

## Women in Ministry Leadership Resource List

This resource list contains information about books, journal articles, and blog posts produced within the Brethren in Christ U.S. as well as select resources that are broadly in alignment with our denominational stance as a church family that affirms Women in Ministry Leadership. May it be of benefit to you whether you are currently working on your Doctrinal Questionnaire, seeking more information about the BIC view, or looking for ways to recognize and support Women in Ministry Leadership within your congregation.

### **In this Resource List you will find...**

- I. Introduction from GLC Theologian in Residence Matthew R. Peterson Page 1
  - II. Official Brethren in Christ U.S. Statements Page 3
    - a. *Statement from 1982 Brethren in Christ U.S. General Conference Minutes*
    - b. *Statement from the Brethren in Christ U.S. Bylaws*
    - c. *Brethren in Christ U.S. Women in Ministry Leadership Statement (2017)*
  - III. Brethren in Christ Resources Page 4
  - IV. Other Resources
    - a. Biblical Interpretation & Theology Page 7
    - b. Women in Church History Page 8
    - c. Church Practices & Miscellany Page 9
    - d. A (Few) Women in Biblical Studies Page 9
  - V. Brethren in Christ U.S. “Women in Ministry Leadership Statement” (August 28, 2017)
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### **I. Introduction from GLC Theologian in Residence Matthew R. Peterson**

Recognition that both men and women are equally called to ministry leadership has formally been a part of the Brethren in Christ theological worldview since the 1982 General Conference, which adopted a resolution codifying an affirming stance for the denomination and calling for on-going study of the issue.<sup>1</sup> This statement was the culmination of on-going work across the Brethren in Christ in light of a historical heritage marked by the service of women in ministry.

Today women serve the BIC U.S. in numerous church, denominational, and missionary roles. A report by the *Women in Ministry Task Force* indicated that in 2021 there were 176 women serving in staff roles at BIC U.S. churches, and that across our denomination 54 women held an

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<sup>1</sup> Brethren in Christ U.S. *General Conference Minutes (1982)*, page 85. [see below]

## *Women in Ministry Leadership Resource List*

active Ministry License and 21 women were Ordained.<sup>2</sup> Women also currently serve our denominational leadership as Bishops and members of the General Council Board.

Unfortunately, the promise of Women in Ministry Leadership continues to be controversial in some circles of the broader Christian community, with some traditions arguing that it is inappropriate for women to serve in pastoral roles or to pursue ordination. Such a position is represented among several major denominations and in many evangelical publications under the label *complementarianism*. Church members and pastors who have come to the BIC from other traditions have been informed by these views and are in some cases unfamiliar with our denomination's current stance and historical developments regarding this important issue.

Over the forty years since it formally adopted the affirming stance, the Brethren in Christ has tried to reinforce this view across the denomination in several ways. It has been discussed at various General Assembly meetings, been written about in our denominational handbooks and journals, and prompted inclusive language in our theological statements. And applicants for Ministry Licensing are asked in their *Doctrinal Questionnaire* to provide a personal statement on their "understanding from the Scriptures of Women in Ministry and Leadership."<sup>3</sup>

The BIC U.S. has also benefitted from the work of the *Awaken BIC Network*, an affiliated group that equips women in ministry within our denomination through resourcing and mentoring opportunities. And in 2021 a *Women in Ministry Task Force* was appointed by the Leadership Council to investigate concerns that our denominational practices fell short of our theological stance, with a report that was released as part of the 2022 General Assembly minutes.<sup>4</sup>

Alongside this on-going work at the denominational level is a need to better equip our church members to embrace the affirming perspective on Women in Ministry Leadership. It is my hope that this resource list might contribute towards that goal by prompting additional learning and reflection about our denomination's past, present, and future regarding this important topic.

**–Matthew R. Peterson (*Theologian in Residence* for the Great Lakes Conference BIC)**

March 2023

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<sup>2</sup> Pauline Peifer, "AWAKEN: BIC Network for Women in Ministry," pages 46-47 in Brethren in Christ U.S. *General Assembly 2022 Minutes*. Accessible at: <https://bicus.org/event/general-assembly-2022>

<sup>3</sup> Brethren in Christ U.S. Commission on Ministry & Doctrine, "Doctrinal Questionnaire," page 4. [Part I: Doctrine, Section V: The Church, Question D]

<sup>4</sup> "Report to the General Assembly from the Women in Ministry Task Force," pages 48-98 in Brethren in Christ U.S. *General Assembly 2022 Minutes*. Accessible at: <https://bicus.org/event/general-assembly-2022>

## II. OFFICIAL BRETHREN IN CHRIST U.S. STATEMENTS

### **Statement from 1982 Brethren in Christ U.S. General Conference Minutes**

*WHEREAS God has gifted men and women for service in the church through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; and WHEREAS women and men were called to leadership roles in both the Old and New Testaments; and, WHEREAS the Christian church has been built up through the faithful service of women as well as men, in many spheres of service-missions, education, medicine, languages, etc., and WHEREAS the Brethren in Christ Church has specifically prospered through the service and leadership of the sisters, in both the past and present, with no evidence of General Conference rulings restricting the exercise of their gifts. We therefore RECOMMEND:*

- a. That General Conference affirm the ministry of women in the life and programs of the church;*
- b. That the paper, "Theology of Women in Pastoral Ministry," prepared for the study process, be circulated to the brotherhood at large.*
- c. That the General Conference authorize the Board of Administration to keep the matter of women in ministry before the church through on-going study and discussion.<sup>5</sup>*

### **Statement from the Brethren in Christ U.S. Bylaws**

*The BIC U.S. fully affirms women in ministry at all levels of Church life. Women are ordained and commissioned as pastors, bishops, deacons, denominational leaders, and members of congregational, regional, and national BIC U.S. governing boards.<sup>6</sup>*

### **Brethren in Christ U.S. Women in Ministry Leadership Statement**

*As a denomination within the historic Christian faith, we are committed to the Bible as the divinely inspired, authoritative Word of God. And it is our reading of the Bible that leads us to support women in ministry leadership, grounded, more specifically, in our understanding of*

- 1) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people — both women and men,*
- 2) the witness in both the Old and New Testaments of women called to spiritual leadership, and*
- 3) the example of Jesus partnering with women in ministry.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Brethren in Christ U.S., *General Conference Minutes (1982)*, page 85.

<sup>6</sup> Brethren in Christ U.S., *Manual of Doctrine & Government*, Bylaws Article 13.1.1, page 55.

<sup>7</sup> Brethren in Christ U.S., *Women in Ministry Leadership Statement* (August 28, 2017), page 1. [See attached copy]

### III. BRETHREN IN CHRIST RESOURCES

The following resources are part of our denominational heritage. They include formal statements by the Brethren in Christ U.S., articles published in the journals *Brethren in Christ History & Life* and *Shalom! A Journal for the Study of Reconciliation*, posts on the BIC U.S. blog, and essays written by Brethren in Christ members. Many of these entries can be accessed via our [Denomination Archives](#). I have included direct links and database links to resources when available and have supplied each with a brief summary of its contents.

**BIC U.S. Communications, “Called to Ministry – Q&A with Four Female Pastors” *Brethren in Christ U.S. Blog* (March 24, 2021). [Direct Link](#)**

Interviews with Brethren in Christ Pastors Naomi Smith, Carmen Dones, Rebeca Pedroza, and Teddi Rodgers about their pastoral calling, ministry experiences, challenges, and encouragements for women in ministry.

**Brethren in Christ U.S. “Women in Ministry Leadership Statement” (August 28, 2017).**

Formal position statement from the BIC U.S. detailing its stance on the topic of Women in Ministry Leadership including its biblical support. [See attached copy]

**“Q&A with Alan Robinson: On the Women in Ministry Leadership Statement” *Brethren in Christ U.S. Blog* (September 8, 2017). [Direct Link](#)**

This interview clarifies the ecclesiological framework in which the “Women in Ministry Leadership Statement” of 2017 was written, with details about why it was adopted.

**Heather & Micah Brickner, “Leaning into Giftedness” *Brethren in Christ U.S. Blog* (March 16, 2021). [Direct Link](#)**

Personal reflections from a wife and husband church plant team (*Branch & Vine BIC Lancaster City, PA*) about the importance of recognizing and honoring gifts rather than gender as the core of ministry calling.

**Arthur M. Climenhaga, “A Case Study in Biblical Interpretation: Women in Ministry” *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 13.1 (April 1990): pages 64-72. [Database Link](#)**

This paper came out of a workshop on biblical interpretation and argues for an approach to the Scriptures that looks at broad patterns of how women are presented in the Bible while interpreting passages through the lens of their historical contexts. It suggests that arguments that texts like 1 Cor. 14:33-37, 1 Tim. 2:11-15, and 1 Tim. 3:2-12 universally forbid women in ministry ignore a wealth of texts in both testaments that portray women in leadership positions among the people of God.

**MJ Fair, “A Personal Journey in Pastoral Ministry” *Shalom!: A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* 38.2 (Spring 2018): pages 9-10.**

Reflections from a retired associate pastor who also served on the Board for Congregational Life, General Conference Board, and Board for Ministry and Doctrine about her experiences in ministry with the BIC.

**Timothy W. Fisher, “1 Timothy 2:11-12 and the Unnatural Use of a Singular Noun”**

This essay reviews a challenging biblical text with reference to its original Greek grammar and historical context, arguing that Paul was speaking about a particular woman in the Ephesian community (who was deceived by wrong ideas and attempting to usurp authority in the church) rather than establishing a universal prohibition of women in church leadership.

**Timothy & Beth Fisher, “When the Best Preacher in the House is a She” *Shalom!: A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* 38.2 (Spring 2018): pages 3-4.**

Reflections from a husband-and-wife pastoral team about supporting one another in their respective ministries.

**David Flowers, “It’s a Woman’s World Too” *Shalom!: A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* 38.2 (Spring 2018): pages 2-3.**

This article is a summary of a sermon preached on the topic of women in ministry leadership. It argues that women were affirmed and emancipated by Jesus during his ministry and that Scriptural texts that are commonly read as forbidding women to preach must be read in their historical contexts.

**Lynda Gephart, “All God’s Children Can Serve” *Shalom!: A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* 38.2 (Spring 2018): pages 5-6.**

Reflections from a BIC pastor about her experiences in ministry, including challenges from those who disagree with the affirming stance on women in ministry.

**Luke L. Keefer Jr. & Grace Holland “Women in Ministry/Leadership” *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 16.2 (August 1993): pages 214-241. [Database Link](#)**

This article reviews theological arguments both opposed to and in favor of women in ministry leadership alongside the impact of women in the BIC’s history. It locates the work of preaching/teaching in the mold of biblical prophecy rather than priestly service, and therefore argues that both women and men who are Spiritually endowed for such work should be affirmed in their ministry callings.

*See also responses from Kenneth Gibson, Kathleen Leadley, and Esther Snyder (pages 242-258).*

**Luke L. Keefer Jr., “Helping the Church to Accept Women in Leadership” *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 13.1 (April 1990): pages 73-83. [Database Link](#)**

This paper reviews theological, ecclesiological, and personal barriers that women within the BIC family face when exploring the call to ministry leadership, as well as some opportunities for improvement in those areas.

**Janet M. Peifer, “Brethren in Christ Studies and Writing of Women in Ministry, 1887-1987” *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 13.1 (April 1990): pages 3-25. [Database Link](#)**

This article reviews nineteenth and twentieth century discussions in the BIC publication *Evangelical Visitor*, concluding that our denomination contained within it prominent

## *Women in Ministry Leadership Resource List*

voices affirming of Women in Ministry at an early date. Such views were often linked to the idea of public testimony as prophecy and as fulfillments of the promise in Joel/Acts.

**Pauline Peifer, “An Awakening” *Shalom!: A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* 38.2 (Spring 2018): pages 4-5.**

Personal reflections from the first woman to serve as a Bishop with the Brethren in Christ about her wrestling with a call to ministry and involvement with the Awaken BIC network.

**Alan Robinson, “Celebrating Women in Ministry Leadership” *Brethren in Christ U.S. Blog* (August 25, 2017). [Direct Link](#)**

This article marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the BIC’s formal affirmation of women in ministry leadership. It briefly reviews historical developments and reflects on present trends in the BIC family pertaining to women in ministry.

**Zach Spidel, “Embracing Women in Ministry” *Brethren in Christ U.S. Blog* (March 8, 2021). [Direct Link](#)**

This article briefly reviews historical women who were influential in the Brethren in Christ’s work of evangelism and missions. It then connects the recovery of their stories to the denomination’s decision to formally endorse women’s ordination.

**Lynn I. Thrush, “The Theology of Women in Pastoral Ministry” (1980).**

This paper was prepared for the *Committee on Women and Pastoral Ministry* in response to denominational wrestling over the prospect of women in ministry. It argues that “the sum of Scripture does not forbid women pastoral leadership” and that common “restrictive” passages should be viewed as contextual arguments against domineering attitudes rather than absolute bans on women in leadership.

**Women in Ministry Task Force, “Report to the General Assembly” (July 2022). Pages 48-98 in Brethren in Christ U.S. [General Assembly 2022 Minutes](#).**

A report generated at the request of the Leadership Council following an investigation into broader practices in the BIC U.S. family. The report contains recommendations on how to empower women more effectively within the BIC U.S. for ministry service, educate the denomination at large about the affirming stance, and produce resources for engaging congregations on cultural matters pertaining to these issues.

#### IV. OTHER RESOURCES

The following resources have been written by those outside of the Brethren in Christ (or by BIC members in external publications) whose views on Women in Ministry are broadly in alignment with our denomination's stance. These books provide fruitful discussion of concepts Scriptural, Historical, and Pastoral. Many of these resources are written for general audiences. I have marked resources that assume technical knowledge (biblical languages) with an asterisk (\*).

##### BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION & THEOLOGY

**Linda L. Belleville, Craig L. Blomberg, Craig S. Keener, Thomas R. Schreiner. *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Zondervan Academic, 2010)**

Part of Zondervan's *Counterpoints* series, this book offers essays (and rebuttals) from multiple biblical scholars on both sides of the women in ministry debate. Helpful for gaining an understanding of the nuances of both sides of the argument.

**Linda L. Belleville. *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Baker Academic, 2000)**

This book probes three questions: "In which ministries in the church can women be involved?" "What roles can women play in society?" and "Can women hold positions of authority in the church?" in response to statements from non-affirming denominations. \*Note that some of the arguments in this book are repeated in Belleville's entry in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*.

**Kevin Giles. *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* (Cascade Books, 2018)**

This resource centers around common texts used by some authors to suggest the subordination of women (1 Cor. 14:33-37; 1 Tim. 2:11-15, 1 Tim. 3:2-12; etc.) and argues that these texts are more fully understood in light of the wider witness of Scripture and the historical situations in which they were written.

**David Instone-Brewer. *Moral Questions of the Bible: Timeless Truth in a Changing World* (Lexham, 2019).**

This book covers a multitude of current issues facing churches and, in several chapters (14-15), addresses the topic of women in ministry from an affirming perspective. A highly approachable read noteworthy for how well its author addresses complex topics in limited space.

**\*Craig S. Keener. *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Baker Academic, 1992).**

This book reads Paul in comparison to his contemporaries, arguing that the apostle's language is both affirming and uniquely progressive in his social context. Especially helpful for learning about views of women in the ancient cultures to which the Scriptures were first written.

**Dorothy A. Lee. *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Baker Academic, 2021).**

This resource by a Roman Catholic scholar reviews the stories of women in the Scriptures with a special emphasis on how they are portrayed in narrative texts (Gospels, Acts) as well as arguments about the often-neglected references to prominent women in the letters of Paul. It then argues that women ought to be more fully included in ministry leadership positions.

**Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall (editors). *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural & Practical Perspectives* (IVP Academic, 2021).**

This book includes more than thirty essays by biblical scholars on scriptural, theological, hermeneutical, cultural, and practical matters related to the position of biblical gender equality. A comprehensive “one stop shop” for learning about this perspective.

**\*Cynthia Long Westfall. *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Baker Academic, 2016).**

An exceptional book on the cultural backgrounds and major themes informing Paul’s theology and his approach to women and men in the epistles. Quite technical, yet a worthy read.

## WOMEN IN CHURCH HISTORY

**Beth Allison Barr. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Brazos Press, 2021)**

This popular-level book traces the development of the complementarian view of gender hierarchy and its influence in modern American evangelicalism through prominent preachers, resources, and even Bible translations, and how that movement has influenced conservative Christian views on women in ministry and in the home.

[Personal Review](#)

**Leanne Dzubinski & Anneke Stasson. *Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles Throughout Church History* (Baker Academic, 2021).**

This book highlights the stories of women leaders throughout Christian history. Especially helpful for filling in the gaps on early church, medieval, and early modern women in ministry.

**C. Arnold Snyder & Linda A. Huebert Hecht. *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.**

As suggested by the title, this book reviews women of the early Anabaptist movements and their contributions to the developing ethos of Anabaptism.

## CHURCH PRACTICES & MISCELLANY

**Kevin Giles. *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?* (Cascade Books, 2020)**

This book draws a connection between complementarian readings of Scriptural passages about women in ministry and household roles in light of social tendencies towards abuse in some segments of the church. [Personal Review](#)

**Lisa Weaver Swartz, *Stained Glass Ceilings: How Evangelicals Do Gender and Practice Power* (Rutgers University Press, 2022)**

This book surveys how women's voices are received at two theological seminaries: one affirming of women in ministry and the other non-affirming, offering in the process a critique of how institutions engage in gender discourse and social practices with reference to women.

## (A FEW) WOMEN IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

The following scholars are a representative sample of women engaged in my field (Biblical Studies). Although I have not read everything written by each of them, what I have encountered has been of a sufficient quality that I am comfortable recommending their works.<sup>8</sup> Provided in parentheses are some of their research interests and publications.

**Jeannine K. Brown** (New Testament; *Matthew (THNT)*)

**Lynn Cohick** (New Testament; *Ephesians (NICNT)*)

**Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza** (Theology; *The Book of Revelation: Justice & Judgment*)

**Amy Jill-Levine** (New Testament & Early Judaism; *Sermon on the Mount: A Beginners Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven*)

**Karen H. Jobes** (New Testament; *1 Peter (BECNT)*)

**Jennifer Matheny** (Old Testament; *Ruth: Recent Research*)

**Margaret M Mitchell** (New Testament; *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*)

**Carolyn Osiek** (New Testament; *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*)

**Ruth Anne Reese** (New Testament; *2 Peter & Jude (THNT)*)

**Sandra Richter** (Old Testament; *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament*)

**Cynthia Long Westfall** (New Testament; *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*)

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<sup>8</sup> As always, recommendations should not be taken as endorsements of every position found in their works.

## **Women in Ministry Leadership Statement**

Brethren in Christ U.S.

*August 28, 2017*

The Brethren in Christ U.S. fully affirms women in ministry leadership at all levels of Church life. Women are ordained and commissioned as pastors, bishops, deacons, denominational leaders, and members of local, regional, and national BIC U.S. governing boards.

As a denomination within the historic Christian faith, we are committed to the Bible as the divinely inspired, authoritative Word of God.<sup>i</sup> And it is our reading of the Bible that leads us to support women in ministry leadership, grounded, more specifically, in our understanding of 1) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people — both women and men, 2) the witness in both the Old and New Testaments of women called to spiritual leadership, and 3) the example of Jesus partnering with women in ministry.

### **The Holy Spirit's Commissioning of All People**

The coming of the Holy Spirit not only empowered the followers of Jesus for ministry but simultaneously revolutionized the Church when the prophesy of Joel (Joel 2:28-32) was realized in the divine outpouring at Pentecost. Proclaimed Peter on that day:

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy' (Acts 2:16-18).

During Pentecost, the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 did more than enable the disciples to preach the gospel to each person in their own language. The coming of the Holy Spirit also fulfilled the prophecy of Joel in testifying that all people — “sons and daughters,” “men and women” — were equipped for ministry: gifted, empowered, and called. That day, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christ unveiled the freedom of life in him as described by the apostle Paul: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

### **Support for Women in Leadership from the Biblical Narrative**

The concern of some is that select passages of Scripture (for example, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12) exclude women from roles of teaching and pastoring within the Church. However, the broader scope of the biblical narrative recognizes women in a variety of ministry leadership roles:

**Deborah** leading Israel (Judges 4-5)

**Huldah** interpreting the law for the nation (2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34)

**Esther** saving God's people from genocide (Esther)

**Miriam** leading the people and directing worship (Exodus 15; Micah 6:4)

**Mary Magdalene** the first to preach the Gospel (John 20:1-18; Mark 16:9-11; Luke 24:1-12)

**Mary of Bethany** anointing Jesus as the Messiah (John 12)

**Mary of Nazareth** birthing the Savior of the world (Luke 1-2)

**Anna** the prophet (Luke 2:22-40)

**Tabitha** the disciple known for her good works (Acts 9:36-42)

**Priscilla** who corrected false teaching (Acts 18:24-28)

**Lydia** and **Nympha** hosting house churches (Acts 16:11-15; Colossians 4:15)

**Joanna** and **Suzanna** who traveled with Jesus as disciples (Luke 8:1-3)

**Junia** the apostle (Romans 16:7)

**Phoebe** the deacon (Romans 16:1-2)<sup>ii</sup>

Paul instructs us that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). As such, it should be used to establish a more fully orbed and broadly biblical doctrine of women in ministry leadership.

How, then, do we synthesize Paul’s teachings that appear to oppose women in Church leadership with the overwhelming affirmation of women in leadership throughout the Old and New Testaments? First, these Pauline passages, after careful study (beyond the scope of this document), must be considered as localized and contextual admonitions given to particular situations amid a profoundly patriarchal first century culture. In short, they must be seen as the early Church working out the implications of the revolutionary teachings of Jesus and the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel in Acts 2 within the laboratory of local congregations.

Second, as we read biblical passages within the framework of all of Scripture, we also should read Paul’s seemingly contradictory statements in the context of his entire writings. Consider one of the most difficult passages referenced above: “Women should remain silent in the churches” (1 Corinthians 14:34). While it appears Paul prohibits women from participating in the life of the Church, a few chapters earlier in 1 Corinthians, he advocates for women prophesying (1 Corinthians 11:2-11).<sup>iii</sup> Clearly, Paul does not exclude women from Church engagement if he also remarks they are to share God’s Word!

Third, Paul’s position toward women in Church leadership must also take into account Paul’s interaction with — and recognition of — women in ministry. He refers to Priscilla as his “co-worker in Christ Jesus” (Romans 16:3), a term used for Church leaders such as Timothy, Mark, and Titus; calls Phoebe a “deacon” and highly extols her work (Romans 16:1-2); and praises Junia as “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7).

### **Jesus’ Partnership with Women in Ministry**

Jesus’ inclusion of women in his ministry perhaps provides the most compelling example of God’s heart toward women leading the Church. Jesus had women disciples who traveled with him throughout his ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Systematically destroying cultural, religious, and gender barriers, Jesus commissioned the Samaritan woman as one of the first evangelists (John 4:4-42) — and “many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (verse 39). He memorialized the act of the woman who broke an expensive alabaster jar of perfume and poured it on his head (Mark 14:3-9). Celebrating her extravagant love, he proclaimed that “wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (verse 9).

But, perhaps, most extraordinary is Christ’s commendation of Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mary is said to have “sat at Jesus’ feet,” angering her sister Martha for not helping to entertain the guests (Luke 10:38-42). In the first century, to *sit at a rabbi’s feet* meant you were the rabbi’s disciple. In this act, Mary was calling herself a disciple, equal to men. Furthermore, a disciple’s goal was to become their rabbi’s successor. So, in effect, Mary was claiming she would share Christ’s ministry. How did Jesus respond to Mary’s audacious declaration? He defends Mary’s decision to sit at his feet — endorsing her station as a disciple and a future rabbi.<sup>iv</sup>

Not only were women among the disciples following Jesus, learning from him, serving him, and supporting him, but they were also at the cross, at the tomb, and the first to see and speak to the risen Christ. Eyewitnesses to the resurrection — the defining event of the Christian faith — women were the first to proclaim his being raised from the dead (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:18). In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus welcomed women as full participants and enthusiastic proclaimers of the gospel message.

## Conclusion

In 1982, the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church took formal action to “affirm the ministry of women in the life and programs of the Church”<sup>v</sup> — an action that was re-emphasized a decade later by the 1992 General Conference.<sup>vi</sup>

In keeping with historic convictions of the Brethren in Christ Church and our desire to remain faithful to our understanding of Scripture, the BIC U.S. continues to fully recognize and support women in ministry and leadership at all levels of Church life. We believe that the Church truly does constitute God’s new community inaugurated by Christ, where both women and men are gifted and empowered for ministry, so that, together, we may fulfill the calling upon each of our lives:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:10-11, NIV).

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<sup>i</sup> “What we believe about the Bible: A Brethren in Christ approach to reading and interpreting Scripture,” Brethren in Christ U.S., <https://bicus.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Statement-Scripture.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Kate Wallace Nunneley, “Why I Support Women in Leadership — in 30 Seconds,” The Junia Project, May 24, 2016, <http://juniaproject.com/why-i-support-women-in-church-leadership-30-seconds>. Aside from reformatted biblical references and a slightly modified text, the passage is quoted with permission from leadership at The Junia Project.

<sup>iii</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 72-73.

<sup>iv</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 69-70.

<sup>v</sup> Minutes for the General Conference, Brethren in Christ Church (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1982), 85.

<sup>vi</sup> Minutes for the General Conference, Brethren in Christ Church (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1992), 65.