

Submitted Motion #1:

We move to amend the bylaws by removing the word "male" from Section 3:03, regarding qualifications for Elders, thereby removing the limitation that Elders be men only.

Motion made 2/24 by: Adam Lewis

Seconded by: Alyssa Lewis.

Rationale of Motion #1:

Under our current bylaws, women participate in leading the spiritual direction of the church. Under the proposed bylaw revisions, they cannot. While it has been communicated with the congregation that the proposed bylaw revision expands the role of women in leadership, because they are permitted to be Deacons, the overall picture of these revisions shows that the much-needed spiritually formative leadership of women is diminished. Currently, women may serve on the "Executive Board", the present title for the spiritual oversight body. But the change in title to "Elders" finds this opportunity removed.

Twenty years ago, the bylaws were revised to streamline leadership so the church could get to the work of ministry instead of spending the majority of its time held up in meetings. Member at-large positions were included on the Executive Board with the intention of providing opportunity for women to serve in leadership. According to Article II, Sections 2 and 3 of our current bylaws, the Executive Board is responsible for "promoting the spiritual welfare of the members of the church," and, "performing such other spiritual offices as the Word of God teaches," and, "overseeing all matters of a spiritual nature, locally and worldwide, and teaching and nurturing the fellowship with care as shepherds of the flock."

In 1 Peter 5, Peter exhorts the elders in various places to do as described above, to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight." This word "oversight" is the verb form of the same word Paul uses for Elders in 1 Tim 3, one of two main passages used in the bylaws (both current, and the proposed revision): "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." It would seem then, that while we have been using a different title, the Executive Board serves the function of Elders. And since positions were included for women to serve on the board, we have had women Elders for the last twenty years. And we would argue that our church is all the better for it.

This body needs an increase in the accountability and spiritual formation found in the presence, wisdom, perspective, and insight of our godly sisters and mothers in Christ, and certainly not a complete removal of this already limited leadership space. Currently, women may occupy only two of the ten, non-pastoral positions on the Executive Board - and these are at-large positions only.

This amendment will allow for a fuller, more robust church. The discipleship and shepherding of the whole congregation from men and women working together will have stronger foundations and far greater impact on the church and the community. Additionally, justly receiving the leadership and guidance of godly women will provide the much needed opportunity for other women in the church to have someone in directorial leadership they can more wholly and safely approach for council. And women in Eldership will be much more understanding toward other women in the church than will be men.

Regarding denomination, the EFCA grants the local church the freedom to decide for itself how to form and enact its own spiritual care and governance. Retaining and even increasing the opportunity for women to spiritually care for the church would have no effect on our affiliation with the EFCA.

Theologically, we recognize that this is a contested issue. Many theologians and scholars make biblical arguments both in support of, and against women as Elders. Being a congregational form of government, we believe the members of this body should be free to dialogue and process, and to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit, deciding together on this matter.

Motion #1 Executive Board Response:

Our intent in revising the constitution/bylaws has always been to improve the care and nurturing of our church family through the Scriptural model of shepherding elders and caring deacons. The constitution/bylaw have been revised to modify our governance structure and incorporate Elders and Deacons while affirming and retaining our theological, denominational, and congregational positions. The constitution/bylaw revision charter has always been that WEFC will remain in the EFCA, will remain congregational, and will remain complementarian. The constitution/bylaw revision charter has always been to start with Scripture for the qualifications for elders and deacons, our starting point was not the current bylaws.

We acknowledge that the current Bylaws are ambiguous regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Board, The Deacons (male office only) and the Spiritual Care Committee (male office only). One of the objectives of revising the bylaws is to clarify and align the spiritual care responsibilities of our church, according to Scripture, using a model of both Elders and Deacons.

We affirm that both men and women are needed and necessary for the health and ministry of the church. Godly men and women should be visible partners in the corporate life of the church, deploying their diverse gifts for the good of the body. Simply put, all Christians contribute to the ministry of the church.

We deny that the church can flourish without brotherly/ sisterly partnership. We deny that a church can exist in which the men flourish and the women do not, or vice versa.

We affirm that the role/function of elder is reserved for qualified men. Elders are distinctly responsible for overseeing the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1–2) and preaching the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9).

We deny that the role of elder being withheld from women diminishes their importance or their influence in the church. The indispensable help women were created to give can and should be exercised in all manner of roles/offices in the church, excepting those reserved for qualified men.

We maintain that Scripture is sufficient in providing the direction and safeguards for proper church governance and that the revised bylaws are consistent with Scripture. Elders will be accountable to God and to the congregation to seek out, understand and serve the men, women, children, and youth within God's church with compassion and humility. Elders will "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:2) in the model of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). An elder will discern the direction of the Holy Spirit and guide the church toward His plans for ministry (2 Tim. 1:13-14). An elder will rely on the endless resources of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to serve His people (2 Cor. 12:9; Acts 1:8).

We believe that the revised bylaws now include sufficient mechanisms for church family collaboration, coordination, and consultation. For example:

Under Section 3.02 Duties and Responsibilities of Elders:

The Elders may establish, reconstitute, or disband committees, groups and organizations as needed.

The Elders shall work with the Deacons and church staff to ensure that spiritual growth needs are being met throughout the church.

Under Section 3.09: Meetings:

..... "any church member may come before the Elders to discuss a specific issue upon prior arrangement with the Church Chairman. The Elders may invite Pastors, permanent committee chairs, members of permanent committees, church members or other individuals to meetings, if appropriate."

Although it is not our intention to change our complementarian position, if, in the future, the congregation decides to reconsider our theological position it will require a significant amount of time to allow for sufficient prayer, biblical study, and communication. The position of the Executive Board is that this is not the appropriate time to discuss a change in our theological positions.

Submitted Motion #2:

The office of Deacon should be limited to men only. Amend the bylaws by removing the word "women" from Section 5:03.

Motion made by: Ray Gratton

Rationale of Motion #2:

Scripture is clear that a woman should not have authority over a man in either the home or in the church. By allowing women to serve as a deaconess, in different ministries, it creates situations in which women would be in a position of authority over men.

Motion #2 Executive Board Response:

We believe that Scripture does allow for women to serve as deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13). The role of deacon, as outlined in the revised bylaws, is a role of care and not a position of authority.

We believe that neither men nor women are above the other in value or importance and that both are integral to the health and growth of the whole church body, which results from each member carrying out in Christ-like manner the role or task for which they have been equipped. We hold a complementarian view of these roles and believe that the responsibility of the shepherding oversight of the church has been tasked to men. We also believe that the men serving in this task, as they shepherd the whole Church, must humbly pursue, and consider with equal care and validity the concerns, perspective, and understanding of every member alike: women and men, single and married, with and without children, old and young, poor and rich, every culture.

As the Deacons are not tasked with the same general oversight but serve under the Elders in meeting the practical needs and engaging intimately in the life of the church, we welcome, strongly encourage, and need women in this role. We all belong to each other as one body, and we all need each other serving in the places to which we have been called. Without the perspective, insight, and wisdom that the women of the church steward, we would be incomplete, unable to fully grow and mature. We need a diverse set of people to meet a diverse set of needs.