



General Church of the New Jerusalem

Release of Report of the Women's Participation Task Force

July 6, 2017

Dear General Church Friends,

This report of the Women's Participation Task Force, prepared for the General Church Clergy and Board, is being released to the Church at large. The intent of this cover letter is to offer some acknowledgments and share some perspectives that have come forward since the report was completed.

The following statement in the "current state" analysis of the General Church strategic plan, quoted on p. 2 of the report, summarizes where we are: "Some wish to see change and others are urging the Church to stay the course." Since this report has been presented...

- There has been push-back from some clergy and lay people on the perspectives primarily contributing to the report. Their message is that the report and the process that led to it under-represents those who are relatively content with the Church's teachings and conduct around honoring women. Some also suggested that it under-values the greatest contributions of women, particularly in the realms of marriage and family.
- A "shoe" demonstration took place outside of the entrance to the venue where General Church clergy meetings were held. Anonymous organizers unrelated to the task force process encouraged people to drop off a pair of women's shoes as a way of communicating that women should have a greater voice in church leadership, including ordination. I acknowledge their voices, and respectfully ask them to consider the report of this task force. I hope it is seen as tangible evidence of the Church's willingness to address this tender subject.

It should be noted that the charge of this task force was to engage in an exploration that expressly did not aim to address the General Church ordination policy. While the subject did come up during the process, the report itself should not be viewed as striving to influence that policy.

With these things said, readers are invited to make up their own minds about the report. Your perspectives—including challenges, affirmations, or additions—are welcomed. Most importantly, what is your understanding, based on New Church teaching, of the common ground that all of us can stand on relative to the participation of women in the life of the Church? Contact information for the chairs of the task force is given on p. 1.

Best wishes,

Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr.
Assistant to the Bishop



General Church of the New Jerusalem

Report of the General Church Women's Participation Task Force

Prepared for General Church Clergy
and the General Church Board

June 2017

Contact information:

Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.—Co-Chair

Phone: 267.502.4918

Email: Peter.Buss.Jr@newchurch.org

Dr. Jane K. Williams-Hogan—Co-Chair

Phone: 267.502.2501

Email: Jane.Williams-Hogan@brynathyn.edu

INTRODUCTION

The General Church Strategic Plan, adopted by the General Church Board at its May 2016 meeting, called for the formation of two task forces. A Women’s Participation Task Force was one of them (see Appendix A for relevant section).

The whole plan aims at greater engagement in the church through six strands: education, outreach, participation, communication, professional development, and international planning. The participation strand is focused on “providing avenues for greater involvement and participation in the life of the church.” We would like that for everyone, but for planning purposes we narrowed it down to two groupings of people: young people and women. The reason is that our current-state analysis found a stepping back instead of engagement from some young people and some women—or some men because of their sense of the church’s messaging about women. Here is the way the GC Strategic Plan describes our current state in the participation strand:

The General Church is a beloved organization that is struggling to keep the Lord relevant in the active lives of its people, specifically among young adults. There is a strong message of “useful service” causing many to give of their time and expertise to the church. Yet some who could engage are choosing to hold back for a variety of reasons. Some wish to see change and others are urging the church to stay the course. Differences in doctrinal interpretation can result in divisive conversations, most notably those concerning the roles of women. At times, this presents challenges to utilizing the service of dedicated lay people in church uses. Our doctrinal understanding and research capability could lead to greater responsibility across the church for increased participation in service to the Lord. (GC Strategic Plan 2016-2020, slide 14)

For the proposed Women’s Participation Task Force, the plan gave the following charge:

Promote involvement of women through a task force charged with exploring respect for and utilization of feminine wisdom in church activities. After doctrinal and current-state exploration, develop a report on appropriate methods of enhancing the roles feminine wisdom and expertise may play in the Church. (GC Strategic Plan 2016-2020, slide 15)

Further detail was provided regarding recommendations and tracking of implementation as follows:

Within one year the women’s task force will complete its initial report, containing recommendations for specific activities that can enhance the roles of feminine wisdom in the Church, along with suggested measures to determine whether such activities are implemented. A follow-up report will be submitted after an additional year to assess the uptake and impact of these recommendations. Continued focus on recommendations will lead to a growing sense of confidence that the Church is an organization that overtly seeks to honor the unique and complementary nature of each sex, as stated in its core values. (GC Strategic Plan 2016-2020, slide 16)

This report constitutes fulfillment of the General Church’s commitment to conduct an exploration of where we are and what we can do to draw more effectively on feminine wisdom and energy, as called for in this plan.

For reference our report is organized with the following sections:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Women’s Participation Task Force
- Section 3: Description of Process

- Section 4: Findings
- Section 5: Recommendations
- Section 6: Thoughts on Implementation and Assessment
- Section 7: Closing Thoughts

After the report are the following appendices:

- Appendix A: Letter to Prospective Task Force Members
- Appendix B: Relevant Portions of the General Church Strategic Plan 2016-2020
- Appendix C: Reports Along the Way
- Appendix D: Doctrinal Foundations
- Appendix E: Invitation and Questions for Focus Groups
- Appendix F: Summaries of Feedback Received via Focus Group Sessions
- Appendix G: Possible Examples of Recommendations in Action
- Appendix H: Files Distributed to Task Force Members

The subject of women's participation in the church is near to the hearts of many people. It arouses strong emotions and thoughts, many of which conflict with one another. Coming out of a review of the General Church's ordination policy, many would agree that there is an entrenched polarity within the membership, with some ardently opposed to the all-male ordination policy, and others equally strongly in favor of it. Everyone has her or his reasons, and conversations about that subject will no doubt continue.

While concerns about ordination did enter into the conversations of this task force, the primary aim was to seek non-ordination solutions to the goal of welcoming feminine wisdom and energy more fully into the life of the church. A reason for this focus is the realization that the polarity that exists will not soon go away, no matter how much some wish it would. Instead of remaining in the argument, the aim was to explore, from our teachings, ways to draw more effectively on the skills and insights given to women that the vast majority of the church could support. We pray that our findings and recommendations, the heart of this report, demonstrate deep listening, and some useful ways forward for our church.

THE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION TASK FORCE

A first step was to form a task force to carry this work forward. Peter Buss, Jr., Assistant to the Bishop, was assigned to lead this effort. Two immediate tasks emerged: to draft an approach to this work that could be shared with potential task force members, and to solicit names of people who might serve. Peter took counsel from the GC Strategic Planning Committee, the GC Board and members of the Clergy on the approach and on recommendations for who could usefully serve.

Appendix B contains the letter sent to prospective task force members, after an initial conversation about their interest in the topic. As you will see, there were three basic parameters:

1. Time availability for meetings.
2. Those who are actively participating in the life of the church.
3. People willing to explore participation and a more supportive culture that does not center on ordination.

Also relevant are the representative voices we aimed to include:

- People from different parts of the church
- Women of different age brackets
- Women with a range of perspectives on the subject of feminine contributions
- A couple of priests besides the Assistant to the Bishop
- Representation from the GC Board
- Some who have done pertinent research
- A couple of lay men

The following people agreed to serve on the task force:

- Heather Allais (Buccleuch, South Africa)
- Rakel Björkström (Stockholm, Sweden)
- Hilary Bryntesson (Bryn Athyn)
- Ethan Daum (Austin)
- Liane deChazal (Oak Arbor)
- Nina Dewees (Bryn Athyn)
- Mac Frazier (Glenview)
- Charlotte Gyllenhaal (General Church Board, Indiana)
- Cathlin Hendrichs (Boulder)
- Laura Hill (Caryndale)
- Jeremy Simons (Bryn Athyn)
- Craig Steen (Oak Arbor)
- Jane Williams-Hogan (Bryn Athyn College, Co-Chair)
- Peter Buss, Jr. (Bryn Athyn, GC Administration, Co-Chair)

The co-chairs would like to express heartfelt thanks to the people of the Women's Participation Task Force. Their dedication to the process, insights, willingness give of many a weekend hour, and extra efforts to gather information has been tremendous. When invited, it was acknowledged that they would be engaging in a conversation that would not be easy, but could be very useful. That has proven to be true. The church owes these members a debt of gratitude for their service.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS

The Women's Participation Task Force met monthly between September 2016 and June 2017. Shared below are four lenses into the process we engaged in:

1. Feedback loops: the groups to which we reached out along the way.
2. Subjects covered: Dates of full task force sessions and subject headings, together with outcomes from each meeting. Noted too are subcommittees formed, which met between main meetings.
3. Summary statements from our exploration of "Doctrinal Foundations." We wished to begin with a focus on relevant teachings, and debated them at length. We also strived to keep them in mind throughout our process.
4. Report on focus group sessions: How we approached the major goal of soliciting input from the people of the church.

Feedback Loops

A key goal of our task force exploration was to conduct our work with several planned feedback loops. While challenging to get the word out about this task force and to solicit input along the way, we made the following efforts to do so:

- Reached out to the Bishop's Consistory with periodic updates and requests for input
- Reached out to the GC Board-Clergy Communication Committee with periodic updates and requests for input
- Notice in November/December 2016 issue of New Church Life
- Presented updates to the General Church Board at two of its meetings
- Reached out a couple of times to the Clergy with updates and specific requests
- Encouraged task force members to connect with people in their circles about this work

Please see Appendix C for examples of these communications.

The goal in all of this was twofold: First, perhaps obviously, we wanted broad input into our work. We are tremendously grateful for the time and thoughtfulness of those who responded. It is an understatement to say that all of it informed our process in pivotal ways. Second, we wanted to lay the groundwork for beginning consensus around the findings and recommendations that are a key output of this exploration. We wished to avoid putting forward recommendations that a number of pastors would find themselves unable or unwilling to consider implementing. We also wanted to ensure that the things explored in depth by our 14-member task force held true when shared with a broader swath of the church.

Subject Covered and Flow of Meetings

September 17: Primary Focus—Getting Organized and Started

- Welcome and introductions
- The task at hand
- Organizational issues
- Soliciting ongoing input on our work
- Outcomes:
 - Jane Williams-Hogan selected as Co-Chair
 - Additional names recommended for two more task force slots

October 8,9: Primary Focus—Doctrinal Foundations

- Discussion of previously circulated teachings (see Appendix D)
- Exploring implications
- Generating reportable conclusions
- Outcomes:
 - Further dialogue of relevant teachings

October 29: Primary Focus—Summary Statements about Doctrines

- Further exploration of teachings
- Summary statements that capture salient points to bring forward
- Points that could use further exploration and discussion
- Outcomes:
 - Summary statements from teachings (see below)

December 10: Primary Focus—Greater Voice/More Effective Listening

- Listening more effectively to feminine wisdom
- Forums: informal and semi-formal
- How to honor those who do not wish to debate and be front-of-the-room
- More volume on causes and concepts closer to a majority of women’s hearts
- Meeting dynamics
- Outcomes:
 - Subcommittee commissioned to explore the best way to solicit input from the people of the church.

January 21: Primary Focus—Catching Up/More on Structure and Forums

- Subcommittee report on possible survey/focus group input-gathering process
 - What would we like to know from the people of the church?
 - How will we go about gathering information?
 - How do we propose to use the information gathered?
- Recommendations to date:
 - Are we hitting on some things that would allow us to serve more effectively?
 - How could these and subsequent recommendations be implemented?
- Outcome:
 - Assignment to all task force members to list what is happening within their congregations regarding women’s participation

February 25: Primary Focus—What’s Happening/What Could Happen?

- Digesting information gathered; additions from our group
 - Consideration alongside Doctrinal Foundations
 - Transportability of what’s happening in some places, to other places
 - Pastoral engagement
 - Things standing in the way: finances, local congregational culture, etc.
- Are there causes closer to a majority of women’s hearts and minds that we should be championing more?

March 11: Primary Focus—Toward A More Supportive Culture

- Perception and reality
- “The air we breathe...”
- Things we could do to influence a more respectful culture

- What does appropriate “valuing” or “recognizing” look like?
- Honoring personal choices: stay-at-home, career

April/May: Input/Feedback forums—Preparation for and Implementation of

- Subcommittee work to determine approach (focus groups format chosen), then craft invitation and questions
- Name generation—reaching out to pastors to solicit names, to augment those recommended by task force members
- Conduct feedback sessions
- Outcomes:
 - Focus group format chosen
 - Invitation and questions crafted
 - Invitations made
 - Focus groups scheduled and completed
 - Notes from all distributed to task force members and synthesis prepared for final report

May 13: Primary Focus—Educational Strands

- Reports on feedback received to date
- Education for careers sought by women—what should the church be involved in?
- Educational messages in elementary, secondary school and college: good and bad
- Outcomes:
 - Subcommittee to consider structure of final report

June 3: Primary Focus—Gathering Up Recommendations

- Consideration of draft “findings”
- Further brainstorming on recommendations
- Format and delivery method of report to Clergy and Board
- Outcomes:
 - Assignment to all task force members to contribute to list of recommendations
 - Subcommittee to organize recommendations into themes, and draft final list for task force consideration

Summary Statements from Doctrinal Foundations

Preface: The following statements reflect robust discussion and debate within the task force about the passages in our Doctrinal Foundations document and their implications. In presenting them, it is not to be concluded that everyone on the task force agrees with every statement. They stand as a reflection of key points made, and as a resting point for that early part of our work. It should be noted that one of the recommendations coming out of this task force exploration is to continue sharing and exploring the implications of these and other teachings about masculinity and femininity.

- The Heavenly Doctrines teach that each human being, male or female, is his or her own unique version of will and understanding. There are approximately 3.5 billion ways to be a masculine human being or a feminine human being, and these unique qualities need to be seen in the context of the definitions of masculinity and femininity taught in the Word.

- The Heavenly Doctrines teach that there is a fundamental and pervasive difference between men and women, based on the ways their souls and minds have been formed by the Lord. This is a good thing and should be embraced within the church, even though the ways in which these differences play out in daily life could be debated.
- The interplay of teachings about masculinity and femininity and people's experience of masculine and feminine human beings can be tricky. There is value in drawing on the wealth of brain research, sociological observation, and other life studies when grappling with our understanding of gender, in an effort to illustrate the teachings of the Word. It can also be useful to acknowledge that some people struggle to match the doctrinal descriptions of masculinity and femininity with their experience of themselves and the people in their lives.
- It is useful, especially when challenged by a teaching in the Heavenly Doctrines that seem dated or rankle modern sensitivities, to view that teaching in terms of its deeper implications, and then return to the words and images used to consider why they may have been chosen.
- It is useful to differentiate the term will-oriented, associated with women, from willfulness, or an old-will orientation that all of us need to work on. Defining the term related to the orientation of women is usefully done in association with other descriptions such as relationship-oriented, focused on goodness, or the perceptive wisdom that can be given to women.
- Being will-oriented does not mean un-intelligent; rather it has implications for the quality of intelligence and wisdom offered by women.
- Teachings about men and women given in the context of marriage can shed light on qualities of masculinity or femininity, but should be viewed carefully.
- Single people should be respected equally as married individuals in the church and its uses, recognizing that the essential marriage takes place in the individual heart and mind, and that the influence of the opposite sex may be welcomed and received by all within the context of their many relationships.
- The heart and lungs are an often-used model in the Heavenly Doctrines to describe the relationship and interaction between men and women. Generally speaking, men are aligned with the lungs and women with the heart. There is much that could be explored relative to feminine contributions related to the heart: pumping, life-blood, goodness, etc.
- We are taught in the Heavenly Doctrines that women have a potential from the Lord to develop a perceptive wisdom not available to men around human relationships, including those of marriage and family.
- Given the "higher heat" (cf. CL 188) that women can receive from the Lord, it is likely that women will consistently have greater degrees of emotional intelligence to contribute than men.
- Given the complementary perspective and approach of men and women, it follows that human society works best when masculine and feminine input is brought to bear. When both masculine and feminine people approach a given use from love, and collaborate on its performance, the use is elevated.
- Teaching the differences between men and women needs to be done sensitively, with the goal of honoring the strengths of each gender, and recognizing the ways in which they need each other.

- Cultural awareness is important to note, even to the point where current sensitivities may make certain teachings feel uncomfortable or dated. It can be useful to acknowledge these reactions, rather than pretend they are not, or should not, be there.
- One way to describe a strength given to women is an ability to weave many strands of humanity together in beautiful patterns, reminiscent of the art of embroidery.
- Another way to describe a strength given to women is to focus, as some passages in the Heavenly Doctrines do, on the gestational process, by which a new life is born into the world (see CL 115:5).

Report on Focus Group Sessions

One of the biggest efforts made by the Women's Participation Task Force was to conduct focus group sessions with lay people across the church. Our aim was to find people who would be willing to sit with representatives of the task force for a couple of hours answering a series of thought-provoking questions.

To generate an invite list, we asked task force members and pastors to suggest people from whom it would be useful to hear. We put gentle suggestions out there as to who might be good candidates: mostly women, some engaged congregation members, some younger people, and some less connected people. This effort generated well over a hundred names, from which we selected our final invite list.

In addition to this "congregational" list, we reached out to: graduates of the Master of Arts in Religious Studies program, some faculty at the Academy of the New Church Girls School and Bryn Athyn College, and women employed in the General Church Central Offices.

In the end, we held nine focus group sessions, and connected with several people who chose to provide feedback individually. Average attendance at each session was six. By means of it all, we received substantial feedback from over sixty people. The notes generated from these sessions took over forty pages to convey.

A success of these feedback sessions was: the small size of each, the time allotted to each allowing for in-depth reflections, and the "safe space" created for people to be forthright.

We do not claim, however, that the feedback received is representative of all the relevant attitudes or opinions within the church. While we heard a lot from a good number of people, and greatly appreciate their time, our task force reflection is that our sample of people was not a classically random sample in a statistical sense. We asked for names of people who might be interested, which may have led to an under-representation of people who are relatively content with the way things are in the church. We asked for people on the younger spectrum, but in the end heard from a relatively small number from that age group.

We are satisfied, however, that we received a great deal of helpful input about attitudes and perspectives that exist within the church.

Please see Appendix E for the invitation letter sent to participants, and the questions asked at each session.

Regarding the great deal of feedback received, two people on the Women's Participation Task Force independently analyzed the combined notes from the majority of our focus group sessions, and articulated themes arising from it all. Two other people summarized feedback from representatives

of the ANC Girls School faculty, and graduates of the MARS program. Readers are strongly encouraged to read these summaries in Appendix F. They contain a great deal of information that is worthy of consideration.

Out of all that feedback, and combined with the task force's own considerations of the topic at hand, we have a series of FINDINGS to report. These findings constitute the first of two major outcomes of this report, with the second being a series of recommendations.

FINDINGS

Preface—The Elephant and The Camel

It is noted in the Introduction that the primary aim of this exploration was to seek non-ordination solutions to the goal of welcoming feminine wisdom and energy more fully into the life of the church. Nevertheless, the subject of the General Church's ordination policy came up at a number of junctures, most notably in the focus group sessions just mentioned.

One way of characterizing discussions within the task force, feedback within our focus groups, and perhaps many a debate within the church, is to refer to the elephant and the camel. On the one side, there are those who claim that to discuss women's participation in the church without addressing the General Church's ordination policy is to ignore the proverbial "elephant in the room." On the other side, there remains deep conviction that the teachings of the New Church support the current ordination policy, to the point that it is easy for proponents of the way things are to see "the camel's nose poking into the tent"—a colloquial reference to a change agenda that can be relentless.

As noted before, this polarity within the church is not likely to change any time soon. Further, the subject tends to generate argumentativeness, hurt feelings, negative impressions of the church, and general dissatisfaction. For that reason, readers of the following "Findings" and "Recommendations" are invited to set aside "the elephant and the camel" and consider what might help. Will it help to absorb some of the feedback themes discovered by means of this process? We believe that it will. Can we do things to further embrace and honor the gifts that the Lord has given to women that are in keeping with our teachings? Of course the answer is yes.

Findings

1. A number of people in our focus groups reported messaging that was off-putting or demeaning regarding women's intelligence, particularly with regard to reading the Word with understanding and sharing insights into its teachings. In general, more respondents articulated valuing messages for relational, organizational, and networking abilities, and less for intellectual and doctrinal contributions. This is one of the most significant findings of this round of exploration.
2. Concern was expressed by some about the way masculine and feminine differences play out within the church. While most agree that there are useful and beautiful teachings about these differences, some felt that they were referenced at times to dismiss feminine perspectives, or to relegate women to a relatively narrow band of roles. Others emphasized the fact that, regardless of the role in question, men would do it in a masculine way and women in a feminine way.
3. Many people who work for the church or volunteer within the church expressed that they feel valued for what they offer. This was said by those employed and those who volunteer, also within many congregations, the GC Central Offices, and within the Academy. That said, for a number of people, a general sense of devaluing of women is perceived, largely related to the General Church's perceived messaging around women's intelligence and its ordination policy. This is apparently true even if the respondents themselves had not experienced devaluing messages about their personal work or contributions.
4. Many people noted the broad range of things that women do for the church, often stepping in to do many of the things that need to get done. Yet some articulated an under-noticing or under-appreciation for all this freewill effort. Some also referenced the struggle they experience of feeling called to carry certain somewhat mundane uses forward, despite the many other demands on their

time (professional and personal), leading to the hope that the load could be lightened by hiring out certain functions. This could make room for other, more spiritual ways that women could serve.

5. A few people within our feedback sessions reported discomfort in speaking affirmatively about the church's messaging around men's and women's roles or its ordination policy, expressing hesitancy at speaking in opposition to the strongly-held convictions of others. Some chose to approach task force members individually to express their views. Some referenced others like themselves who feel that their perspectives are under-represented or hard to hear in discussions of this nature.
6. In some parts of the church, there appears to be less angst or need for reparative analysis than in others. Several smaller congregations report overall happiness and engagement, stating there is an inherent call for everyone to step up. Also at play, pastors who overtly draw on the range of skills within the people of their congregation—men and women—and who share leadership, appear to have a pivotal effect in the positive vibe within the congregation. On the other side, when someone in a leadership position does not strike this tone, the impact can be significant.
7. People have noticed significant changes within the church over the past 20+ years. There are more women serving on boards, more women working within the church in a broader range of functions, more small groups led by men and women, more testimonials and seminars offered by women, more women faculty at Bryn Athyn College, and more women who have graduated from the MARS program. Nevertheless, there is a sense that the General Church is culturally "behind the times" with regard to the equality between men and women that is expected in many parts of the world today.
8. A significant number of people within our focus groups called for viewing each human being, male or female, as to his or her range of skills and qualities. While these can be seen in the context of masculine and feminine characteristics exemplified in New Church teachings, they stated that the unique human being should most often be the focus. An extension of this finding is that there is some hesitancy to discuss the differences between men and women as taught in the Heavenly Doctrines, based on concerns of what roles will be assigned, or not, to each.
9. Confusion was noted in a number of cases of "where the line" is for women to share doctrinal ideas or to teach children about the Word. Some expressed anxiety about inadvertently crossing that line and receiving some form of cultural censure. Others expressed upset about the under-utilization of feminine minds to share insights—especially since all of us are called to read the Word and apply it to life.
10. A number of characteristic feminine traits were mentioned, including: feminine wisdom (as compared to masculine wisdom), intuition or perception leading to connecting and building relationships; beautifying environments (broadly applied); bringing ideas or projects into reality; community building, sensitivity to human states and the caring that results. There is perceived room to draw more effectively on these strengths within the life of the church.
11. The subject of ordination remains a sensitive, heartfelt, and divisive issue in the church. Some found value in being able to discuss it even if not the goal of this task force process. Others found frustration in the strength of feeling and argumentation that continues to come up as a result.
12. Some single women and married women without children express difficulty in maintaining a sense of belonging in the church because of its emphasis on marriage and family. While not against these core relationships in any way, some expressed a wish for greater sensitivity or awareness of messaging, and a greater utilization of the skills or interests they have to offer.
13. The challenge for all of us is to bring together the culture in which we live and Divine revelation. Sometimes cultural trends appear to be at odds with messages in the Heavenly Doctrines, especially around the subjects at hand of male/female roles and how equality should play out. In our feedback

sessions, we heard some people appearing to speak from their cultural perspectives, without reference to relevant teachings. In other cases, we heard people wrestling with the culture-revelation interplay, expressing sentiments about “Swedenborg’s time” or interpretive variety in an effort to bring together culture and doctrine in a satisfying way.

14. Despite world-wide efforts over the past decades, a pervasive sentiment remains that we live within an age that does not fully honor women. This manifests itself in terrible evils like the sex trade and pornography industry, as well as in more subtle ways of placing a higher value on what men contribute. The Heavenly Doctrines support the sentiment that many unregenerate men claim superiority because they are men. This means that some women come to the church already feeling diminished by the world in which they live. It is felt that the church can reverse the trend by focusing on love and morality, and teaching against some of the ways women are treated, rather than limiting the focus to equal or sameness of roles.

Summary

By way of summary, it is a challenging message to share that the General Church has a branding issue with regard to its messaging about women. Branding as a term can apply to the messages that an organization sends out about itself, representing the way it wants to be seen. Branding, though, is often assigned to an organization by its participants. Sometimes there is a gap between the messaging the organization is striving to send, and the messages that are received.

A conclusion reached by this task force exploration is that the General Church has some work to do in terms of its messaging and some of its actions in order to close the gap between branding intended and branding achieved. Fair or unfair, the General Church, as opposed to some entities within it (e.g. a local congregation or the Academy), appears to be the target for a negative vibe around for women’s issues. This appears to be the reason that many feel individually valued, but sense a problem with the church at large; why some feel a hesitancy to delve deeper into teachings concerning the unique character of men and women, choosing instead to champion the individual skills of each human being; or why there appears to be resistance to defining roles within the church that cater specifically to the strengths that the Lord has given to women.

On the positive side, a deeper understanding of the ways its messages are received by some may influence the General Church, especially its priesthood, to consider carefully the ways the precious teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines are brought forward, and to engage in certain initiatives that could enhance its efforts to send the messages of respect and participation that it wishes to send. This is the intent of the recommendations that come next.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In brainstorming and refining recommendations, the Women's Participation Task Force tried to hold the following parameters in mind:

- The connection between each recommendation and the teachings of the Word.
- Some recommendations that could be acted on immediately and others that might take time and resources to properly support.
- Some that aimed at positively influencing the culture of the General Church, and others that were more functional in nature.
- A doable number of recommendations.
- A sense of how the recommendations might be implemented and by whom—locally and centrally, at the discretion of the teams of leaders involved.
- The likelihood that a given recommendation would be accepted by a large portion of the church.

In terms of format, we propose the main recommendations here, and draw attention to a listing of examples or possible extensions of each recommendation in Appendix G.

Recommendation 1: Encourage, at all levels of the General Church, means of input and influence by women and men. This includes councils, advisory groups, leadership teams, and input into decision-making, as well as sensitivity to input through active solicitation and considerate listening. This recommendation is based on the premise that bringing masculine and feminine perspectives to bear tends to ennoble the use. It is not the intent to imply here that none of this is happening within the church, but rather to recommend additional effort to ensure consistency and pervasiveness of input by the women and men of the church.

Recommendation 2: Promote the study and exploration of femininity and masculinity from the perspective of the Heavenly Doctrines. The aim is to bring forward the beautiful and needed messages of the Word in ways that people can hear and embrace. Aiming to build connection between people's experiences of life and the teachings given will help to reduce resistance to concepts of unique perspectives. Further exploration may also advance the church's understanding of the teachings on masculinity and femininity, and appropriate manifestations of them in today's world. It is also a goal of this recommendation to promote continued turning to the Heavenly Doctrines as a Divinely authoritative guide to life.

Recommendation 3: Promote congregational involvement in worship and worshipful activities. While it is acknowledged that the priesthood has the responsibility to lead in worship, there are ways of inviting appropriate lay involvement in the worship process. Optional examples could include worship teams, music, enactments, testimonials, lay readings, and other things that happen on a Sunday morning. It could also include messaging around the activities of worship in personal life or in small group settings: praying, reading the Word, and sharing spiritual insights.

Recommendation 4: Draw more fully and effectively on feminine intellect, wisdom and spiritual perspective. The aim is to encourage study and reflection on the Word, and welcome more sharing of insights gained. More broadly, it is to embrace the range of capabilities that many women bring to their professions, households, and the church.

Recommendation 5: Provide training in the Doctrines for relevant “ministries” or avenues of service within the church and outside of it. One way to do so is to refocus attention on the Master of Arts in Religious Studies program, utilizing it as a foundational vehicle for a range of professions (e.g. teaching, counseling, chaplaincy). Another is to organize training focused on caring ministries such as mentorship, women-to-women counsel, and other uses that women may wish to pursue from the Doctrines.

Recommendation 6: Examine and actively influence church culture by means of thorough discussion of the “findings” of this task force exploration. Envisioned here are a series of discussions at a local and central level aimed at more effectively sending the messages as a church that we wish to send, and diminishing messaging that is unnecessarily off-putting.

Recommendation 7: Draw on known feminine skills to minister to and mentor the people of the church. The aim is to draw on women’s ability to build community and assess human states so that more people feel cared for and included. Also contained within this recommendation is the recognition that women will tend to have far greater insights into the life-journey of other women than men do. Included also is an intentional drawing on the God-given focus of many women on the relationships of marriage and family.

Recommendation 8: Facilitate and welcome people’s service to the church and the surrounding community, and their ways of making the world a better place. Everyone has her or his unique ways of serving—their use. The church could become an even greater force for good by encouraging people to step up with acts of service that represent their way of putting the teaching of the New Church into action.

Recommendation 9: Share positive messages and gratitude concerning the things that women are doing within the church or outside of it. This could include things currently happening in certain parts of the church, or new things that come to light as a result of this task force exploration. Gratitude can be a simple and appropriate way of valuing the time that women (and men) spend helping the church, or making the lives of their fellow human beings better.

Recommendation 10: Promote professional development for women employed within the Church—at central and congregational levels. This could include avenues for further learning in the Doctrines as applicable to the work being done (e.g. through the MARS program). It could include pastors and staff members attending various retreats or seminars together. In general it would represent conscious investment in the human beings who are giving of their professional energies to the church or one of its schools.

IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

The Women's Participation Task Force acknowledges that its recommendations are non-binding. It further recognizes that implementation of them is at the discretion of the various departments of the General Church Central Administration, local congregations together with their pastors, and school administrators. In proposing some implementation ideas, we seek to provide initial consideration of how these recommendations could be implemented. For the sake of simplicity, we note the following people or entities that could consider implementing these recommendations:

- Local: Local congregations or schools
- Central: GC Central Administrators
- Members: Individuals within the church

Implementation responsibility for each recommendation could be assigned as follows:

Recommendation 1: Encourage means of input and influence

- Local, Central

Recommendation 2: Promote study of masculinity and femininity

- Local, Central, Members

Recommendation 3: Promote involvement in worship and worshipful activities

- Local, Members

Recommendation 4: Draw more effectively on feminine intellect, wisdom and perspective

- Local, Central, Members

Recommendation 5: Training for ministries

- Local, Central

Recommendation 6: Influence church culture

- Local, Central, Members

Recommendation 7: Draw on feminine skills to minister to and mentor people

- Local, Central

Recommendation 8: Facilitate and welcome people's efforts to make the world a better place

- Local, Members

Recommendation 9: Share positive messages and gratitude about things women are doing

- Local, Central

Recommendation 10: Promote professional development for women employed by the church

- Local, Central

Another implementation thought relates to monitoring and assessment of impact. The General Church Strategic Plan calls for a year of such monitoring after the completion of this report. An ad hoc committee for such monitoring could include:

- Representatives from the GC Central Administration
- Representatives from the GC Board
- Representatives from the Women's Participation Task Force who are willing to continue with this work

A final thought regarding implementation relates to the procurement of resources for the recommendations requiring them. Professional development, for example, comes with a price tag. So does the development of training modules for caring ministries. Congregations may wish to consider staffing positions to bring forward some of what is recommended. The General Church Board, and the boards of local congregations and schools are encouraged to consider such things in their annual budgeting and fund-raising processes.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The members of the task force wish to express heartfelt gratitude to the people who participated in our focus group process. The church owes a debt of gratitude for your courage, your honesty, and your support. Please know that your input factored significantly into the report that is before the Clergy and the General Church Board.

Speaking of that report, the people serving on the Women's Participation Task Force have worked diligently to complete the task set before them, and to come together with a report that all of them can stand behind. That is not intended to imply that everyone agrees with everything said. Given the nature of the group, with its planned variety of perspectives, there are some on the task force who believe that more needs to be done than is reflected here, and there are others who believe that certain recommendations push the envelope of wisdom in terms of what we should be attempting as a church. That is likely reflective of the range of reactions from the readership of this report—Clergy, GC Board, and others.

All could agree, however, that the subject at hand is of vital importance to the church. The blending of our powerful teachings, so needed within the world, and the cultures within which we operate, is something well worth attempting anew. It is evident that the people of the church care deeply about respect for women and the welcoming of their participation in the life of the church.

We humbly request due consideration of the findings and recommendations we have generated.

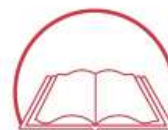
Respectfully submitted:

Heather Allais
Rakel Björkstom
Hilary Bryntesson
Ethan Daum
Liane deChazal
Nina Dewees
Mac Frazier
Charlotte Gyllenhaal
Cathlin Hendrichs
Laura Hill
Jeremy Simons
Craig Steen
Jane Williams-Hogan
Peter Buss, Jr.

Excerpt from General Church Strategic Plan 2016-2020, Participation Strand

Participation strand—Current state

Provide avenues for greater **involvement and participation** in the life of the church.

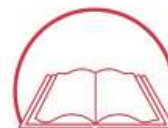


Summary:

- The General Church is a beloved organization that is struggling to keep the Lord relevant in the active lives of its people, specifically among young adults. There is a strong message of “useful service” causing many to give of their time and expertise to the church. Yet some who could engage are choosing to hold back for a variety of reasons. Some wish to see change and others are urging the church to stay the course. Differences in doctrinal interpretation can result in divisive conversations, most notably those concerning the roles of women. At times, this presents challenges to utilizing the service of dedicated lay people in church uses. Our doctrinal understanding and research capability could lead to greater responsibility across the church for increased participation in service to the Lord.

Participation strand—Strategies

Provide avenues for greater **involvement and participation** in the life of the church.



Strategy #5:

- Promote involvement of women through a task force charged with exploring respect for and utilization of feminine wisdom in church activities. After doctrinal and current-state exploration, develop a report on appropriate methods of enhancing the roles feminine wisdom and expertise may play in the Church.

Strategy #6:

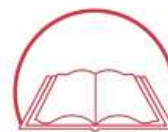
- Engage youth by starting a youth task force to counsel with members of the church on service to and by young people, including receiving input on plans for youth membership. Pilot-test at least one youth engagement program as a result.

GC Values that will drive our strategies:

- Welcoming all who wish to explore GC values to participate in the life of the church.
- Applying principles from the Word to a life of useful service.
- Sharing the truths the Lord has provided with the next generation and with all who are receptive.

Participation strand—FY17 tactics

Provide avenues for greater **involvement and participation** in the life of the church.



Who? Two task forces led by Bishops: Brian Keith—Youth Task Force; Peter Buss Jr—Women’s Participation Task Force

Strategy #5: Women’s Participation Task Force

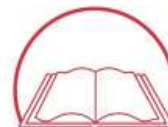
- Form a task force of 8-10 people, headed by the Episcopal office and including a diversity of background and outlook.
- Conduct research in Writings and recent papers, plus via surveys.
- After 1 year, the committee will produce a document with recommendations.

Strategy #6: Youth Task Force

- Form a task force of 10-15 people under supervision of the Episcopal office, with at least 50% under age 40.
- Catalog activities already taking place
- Develop introductory membership
- Pilot young people’s programs for congregations

Participation strand—Five years out

Provide avenues for greater **involvement and participation** in the life of the church.



If we are successful in focusing energy and resources on our participation strategies...

- Within one year the women’s task force will complete its initial report, containing recommendations for specific activities that can enhance the roles of feminine wisdom in the Church, along with suggested measures to determine whether such activities are implemented. A follow-up report will be submitted after an additional year to assess the uptake and impact of these recommendations. Continued focus on recommendations will lead to a growing sense of confidence that the Church is an organization that overtly seeks to honor the unique and complimentary nature of each sex, as stated in its core values.
- After one year, the youth task force will submit an evaluation document on current and planned youth engagement activities, along with suggestions for new directions. A pathway to youth membership will be envisioned and becoming reality. A pilot test of a youth engagement program will be completed by a selected congregation. Given a successful pilot test, at least two other congregations will be supported in implementing the program. As a result of all these efforts, a greater number of young people will choose active involvement in the church.

Suggested measures:

- With both task forces, steps taken within timeframes recommended (e.g. survey completed, number of meetings, reports completed).

Letter to Prospective Task Force Members

Hello _____,

Thanks for the conversation today. It was neat to hear your perspective. I said I would send some materials and give you the time you need to make a decision about your participation. If you can swing it, I'd love to have you involved in this work. Attached is a copy of the GC Strategic Plan out of which this task force arises. Below is a description of the task force for your consideration.

Women's Participation Task Force.

If you read the proposed GC Strategic Plan, you will notice a call for a Women's Participation Task Force (slide 17). It falls to me to lead this exploration. I am actively engaged in the work of inviting people to serve on this task force. To that end, I share a general description of the approach we are taking.

The size of the committee, to allow for useful representation, will be about 12-14 people. It will include people from different parts of the church, women of different age brackets and perspectives on the subject of feminine contributions, a couple of ministers besides myself, representation from the GC Board, and some who have done pertinent research.

In seeking people to serve, it seems wise to consider the following:

- Time availability for meetings;
- Those who are actively participating in the life of the church;
- People willing to explore participation and a more supportive culture that does not center on ordination.

Here is what we are thinking the task force will do over the next year:

- Study of relevant information: This includes teachings on femininity and masculinity, and presentations on relevant subjects.
- Fact finding: Conduct a survey of activities and roles that are happening, or could happen, within the General Church.
- Toward a more supportive culture: Intentional shifts that could engender a more supportive culture toward the wisdom and engagement of women.
- Communications: Explore forums and structures that best invite and convey feminine wisdom.
- Educational strands: capturing, for example, the findings of the Academy Girls School Conjugal Love committee, or furthering the exploring of higher education offerings through Bryn Athyn College.
- Ways of acknowledging and affirming: if it is true that some of the contributions of women go unnoticed, in what ways can the church more effectively "notice" them?

I welcome feedback and input on the work of the Women's Participation Task Force. While it won't solve all issues in this realm, it has the potential to make some powerful recommendations, and I look forward to the process.

Best wishes,

Peter.

Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.
Assistant to the Bishop

Reports Along the Way

Vice President's Report to GC Board, September 2016 (also shared with the Bishops Consistory)

Women's Participation Task Force

The Women's Participation Task Force will have started its work by the time of our Board meeting (with the first session taking place Saturday, September 17). Appended to this report are some of the materials I have sent to the group in preparation for the first meeting.

As to the formation of the committee, it was a useful process in itself. The first phase was to reach out to pastors, Board members and others for recommendations of people to serve. That generated quite a list. From that I worked with a couple of people to zero in on a prioritized group to ask. Almost to a person, each one of those invitations led to a substantial exchange concerning what the task force was all about, whether it fit with the person's other time commitments and interests, the viability of recommendations that might result from the effort, and so on. The input was quite useful, even from some of those who eventually declined.

I'll offer one example, which gets into clergy-lay dynamics around an exploration such as this. A couple of people recommended that the clergy be more involved, even having a preliminary phase of the task force's work that was clergy-only, so that certain doctrinal parameters could be clarified. I declined to stage the process in that way, believing it would create as many issues as it solved to go into a clergy huddle on a conversation we're hoping to be collaborative. But I did feel usefully reminded to redouble efforts from the get-go to communicate progress and questions with clergy along the way, and to work with pastors to gauge their willingness to entertain recommendations from this task force within their congregations. I'm grateful for this dialogue, as it is making a difference in how this task force plans to go about its work.

A final comment about the constitution of the group: ten people besides myself are listed. I have asked two others to consider serving, who have not yet had the time to get back to me. At the first meeting one of the organizational items will be to consider whether the group could use another representative or two to round itself out. I suspect that we will hear recommendations to ask a couple of lay men to serve.

It is apparent to me already that this exploration we are embarking on is not simple, on the one hand, and very useful on the other. I welcome your input and your support as we proceed.

New Church Life: November/December 2016, pp. 582-583**Women's Participation Task Force, report by the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.**

The General Church strategic plan calls for a Women's Participation Task Force. The charge of that group is as follows:

- Promote involvement of women through a task force charged with exploring respect for and utilization of feminine wisdom in the church. After doctrinal and current-state exploration, develop a report on appropriate methods of enhancing the roles feminine wisdom and expertise may play.

This task force is up and running. I write to describe who is involved, what is happening, and how to share any input you may have.

There are fourteen people on this task force, including me:

- Heather Allais (Buccluch, South Africa)
- Raket Björkström (Stockholm, Sweden)
- Hilary Bryntesson (Bryn Athyn)
- Ethan Daum (Austin)
- Liane deChazal (Oak Arbor)
- Nina Dewees (Bryn Athyn)
- Mac Frazier (Glenview)
- Charlotte Gyllenhaal (General Church Board, Indiana)
- Cathlin Hendrichs (Boulder)
- Laura Hill (Caryndale)
- Jeremy Simons (Bryn Athyn)
- Craig Steen (Oak Arbor)
- Jane Williams-Hogan (Bryn Athyn College, Co-Chair)

We have met three times: once to get oriented and organized, and a second time to digest relevant teachings from the Word, and a third time to review summary statements based on those teachings that can serve as a reference point for our continued work.

I would characterize the discussion that has happened to date as equally inspiring and challenging: inspiring in that members are offering insights on teachings, and thinking creatively about how they apply in today's world; challenging in that not all task force members agree on the meaning we should derive from these teachings or on some of the proposed applications.

Nevertheless, we are making progress. By way of illustration, I offer two (of seventeen) of the summary statements brainstormed by this task force:

- *Given the complementary perspective and approach of men and women, it follows that human society works best when masculine and feminine input is brought to bear. When both masculine and feminine approach a given use from love, and collaborate on its performance, the use is elevated.*
- *The interplay of teachings about masculinity and femininity and people's experience of masculine and feminine human beings can be tricky. There is value in drawing on the wealth of evidence from brain research and sociological observation which appear to confirm the teachings presented in the Writings. It can also be useful to acknowledge that some people*

struggle to match the doctrinal descriptions of masculinity and femininity with their experience of themselves and the people in their lives.

The next topic under consideration is that of communication: how to listen more effectively within the church to feminine wisdom, and to ensure that the perspectives women would offer can appropriately influence things within the church. Other topics on the docket include: what's happening around the church, and what could happen; toward a more supportive culture; and educational strands.

This task force is seeking to operate in an open and collaborative format. It is sending regular updates to the Clergy and GC Board. If you would like to address us, please feel free to email me at peter.buss.jr@newchurch.org or Jane Williams-Hogan, Co-Chair, at Jane.Williams-Hogan@brynathyn.edu.

Our aim is to present major findings and recommendations to the Council of the Clergy and to the General Church Board at their respective June 2017 meetings.

To General Church Board-Clergy Communication Committee, November 2, 2016

Hello All,

I'm taking the liberty of asking the Communication Committee a question even though I'm not on it. I'm copying Jane Williams-Hogan, the Co-Chair of the Women's Participation Task Force.

As you know, I've been working with this task force, as an outcropping of our GC strategic plan. We've made it a priority to seek feedback along the way from Clergy and Board. My purpose in writing to you is to seek counsel on how best to get feedback from the Board.

The challenge is that there is a significant amount of information that could be shared—reports of monthly meetings, documents generated, initial recommendations to get feedback on, etc. The task force is committed to communicating with the Board, but how and how much is a question.

A recommendation I have is that we share more of a month-to-month update with a smaller group of Board members, similar in frequency to what we are sharing with Consistory. That smaller group could be:

- The Communication Committee (which I know has clergy on it too)
- The Executive Committee
- An ad hoc group of Board members who signs up to receive these more frequent updates on behalf of the Board
- A combination: e.g. Communications Committee plus Board members who sign on for monthly updates.

Attached are a couple of things, representative of the kind of reporting that could be expected on a monthly basis (acknowledging that this "get started" one is likely more than what you'd normally receive):

- Report of October 8,9 task force sessions
- Draft report (not yet finalized by task force) of October 29 session
- Updated Doctrinal Foundations collection
- Draft Summary Statements from Doctrinal Foundations discussion

- Updated list of task force participants (listed below)

An observation I would share is that it is relatively easy to report on activity; more challenging to report on how things are going. For example, there's been substantive debate within the task force about how to hold the teachings about feminine and masculine differences in the Writings. Most are content to acknowledge these differences, but some see them as generalizations that can have exceptions, rather than as describing the innate structure of the mind of each sex which is consistently complementary. This leads to debate about what to do with these teachings and whether we should even be recommending specific areas of use or roles for women within the church—something I thought was the primary goal. Also, some initial feedback from Consistory could be characterized as supportive-but-cautious about where recommendations of this task force may go. I expect this kind of tension to continue, and tend to see it as a good thing. We're set up with a task force of talented and thoughtful people, and have built-in feedback loops, all of which should lead to recommendations that are as helpful as they can be.

So the question boils down to how best to gather feedback from the Board. They're busy people with lots coming at them. Hence the wonderment about how much to pepper them with, and the communication recommendation above—more frequent updates to a subset, and less frequent updates to the Board as a while.

Thanks for your feedback on this.
Pete.

Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

Assistant to the Bishop

General Church

O: 267.502.4918

C: 215.480.2546

To General Church Board-Clergy Communication Committee, January 13, 2017

Also sent to Bishops Consistory on same date

Communication Committee/Consistory:

I hope this message finds you well. I believe we agreed that I would send you periodic updates on the work of the Women's Participation Task Force. It's time for me to do that again.

Since I received some feedback that "shorter is better" I'm going to summarize where we are right now in the text of this email. Those who wish to read more are welcome to see the attached report of our last meeting of the full task force on December 10.

We've met four times as a full task force, with a fifth meeting scheduled for January 21. In addition, a sub-committee is at work to determine a useful way to solicit input and feedback on our work-to-date from the church at large.

In terms of topics we have covered, they include:

- Doctrinal Foundations—digesting relevant teachings together
- Draft summary statements derived from the teachings and our discussion of them
- Exploration of "the real issues" underlying our tensions around women's roles in the Church

- More effective listening, or drawing more effectively on feminine wisdom

Next up is consideration of structures and forms:

- Hearing from our “feedback” subcommittee as to how we might gather useful information from the Church and what we intend to do with it once collected.
- Reviewing recommendations considered to date (in draft form)
- Considering how these recommendations could be implemented: necessary central structures? networking into congregations?

I note that a considerable amount of energy has gone toward the subject of feminine intellect. At issue is the perceived message by some that feminine intellect is “less than” in some ways. Our considerations have been more along the lines of the differences in character or nature of intellect between men and women, not that one is superior. The question becomes how to most effectively draw on the characteristic focus of feminine intellect, and what forms that takes. In play also are the many doctrinal strands relating to a love-orientation that comes more naturally to women, together with relational perceptions that are a feminine strength. Our exploration is on the powerful mind that applies itself in many women to these uses. Love may indeed lead, but intellect follows. The term “lovingly wise” has been offered to capture this.

I would appreciate some feedback from this group on some of the recommendations that have been drafted to date. After our next task force meeting, once we’ve had a chance to review them again as a group, I’ll likely be bringing those to you.

As a final thought, I’d acknowledge that the conversation has been challenging at times. This is probably to be expected. We have a great group of fourteen dedicated individuals who don’t always agree on the sensitive topics at hand. We’re working through that. I greatly appreciate the time and dedication of this group, and I look forward to what comes out of this labor of love.

As always, feedback is most welcome.

Pete.

Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

Assistant to the Bishop

General Church

O: 267.502.4918

C: 215.480.2546

Strategic Plan Update to GC Board, March 2017 (Also shared with entire Clergy)

Women’s Participation Task Force

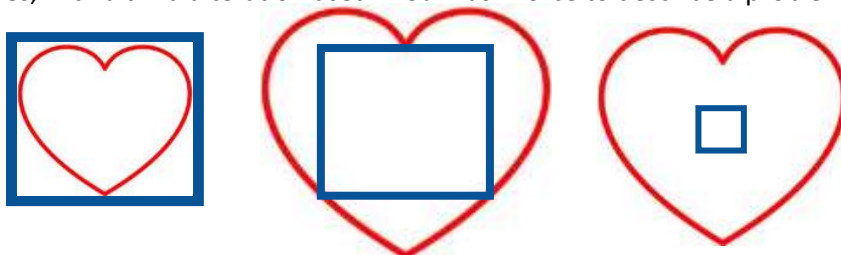
The work of this task force continues apace, with several full meetings having taken place since the last set of GC Board meetings, interspersed with sub-committee meetings and email exchanges amongst task force members. It is challenging to communicate all that has been explored in one report, but I will do my best to give an overview of where we are.

Attached to the end of this report is an updated “Flow of Meetings” schedule, showing topics we have covered and intend to cover. Note the three proposed input/feedback sessions planned in April.

I am grateful to report that engagement in the work at hand by task force members remains high. Looking over the Flow of Meetings, and considering the complexity of the subject we are delving into, one can easily conclude that this work is not easy. Yet these intelligent and caring people are showing up to meetings, expressing considered and heartfelt opinions, and moving the ball forward toward recommendations we pray will help the church.

That is not to say we have yet reached consensus on our task force (although the optimist in me says we are getting there). As could be imagined, there are a variety of opinions within our group. Sometimes in our conversations there is a predictable gravitational pull toward the GC's ordination policy, even though a premise of our exploration is to seek non-ordination solutions to the goal of drawing more effectively on feminine energy and wisdom in the life of the church. At issue has been the question of whether we are getting to the heart of the matter, with passions rising at times. Not surprisingly, women's marches after US elections, and the movie "Hidden Figures" came up in terms of implications for our church. When recommendations have come up about drawing more heavily on what appears to be an obvious strength of women, in the vital realm of human relationships and support for people, often a challenge has come forward not to limit women's contributions to these "heart-oriented" uses, but to draw on their intellectual capabilities as well.

I'll comment further on this latest strand of honoring women more fully for their intellectual contributions, because it is emerging as a significant theme of our sessions. Some diagrams will help to illustrate—diagrams I personally resonate with, but can take no credit for; they come from work that Barry Halterman and Hilary Bryntesson are doing in the Academy Secondary Schools. They use two diagrams to describe the differences between men and women as outlined in the Heavenly Doctrines, with a third alteration used in our Task Force to describe a problematic perception.



- The first diagram describes masculinity at its core—love clothed with wisdom—demonstrating that a man views the world first from the intellect, then consulting his loves. In this way men are “wisely loving.”
- The second diagram describes femininity at its core—wisdom clothed with love—demonstrating that a woman views the world first from love, then informed by her wisdom. In this way women are “lovingly wise.”
- The third diagram depicts the way some women hear the GC messages about them, namely that their intellect is much less significant and impactful than it is.

If we could hang in there with a further extension of this strand of a perceived undervaluing of feminine intellectual contributions, it showed up in a different way in our most recent meeting. The focus was on “what’s happening and what could happen” in the church. We heard news of a wide range of things already happening: Stephen Ministry in Bryn Athyn, with dozens of men and women trained and serving; positions like the one Nina Dewees has in Bryn Athyn, or that exists in different forms in a couple of other congregations, focused on connecting people and coordinating efforts to help those in need; co-authors of Journey Program workbooks; marriage mentoring; Outreach 365

seminars that invite lay-clergy teams to receive leadership training; professors at the College writing books, organizing seminars, teaching in the MARS program, etc. While celebrated by many on the task force, a conversation strand persisted to the effect that there still appears to be this perception of under-valuing the contributions of women. Some postulated that it is due to an under-appreciation of the role women could have in doctrinal matters of the church, from a feminine perspective. Others offered the thought that the GC has been traditionally doctrinally lopsided, or less balanced with “heart” stuff, and that we may not get where we want if we seek to load up the doctrinal side of the equation even more. Others raised the challenging and sensitive issue of pay as an external value-driver. Others still spoke to the value of drawing on feminine wisdom as it pertains to support for families, marriage, and relationships, as this contributes so usefully to that sense of belonging and support that we wish to foster within the church.

I hope you can hear through these descriptions the level of debate that is happening, and perceive a bit of the journey that we are on to come up with recommendations that: a) spring from our teachings, b) demonstrate listening and deep understanding of the issues at hand, and c) will have helpful impact in the life of the church.

To aid us in that endeavor, we are seeking feedback on some of the recommendations we are working on. Please see these as draft in form. We are content to share them because they are works-in-process, but here’s what we’ve been contemplating:

- Work toward a trained network of female and male mentors within congregations (could be counselors, Stephen Ministers, or some other uniquely New Church position)
- Seek feminine input into the relational components of congregational life, including the central relationships of marriage and family.
- Seek additional forums for women to share their spiritual perspectives—blogs, website, or speaker series.
- Consider educational/training strands, so that women seeking to enter into various professional or volunteer positions may do so with relevant doctrinal background.
- Intentionally communicate that the relational *and* intellectual gifts of women are needed and valued.
- Share information about what is happening successfully in parts of the church with other parts of the church that may wish to implement their own version of those things.
- Consider a centralized mechanism or position for supporting the implementation of the recommendations above in congregations throughout the church that desire such support.

I could go on, but I’ll stop here, in hopes this report gives an accurate update on the work at hand. Please feel free to ask questions or provide feedback.

Consistory Report, Shared with entire Clergy and Task Force members:**Consistory Report, March 9, 2017 Meeting**

There was one topic for this meeting: “Seeking counsel on Women’s Participation Task Force progress.” Pete had asked that Consistory—those who could attend—provide feedback on an interim report pre-circulated. This report had also gone to the General Church Board in advance of its March 17-18 meetings.

Pete opened the meeting with a few words of context: The Women’s Participation Task Force has been meeting steadily since September, covering a range of topics including: doctrinal foundations, the issues we’re trying to solve for, what’s happening around the church or could happen, and more effective listening. It has a few more topics to cover, but is seeking feedback on progress to date, particularly on some themes that have emerged, and some draft recommendations.

Consistory Discussion:

- Question as to how much North American culture is driving this exploration, and whether the discussion reflects the many cultures around the world where the church is operating.
- Pete: Based on travels, this does seem to be a universally discussed topic. That said, outside of North America (or Europe) there doesn’t seem to be the same strong sentiment that things are significantly out of whack.
- A perspective that comes through in North America for some is that the church is fundamentally broken in terms of respect for women, largely based on its ordination policy. While women’s issues are discussed elsewhere, there doesn’t appear to be the same level of “brokenness” associated with the dialogue.
- Jeremy (who serves on the Task Force): A message of the church, particularly from the clergy, that is heard by some, is that men are smarter than women, and that women’s contribution, while laudable, is somehow less-than that of men.
- It’s hard to authentically represent the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines in today’s world. We struggle for the words to convey the fact that the wisdom of men and women is different.
- This issue for the church is part of a bigger cultural battle, which makes it tremendously challenging. Today, our spiritual concepts of differences between the sexes erroneously come across as suggesting submissiveness. It’s hard in this context not to elicit an immediate negative response to doctrinal presentations on the differences between men and women.

Note: some of the following comments related to draft recommendations in the report circulated, quoted here for reference:

1. *Work toward a trained network of female and male mentors within congregations (could be counselors, Stephen Ministers, or some other uniquely New Church position)*
2. *Seek feminine input into the relational components of congregational life, including the central relationships of marriage and family.*

3. *Seek additional forums for women to share their spiritual perspectives—blogs, website, or speaker series.*
4. *Consider educational/training strands, so that women seeking to enter into various professional or volunteer positions may do so with relevant doctrinal background.*
5. *Intentionally communicate that the relational and intellectual gifts of women are needed and valued.*
6. *Share information about what is happening successfully in parts of the church with other parts of the church that may wish to implement their own version of those things.*
7. *Consider a centralized mechanism or position for supporting the implementation of the recommendations above in congregations throughout the church that desire such support.*

Consistory comments, continued:

- The first several of them seem okay. #5 seems particularly important. Last two could be problematic. Generally, though, what seems lacking is a recognition that feminine wisdom comes from humility, and is not blustery, not prone to pride of self-intelligence as is an issue for men. The perceived push to be “publicly recognized” for intellectual prowess may contradict the inner looking-to-goodness at the core of feminine wisdom.
- Speaking to draft-recommendation #5, when considering individual human beings, we certainly should appreciate her relational and intellectual gifts. Question whether we should be promoting this as a church or showcasing publicly via jobs and forums etc.
- Reflection on what might be called “referred pain”—the problem is with men not performing their masculine spiritual roles adequately, and not respecting women authentically. Solutions that call for women in more strident equality positions in the church, could, in that case, be misapplied. Some solutions should aim at men.
- Are we being asked to respect women for the wrong reasons—being more like men? Are we potentially, by these recommendations, failing to play to their God-given strengths?
- Comment that in this whole church-wide discussion over the past several years, the priesthood has been raised up to be more synonymous with “the church” than it was ever intended to be.
- Pete: Part of what is being called for is an acknowledgment of the problem. If men are part of the problem, let’s acknowledge that and consider ways to call for more respect and listening. More broadly, the exploration here is designed to consider what we can affirmatively champion, based on our teachings, that will have a positive impact on the church. That’s the goal in some of the draft recommendations, but they need refining. A challenge of our context is that there is a level of exasperation out there, based on perceived and real deficiencies in our system, that lend themselves to more strident solutions.
- Would recommend that the core of the recommendations aim toward better individual listening and respect between men and women, with some of recommendations pointing to external forms that can support this internal goal.
- In some ways we are, by teaching what the Heavenly Doctrines say, offensive to the kind of justice that is being called for in our culture. It’s tricky to discern how much we should

be holding ground on things we need to hold ground on—where the Doctrines demand it—and how to bend where appropriate.

- In some ways, New Church teachings don't agree with cultural trends. Some people within our culture appear to place cultural messages above Word as our authority.
- It's important to note that this Task Force is an effort to engage in the dialogue. It's a crucial discussion to be having. What can we agree on? In the draft recommendations: #1-5 perhaps.
- Mac (offering a perspective as a Task Force participant): Going into the work of this Task Force as a participant, I had some doubts—that we'd talk past each other as has been evident in the conversation to date. There is a good variety of perspectives, and a good push and pull happening. The very fact that we are engaging organizationally is good. Especially since a number of people don't feel listened to.
- The very conversation is likely helpful to those engaged in it. Harder for the rest of us to feel the same way, as we're not involved in the conversation to the same level.
- A trained network of mentors could be good and could be problematic, depending on how they dove-tail with or work against the local pastor's priorities.
- #3—forums, what does that mean? There are several already; hard to imagine what "more" looks like at the congregational level.
- #4—education and training could certainly be useful.
- #5—seems like a cultural thing and hard to measure.
- #6—cross-sharing could be good or problematic depending on how it's done, and the level of advocacy involved.
- #7—centrally driven initiatives can also be problematic to local priorities and leadership processes.
- Agree with the caution against things imposed from the center. Main point, though, is that there is a lack of evident discussion and support for women who wish to be moms and wives and don't necessarily want to see women on the public stages of the church more. Who is speaking up for them, especially since many of them, in line with what our teachings indicate, resist proclaiming their sentiments publicly. Some of them are feeling disrespected for their choices.
- Pete: Duly noted, and on my mind. It's one of the messages I hope to bring into the Task Force discussions in the next meeting on "Towards a more supportive culture."
- A challenge is the perception out there that that's *all* the clergy wants to value from women. Therefore, there's a call for respecting women for the range of things they can contribute. It does make it hard to stand up for the stay-at-home moms without sounding repressive.
- Are the recommendations, by and large, playing to weaknesses rather than tapping into strengths of women? Women's wisdom (including intelligence) is often a hidden thing by choice; we're told that women do some of their moderating and influencing without calling attention to it. It's almost as if, with women, we're told that less overtness allows for more wisdom and influence. In the recommendations, training and promoting jobs seems to focus on visibility, spotlight, and knowledge accolades that may be inherently counter to the way feminine wisdom works.

- Concerning a lack of support for women as wives and mothers: agree that this could use some significant focus within the Task Force process—good to promote them as vital roles.
- Regarding recommendation #1—trained network of mentors: the church does need this, provided it's done well.
- Also wish to comment on the focus on feminine intellect, noting that the essentials of women's wisdom are deeper than acumen or learning. How to value this deeper wisdom is key.
- Regarding the quieter voices of women who may not champion their feminine roles as wives and mothers: The Heavenly Doctrines point to them as *central* and *vital* roles and it seems imperative that we do too.
- Pete: Acknowledge potential challenges of centrally-driven implementation strategies (#7). If that is contemplated, it would be in supportive rather than pressuring ways. There may be some things that can't as easily be done locally (e.g. a Stephen Ministry-type training program). Regarding jobs and training, most of us have had positive experiences working professionally within teams of men and women. We could testify to the crucial value that the women on those teams bring. A sense I have is that, done well, certain positions within the church held by women could increase the feeling of support for stay-at-home moms and many others. The goal is to meet needs of people in the church in healthy ways, and to draw on the gifts the Lord has given to women more effectively. Some of that may indeed be individual/informal; some of it may usefully be supported professionally.
- There was an early debate in the feminist movement between a "women can do it all" model, and a "women have seasons of life" model—not punished for taking time off from career to be with children, etc. Useful to step back and think about that question again.
- Another thought: it's important that the church holds child-rearing as important for everyone, not just women. Mothers, fathers, grand-parents, etc. It's something all of us have a responsibility from doctrine to champion.
- In terms of jobs, it could be argued that women make up a majority share of the GC workforce already. What is the goal in seeking more professional positions for women in the church by means of these Task Force recommendations?
- Another key question that could be asked: What do women in heaven do all day? Likely has something symbolically connected to reproductive or life-generating activities.
- We sometimes use the terms "domestic" and "forensic" because the Writings do. My sense, though is that the dominant doctrine is that there are roles where love plays the leading role, and roles where wisdom takes the leading role—and domestic/forensic fall underneath this more-dominant teaching.
- Pete: Will feed these perspectives appropriately into the Task Force's work. Thanks for the time!

Doctrinal Foundations

Women's Participation Task Force

Version date: October 3, 2016

Essential and enduring differences

(2) *A male is then still a male, and a female still a female. Since a person lives as a person after death, and people are male and female, and since it is one thing to be masculine and another to be feminine, with the two qualities being so different that one cannot be converted into the other, it follows that after death a male still lives as a male and a female still lives as a female, each of them being a spiritual person.*

We say that masculinity cannot be converted into femininity, nor femininity into masculinity, and that after death a male is consequently still a male, and a female still a female. But because people do not know what masculinity consists in essentially, and what femininity consists in essentially, therefore we must say a few words about it here.

The difference essentially consists in this, that the inmost quality in masculinity is love, and its veil wisdom, or in other words, it is love veiled over with wisdom, while the inmost quality in femininity is that same wisdom, the wisdom of masculinity, and its veil the love resulting from it. This second love, however, is a feminine love, and it is given by the Lord to a wife through the wisdom of her husband, whereas that first love is a masculine love, which is a love of becoming wise, and it is given by the Lord to a husband according to his reception of wisdom. Consequently, the male is a form of the wisdom of love, and the female is a form of the love of that wisdom. Therefore, from creation there was implanted in both male and female a love of uniting into one. But more on this subject will be said later. (*Conjugal Love 32*)

It is owing to this original formation that a male is born intellect-oriented and that a female is born will-oriented, or in other words, that a male is born with an affection for knowing, understanding and becoming wise, while a female is born with a love for joining herself to that affection in the male.

Furthermore, because interior qualities form the exterior ones to their likeness, and the masculine form is a form of the intellect while the feminine form is a form of the love of the intellect, therefore the male has a different look, a different sound, and a different physique from the female. Namely, he has a tougher look, a rougher sound, and a stronger physique, and moreover his lower face is bearded. In general, he has a less beautiful form than the female. The two sexes also differ in behavior and manners. In short, nothing in the two sexes is the same, although there is nevertheless a capacity for conjunction in every detail.

Indeed, masculinity in the male is masculine in every part, even in the least part of his body, and also in every idea of his thought, and in every bit of his affection. So, too, with femininity in the female. And because one cannot as a consequence be converted into the other, it follows that after death a male is still male, and that a female is still female. (*Conjugal Love 33*)

Masculinity

(4) *In members of the animal kingdom, good's truth or truth resulting from good is masculine, and truth's consequent goodness or good resulting from that truth is feminine...*

[2] With respect to the disposition of the male, reason sees that it is a disposition to know, understand, and be wise - a disposition to know in childhood, a disposition to understand in adolescence and early youth, and a disposition to be wise from this time of his youth on into old age. From this it is evident that the male is by nature or temperament inclined to develop his understanding, consequently that he is born to become intellect-oriented. But because this cannot happen apart from love, therefore the Lord attaches love to him according to his reception, that is, according to the spirit in him that wills to become wise.

[3] With respect to his employment, reason sees that it has to do with things involving the intellect, or things in which the intellect predominates, most of which are occupational and are directed towards serving the public.

With respect to his behavior, reason sees that his customary habits all stem from a predominance of the intellect. Consequently, the actions of his life, meant by behavior, are directed by reason - or if they are not, he wants them to appear so. A masculine exercise of reason is also visible in his every virtue.

With respect to his physique, reason sees that it is different and totally distinct from the figure of the female - on which subject, something may also be seen above, no. 33. In addition to these traits, there is the power of insemination which resides in the male. This has no other source than the intellect, for its source is truth there resulting from good. That the power of insemination comes from this source will be seen later. (*Conjugal Love* 90)

Femininity

In contrast, the female is born to be will-oriented, but will-oriented in response to the intellectual orientation of the male, or in other words, to be a lover of the wisdom in a man, because she was formed by means of his wisdom (regarding which, see above, nos. 88, 89). This can also be seen from the disposition of the female, her employment, her behavior, and her figure.

With respect to the disposition of the female, it can be seen that it is a disposition to love knowledge, intelligence and wisdom - though not in herself but in a man - and for that reason to love a man. For a man is not lovable simply on account of his physique, the fact that he looks like a man, but on account of the gifts he has in him which make him human.

With respect to the employment of the female, it can be seen that it has to do with things that are works of the hands and are called sewing, needlework, and other names, which serve for decoration, for her personal adornment, and for enhancing her beauty. Also, that it has to do as well with various tasks called domestic, which complement the tasks of men (which, as we said, are called occupational). Women do these things out of an inclination towards marriage, in order to become wives and so one with their husbands.

With respect to the behavior and figure of the female, it is evident without explanation that the same thing is visible from these. (*Conjugal Love* 91)

Capacity for conjunction in every detail

(4) *Especially does a love for the opposite sex remain, and in the case of people coming into heaven, namely, people who become spiritual on earth, conjugal love. A love for the opposite sex remains in a person after death for the reason that a male is then still a male, and a female still a female, and masculinity in the male is masculine in the whole and every part of him, likewise femininity in the*

female, and there is a capacity for conjunction in every detail - indeed, in every least detail - of the two sexes.

Now, because that capacity for conjunction was introduced from creation and is therefore permanently present in the two sexes, it follows that each yearns for and aspires to conjunction with the other.

Love regarded in itself is nothing but a desire for and consequent effort to conjunction, and conjugal love is a desire for and effort to conjunction into one. For the human male and the human female were so created that from being two they might become as though one person or one flesh.* And when they become one, then taken together they are man in his fullest sense.** But without that conjunction they are two, and each is like a person divided or half a person.

Now, because that innate capacity for conjunction lies inmosty within every single aspect of the male and in every single aspect of the female, and an ability and desire for conjunction into one is present in every part, it follows that a mutual and reciprocal love for the opposite sex remains in people after death. (*Conjugal Love* 37)

* Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, Mark 10:6-9.

** Cf. Genesis 1:27.

“A form of love” “A form of wisdom”

The same idea clearly follows from the creation of human beings into this love, and from their formation as a result of it afterwards. The male was created to become a form of wisdom from a love of growing wise, and the female was created to become a form of love for the male on account of his wisdom, thus in accordance with that wisdom. It is evident from this that two partners are real forms and reflections of the marriage between love and wisdom or between good and truth. (*Conjugal Love* 66)

(3) These changes [of states of life] are of one kind in men and of another kind in women, since from creation men are forms of knowledge, intelligence and wisdom, and women forms of love for these things in men. We have already shown that men were created to be forms of understanding and that women were created to be forms of love for the understanding of men, as may be seen above in nos. 90, 91. It follows that the changes of state which take place successively in him and in her from infancy to maturity are for the sake of perfecting their forms – an intellect-oriented form in men, and a will-oriented form in women. That is why we say that the changes are of one kind in men and of another kind in women. (Conjugal Love 187)

“Understanding” aligned with male; “will” aligned with female

Male and female He created them. What ‘male and female’ is used to mean in the internal sense was very well known in the Most Ancient Church, but when among later generations the interior sense of the Word was lost, so too was this particular arcanum. Marriages gave them their highest forms of happiness and delight; and they used to liken to a marriage anything that could be likened to it, in order that from it they might feel the happiness of marriage.... Consequently, they reflected the heavenly marriage in those things, which, they perceived, was the source of the happiness in their own marriages. For this reason, they called the understanding in the spiritual person Male and the will Female, and when the two acted as one, they called it Marriage. From that Church sprang the common usage of

referring to the Church itself, because of its affection for good, as 'a daughter', and also 'a virgin' - as in Virgin of Zion, Virgin of Jerusalem - and 'a wife' as well. (*Arcana Caelestia* 54)

Predominance and interdependence

Everyone, whether man or woman, possesses understanding and will; but with the man the understanding predominates, and with the woman the will predominates, and the character is determined by that which predominates. Yet in heavenly marriages there is no predominance; for the will of the wife is also the husband's will, and the understanding of the husband is also the wife's understanding, since each loves to will and to think like the other, that is mutually and reciprocally. Thus are they conjoined into one. This conjunction is actual conjunction, for the will of the wife enters into the understanding of the husband, and the understanding of the husband into the will of the wife, and this especially when they look into one another's faces; for, as has been repeatedly said above, there is in the heavens a sharing of thoughts and affections, more especially with husband and wife, because they reciprocally love each other. This makes clear what the conjunction of minds is that makes marriage and produces marriage love in the heavens, namely, that one wishes what is his own to be the others, and this reciprocally. (*Heaven and Hell* 369; note—*Conjugal Love* 42 provides a beautiful illustration of this togetherness and love in marriage)

Feminine wisdom is perceptive, from love (relationship sensitivity)

(10) *This perception is a wisdom that the wife has. A man is not capable of it, neither is a wife capable of her husband's intellectual wisdom.* This follows from the difference that exists between masculinity and femininity. It is masculine to perceive from the intellect, and feminine to perceive from love. Moreover, the intellect also perceives those sorts of matters which transcend the body and the world - it being the nature of intellectual and spiritual sight to move in that direction - while love does not perceive beyond what it feels. When it does, its perception draws on its union with the intellect of a man, a union established from creation. For the intellect has to do with light, and love with warmth, and concerns that are matters of light are seen, whereas concerns that are matters of warmth are felt.

It is apparent from this that, because of the universal difference which exists between masculinity and femininity, a husband is not capable of his wife's wisdom, nor is a wife capable of her husband's wisdom. Women are not even capable of a man's moral wisdom to the extent that it springs from his intellectual wisdom. (*Conjugal Love* 168)

Let it be known that husbands rarely recognize their wives, but that wives readily recognize their husbands. The reason is that women have an interior perception of love, while men have only a more superficial perception. (*Conjugal Love* 47r)

At that the husbands then said, "Our wives know all the states of our mind, nor is anything hidden from them. They see, perceive and feel whatever comes from our will. And we in turn know nothing of this in our wives. Wives have this gift, because they have very tender loves and feelings of almost blazing zeal for the preservation of the friendship and trust in marriage and thus for the preservation of both partners' happiness of life. This happiness they watch over for their husbands and themselves from a wisdom inherent in their love - wisdom which is so full of discretion that they will not and therefore cannot say that they are the lovers, but that they are the recipients of love."

[The wives] then said, “Every man has five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. But we have also a sixth sense, which is a sense of all the delights of conjugal love in our husbands.” (*Conjugal Love* 155r)

“We therefore anticipated your coming,” they said, “to entreat us to reveal one more secret of conjugal love.”

“But why do you say one,” I asked, “when I have come here to learn many more?”

[2] “They are secrets,” they replied, “and some of them so transcend the wisdom of you men that the comprehension of your intellect cannot grasp them. You men vaunt yourselves over us on account of your wisdom, but we do not vaunt ourselves over you on account of ours - even though our wisdom is superior to yours because it enters into your inclinations and affections and sees, perceives and feels them.

“You know nothing at all about the inclinations and affections of your love, and this despite the fact that it is because of them and in accordance with them that your intellect thinks, consequently that it is because of them and in accordance with them that you have your wisdom. Yet wives know these things in their husbands so well that they see them in their husbands’ faces and hear them in the intonations of the speech of their mouth - indeed so well that they feel them with the touch of their hands on their husbands’ breasts, arms and cheeks. But from a zealous love for your happiness and at the same time our own, we pretend as if we do not know these things, while at the same time moderating them so discreetly that whatever our husbands’ wish, pleasure or will, we accede to it by allowing and enduring it, and only redirecting it when possible, but never compelling.”

[3] “How is it that you have this wisdom?” I asked.

They replied, “It is implanted in us from creation and so from birth. Our husbands liken it to an instinct, but we say it comes of Divine providence, in order that men may be made happy through their wives. Our husbands have told us that it is the Lord’s will that the masculine sex act in freedom in accord with reason; and since a man’s freedom involves his inclinations and affections, therefore the Lord Himself moderates his freedom from within, and through his wife from without, and so forms the man and his wife together into an angel of heaven. Besides, if love is compelled, its fundamental nature changes and it becomes no longer the same love.

“But we will explain it more frankly. We are moved to this - that is, to a discreet moderation of the inclinations and affections of our husbands, so discreet that it seems to them that they act in freedom in accord with their own reason - because we feel delight from their love, and we love nothing more than for them to feel delight from our feelings of delight. But if these feelings become matters of indifference in them, they also begin to fade in us.” (*Conjugal Love* 208)

Marriage orientation in women

(14) *This atmosphere [of conjugal love] is received by the female sex and communicated through it to the male sex.* The male sex does not have any conjugal love inherent in it, but conjugal love is inherent only in the female sex and is transmitted to the male sex from it. This is something I have seen attested from an experience I had, related above in no. 161. It is supported also by the following argument, that the masculine form is an intellect-oriented one and the feminine form a will-oriented one; and an intellect-oriented form does not have the capacity to develop a conjugal warmth on its own, but can do so only from the associated warmth of another in whom this has been implanted from

creation. Consequently, the masculine form cannot receive conjugal love except by having adjoined to it the will-oriented form of a woman, because this is at the same time a form of love. (*Conjugal Love* 223)

(5) *A wife inspires the union in her husband according to her love, and a husband receives it according to his wisdom.... We say that it is wives who inspire or insinuate the love in their husbands, because not a particle of conjugal love, not even of love for the opposite sex, is seated in men, but only in wives and women.* The fact of this was vividly shown me in the spiritual world:

[2] A conversation on this very subject once occurred there, and some men, having been persuaded by their wives, kept insisting that they were the lovers, and not their wives, but that their wives were recipients of love from them.

In order to settle the dispute over this question, all women, including their wives, were removed from the men; and together with them the underlying atmosphere of love for the opposite sex was taken away. When this was taken away, the men came into a state altogether foreign to them and never before felt, at which they complained considerably.

Then, while they were in this state, some women were brought to them, and the wives were presented to their husbands; and the women and the wives spoke sweetly to them. But at their blandishments the men became cold, and turning away they said to each other, "What is this? What is a woman?" And when some of the women said that they were their wives, they replied, "What is a wife? We do not know you."

However, when the wives began to grieve over this utterly cold indifference on the part of their husbands, and some of them to cry, an atmosphere of love for the feminine sex and of conjugal love (which to this point had been taken away from the men) was restored. And then at once the men returned to their former state - the ones who loved their marriages into their state, and the ones who loved the opposite sex in general into their state.

Thus the men were convinced that not a particle of conjugal love, not even of love for the opposite sex, resided in them, but only in wives and women. (*Conjugal Love* 161)

[3] To this the wives replied with annoyance, "You think we do not know what wisdom is and what sort of wisdom we mean, even though we continually reflect on it in our husbands and daily learn it from their mouths. Indeed, we wives think about the state of our husbands from morning to evening, with scarcely any time intervening in a day when this is interrupted or in which our instinctive thought is entirely withdrawn or gone from them. Our husbands in contrast spend very little time in the course of a day thinking about our state. As a result, we know what sort of wisdom in them finds delight in us. Our husbands call this wisdom a spiritual-rational wisdom and a spiritual-moral one. Spiritual-rational wisdom, they say, is a matter of the intellect and its intellectual concepts, while spiritual-moral wisdom is a matter of the will and its mode of life. Yet they join the two together and regard them as one; and they maintain that the pleasant delights of this wisdom are transposed from their minds into delights in our hearts, and from our hearts back to their hearts, so that these return to the wisdom from which they originated." (*Conjugal Love* 293:3. *Note: the rest of this passage, and Conjugal Love 294 are well worth reading, dealing in some depth with wives' insights into the states of their husbands and what they do with these insights. Interestingly, some women in this world denied having this ability.*)

Family orientation in women

This atmosphere [of a love for little children] affects the feminine sex primarily, thus mothers, and the masculine sex or fathers from them. This stems from the same cause as discussed previously, that the atmosphere of conjugal love is received by women and communicated through women to men, for the reason that women are born forms of love for the understanding of men, and the understanding is its recipient. It is the same with a love of little children, because this originates from conjugal love. People know that mothers have a very tender love for little children, and fathers a less tender one.

Evidence that a love of little children is engraved on the conjugal love into which women come by birth is apparent from the loving and friendly affection of girls for little children, and for the dolls which they carry, dress, kiss and clasp to their bosoms. Boys do not have the same affection." (*Conjugal Love* 393).

The interrelation of truth and good

Because there is a union of good and truth, and this a reciprocal one, it follows that there is a truth of good, or truth from good, and also a good of truth, or good from truth. In the next chapter we will show that the truth of good or truth from good exists in the male and is the essence of masculinity, and that the good of truth or good from truth exists in the female and is the essence of femininity. We will also show that there is a conjugal union between the two." (*Conjugal Love* 61)

The terms 'truth of good' and 'good of truth' are used because in the case of a person who is being regenerated, and especially of one who has been regenerated, truths emanate from good, and forms of good emanate from truth. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9300)

...The man was created to be the understanding of truth, and the woman to be the affection of good; and thus the man to be truth, and the woman good. When the understanding of truth which is with the man makes one with the affection of good which is with the woman, there is a conjunction of the two minds into one. This conjunction is the spiritual marriage from which conjugal love descends. (*Apocalypse Explained* 983:3)

This union is by no means possible except by the marriage of two minds into one, since, as has been said before, man was created to be the understanding of truth, and thus truth, and woman was created to be the affection of good, and thus good; therefore, in them the conjunction of good and truth is possible. For conjugal love which descends from that conjunction is the veriest means by which a person becomes the love that is the image or the likeness of God. For the two partners who are in conjugal love from the Lord love one another mutually and reciprocally from the heart, thus from inmosts; and therefore although apparently two they are actually one, two as to their bodies, but one as to life. (*Apocalypse Explained* 984:2)

Higher Light/Higher Heat

(4) In men the mind is elevated into a higher light, and in women the mind is elevated into a higher warmth; moreover, a woman feels the delights of her warmth in the light of a man. By the light into which men are elevated we mean intelligence and wisdom, because spiritual light, which emanates from the sun of the spiritual world (a sun which in its essence is love), goes together with these two as one and the same thing. Moreover, by the warmth into which women are elevated we mean conjugal love, because spiritual warmth, which emanates from the sun of that world, in its essence is love, and in

women is love that unites itself with the intelligence and wisdom in men. Taken in its broadest terms, this is the definition of conjugal love, and when given a specific focus it becomes conjugal love.

[2] We call it an elevation into a higher light and warmth, because it is an elevation into the light and warmth in which angels of the higher heavens are. It is also an actual ascent, as though from a mist into open air, and from a lower region of the air into a higher one, and from this into the upper atmosphere. Therefore, the elevation into a higher light in men is an elevation into higher intelligence and from this into wisdom, in which there is possible a still higher and higher ascent. And on the other hand, the elevation into a higher warmth in women is an elevation into a more and more chaste and pure conjugal love, and this continually towards the conjugal ideal which from creation is innate in their inmost beings. (*Conjugal Love* 188)

*[Married partners'] forms are also thus progressively perfected and ennobled from within. The human form is most perfect and most noble when by marriage two forms become one form, thus when the flesh of two becomes one flesh, in accordance with the story of their creation. The husband's mind is then elevated into a higher light, and the wife's mind into a higher warmth, and they then burgeon, blossom and bear fruit, like trees in springtime. (*Conjugal Love* 201)*

We say that a wife's union with her husband's intellectual wisdom exists inwardly, because this wisdom is characteristic of the intellect of men, and it ascends into a light in which women are not. That is why women do not speak from it, but in gatherings of men where matters like this are being discussed, they keep silent and only listen. Nevertheless, wives still have these things in them inwardly, as is apparent from the fact that they do listen, inwardly recognizing and concurring with those things which they hear and have heard from their husbands.

On the other hand, a wife's union with men's moral wisdom exists outwardly, because the virtues of this wisdom are akin for the most part to similar virtues in women, and they spring from the husband's intellectual will, with which the wife's will unites and forms a marriage. And because a wife recognizes these virtues in her husband better than he recognizes them in himself, we say that a wife's union with them exists outwardly. (*Conjugal Love* 165)

Those imbued with an affection for truth and good...have no affection for the knowledge of truth and good, only for truths and forms of good themselves, as they hear and perceive them from others. This kind of affection exists generally with good women, but the affection for knowledge of truth exists generally with men. [4] So it is that those who are spiritually perceptive have a liking for women with an affection for truths, but not for women who concentrate on gaining knowledge. For it is in keeping with Divine order for men to know things and for women purely to have an affection for them, so the women do not love themselves because of their knowledge but love men; and from this springs the desire for marriage. This also is why those of old said that women must keep silent in the Church. All this being so, factual and religious knowledge are represented by men, but affections by women; at this point affection for truth that pours out of the delights belonging to natural kinds of love is represented by female slaves. And because people with this kind of affection are of an entirely different disposition from those with an affection for knowledge, the situation with female slaves is entirely different from that with male slaves. So this is what is meant by 'a female slave shall not go out as the male slaves do'. It should be recognized however that this is the situation among those who belong to the Lord's spiritual kingdom, whereas among those who belong to His celestial kingdom the reverse applies. There

husbands are the ones with affection, and wives are the ones with knowledge of good and truth; and this is what the desire for marriage springs from among them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8994; cf. 4823:2, 4843)

We say that a wife cannot enter into duties appropriate to her husband or conversely a husband into duties appropriate to his wife, because they differ, like wisdom and its accompanying love, or like thought and its accompanying affection, or like the intellect and its accompanying will. In duties appropriate to husbands, understanding, thought and wisdom play the primary role, whereas in duties appropriate to wives, will, affection and love play the primary role. A wife also performs her duties out of will, affection and love, while her husband performs his out of understanding, thought and wisdom. Consequently, their duties are by nature different; but still they are progressively conjunctive as time goes on.

[2] Many people believe that women can perform the duties of men if only they are introduced into them from early age in the way that boys are. However, women can be introduced into the exercise of these duties, but not into the judgment on which the proper performance of these duties inwardly depends. Therefore, those women who are introduced into the duties of men, in matters of judgment are bound to go to men for advice; and then, from the men's recommendations, if they are their own mistresses, they choose what accords with their love.

[3] Some people also suppose that women can raise the sight of their understanding into the same realm of light that men can and see things on the same high level. They have been persuaded of this opinion by what some educated female poets have written. But when the works of these female poets were examined in their presence in the spiritual world, they were found to be works, not of judgment and wisdom, but of cleverness and a facility in the use of language. And works which result from these two gifts, because of the elegance and skill in the way the words are put together, appear as though they were lofty and intelligent - but only to people who take any kind of cleverness and call it wisdom.

[4] We also say that men cannot enter into duties appropriate to women and perform them properly, because they cannot enter into the affections of women, which are completely different from the affections of men. Since the affections and perceptions of the male sex, from creation and thus by nature, have been made so different, therefore the laws among the children of Israel also included the following decree:

A woman shall not have on the garment of a man, nor a man the garment of a woman, for it is an abomination.... (Deuteronomy 22:5)

The reason for this was that all in the spiritual world are clothed according to their affections, and the two affections - the affection of a woman and the affection of a man - cannot become one except between the two sexes, and never is this possible in one person. (*Conjugal Love* 175)

"We found that it is gradually tempered as the husband is perfected in wisdom and as the wife grows to love that wisdom in her husband, which is achieved through and according to the useful services which each of them performs in society with the other's help." (*Conjugal Love* 137:3)

Masculine aggressions and feminine manipulation

When men have this [striving for power] as their endeavor and after a succession of struggles obtain the mastery, they then reduce their wives to the condition of being either a possession at their disposal, or puppets obedient to their will, or indentured servants, depending on the degree of their will

to prevail and the capability they have inherent or latent in them. On the other hand, if wives have this as their endeavor and after a succession of struggles obtain the mastery, they then reduce their husbands to the condition of being either equal to them in privilege, or puppets obedient to their will, or indentured servants. However, in the case of wives, after they have obtained the scepter of command, their desire to possess that masquerades as conjugal love remains, being held in check by law and the fear of legitimate separation if they extend their power beyond just limits; and since it remains, they therefore lead a companionable life with their husbands. (*Conjugal Love* 291)

Weapons women can use when not respected

[2] Now because these men wondered themselves why there arose in them such animosity inwardly and such apparent amiability outwardly, they sought the reasons from women who knew the secret art that caused it; and from what those women told them, they said, they learned that women deeply conceal a knowledge within them by which they know how to skillfully tame men, if they wish, and make them subject to their command. They learned further that, on the part of ill-bred wives, this is accomplished by scoldings and periodic commendations; in some cases by continually hard and unpleasant looks, and in similar cases by other tactics. On the part of well-bred wives, however, it is accomplished by persistent and incessant pressings of requests, and by stubbornly resisting and opposing their husbands if they suffer hardships on their account, insisting on their right of equality by law and making themselves brazenly obstinate because of it. Even if they were to be expelled from the house, they say, they would return at will and continue to pursue the same demands. For they know that the nature of men makes it altogether impossible for them to withstand the persistent efforts of their wives, and that once men have yielded they then submit themselves to their wives' wishes. At that point, said the men, once the wives have them under their control, they then show their husbands courteous and amiable treatment....

[3] I have also heard justifications from the aforementioned women in the spiritual world as to why they entered into the practice of this art. They said they would not have entered into it except that they foresaw the supreme contempt, future rejection and thus utter ruin that lay ahead for them if they were to be beaten down by their husbands. Thus, they said, out of necessity they had taken up these weapons of theirs. To this they added the following warning for men, to leave to their wives their rights, and when they experience periodic states of coldness, not to regard their wives as inferior and treat them worse than they would servants. They said as well that many of their sex are not prepared to practice this art owing to an innate timidity (though I put in, owing to an innate modesty.)

This now is sufficient to make known what we mean by hellish marriages in the world, in which the partners are inwardly bitter enemies and yet outwardly seem like the closest of friends. (*Conjugal Love* 292)

Differing intelligence and nature

(9) *The intelligence of women is by nature modest, gracious, peaceable, compliant, soft and gentle, while the intelligence of men is by nature critical, rough, resistant, argumentative, and given to intemperance.* Evidence that this is the nature of women and the nature of men is clearly apparent from the body, face, tone of voice, speech, bearing and behavior of each sex.

With respect to the body, men are firm in skin and flesh, while women are soft. With respect to the face, men's are harder, more defiant, rougher, darker in color, also whiskered, thus less beautiful, whereas women's are softer, more compliant, gentler, lighter in color, and so pictures of beauty. With respect to tone of voice, men have a stern one, while women have a gentle one. With respect to their

speech, men's is given to intemperance and argumentativeness, while women's is modest and peaceable. With respect to their bearing, men's is bolder and more forceful, whereas women's is meeker and more delicate. With respect to their behavior, men's is more unruly, while women's is more civilized.

[2] The nature of men and the nature of women are different even from the time they are born, and it became clearly apparent to me how much they differ from seeing boys and girls together in groups. Several times in a great city I looked through my window and saw gatherings of them on the street, where over twenty of them would congregate every day. There the boys would play together in accordance with the temperament inborn in them - raising a commotion, shouting, fighting, striking blows, throwing stones at each other. In contrast, the girls would sit peacefully at the doors of the houses, some playing with little children, some dressing dolls, some sewing on bits of linen, some giving each other kisses. And yet I was surprised to see that they regarded the boys the way they were with friendly eyes.

From this I could clearly see that a man is born a form of the intellect, and a woman a form of love. I could also see what the nature of the intellect is and what the nature of love is in their beginnings, and thus what a man's intellect in its development would be like without conjunction with feminine love and eventually conjugal love. (*Conjugal Love* 218)

The origins of beauty in women

[3] But the receptionist said, "Let us join together now in some conversation of wisdom. Let the conversation be about causes, today the reason for the beauty in the female sex."

So they then spoke in turn. And the first speaker gave this reason, that women were created by the Lord to be forms of affection for the wisdom in men, and affection for wisdom is beauty itself.

The second speaker gave this reason, that woman was created by the Lord through the wisdom in man, because she was created from man, and that she is therefore a form of wisdom inspired by the affection of love. And because the affection of love is life itself, a woman is a form of the life in wisdom, while the male is a form of wisdom, and the life in wisdom is beauty itself.

The third speaker presented this reason, that women have been given a perception of the delights in conjugal love. And because their whole body is an instrument of that perception, the abode where the delights of conjugal love dwell with their perception cannot help but be a form of beauty.

[4] The fourth speaker gave this reason, that the Lord took beauty and grace of life from man and transferred them into woman, and that is why a man not reunited with his beauty and grace in woman is stern, severe, dry and unattractive, and also not wise except for his own sake alone, in which case he is a dunce. On the other hand, when a man is united with his beauty and grace of life in a wife, he becomes agreeable, pleasant, full of life and lovable, and therefore wise.

The fifth speaker gave this reason, that women were created to be beauties, not for their own sake, but for the sake of men, so that men's natural hardness might become softer, the natural solemnness of their dispositions more amiable, and the natural coldness of their hearts warmer. And this is what happens to them when they become one flesh with their wives.

[5] The sixth speaker offered this reason, that the universe created by the Lord is a most perfect work, but nothing is created in it more perfect than a woman attractive in appearance and becoming in behavior, in order that a man may thank the Lord for such a gift and repay it by receiving wisdom from Him.

After these and several other similar views were expressed, one of the wives appeared through the crystal-like partition, and she said to her husband, "Speak, if you wish." And when he spoke, the life in his wisdom from his wife was perceived in his speech, for her love was in the tone of his voice. Thus did experience bear witness to the truth expressed. (*Conjugal Love* 56)

Bride, Wife, Mother

In heaven the joining of good and truth is called the heavenly marriage, for all there are linked in this marriage. This is why heaven in the Word is likened to a marriage, and the Lord is called bridegroom and husband, while heaven is called bride and wife; and these same terms are used of the church. The reason why heaven and the church are so called is that those in them receive Divine good in truths. (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 13)

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LORD AND THE CHURCH AND CORRESPONDENCE TO IT

This chapter also takes up the marriage of the Lord and the church and correspondence to it, because without a knowledge and understanding of the subject, scarcely anyone can see that conjugal love in its origin is sacred, spiritual and heavenly, and that it comes from the Lord. Some in the church indeed say that marriage has a relationship to the marriage of the Lord with the church, but they do not know what the nature of that relationship is.

In order to make this relationship perceptible to some sight of the understanding, therefore, we must discuss in detail that sacred marriage which exists with and in those people who form the Lord's church. They, too, and not others, possess truly conjugal love.

To explain this secret, however, we must divide our treatment into sections under the following headings:

(1) In the Word, the Lord is called a Bridegroom and Husband, and the church a bride and wife; and the conjunction of the Lord with the church and the reciprocal conjunction of the church with the Lord is called a marriage.

(2) The Lord is also called Father, and the church, mother.

(3) The offspring from the Lord as Husband and Father and from the church as wife and mother are all spiritual offspring, and this is what is meant in the spiritual sense of the Word by sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and by other terms which have to do with descending generations.

(4) The spiritual offspring that are born from the marriage of the Lord with the church are truths, from which come understanding, perception and all thought; and also qualities of goodness, from which come love, charity and all affection.

(5) From the marriage of good and truth that emanates and flows in from the Lord, a person acquires truth, to which the Lord joins good, and in this way the church is formed in the person by the Lord.

(6) A husband does not represent the Lord and his wife the church, because both husbands and wives together form the church.

(7) Therefore neither in the marriages of angels in heaven nor in the marriages of people on earth does the husband correspond to the Lord and the wife to the church.

(8) Rather, the correspondence rests with conjugal love, insemination, procreation, love for little children, and other things of a similar sort that occur in marriage and result from it.

(9) The Word is the means of conjunction, because it is from the Lord and thus is the Lord.

(10) The church comes from the Lord and it exists in people who go to Him and live according to His commandments.

(11) Conjugal love depends on the state of the church in a person, because it depends on the state of his wisdom.

(12) So, then, because the church comes from the Lord, conjugal love comes from Him as well. (*Conjugal Love* 116)

Heart and lungs

Since I was thinking that I wanted to know about marriage among the most ancient people, I looked in turn from husband to wife and back again, and observed that their faces showed how they were almost of one soul. So I said: 'You two are one.' The man replied: 'We are one. Her life is in me and mine is in her, so we are two bodies, but one soul. The union between us is like that of the two cavities in the chest, called the heart and lungs. She is my heart and I am her lungs. But since by heart we understand here love and by lungs wisdom, she is the love of my wisdom, and I am the wisdom of her love. Her love therefore forms the outer covering of my wisdom and my wisdom is inwardly inside her love. As a result, as you said, the unity of our souls is to be seen in the look of our faces. (*Conjugal Love* 75:5)

The same point could be further confirmed from the marriage between good and truth, and, to the natural man, from the marriage between the heart and the lungs, because the heart corresponds to love and the lungs to the intellect. However, because most people are without knowledge of these, any confirmation on the basis of them would do more to obscure than enlighten. (*Conjugal Love* 223:2)

(4) *Love or the will prepares a home or bridal chamber for its future spouse, which is wisdom or the intellect.* Present in the created universe and in each of its constituents is a marriage of goodness and truth, and this for the reason that goodness is a property of love, and truth a property of wisdom, and these two are in the Lord, from whom come all created things.

How this marriage is formed in the human being can be seen mirrored in the conjunction of the heart with the lungs, for the heart corresponds to love or good, and the lungs to wisdom or truth, as stated above in nos. 378-381, 382-384.

From that conjunction it can be seen how love or the will betroths to itself wisdom or the intellect, and afterward marries it or enters as though into a marriage with it. Love betroths wisdom to itself by preparing a home or bridal chamber for it, and it marries it by joining it to itself through affections and then living wisely with it in that home.

[2] The reality of this can be fully described only in spiritual language, because love and wisdom, and consequently the will and intellect, are spiritual. They can indeed be presented in natural language, but only to a hazy perception of them owing to people's not knowing what love is, what wisdom is, and so what affections for good are, and what affections for wisdom, or affections for truth, are.

Nevertheless, the nature of the betrothal and marriage of love with wisdom or of the will with the intellect can still be seen by the parallel afforded by their correspondence with the heart and lungs. For the case with the latter is the same as with the former, so much the same that there is no difference whatever, except that one is spiritual and the other natural.

From the heart and the lungs, therefore, it is clear that the heart first forms the lungs, and afterward conjoins itself with them. It forms the lungs in the fetus, and conjoins itself with them after birth. This the heart does in its home, called the breast, where the two have their joint abode, separated from the rest of the body's organs by a membranous partition called the diaphragm and by a covering called the pleura.

The same is the case with love and wisdom or with the will and intellect. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 402)

Conceiving, Carrying, Giving Birth

“The wisdom that men have from the Lord knows no greater delight than to transmit its truths. And the love of wisdom that wives have in heaven knows no greater pleasure than to receive them as though in a womb, and thus to conceive them, carry them, and give them birth.

“That is what spiritual procreations are like among angels of heaven. And if you would believe it, natural procreations come also from the same origin.” (*Conjugal Love* 115:5)

Raising Children

Spiritual parents love their children for their spiritual intelligence and moral life, loving them thus for their fear of God and for their piety of conduct or life, and at the same time for their affection for and application to useful endeavors of service to society, thus for the virtues and good habits in them. Out of a love for these traits principally do they provide for and supply their needs. (*Conjugal Love* 405)

Invitation and Questions for Focus Groups

Purpose and Invitation

I am [calling] [emailing] you to solicit your input concerning women's participation in the General Church, specifically regarding attitudes and sensitivities about the status of women in the Church. I am representing The Women's Participation Task Force, a group that has been meeting monthly under the leadership of the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr. and Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan, Co-Chairs of The Task Force. Altogether we are fourteen individuals, five men and nine women from nine societies, two of whom are outside of North America. The Task Force was proposed by the Bishop's office. Our plan has been to meet for a year and then submit findings and proposals to the Bishop and the General Church Board in June 2017.

Our mission is to explore respect for and utilization of feminine wisdom in church activities. We are assessing the **overall climate** among people affiliated with the General Church concerning the **valuation of women** and their **participation** in the Church. Based on our work and our findings, we will make recommendations to the Bishop and the GC Board about whether the climate around women's value and participation in the church needs improvement, and practical ways to promote improvements where they might be needed. Our overall goal is to ensure that women's wisdom and other gifts can be fully integrated into the life of the Church, thereby enriching the Church and allowing it to more fully serve the Lord and society. In all this we hope to be guided by the teachings of the New Church to propose recommendations that will allow the Church to serve more effectively. It might be useful to note that the goal of this task force is not to consider changing the General Church's ordination policy at this time.

In the next few weeks we will be holding a series of discussions with selected Church members to solicit input on questions of how the Church values women, on their roles and participation, and on suggestions for improvement as well as pointing out areas where we are doing well. We'd like to invite you to participate in one of these sessions, which will be held with both in-person attendance for those in Bryn Athyn, and phone or internet attendance for those in other areas. Here are examples of some of the questions we want to explore: What is considered uniquely feminine and the ways in which feminine characteristics could, or do, enhance the Church? Do women feel valued for their relational skills, their intellectual skills, or their wisdom in the Church? How is such value or lack of value is communicated? What changes have people noticed over the years in women's participation in the Church; and what impact have such changes had?

The times we have available for talks are:

- May 3, 7:00 p.m. EDT
- May 9, 1:00 p.m. EDT
- May 9, 7:00 p.m. EDT
- May 12, 2:00 p.m. EDT
- May 17, 7:00 p.m. EDT
- May 19, 3:00 p.m. EDT

Would you be interested in participating in one of these sessions, and able to attend or call in? If you're interested but unable to attend, we'd also be happy to talk with you one-on-one to hear some of your ideas.

Questions

CLIMATE OF VALUE/APPRECIATION

1. A. Do you
 - (i) Work in a Church institution: school, administration, congregation?
 - (ii) Work in the home?
 - (iii) Work in an organization outside the church?
- B. Do you personally feel valued in your work? How?
2. A. Do you feel valued by the Church ...
 - i. For your relational skills?
 - ii. For your intellectual skills?
 - iii. For your organizational skills?
 - iv. For your doctrinal understanding?
 - v. For your wisdom?
 - vi. For your networking abilities?
 - vii. In other ways?
- B. How is that value, or lack thereof, communicated?

ROLES / PARTICIPATION

3. Over the years, what changes have you noticed in the Church as an institution, and with regard to women's roles? (If necessary prompt with 'more female teachers at the college, women on financial boards, women in staff positions in congregations)
4. In what ways do you currently see women contributing to the life of the Church? (Formally or voluntarily.)
5. What do you think are the 'unique' gifts women have to offer the Church?
6. What do women have to offer the Church in terms of their doctrinal understanding?

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE

7. Please suggest ways to expand women's roles in the Church in order ...
 - a. To increase the perceived value of women
 - b. To make wider and deeper use of women's relational, intellectual and organizational capabilities, doctrinal wisdom, and other aptitudes, gifts and skills.
 - c. Any other suggestions?

Summaries from Focus Group Sessions

1. Themes compiled by Charlotte Gyllenhaal, illustrated by summaries of statements from feedback group participants.

Question 1: Do you work in a Church institution, in the home or in an organization outside the church?

About half of participants report working or volunteering for General Church, other half worked for a variety of other organizations.

I'm Principal of New Church School, feeling extremely valued.

I'm on the board of church, also an administrator, have outreach leadership role, on worship team, Sunday

I volunteered for 12 years with contemporary service and 7 years on women's study group. Work on Tableaux and in hospice. A comment by clergy member: "You've done more study than many of us." Was the first time I felt recognized. Have felt patronized.

Workers for variety of General Church and Academy departments were included. "Women are the pillars of the Central Office."

I work in medical field using analytical skills and serve on board. Our church has always had women on the board since we all need to support each other.

I am a program manager at a defense contractor.

I work for non-General Church organization promoting the New Church.

I have a private therapy practice.

Question 2: Do you feel valued in your work? How? Do you feel valued by the Church?

Theme: women feel valued by the Church in their work, often in more conventionally "feminine" roles, but also in leadership roles (e.g. boards)

I teach children so definitely feel valued for that.

Women are on all boards in my congregation as well as on the pastoral staff, and very accepted in that way. Similar experience in areas where small church groups have women on boards because there are not enough men.

I have felt valued in my work as a church lay leader and a mom, also in paid position outside church.

I feel my New Church education equipped me with a lot in terms of doctrine, and I do feel valued for my doctrinal understanding.

Feel valued for rational and intellectual skills as someone working for the church with an emphasis on education.

Women are given such a voice in our church. They are really strong role models.

Theme: But although women mostly feel valued, this valuation is not consistent – they are valued but not "really" valued because of presumed intellectual lack.

I often work with male groups in GC functions and generally feel valued but am sometimes treated differently, demeaned or dismissed.

Any time a New Church woman feels demeaned, it is probably a result of older understandings of what the Writings say, and not the understanding that we need to embrace today – devaluing someone as a human being is not truth, it's something else.

I don't feel valued for my doctrinal understanding or wisdom, or how that would even be communicated. Feel valued for providing music, food, Sunday school teaching.

There is a "mental pirouette" in the church in which women are valued, but not really, when the rubber meets the road, because they don't make the grade intellectually.

"Unique" gifts that women have to offer church

Two approaches to this question emerged. One is that women have particular gifts that men do not share. The other, more frequent approach was that people's gifts are individual and should not be attributed to one sex or the other.

Women's gifts vs men's gifts

Theme: women's influence is needed in worship, which is too dry and should have more emphasis on community and love.

We are missing women's influence in worship. It is very dry and doctrinally oriented. We should be talking more about community, love and tolerance, about how to love each other, and maybe a woman would bring that.

I run worship services for Theta Alpha meetings in my congregation. Since I started doing this, I feel the services are more tailored to women and more rich experiences.

Theme: appropriateness of having religion teachers of the same sex. Boys need men teachers, but girls need women to have the conversations they really need.

Boys are really struggling these days because they don't have a role; women have taken roles that were formerly men's. Women teaching religion to junior high or high school girls would be great, but they would not be so great at teaching boys. Being taught religion by a different sex affects the conversations that can be had. Boys need the example of spiritual leadership from men.

Theme: women may offer safer and more insightful counsel to other women; men do not really understand some things women go through.

There are a number of things that women feel safer talking to other women about rather than men. Women in the church already minister to me in this way.

Male clergy are not in touch with women's temptations the way women would be.

Theme: women contribute to congregational caring and community in ways that men do not, and have useful insights and intuition.

Women have valuable insights, gut feeling and intuition. We can draw on this in teams. Pastors are recognizing this and drawing on it more.

The caring part of pastoring – women contribute to this in so many ways.

The only reason people gather into congregations is because of women's need for community. Without women the Church wouldn't be more than a bunch of guys studying Scripture independently.

Individuality of people's gifts

Theme: women's and men's gifts are more individual than gendered. Love and wisdom are equally important, and assigning qualities to one sex or the other is concerning.

Individuality trumps gender. Some things are generally true about women and some about men, but there is overlap and the middle is very fluid.

I don't want to assign qualities to men or women because they are not so much based on gender. The Divine Human is not gendered. Love and wisdom are both equally important.

You can't get rid of femininity or masculinity, but it gets tricky when you assign qualities to each of them. You can't deny who you really are, and whatever you do, you will do it from your feminine or masculine soul.

Theme: the Heavenly doctrines make it clear that we can all raise our understanding above our will because we are fully human and thus fully capable of contributing to the Church based on individual gifts.

The Writings talk mostly about human beings, not about men vs women. It's clear that human beings can all raise their understanding above their will. The Writings are really about truth as a steppingstone to love, and we need to get people past a variety of stumbling blocks to see what it is about.

Why do women's gifts have to be unique? How about we empower women as fully human followers of the Lord and fully capable church leaders, and then we can all enjoy their gifts in whatever form they take?

Theme: women and men are both needed in congregational work and both can be strong leaders, even though they may approach things differently.

Women's role is everything. Men's role is everything. Women will approach everything differently from men due to their unique spiritual gifts.

Users of the church's services are half men and half women. I am in a small society and everyone works hard. Cultural awareness and importance of being seen as democratic and demonstrating equality are important in our country.

Women and men work together all the time in my congregation. There are strong women and strong men. Sometimes new leaders do not get that. We do not categorize gifts as male/female.

What changes in women's roles have you noticed in the Church as an institution over the years?

Theme: women have advanced in many ways in the church in both institutional and spiritual leadership, though it has not been easy and there is still frustration with some of the limitations they face.

The biggest change is that we are talking about this now. There is more awareness of the need for balance between men and women.

Girls are now in athletics at the Academy, though it was a fight to get them there.

You can now get a MARS degree, but it's useless, unlike an MDiv which will let you do something you are called to do.

Having a woman as president of the College had to have been a really eye-opener since she was such an effective leader.

More people can participate in spiritual leadership, with the Journey Program instead of just having doctrinal classes given only by the pastor.

More women on boards and committees, and more women teaching in high school. Half of the college faculty are women.

The Marriage Conference, MARS program.

Question 4: In what ways do you currently see women contributing to the life of the Church?

Theme: women should contribute in all roles, and are sometimes taken for granted. New roles have emerged such as Stephen Ministry and sermon writing teams.

In all ways. Women should contribute in all roles.

I actually find this question offensive. Women contribute all day every day, it's just that there are limited formal roles. The church takes women's volunteer time for granted.

Lots of different things especially behind the scenes making everything happen. Contributing in the Stephen Ministry which is a huge bonus to the church, much better than the pastor doing it all.

Sermon writing teams, finances, communication and connection.

Question 6: What do women have to offer the Church in terms of their doctrinal understanding?

Theme: not much difference noted in what men and women can contribute to doctrinal understanding, and both should contribute to our growth in this area.

NC Life articles are mostly written by men, more of whom are "on the clock" for such work. Women have less time for it but could be encouraged to contribute.

There are women with strong intellectual gifts and men with high emotional intelligence. The Writings say there are distinct differences, but in fact there are overlaps. We are best served by having both men and women contribute.

The same thing that men also contribute – being people in the Church reading the Word. We should each share our own enlightenment from the Word.

We have the opportunity for the church to really grow in doctrinal understanding if people – men and women – are truly invited to share and appreciated for it.

Theme: we should not be so focused on doctrinal understanding and should be more open to a variety of spiritual gifts.

Why are we so focused on doctrinal understanding? Life is not doctrine, neither is ministry. The narrowness of this question illustrates the problem at hand beautifully. I believe every person has spiritual gifts to offer the world.

Question 7: Suggestions to improve things

Themes are not extracted from this section. The varied suggestions from the group are offered to the task force members to consider for possible recommendations.

Sermon-writing teams, in which women can be really valued and heard, creating a sermon in community and with love.

Women should teach religion, especially for upper elementary school girls and we should hire women to be principals in the schools [note that this is done some places already]. Maybe they should give chapel. Could relieve time burdens on pastors. Team-teaching at upper elementary or high school levels (e.g. at BACS and ANCSS).

Religion 101 teachers needed in BA College. Could women do that after appropriate training?

Position of Assistant to the Pastor, paid and valued by church. Could include some pastoring, visiting, counseling. These are not just volunteer activities.

Question of giving chapel and the representation of God as male. Jesus was male, but God is both male and female, because men and women were both created in His image. Shutting out girls because women can't represent God isn't right.

Raise the MARS degree to an MDiv, put the money and investment into that program to open up opportunities.

A list of actions the church take to support women's roles in worship and elsewhere was previously circulated and should be in this discussion. Would like to see a letter from the GC outlining what women's duties are allowed. Can women be allowed on chancel or be lay readers (balanced by male lay readers)?

The bishop's office should lead this change so the direction is coming from the top. But it will take courage for leadership to effect this change.

Have "ministries" such as youth ministry or outreach ministry that other denominations do, open to men and women. Stephen Ministry has been very useful.

Men and women should both be encouraged to read the Word, and we should elevate what is common to both.

Open up to a broader array of spiritual gifts and skills.

We should encourage all people to be active in the church. If women are targeted as a "special group" to improve their participation, it means they inherently consider themselves to be of lower value.

What is the unofficial role of being a minister's wife or Bishop's wife? Some societies have passed up ministers because their wives did not meet the society's expectations.

Invest in professional development for women – help further education (i.e. MS degrees), attend conferences. More women interns should be mentored by men. There isn't room for growth for women working in our church.

I work with a lot of clergy yet am not allowed to either weekly staff meetings or yearly clergy meetings. There should be more communication from the clergy with all church staff. Women are not even invited to pastoral staff meetings when they are about topics women have worked on or are in charge of.

In our congregation we are all challenged by the pastor to improve. The pastor's role is to value people, create space for leadership and challenge leaders. This works against old-fashioned leadership and is more suited to modern people.

Support women through analyzing underlying use, e.g. of ushers, who are really engaged in welcoming – a relational gift that is perhaps very suited to women.

Sermon writing teams and having women teach religion are two things. A woman could write a "sermon" or piece of intellectual work and publish it in New Church Life, but she could not stand up in church and say it. Where is the line?

Government of the church is too linear. It should be more circular, without the "pecking order."

Projects developed by individuals, such as the "lost souls committee" started by a woman.

Generally, try to value women's intellectual contributions, e.g. through more involvement in theological conversations.

Evaluate work spaces for women. Men have big office spaces but women are usually crammed together in a room.

Closing comments

Themes: we are emphasizing faith more than charity; women have more to offer to the organization, and pastors and other leaders should respect women active with/working with the church and communicate with them about how they want to serve.

If we continue to be a church that emphasizes faith more than charity, we will continue to have this challenge. We dance with faith alone more than we think we do.

The older I got, the less what I read in the Word for myself was valued.

Women have more to offer than is allowed in this organization.

Respect and retain the women who are active with and/or employed by the Church.

Pastors should become more open in communicating with women about how they would like to serve. If their opinion is valued, women feel like they belong. If the unspoken message is that women's role is pre-defined, it won't work as well.

Other

Disagreement with ordination policy

Theme: Although the ordination policy was specifically noted as not being a subject of this task force, there were still substantial expressions of disagreement with and pain about it.

The policy is a fundamental injustice and I hope we don't have to fight a war over it.

I really respect women who can talk about doctrine and don't see why we don't ordain them. We have lost strong New Church women to other faiths. We should promote and not stifle women so they can be strong mentors and leaders.

I understand why women have left who saw there was no path for them to become priests. Can we have closer relationships with New Church women in other branches of church?

The presentation of the GC decision not allowing women to be in the priesthood was so painful, very close to saying women were not human. Where was the "image and likeness of God" in women?

It doesn't seem right to have an organization of men telling women "No." There is a way of reading the Writings that would not support the male-only clergy.

Only men can be ministers. Only men can make certain decisions. Women aren't wise enough to figure out if we are wise enough. We are stuck, and shooting ourselves in the foot.

Cultural change

Theme: we have been through a dramatic cultural change, but there are still areas in which we are lagging behind.

Cultural change in women's roles – dramatic since days of growing up in 1950s.

Glad to see social media discussion about women's roles.

Sometimes I have to defend my position as a working mom and feel I should not have to. But culture is changing and sometimes roles are reversing with more stay-at-home dads taking care of families. Church should be more sensitive about gender roles.

A recent Bryn Athyn Board election was quite disappointing. Not one woman was elected to office. Is there a subconscious sense that leadership is unfeminine?

Theme: secular culture is attacking women and they are treated terribly in many places. Women are already feeling victimized by the culture and may be feeling defensive even before interacting with the church.

Today's global culture is attacking women, femininity and marriage. Secular society gives US women confusing and destructive messages. Women are treated horrifically in many parts of the world. So

if women don't feel valued, I feel it's not the fault of the Church. When women turn to the Church for support, the secular ideas in our heads get in the way. Women come to the Church already victimized by our culture and thus feel bruised and defensive even before their interaction with the Church begins.

It's only when things are not working the way they should, when women don't feel safe and supported because of secular influences, that value needs to be detailed tangibly. Could the Church do more to defend women against external attacks? Including some programs for women out of the church who have been victimized by some of the aggressions listed [in the above paragraph].

Comments about process of changing

Theme: emotional difficulty of change on all sides.

I have a heartfelt sympathy for people who feel their faith is being torn down due to the critique of the all-male clergy. The tearing down of our personal experiences of the church can be powerful and difficult.

We can be loyal to the organization as it is even though we don't agree on the ordination policy.

Theme: sensitivity regarding how suggested changes are communicated around the church.

"Edicts" are not received well by other congregations. Recommendations should be viewed as suggestions. The GC Central Office should lead by example, e.g. including more female representation in worship.

Keep in mind the differences in cultures and in congregations around the church.

Theme: negative messages about women who are entering new leadership areas are counterproductive and need to be reduced.

Changing attitudes is hard – get rid of negative messages about women.

There needs to be a safe space for women to blaze new trails in the church. When women have done this, they have received sarcasm and joking or been shunned. We really need leadership to support women who are trying to bring about change.

2. Themes compiled by Peter Buss Jr.

Question 1: Sense of being valued

- In general, many felt respected for what they do: those who work for the church, those who work in professions outside the church, those who volunteer, etc. (20 respondents out of 37 expressed positive sentiments about value within the church context; more expressed positive contexts about their outside work environment).
- A sub-theme in this section related to people receiving positive feedback for the ways they chose to serve, based on their personal strengths (12 respondents).
- Some reflected on messages that did not feel valuing to them, about intellectual or doctrinal contributions, and that there's a subtext they perceive relative to women's doctrinal contributions that sometimes seems off or demeaning to them (13 related comments).

Question 2: Dimensions of respect and valuing:

- In general, more respondents articulated valuing messages for relational, organizational, and networking abilities, and less for intellectual and doctrinal contributions (15 respondents out of 30 made some reference in this direction).

- A number of people commented on the range of things mentioned as indicative of what individual human beings, regardless of gender, could and do offer (5 or 6 comments).
- Several noted valuing messages for the many things women do for the church that keep the church going (15 respondents).
- Some noted anecdotes where a devaluing message was received (4 or 5 comments).
- In some cases, pastors were mentioned as positive examples of drawing on the range of qualities and abilities congregants had to offer, and sending welcomed messages. Others experienced devaluing messages for their intellectual or doctrinal contributions.
- One person reflected poignantly about secular society or non-church environments that send devaluing messages to women, leading some to understandably come to the church already feeling somewhat “bruised and defensive”.
- Some identified the source, for them, of devaluing messages, namely the GC’s ordination policy (9 comments).

Question 3: Changes over time

- Changes noted include: women serving on church boards, women leading small groups or contributing to Journey programs, the church being more open to serving people’s natural needs, more shared counseling or support, the MARS program, and more women in leadership positions (12+ comments).
- Some commented that not much has changed, in terms of the organization itself (3 or so comments).
- A number reacted to the question, using it as a chance to comment on things that could change but haven’t, including some negative messaging around women’s intellect or doctrinal ability that persist (4 or so comments)
- A few people expressed appreciation that conversations like this are happening around women’s involvement in the church (3 or so comments).

Question 4: How are women contributing to the life of the church now?

- This question got less air-time than others. Some saw it as slightly confusing, because women do so many things to help the church. Comments like, “all day in all ways”, or “without women things would grind to a halt.” Others mentioned a few specifics, like small group leadership and Stephen Ministry, tableaux, music programs, flowers, etc.

Question 5: Unique gifts

- A number of respondents raised cautions at this question, not wanting to make too much of differences, especially when it comes to roles. (6 of 22 commented in this direction)
- A number of characteristic traits were mentioned, including: feminine wisdom (as opposed to masculine wisdom); pastoral care or loving/nurturing; intuition leading to connecting and building relationships; beautify environments (broadly applied); bring ideas into reality; community building; glue that holds congregational relationships together (10 of 22 responses)

Question 6: Doctrinal understanding

- Several found this to be a loaded question too, with some articulating that women contribute many additive strands, and would do so increasingly if trained and “on the clock” (13 comments).

- Some used this question as a reminder that each person brings his or her unique skills to the table, which for some women may be doctrinal and others not—same as with men (10 comments).
- Some people used this question as a time to comment on differences between men and women, with women providing more of the care and connecting that happens—a needed form of ministry (4 comments).

Question 7: Recommendations

- Invest more in women, with professional development, internships, leadership roles (4 related comments).
- Empower every person, female or male, to contribute their unique gifts to the fullest (3 related comments).
- Encourage women to enter into spiritual leadership or ministry, write articles, serve on sermon writing teams, do lay readings, and consider other ways to bring women into the worship equation (7 comments).
- Teaching in schools: consider integrating women into the teaching of religion more.
- More integration of clergy and lay—at clergy meetings, amongst colleagues in the central offices (2 comments)
- Enhance MARS program, and open an M.Div. option to women (2 comments)
- Recognize time limitations for things that used to be done by volunteers; consider more paid positions in the church (2 related comments)
- Again some used this question to urge the church organization to reconsider its ordination policy, claiming that anything short of that will not solve the underlying issues (10 comments).

Other comments:

- There appear to be regional differences within the church; some areas express more angst and struggle around women's roles and involvement than others. There is also a variety about what is supported for men and women, and what is discouraged.
- A couple of people wrote in after the sessions to share perspectives on the struggles they had with the "ordination" strands of the feedback sessions. One person in particular did not feel free to speak up for her support for the church's efforts to talk about male/female differences, and even its ordination policy, and expressed sadness that this was the case.
- A couple people offered a final perspective on the ordination issue.
- Some commented that these conversations are hard to have, but valuable, and expressed appreciation for the process.

3. Summary of Responses from Female MARS Graduates

(Drawn from notes supplied by Jane Williams-Hogan)

What prompted you to get a MARS degree?

- Respondents referenced a mixture of work-related and personal reasons for pursuing the degree. Most embraced the option with enthusiasm, desiring to study in New Church teachings in more depth.

How satisfying was doing the MARS degree? Scale of 1 – 10

- Most respondents gave the program very high marks: several grading it 10 on a scale of 1 – 10. They used comments like “very satisfying,” “loved the collegiality,” and “loved every class.” A couple of respondents reflected on things that were less satisfying. For example, one commented, “I loved the content but there was nowhere to put it,” and another expressed sadness at the distinctness of the MARS program from the M.Div. program.

Did you achieve what you wanted by getting the degree? Please explain.

- Some respondents said yes, and others said no. Among those who said yes, they registered advancement in their professional lives or enrichments to them personally. Among those who said no, one referenced a lack of credentialing credit at Bryn Athyn College for this degree, and another expressed that ministry was her goal.

Do you feel better grounded in Doctrine as a result of getting the degree?

- All respondents affirmed that they felt better grounded in the Doctrines.

Do you feel you are more respected by Church members because you have the degree?

- Several respondents reported little change in their level of respect as a result of this degree. Some simply said “No.” Others used phrases like “I don’t feel disrespected...” or “I feel a bit more respected by my teachers, but in general, no.”

Who works for the Church?

- A couple work as teachers within the church, one is a religion education specialist, two serve on church boards, one on pastor’s council, and another does extensive volunteer leadership in a related church entity.

Do you feel more able to contribute to the Church as a result of getting the degree? Could you provide some examples?

- Some respondents said yes, while others wished for a better venue for contributing.

Do you feel disappointed that getting the degree did not affect positive change?

- Some were not disappointed for themselves; others expressed sadness for the MARS program itself.

Suggestions to improve place of women in the church:

- Respondent ideas included: getting the ideas out there; urging the College to recognize the MARS program as more than a stepchild; MARS students doing college colloquia or publishing theses; and developing positions for women’s ministries or counselors.

Examples of Recommendations in Action

The intention here is to share the range of brainstormed ideas that went along with the recommendations that were generated. It is recognized that some of the items contained here would stretch the envelope for some people, and would be welcome additions to others. The Women's Participation Task Force acknowledges the responsibility of the leadership teams at the local or central levels for making determinations of what to select, or not, from the ideas listed here.

Recommendation 1: Encourage, at all levels of the General Church, means of input and influence by women and men.
Encourage influence and feedback councils peopled by men and women for all church congregations and entities.
Seek women's input and representation on boards and committees.
Leadership retreats, advisory councils, forums, etc.
Recommendation 2: Promote the study and exploration of femininity and masculinity from the perspective of the Heavenly Doctrines.
Welcome and encourage all women as well as lay men to read and study the Word.
Recommendation 3: Promote congregational involvement in worship and worshipful activities.
Involve women and lay men in sermon-writing teams, worship planning teams, giving testimonials, contributing by song or poetry, and reading from the Word during worship services. Explore other means of injecting a diversity of viewpoints and experiences into the worship experience.
Invite women to share insights from their study in the Word, by leading Bible studies, religious book groups and other small groups.
Encourage after-church discussion of the topic for the day, to promote lay engagement with the message.
Create spaces for women to lead worship for children or for other women.
In sermons ensure that life application examples include a variety of life experiences - not just about marriage. A woman's use is not only to be a wife and mother - women fulfill many uses in many different fields.
Have women on teams that give feedback on the message of worship services.
Invite women to lead in prayer in their homes, in meetings, and in small group settings.
Feature stories about women from the Word.
Recommendation 4: Draw more fully and effectively on feminine intellect, wisdom and spiritual perspective.
Have all religion classes above 5 th grade team-taught by men and women, at least when discussing sensitive issues, so that opportunities can be made for single-sex discussion.
Develop a MARS/women doctrinal discussion group
Publish some of the MARS theses
Encourage research in the Word by women and welcome them to give workshops or presentations on spiritual topics in New Church congregations. Invite female leaders from other religious organizations or professions to present from time to time.
When quoting from additional inspiring sources in worship services, also include quotes from women.

Feature books by New Church women for small group studies.
Intentionally communicate that the relational <i>and</i> intellectual gifts of women are needed and valued.
Seek additional forums for women to share their spiritual perspectives—blogs, website, or speaker series.
Recommendation 5: Provide training in the Doctrines for relevant “ministries” or avenues of service within the church and outside of it.
Use the MARS degree as a desired credential for staff positions within the church—e.g. youth leader, teachers, ministries, central office staff positions
Add more practically oriented courses to MARS
Consider educational/training strands, so that women seeking to enter into various professional or volunteer positions may do so with relevant doctrinal background.
Recommendation 6. Examine and actively influence church culture by means of thorough discussion of the “findings” of this task force exploration.
Consider a centralized mechanism or position for supporting the implementation of the recommendations above in congregations throughout the church that desire such support.
Develop a position related to/attentive to church culture
Share cultural and attitudinal findings with clergy, with the goal of encouraging dialogue about messaging that conveys authentic respect for the range of skills and qualities that women possess.
Use gender-inclusive language whenever possible, such as in school recitations, readings at church, quotes in church newsletter and Facebook posts.
Use positive statements to explain differences between men and women rather than implying deficiency.
Have a fair and frank discussion at Clergy meetings about the perception that the church does not project an image of supporting women making intellectual and doctrinal contributions to the church.
Recommendation 7: Draw on known feminine skills to minister to and mentor the people of the church.
Work toward a trained network of female and male mentors, educating people with a variety of spiritual gifts to contribute to congregational life (could be counselors, Stephen Ministers, or some other uniquely New Church position).
Encourage congregations to engage teams to assist pastors in pastoral care.
Hire women on the church staff where possible to ensure women’s voices have a role in church management and improving the caring and community-building dimension of the pastorate. Where hiring staff is not possible, be sure to include women in pastoral staff meetings about events/subjects that are being managed by or are important to women volunteers.
Develop a women’s ministry or mentoring program perhaps through MARS.
Encourage women to develop spiritual growth programs designed for women, teen girls etc. Local pastors could preview programs before implementation.
Continue current GCED efforts to support lay people to teach from the Word in Sunday school. Support can be aimed at preschool, elementary school, high school and college ages.
Seek feminine input into the relational components of congregational life, including the central relationships of marriage and family.

One suggestion was that the true cause of these issues is the state of conjugal love both within the church and in the culture at large. This means that the solution lies in promoting conjugal love and the moral climate that it depends on. Specifically, the suggestion is to engage women and men in renewing our emphasis on sexual morality and conjugal love, with sensitivity for the fact that many people are not married.

Recommendation 8: Facilitate and welcome people’s service to the church and the surrounding community, and their ways of making the world a better place.

Support projects developed and led by women; for example, service projects undertaken as part of outreach strategies.

Encourage the emphasis on USE. Everyone is included in this doctrine: priests, lay people, women, married people, singles, widows, divorcees, youth, children, disabled, aged - everyone. Seek out the talents and loves/passions of everyone and find a way to make use of them in the life of the church.

When both married and single women are involved on church boards or such, be sure to give equal credence to the ideas and “voice” of both married and single women.

Encourage study of the Word, presentation and publication by lay men and women. Showcase venues for distribution of lay studies.

Recommendation 9: Share positive messages and gratitude concerning the things that women are doing within the church or outside of it.

Share information about how women’s roles have successfully expanded in parts of the church with other parts of the church that may wish to implement their own version of these models.

Encourage sincere and appropriate appreciation initiatives.

Recommendation 10: Promote professional development for women employed within the Church— at central and congregational levels.

Evaluate the professional status of women working for the church to ensure that professional development opportunities, office space and other aspects of career growth are comparable among men and women at similar professional ranks.

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