men and women to assist them in the diaconal ministry (see recommendation 3 in Part 2).

**GA Report Recommendation 5**

*That sessions consider how to include non-ordained men and women in the worship of the church so as to maintain faithfulness to Scripture, as well as utilizing the gifts God has poured out to His entire church (see exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26 in Chapter Two).*

The rationale for this recommendation states, in part, that “within a complementarian framework, there is substantial, non-controversial opportunity for non-ordained men and women to participate in the leadership of a worship service, in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14:26” (p. 61). In light of the rationale, Recommendation 5 clearly has in view the leader-ship of Lord’s Day worship and the comments that follow speak to that context specifi-cally, and not to other gatherings of the church at other times, where wider discretion may be applied concerning the public role of women and non-ordained men as circum-stances and prudence permit, “according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed” (WCF 1:6).

It should be noted that the recommendation presupposes the correctness of the GA Report’s exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26. However, we take a different view of the passage cited, and therefore differ respectfully from the GA report. We offer the following points in response:

*1. Public Worship is Elder-led*.According to the New Testament, the church’s elders (and only the church’s elders) lead the public worship of the church. Elders are tasked with the public reading and preaching of the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:13), and the admin-istration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 22:14-23). In Acts 6, in the context of controversy over the provision for the needs of neglected widows in the church, the apostles commit mercy ministry to the Seven, and by contrast summarize their task as “prayer and the ministry of the Word.” (Acts 6:4)[[13]](#footnote-13) Reading and preaching scripture, leading in prayer, and administering the sacraments is the work of the eldership. There is no provision in the New Testament for non-elders to lead the congregation in the elements of public worship.

This is consistent with the pattern of the Old Testament, where the leadership of public worship in Israel belonged to the priests and Levites. In Nehemiah 8:7-8, for example, Ezra is assisted in the public ministry of the Word by the Levites, who read the Law and gave its sense, helping the people to understand. In the Mosaic economy, it belonged to the priests to offer sacrifice, to minister the Word, to lead in praise, and to intercede in prayer on behalf of the people. Though eldership is not a ministry of priesthood, public worship is still substantially entrusted to the elders of the church in the New Covenant era, who are appointed from among the people to lead them in praise and bring their petitions to God in prayer, and who are called by God to bring his Word to the people.

*2. Leadership in Public Worship is Not Democratic*.The GA Report claims from 1 Cor. 14:26 (“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an inter-pretation”) that “non-ordained men and women [may] participate in the leadership of a worship service” (p. 61). That is to say, leadership in worship is democratic. This verse, to be sure, aptly describes the worship of the church in Corinth during the apostolic age, which clearly included non-ordained men and women who exercised revelatory gifts (1 Cor. 11:5). But, there are important differences between what Paul describes in 1 Cor. 14:26 and the church’s worship in the post-apostolic age. Paul is describing here the various ways in which God was revealing himself, by the Spirit, to the church.[[14]](#footnote-14) Once God gave to the church a complete canon, special revelation ceased. The extraordinary activities that Paul recounts in 1 Cor. 14:26 therefore no longer characterize the church’s worship. The ordinary elements of the reading and preaching of the Word, public prayer, the singing of praise, and the administration of the sacraments characterize the public worship of the church (then and now). In each of these elements, the Scripture directs the elders of the church, either by express statement or “by good and necessary consequence” (WCF 1:6), to lead the congregation.

*3. Public Worship is Participatory*. In saying that worship is elder-led, we are not saying that the congregation is rendered passive in public worship. On the contrary, every congregant ought to fully participate in each element of worship. In congregational praise, Christians ought to sing vocally and from the heart (Eph. 5:19). In public prayer, the elders are not praying in place of or even for the congregation. They are leading the congregation in prayer. Everyone in attendance ought to join his heart and mind with the voice of the praying elder. In the reading and preaching of the Word of God, congregants ought to listen, discern, and learn from what is being said in order that they may believe and obey the Word of God. In the administration of the sacraments, congregants actively participate as they respond to the visible word set before them.

*4. The Criterion is Office, Not Gender Alone*. We are not saying that the biblical criterion for leadership in worship is gender per se, as though women were excluded from leader-ship in worship strictly by virtue of their gender. We are saying that the primary biblical criterion for leadership in worship is office, specifically, the office of elder.[[15]](#footnote-15) Women are excluded from leadership in worship because the Bible excludes women from holding the office and exercising the functions of the elder. But this same criterion also excludes many, even most, men from exercising leadership in worship. Non-officers, whether men or women, should actively participate in the church’s worship under the leadership of the church’s elders (see recommendation 4 in Part 2).

Despite these differences, we also note some positives of the GA Report’s Exegesis of 1 Cor. 14. The GA report aptly represents the structure of Paul’s argument in 1 Cor. 14:26-35. The committee’s report also shows several ways how Paul’s argument in 1 Cor. 14 is not in conflict with 1 Cor. 11:5 (footnote 9 is particularly well done). (See Appendix for additional comments on 1 Cor. 11:5 and the role of women in public worship.) The report correctly concludes that Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 offer no support for women preaching in the church. For these and the many other strengths of the GA Report we are grateful.

**GA Report Recommendation 6**

*That sessions and presbyteries select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the ordained diaconate.*

This recommendation reiterates the provision of BCO 9-7, and as such is unobjection-able. It should be noted that 9-7 makes no provision for the organizing, setting apart, or commissioning of diaconal assistants. Since diaconal assistants do not hold office in the church, we suggest that sessions and presbyteries take particular care to avoid all con-fusion on this point among church members. To this end, sessions and presbyteries would be wise to ensure that the process used to appoint diaconal assistants be dissimilar to that used in the nomination, training, election, and ordination of deacons and elders.

While mention is made of “commissioning” in the rationale of the GA Report for Recommendation 6, and in the body of the Recommendation 7, no biblical warrant for this practice has been provided, leaving the character and purpose of this “commission-ing” unclear. We note that there is a general calling that belongs to all believers: a task common to all to serve Christ and his church in the world. We further note that there are two offices—elders and deacons—given to the church by Christ, and that ordination belongs only to these two offices. Whatever the GA Report means by the “commission-ing” of non-ordained diaconal assistants, care should be taken to avoid any connotation of ordination to special office. There is also a temptation (that ought to be resisted) to define valid ministry strictly in terms of ministry that is officially recognized by the church. This understanding of ministry can create a two-tier approach to service in the church, and breed discontentment and jealousy among those who serve without “official” recognition. In light of this danger, we urge sessions and presbyteries to exercise great caution in the use of “commissioning.”

Nevertheless many of the churches of PMV make use of the gifts of godly women and men to assist in diaconal ministry in a way consistent with the Scriptures and our Stan-dards and we commend these practices to PMV (see recommendations 3 & 5 in Part 2).

**GA Report Recommendation 7**

*That presbyteries and the General Assembly consider an overture that would establish formally the right of sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly to establish the position of commissioned church worker within the PCA for qualified and gifted un-ordained men and women.*

After careful consideration of this recommendation, we find no need for any overture to facilitate the formal establishment of the position of commissioned church worker:

1. We do not find any biblical warrant for the proposed “position of commissioned church worker” or the introduction of this innovative “category” into the polity of this church (p. 63). (We note that churches are free to create and fill staff positions of various kinds and under various titles as circumstances and prudence warrant.)

2. We do not find the single historical example cited in the GA report—a report in the 1938 PCUSA *Digest*—a compelling encouragement or precedent to follow.[[16]](#footnote-16)

3. We have discovered no perceived need for such a position in this presbytery or any desire for such a position among the women who advised this committee, but rather significant concern and opposition to this recommendation.[[17]](#footnote-17)

We are also convinced the creation of such a position is an unnecessary and ill-considered instrument to achieve the stated goals in the rationale:

1. We recognize the importance of issues of perceived income inequalities between ordained and non-ordained church workers and between men and women serving on church staffs and encourage PMV and the sessions of PMV to act in ways that adorn and commend the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people and offer no occasion for of-fense or reproach in this matter. We do not believe, however, that creating a new category of “commissioned church worker” will “redress an inequity in compensa-tion” created by the current IRS tax code since the IRS code explicitly restricts such benefits as the housing allowance exclusion, to “ministers” of the church.[[18]](#footnote-18)

2. We also encourage the presbytery and its churches to study ways to effectively recognize and show appreciation for everyone who serves the church faithfully, includeing the many faithful women serving the church in paid and unpaid positions. Yet we believe the creation of a new category of commissioned church worker is an unnecessary instrument to accomplish this stated goal that will likely generate signif-icant confusion among commissioning, licensure, ordination, and installation. Indeed, this committee has found that significant confusion over the practice of commission-ing already exists and believes further study of this practice is advisable.

3. We also question whether the desire for “recognition” and to “redress” a perceived income inequality generated by current US tax policy are proper motivations to create such a position or seek such a position if created (pp. 62–63). Furthermore, while we do not dispute that income inequalities exist, it is not clear from this report that such inequalities are a widespread and systemic issue in our church since many churches are well aware of the special tax benefits ordained ministers receive relative to non-ordained staff members and factor this into employee compensation decisions.

Therefore we do not recommend the establishment of the position of commissioned church worker or any overture to that effect (see recommendation 5 in Part 2).

**GA Report Recommendation 8**

*That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly consider how they can affirm and include underprivileged and underrepresented women in the PCA.*

We encourage the presbytery and sessions of PMV to adopt and implement the recommendations of this report of your study committee in such a way as to reach out to and include all women, without partiality (Titus 2:3–5; Gal 3:27–29; Eph. 2:14–21; James 1:27, 2:1) (see recommendation 6 in Part 2).

**PART 2**

**Recommendations to Presbytery**

In light of the recommendations adopted by the Forty-Fifth General Assembly of the PCA and the comments above, we offer the following recommendations for the encouragement and edification of the Presbytery of Mississippi Valley and all the men and women of its many congregations:

**1. That the Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley make available and recommend for study this “Report of the PMV Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Church” to its sessions.**

**2.** The committee recommends the following ways to promote and support the ministry of women in our bounds:

**a. That the sessions of PMV regularly and faithfully communicate with women’s ministry leaders.** PMV is blessed with many godly and gifted women who desire to use their gifts under the oversight and leadership of ordained elders (and deacons). They not only welcome session leadership but also positively desire the session’s guidance, direction, and oversight in their work. Frequent and improved communica-tion between sessions and women’s ministry leaders (and the congregation as a whole) would give the women of PMV churches greater confidence that they are indeed adhering to biblical and constitutional parameters and carrying out the session’s ministry vision and mission in women’s ministries.

**b. That sessions of PMV study ways the work of the ministry may be enhanced by the provision of BCO 9-7, especially as it relates to the expedient assistance women can offer in diaconal ministry in light of 1 Timothy 3:11, and that PMV sessions give attention to the qualifications for women who assist in diaconal ministry specified in 1 Timothy 3:11: that they be “dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”**

**c. That PMV and the sessions of PMV consider how we might better prepare and equip women, especially women’s ministry leaders, for the work of the ministry God gifts and calls them to fulfill as they serve the church at all levels.**

**d.** We commend PMV for occasionally inviting wise and godly women experienced in ministering to other women in the life of the church to address presbytery in order to encourage and equip pastors to better shepherd female members. Considering the need for elders to be well equipped to minister to women and the relatively few opportunities they have to benefit from the wise and godly counsel of Christian women in their elder or ministerial training, we recommend **that PMV establish this occasional opportunity as a regular, perhaps annual, presbytery practice.**

**e.** Although this committee has not discovered any need for an overture to permit women to serve the church in appropriate ways, we remind PMV and the sessions of PMV that committees at all levels of the church have the authority to seek out and invite women to attend and serve as advisers. We recommend **that PMV and the sessions of PMV seek out and invite godly and gifted women to serve as advisers to presbytery committees (as proper).** We commend this practice to PMV and PMV sessions as an appropriate way for women to live out their complementary role in serving the church at the level of the congregation, presbytery, and general assembly.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**f.** Given the presence of women in the midst of this presbytery who desire further training in women's ministry, we recommend **that CDM consider how it might work with the PWMT to involve women in formal and informal internship opportunities for ministry to the churches of PMV.**

**3.** The committee recommends the following regarding diaconal ministry:

**a. That the sessions of PMV ensure that the rights of our members to ordained diaconal ministry are respected, and that wherever possible godly men are ordained to this office.**

**b. That the sessions of PMV pursue selection, training, and appointment processes for male and female diaconal assistants that clearly differentiate between the role of these assistants and the ordained officers of the church.**

**c.** We commend to the sessions of PMV the varied approaches of the churches of the presbytery to the appointment and deployment of diaconal assistants. We recommend **that the sessions of PMV make use of these examples to further develop diaconal ministry throughout the life of our congregations.**

**4.** The committee recommends the following regarding public worship:

**a. That PMV welcomes the GA Report’s clear defense of the biblical teaching that the preaching ministry is to be exercised by elders alone.**

**b. That PMV encourages the churches of PMV carefully to examine the use made of women and non-ordained men during corporate worship on the Lord’s Day, in order to ensure that the elder-led character of New Testament worship is reflected in our services.**

**c. That PMV further encourages the churches of PMV, not only to welcome but also to identify, train, and equip godly and gifted women to teach the Bible well in contexts supported by the New Testament.**

**5.** The committee recommends the following regarding the questions of commissioning and establishing a position of commissioned church worker:

**a. That the sessions of PMV exercise great care if they use commissioning as a mechanism for recognizing church workers, including diaconal assistants, so as to avoid the appearance of ordination or of establishing a quasi-office found neither in scripture nor our constitution.**

**b. That PMV and the sessions of PMV act in ways that adorn and commend the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people and offer no occasion for offense or reproach in issues of perceived income inequalities between ordained and non-ordained church workers and between men and women serving on church staffs.**

**c. That PMV and the sessions of PMV study ways to effectively recognize and show appreciation for everyone who serves the church faithfully, including the many faithful women serving the church in paid and unpaid positions.**

**6. That PMV and the sessions of PMV implement the recommendations of this report in such a way as to reach out to and include all women, without partiality (Titus 2:3–5; Gal. 3:27–29; Eph. 2:14–21; James 1:27, 2:1).**

**7. That PMV dismiss this committee with thanks to its members and advisers.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Study Committee on the Role of Women in the Church*

Members:

TE Guy Waters (chair)

TE Bruce Baugus

TE Caleb Cangelosi

RE Jamie Peaster

RE Otis Pickett

RE Paul Stephenson

TE David Strain

Advisers:

Donna Dobbs

Tammie Haynes

Sherry Lanier

Laurie Nordan

Shelli Robison

Shirley Windham

**APPENDIX**

The purpose of this appendix is to highlight some of the many ways PMV women contribute to the work of the ministry in our bounds and to offer some additional comments on the role of women in public worship.

*Examples of Women Serving the Church*

PMV women serve in paid and volunteer positions and are also active in an array of mercy and service ministries.

Here are some examples of the many different ways the women of PMV serve in our congregations:

PMV women serve in a variety of paid positions, such as these:

Directors of choirs, women’s and children’s ministries, and special needs ministries;

Assistants and interns in campus ministries; and

Musicians, bookkeepers, heads of schools, and in administrative support positions.

PMV women serve as volunteers in these same roles, as well as in others such as these:

Teachers of women’s Bible studies and Sunday school classes;

Directors of VBS and similar programs for children;

Mentors to other women;

Leaders of women’s small groups and co-leaders, with their husbands, of mixed gender groups; and

Panelists and expert presenters to mixed-gender adult groups outside public worship and with voluntary attendance

PMV women are also active in various mercy and service ministries such as these:

Counseling;

Serving on school boards and teaching and tutoring children;

Organizing and serving meals in churches, homeless shelters, and for those with temporary need;

Hosting church groups and visitors;

Visiting new mothers, homebound and bereaved widows, and women in prison;

Supporting adoption and foster care programs;

Maintaining church libraries;

Editing (and contributing to) newsletters and church blogs; and

Caring for church property.

PMV women also serve the church at the regional and national levels. Examples include,

Presbytery Women’s Ministry Team:

Shelli Robison (Coordinator)

Patty Roberts, and

Laurie Herrington;

Ashley Belknap: MNA’s Engaging Disability Director;

Emily Hartman: MNA’s Parakaleo ministry to wives of church planters;

Sherry Lanier: Advisor to CDM, MNA Disaster & Short Term Missions Facil.; and

Ronjanett Taylor: At Large Advisor for Diversity, PCA Women’s Leadership Team.

This list is merely representative, and certainly not exhaustive, of the great diversity of ways PMV women are active in the work of the ministry of the church.

*Women’s Ministry and Public Worship*

The women of PMV also fully participate with the congregation in all elements of public worship. They also help prepare for public worship as worship planners, decorators, and greeters before the service and assist as ushers, musicians, and music and choir directors (including of the congregational choir).

Women occasionally address the congregation during announcements, mission reports, and the like during worship services. They sometimes recite Scripture before the congre-gation during worship on occasions such as singing an offertory, making an announce-ment, and offering a mission report. We do not view these occasions as reading Scripture publically to the congregation as an element of worship. To our knowledge, women are not permitted to read Scripture to the congregation as an element of worship in the order of service or assist in distributing the elements of communion in PMV churches. The women advising this committee did not express any interest in or desire to do so.

While Paul does speak of women “praying or prophesying with her head uncovered” in 1 Cor. 11:5, this statement does not mean that the apostle supports women leading the con-gregation in public prayer.[[20]](#footnote-20) Paul is *describing* what took place in the church in Corinth, without offering comment at this juncture on what was taking place. He first addresses the question of head coverings (1 Cor. 11:1-16). He will later address the propriety of women praying or prophesying in 1 Cor. 14:26-35. In these verses, Paul lays down the principle that “the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says” (1 Cor. 14:34).

Paul and the New Testament affirm that women were prophets in the apostolic church. That reality does not mean that women may assume leadership in the church’s worship today. Male and female prophets were the instruments through whom God revealed him-self to the church in the foundational age of the apostles (Eph. 2:20). The New Testament restricts the *preaching* of special revelation to men, specifically to the church’s elders (1 Tim 2:12). So, while God revealed himself through prophets who were male and female, He limits the authoritative interpretation, explanation, and application of special revela-tion to the elders.

These principles in no way categorically forbid women from teaching in the church outside public worship. On the contrary, the New Testament recognizes a range of teaching activities undertaken by women in the church. Older women were and are to instruct younger women (Tit 2:3-4). Priscilla, with her husband, helped a minister to be “more accurate” with respect to his public teaching (Acts 18:26). In overseeing and encouraging men and women to teach within the church, outside public worship, the elders should take care that such teaching is consistent with the biblical principle that it is the elders of the church who are tasked with the reading and preaching of the Word of God in public worship.

Neither of these principles in anyway forbids women from participating in church choirs, from singing solos, from performing musical instrumentation, or from providing musical direction in the course of a public worship service. To the degree that they have found justification within the regulative principle of worship, musical instrumentation, vocal solos or ensembles, and musical or vocal direction have been deemed circumstantial to the element of the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (see WCF 1.6). That is to say, these activities find their justification in their supporting the congregation in its work of corporate expressions of praise. As such, there is no barrier to non-officers, whether men or women, fully participating in these activities.

1. This does not mean that women are absolutely forbidden from teaching or leading in the church. Mature women are to teach younger women (Titus 2:3–5), may instruct willing men in private (Acts 18:26), and may serve in leadership positions in women’s and children’s ministries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Notably, only apostles or elders, both offices of rule that are only open to and fulfilled by men, conduct ordination services in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 6:6; 14:23; 1 Tim 4:14). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Though opinions vary over the relation of Acts 6 to the diaconate, the interpretation followed here appears to be the majority view in Presbyterian circles and is reflected in our constitutional standards insofar as this passage is the primary source, beside the meaning of the title for the office itself, on the nature and work of diaconal ministry. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This meaning is reflected in the congregation’s vow “to yield” newly installed deacons “all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office . . . entitles him” (BCO 24–6). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 231–35, refers to Romans 16:1–2 as “the clearest” passage supporting female deacons and B. B. Warfield, “Presbyterian Deaconesses,” *The Presbyterian Review* 10.38 (1889): 283–93, finds Romans 16:1 the only passage supporting deaconesses. See also Robert Strimple, “Report of the Minority of the Committee on Women in Church Office (OPC)” and James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 223–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church*, 113. See also the OPC GA Report on “Women in Office.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The phrase of instruction, “the elders in a convenient place together” near or around the communion table, appears to explain the actor of the passive verb in the phrase “the bread is to be distributed” in *BCO* 58-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. While any committee of any court of the church may invite non-ordained persons to serve as advisers, without vote, to assist committees in the fulfillment of their work, the matter of non-ordained church members serving as voting members of GA committees requires careful examination. Two principles are especially germane. First, “all Church courts are one in nature” (*BCO* 11-3) and are essentially “Presby-teries, . . . being composed exclusively of elders” (10-1). We do not have distinct church officers for session, presbytery, and GA. The officers serving in each are the same because the character of each court is essentially the same. So also, “the work of the Church as set forth in the Great Commission is one work, being implemented at the General Assembly level through equally essential committees” (14-1). Second, “the power which Christ has committed to His Church vests in the whole body, the rulers and those ruled, constituting it a spiritual commonwealth. This power, as exercised by the people, extends to the choice of those officers whom He has appointed in His Church” (3-1). The officers of the church are chosen by the members of the church, and represent the church in the Presbyterian system of graded courts. While pres-byters have the right to delegate tasks to, or to invite assistance from non-presbyters, they do not have the right to give presbyterial power to non-presbyters. We would also note that while the actions of permanent committees are subject to the review of committees of commissioners meeting at GA, the work of a year cannot be reasonably and fully scrutinized by commissioners gathered for a few hours’ deliberation. Unlike session or presbytery committees that report multiple times per year, permanent committees of GA must exercise significant freedom in making decisions throughout the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. PMV women do sometimes recite Scripture before the congregation during worship on occasions such as singing an offertory, making an announcement, offering a mission report, and the like, which we do not view as reading Scripture publically to the congregation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Credentials Committee also asks wives of married candidacy applicants to answer a set of questions about the candidate and their marriage in one of its instruments. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The reference to “prayer and the ministry of the Word” is a comprehensive summary of the task committed to the apostles (and now to the elders). Given the fact that the controversy that occasions this declaration has to do with the division of labor in the public ministry of the church, in our judgment it is best to understand it to include both public and private prayer. Praying and proclaiming the word, whether in public or in private, sums up the work of apostles (and therefore elders). They are to be men of prayer and proclamation, and these two marks must distinguish their work in every context and occasion. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The “hymn” of 14:26 is an inspired composition given to an individual by the Spirit (cf. 14:15). See Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), *ad loc.* It is possible that one of the five activities mentioned in 1 Cor. 14:26 is not extraordinary revelation of the Spirit to the church—the “lesson” (*didache*). If this “lesson” were not extraordinary revelation, but the ordinary teaching of the Word of God, then, according to Paul’s stated principles, only men (and elders in particular) would have been permitted so to teach in the context of public worship on the Lord’s Day (1 Tim 2:12). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Those who are testing gifts for the office of elder may be invited by the elders to assist in leading wor-ship. This is a necessary aspect of the trial a man must make before the church may discern whether he has gifts for ministry. But only those who are on some conceivable path to the office of elder may take up this work. The rational of the GA Report cites WLC 156, which supports this view, especially when interpreted in light of the proof texts provided by the Assembly. The Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for Public Worship* also declares that “Reading of the word in the congregation, being part of the public worship of God, (wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon him, and subjection to him), and one mean sanctified by him for the edifying of his people, is to be performed by the pastors and teachers. Howbeit, such as in-tend the ministry, may occasionally both read the word, and exercise their gift in preaching in the congrega-tion, if allowed by the presbytery thereunto” (see *The Westminster Confession with Associated Historical Documents,* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018], 554). Similar rubrics likewise provide for the leadership of ministers only in the exercise of public prayer and the administration of the sacraments. The specific exception mentioned in the *Directory* demonstrates that the Divines did not consider the session free to grant this permission to other persons. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See R. Douglas Brackenridge and Louis A. Boyd, “Women and the Church,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 59.3 (1981): 383–407. The 1938 *Digest* is referring to an action of the 1937 PCUSA General Assembly, “in response to an overture from the Presbytery of Chicago,” that directed “the General Council . . . to prepare standards for the position of Commissioned Lay Workers (both male and female).” Commis-sioned Church Workers were examined by presbyteries but “had no voice or vote in presbytery.” After 1949, they were required to have at least “two years of specialized training in an accredited seminary” and presbyteries were required to “approve the invitation of a local congregation to a CCW to install that per-son.” In 1976 “the Vocation Agency proposed an overture to dispense with the office of Commissioned Church Worker.” Those already commissioned were urged to “qualify for ordination before 1 June 1981” and presbyteries were “permitted to accept ‘experience, continuing education, and self-study’ in place of the formal educational requirements” for previous CCWs (391–92). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Although PMV churches sometimes recognize and pray for women’s ministry leaders before the congregation in a public worship service (perhaps annually), to our knowledge this does not include gathering the session, laying on of hands, extending the right hand of fellowship, and the like. Likewise, there appears to be nothing comparable to the “commissioned church worker” position envisioned in Recommendation 7 of the GA Report nor did PMV women’s ministry leaders express any need or desire for this kind of recognition by the church or standing in the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The rationale of the GA Report cites IRS Topic Number 417: “Earnings for Clergy,” which defines clergy as a “licensed, commissioned, or ordained minister.” IRS Publication 517: “Social Security and Other Information for Members of the Clergy and Religious Workers,” defines minister as follows:

**Minister defined.** Ministers are individuals who are duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed by a re-ligious body constituting a church or church denomination. Ministers have authority to conduct religious worship, perform sacerdotal functions, and administer ordinances or sacraments according to the prescribed tenets and practices of that church or denomination.

If a church or denomination ordains some ministers and licenses or commissions others, it appears that anyone licensed or commissioned must be able to perform substantially all the religious functions of an ordained minister to be treated as a minister under the IRS tax code. The proposed category of commis-sioned church worker would not seem to qualify as a “minister” under this definition and thus not qualify for any tax benefits extended to clergy under the current IRS code. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. We also note that the women who advised this committee spontaneously, emphatically, and unanimously spoke against women serving as voting members on presbytery and GA committees even as they welcomed and embraced the role of serving as advisers. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Again, care should be taken to remember the context in view is the public worship of the church on the Lord’s Day. The teaching and examples of the NT make clear that the gift of prayer should be exercised by every Christian- both men and women alike- and that they may do so together in prayer meetings and other meetings as occasion and prudence dictates throughout the week (see for example, Acts 1:14; 4:24f; 12:5; 12f; 16:13, 16). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)