

The Roles of Men and Women in WELS Lutherans for Life

[WELS Lutherans for Life 4th Annual Convention, Milwaukee, November, 1985]

by Edward C. Fredrich

In response to valid requests for a clarification of constitutional provisions about the role of men and women in the organization, the national board is presenting this position paper. It goes without saying that such a paper must rest squarely on Scripture and reflect the guidance it provides in this matter. The paper therefore begins by pointing directly to and expounding briefly

Two Basic Principles of Scripture.

1. From creation on it has been God's will and his intended order that man fulfill the role of head, the authoritative role, and that woman fill the role of helper, the supportive role.

This is the truth that emerges from any fair and faithful reading of the Bible's creation account in the first and second chapters of Genesis. This role assignment that God made has not been changed by the tragedy recounted in the third chapter of Genesis which tells of the fall into sin. It has become harder for each party to fulfill the assigned role since sin entered the world, but the roles themselves have not been changed.

Any fair and faithful reading of the New Testament applications of the creation account as to manner and time of the creation of man and woman compel the conclusion that this role assignment of God to men and to women still applies even after Christ has made us free from the curse and compulsion of the law and from all ceremonial ordinances. The main chapters to consult are: I Corinthians 11 and 14, Ephesians 5, 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3.

The sinful world in which we live may suggest and enforce other principles. God's people, however, as individuals and as a grouping, will abide by God's immutable and unchanging will and order. As such a grouping, WELS – Lutherans for Life will seek to voice his truths about life and death and abortion from a platform that squares with his truths about the role of men and women in his creation. Anything less would be a contradiction of aims and a cross-purpose of actions. God in his Word has spoken out as clearly on men - women roles as on abortion. At the same time no one should overlook an equally important principle of Scripture that applies in these matters.

2. In Christ's New Testament church there are no abiding ceremonies and binding ordinances beyond God's unchangeable will and Christ's instructions regarding the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

This means that the issue has never been or ever should be a mere matter of using the voice or enjoying the franchise or holding the office. The issue always is the principles that God himself has set down in his Word about the role for man and the role for woman in his creation.

In the area of practical application of these principles there might well be an occasion when a male national board might devote 99 percent of the time of a meeting to hearing from women who are in the front ranks of those carrying out the aims of WELS - Lutherans for Life. There might well be an arrangement whereby input is sought from women without them casting the authoritative vote. There could well be roles in the organization on the national or local level filled by women. These are never the issues that are of ultimate importance. What is important is God's immutable will revealed in the Old and the New Testament and its application in the practices of our synodical body and in our own organization.

That is why from beginning on to now there has always been in the synodical and congregational groupings of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod an adherence to

Two Consistent Practices of Our Church Body.

1. Voting privileges on the authoritative level remain with the male members of the grouping.

The most recent statement on the matter, “Man and Woman in God’s World,” puts it this way on page 19:

In a desire to affirm the headship of men, our congregations withhold voting privileges from women in their governing assemblies. The question of such suffrage does not center on the relative importance of the matter being voted on. If it did, suffrage could be extended to women in matters that do not deal directly with the public ministry of the Word. But the central issue is the headship principle, which God set forth already at the creation of man and woman

The Christian woman knows that if she were to demand the right to vote and to govern the congregation, she would be exercising authority over the man who is to be her head.

These principles include within themselves a commitment on office holding. The point, however, will be stated for clarity’s sake.

2. Office holding on the authoritative level remains with the male members of the grouping.

“Man and Woman in God’s World” provides a succinct and conclusive statement when it declares on page 18: “Paul’s concern, then, is not to exclude women from being involved in Christ’s work, but to direct women in a way that accords with the headship of man that God set forth in creation. Women are not to assume an office of the public ministry when that means exercising authority over men.”

What the previous two sections say simply leads inevitably to what this third section says as it points to:

Two Constitutional Provisions of Our Organization

These provisions may best be underscored by no more than quotation from the constitution rather than by lengthy elaboration.

1. “The constituency of the National Board of this organization and all supervising boards of affiliated chapters shall be composed of pastors, male teachers and laymen who hold voting membership in WELS congregations or the congregations of church bodies in fellowship with the WELS.

2. “The voting membership of this organization shall include all male members who are voting members in their respective congregations ...” (Chapter Constitution: Article IV - Membership Paragraph 3).

Two Important Provinces of Our Women Members

should, however, be highlighted in the conclusion of this position paper.

1. The advisory role of women members of WELS Lutherans for Life is indispensable.

The point role in our organization is a woman’s role. To downplay or ignore this obvious statement of fact could prove ruinous. What “Man and Woman in God’s World” has said on page 19 in a more general sense applies even more so to the work of WELS - Lutherans for Life: We have Christ as our Head, and every decision he makes on our behalf is carried out in perfect love and is always done with our best interest in mind. Christian men will want to exhibit that love to the women members of their congregations (organizations]. They may do this by seeking the opinions and suggestions of the women before a final decision is made. In this way the church will be benefited by the special gifts and talents God has

given to the women in the church, and the men still will be following Christ's example as they exercise the authority God entrusts to them.

2. The service role of women members of WELS Lutherans for Life is of prime importance in its endeavors.

Permit the members of the national board a few closing observations. They realize they are far removed from the organization's main efforts. They meet regularly in an attempt to carry out responsibilities assigned to them by the parent organization. Where the real action is, however, is not in the board meetings. The real action is in the pregnancy counseling centers of WELS Lutherans for Life.

These national board members would much prefer to put in their hours where the real action is. God, however, has designed it otherwise. There will be no quarrel with God about the doings and decisions that have brought about this state of affairs. All will instead do what they can to be helpers to those in the front ranks of our WELS - Lutherans for or Life.