

Who should serve on the World Missions Board?

Our AFLC World Missions Corporation has been involved in a discussion over whether or not women should be serving on the Board of Directors. Different opinions exist on the issue, but we are united in our desire to spread the good news of Jesus throughout the world.

Even Peter admitted regarding Paul's writings: "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). People can share a conviction about the authority and inerrancy of Scripture but come to different thoughts about the interpretation of some passages. One of those passages is where Paul was inspired by the Spirit to write: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

I don't believe I know anyone who holds to a totally literal interpretation of that passage in Timothy. We don't hold to that type of interpretation in the AFLC. Women are permitted to speak at the annual conference. They are not required to be silent. The question is where do we draw the line and what does it mean "to have authority over a man"?

The letter is Paul writing to a young pastor of a local congregation. I still hold to the same interpretation of the passage that I came to while a student at the Free Lutheran Seminary. The authority spoken of is pastor of a local congregation. I believe the message of the verse is that a woman should not serve as pastor of a local congregation.

A Lutheran principle regarding Bible interpretation that I deeply appreciate is that we go as far as the Word goes, but no farther. When the Word is silent we are silent. We are free to have convictions on areas where the Word is silent, but we should not say, "Thus saith the Lord." Included in believing in the inerrancy and authority of Scripture is not trying to stretch the Scripture to say more than it says.

I believe God's Word is silent regarding women serving on a position such as the World Missions Board. Scripture can be hard to understand at times. While Timothy speaks of women being silent, Acts 21:9 says Philip "had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy." Acts 18:26 lists the wife first when he describes both Priscilla and

Aquila being involved in explaining the way of God to Apollos. Judges 4 and 5 tells of Deborah, a prophetess, leading Israel, holding court, deciding disputes and leading God's people into battle.

The local congregation is the highest human authority in our church body, under the Word and Spirit of God. In all of the congregations I have served, women have been permitted to vote at congregational meetings. Women are permitted to vote at our annual conference, and have had that right, I believe, since we began.

Women serve on the Youth Ministries Board. The director has been a pastor and so women have had the authority of calling him and overseeing him. Women serve on the Parish Education Board and as director. They have authority over the men who write and authority in deciding the materials used in education in our congregations.

The World Missions Corporation is the authority over the Board of Directors. Women have been serving on the corporation for many years. We currently have 15 women on the corporation, 17 pastors and 17 laymen. Sometimes finding four laymen to serve on the board has been a challenge. The task would be easier if one or two of the positions could be filled by women.

Half of the missionaries the board serves are women. When a missionary couple is called, the wife needs to fill out an application. She needs to write down her doctrinal beliefs and needs to be interviewed and approved. She is considered a missionary. We also have now, and have had throughout our history, single female missionaries. There are a number of times when having a women's perspective, discernment and gifts would help us as a board as we seek to serve missionaries and congregations.

Our office manager, Wanda Jacobson, is present at all our board meetings and provides valuable insight and assistance. Her work has been extremely beneficial. We have many other women in our congregations who are similarly wise and gifted. At times there are women who have gifts that could be used in service on the World Missions Board. I encourage the corporation to be open to the possibility.