

“Positive Complementarianism”: How we apply the principles of headship in ministry at CCH...

This document seeks to supplement the sermon and lifegroup series in September 2025 regarding the roles of men and women in ministry, by giving a broad overview of how we understand and apply the Bible’s good and authoritative teaching on this topic in several areas of our church life. We recognise that churches with similar theology will apply this teaching in slightly different ways.

Here are seven key Biblical starting points...

1. We believe that men and women are equal in dignity and worth as image bearers (Gen 1:27, Gal 3:28), and without one another we do not properly function as a church.
2. We believe in the ministry of all believers (Eph 4:12), including the wonderful privilege of building one another up with the gospel (1 Cor 14:3) and serve one another according to our gifts (Rom 12:3-8).
3. We believe our church will grow to be richer and deeper in maturity as men and women speak the truth to one another in love (Eph 4:15-16), ministering the gospel to one another across the sexes rather than simply functioning in single sex groups (Acts 2:17; Acts 18:26).
4. We want to affirm the huge range of teaching roles the Bible makes available to women including teaching and training other women and children (Titus 2:3-5), leading small groups, pastoral and evangelistic work (Romans 16:1-3).
5. We believe that within a marriage, the husband should take the lead as the overall head of the family (1 Cor 11:3, Eph 5:23), sacrificially serving his wife (Eph 5:25-28) and together with her, bringing up any children to know and love the Lord (Psalm 34:11).
6. We believe that the Bible calls upon authorised elders in the local church to take the lead in teaching and directing the church (Acts 20:28, Eph 4:11, Heb 13:17). This authoritative teaching (which could be termed “big ‘T’ teaching”¹) can be delineated from all kinds of “lower case ‘t’ teaching” (such as small group work, testimony and mutual encouragement) which are open to other members of the flock, male and female.
7. We believe that the Bible limits those who lead and teach God’s household (bishops, pastor, elders), to appropriately chosen godly men (Titus 1:5-9, 1 Tim 2:12), reflecting the ordering of creation. They are chosen according to their character, convictions and competence.

Here is a summary of how we seek to apply these principles in 5 areas:

GOVERNANCE

- In line with the canons and constitution of our denomination (the Anglican Mission in England) our church is led by a male pastor, and we have male bishops who oversee the churches (see AMiE website [here](#)).
- Our pastor is part of a small team of male elders who are supported by a church council of men and women who together act as the trustees of our church (see church council webpage [here](#)).

PREACHING

- As well as the primary preaching role taken by the pastor and elders, a godly, able senior man who has been carefully selected by the elders for the preaching rota may share in the elders’ preaching ministry at Charlie’s invitation, and with his accountability, support, feedback and training². On occasion we invite a suitably qualified visiting preacher to preach under the leadership of one of the elders.
- We believe that 1 Tim 2:12-14 restricts the role of preaching to men only.

¹ A term used by Andrew Wilson quoted in “Embracing Complementarianism” – Graham Beynon & Jane Tooher p75.

² A list of “lay preachers” is available from Charlie.

LEADING SERVICES

- Normally our pastor or one of our elders will start and close the service. We see this as an opportunity for our appropriately appointed elders to lead our gathered flock including opportunities for teaching and for guarding what is said from the front.
- Under the leadership of the service leader, we encourage godly, able women (as far as their consciences permit) to take part in leading other parts of the service by ... reading Scripture / introducing a song/ recapping what the kids have learned/ praying/ giving testimony/ sharing something that they have been encouraged by lately/ deepening the application of the sermon through reflection or presentation (in consultation with the preacher)/ reviewing a book/ taking a lead on promoting or reporting on an activity in church.

KIDS SPOTS/ALL AGE SERVICES

- While we recognise that this is a nuanced area³, in all age services and children's spots, the Bible is not only being taught to the children but to adults as well, and when this is done in a didactic and directive way ("big 'T' teaching"), it should be the role of the (male) preachers.
- We believe that there are several forms of kids spot/all age teaching which do not involve this level of authoritative teaching ("little 't' teaching"), these include reviewing or illustrating the learning that has been done in kids' groups, sharing a memory verse, teaching a song, illustrating a point (eg through puppets or a sketch), or in consultation with the preacher, reflecting on areas of further personal application. We encourage our gifted and godly sisters to serve in these roles in as much as they are able.

LIFEGROUPS

- We have several mixed lifegroups which meet midweek for fellowship, prayer and Bible study. Both men and women lead these groups which are primarily an opportunity to review the teaching given in the sermon on Sunday (they often follow the same material) and to offer an opportunity for group discussion, and deeper reflection and application.
- Recourse can be made to the elders in the rare events of doctrinal dispute or church discipline.
- Each lifegroup leader must give due regard to their own conscience (and that of their fellow leaders) so that they are not taking on a role that they don't feel comfortable with.

We are grateful to God for the rich unity, diversity and complementarity God has designed in the church and family and which we see at Christ Church Huntingdon. We recognise that understandings of the Bible's teaching on women in ministry vary hugely in the wider church, and as discussed in our doctrinal distinctives document, we don't insist that a person must ascribe to the position of our church or denomination before they can be a member of the church. We recognise that this "complementarian" understanding of the Bible's teaching is countercultural and can take a lot of thinking through for those coming across it for the first time. Any of us would welcome a conversation about this (or any other matter in church life) should you wish to discuss any of this further.

Charlie Newcombe (pastor), and Jon Gilbert, Johnny Pawlett, Simon Sykes (elders).

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³ See Beynon & Tooher Appendix 2 "Common grey areas" p144.