



WELS NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LUTHERAN LEADERSHIP

Rethinking Congregational Partnerships

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Churches often approach ministry by dividing the genders. There are instances where this is necessary to uphold scriptural principles. However, there are also many gospel ministry efforts where those complementary gifts are best used together. This practical presentation talks about how to better align the unique gifts of men and women within gospel ministry.

A. Why Do We Need to Rethink Congregational Partnerships?

1. A New Model
2. Format of the New Model

NOTE: Pastor Jay Zahn and Hailey Meier presented on this topic at the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership 2022. You can find details on the conference website.

DISCLAIMER: . This presentation is not about the callings of men and women. Rethinking Congregational Partnership is considering how to cast a vision and work towards ministry that honors God's design for men and women and uses the gifts of every member of God's family by highlighting some general principles to think about in order to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding.

YOUR TURN: Can you name these?

A "co-worker" of Paul?

If you answered "**Mark,**" "**Luke,**" or "**Timothy,**" you would be correct. However, you would also be correct if you answered "**Euodia,**" "**Syntychē,**" or "**Priscilla.**"

A spiritual influence on Timothy?

If you mentioned "**Paul,**" who spoke of Timothy as his "true son in the faith," you would have a strong argument. But you also would have a strong argument if you mentioned "**Lois and Eunice,**" Timothy's grandmother and mother.

A servant of the church whom Paul asked to deliver an inspired letter to a congregation?

You would be correct if you answered "**Tychicus.**" But you would also be correct if you answered "**Phoebe.**"

From the privacy of the Christian household to the more public working together of Christians in the household of God, God has used both women and men to forward the cause of his gospel. And while he has given us some clear directions for how women and men serve together in gospel ministry according to their unique callings, the opportunities and avenues for gospel service are wide and varied for both. (Heirs Together-Lesson 8)

B. A Shift In Thinking

1. We Are Partners

Partner definition: *One that is **united** or associated with another or others **in an activity** or a **sphere of common interest**, especially.*

- This partnership works because God designed it to work!
- Shared creation (in the image of God-intellect, emotion, will), shared life of service to honor God, and shared fellowship with God. (Genesis 2)
- Shared fall from grace, shared life in a fallen world, shared promise of a Savior, shared heirs of eternity. (Genesis 3, I Peter)
- Shared mission, universal priesthood (I Peter)
- Shared spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:1-6)

**"Diversity is being invited to the party;
inclusion is being asked to dance."**

-Kadi Cole

2. We Are Better Together

1 Corinthians 12

- Eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
- This isn't about giving a "job" or creating a "position" for women. It's about seeing where all gifts fit in the body of Christ. This is about seeing the need and looking for how all gifts fit in.

3. We Get To Show What It Looks Like

When we go through the hard work of figuring out how to work together as men and women, through the love that comes from Jesus Christ, we're showing the world what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Not only are we showing the world around us what it looks like, but we're setting a godly example for the next generation of leaders. When we provide opportunities for men and women to work together in the church, where an emphasis on godly character development through discipleship and service, we're showing them what God's design looks like, giving them something to aspire to, and setting them on a firm foundation for the future.

4. Statistics Don't Lie

- In 2003, 48% of American women attended church regularly, compared to only 35% of men. In 2018 only 29% of men attended church regularly, the same percentage as the women. Women left at a faster rate. For men and women under the age of 35, the number of women attending church is even less than the men.
- WELS exit polls say:
 - Many women do not feel their gifts are being well-utilized by their church.
 - Some women leave for another congregation they believe will better make use of their talents and willingness to serve.
 - Others simply quit church altogether.

YOUR TURN: Reflect on the partnership blessings. What are you most excited about?

C. Here's What You Need To Know

- We Have Different Operating Systems

Thinking / Processing / Viewpoint	
Women	Men
<p>Spaghetti</p> <p>Every thought and issue connects to every other thought and issue in some way.</p> <p>Life is much more of a process for women than it is for men.</p>	<p>Waffles</p> <p>Thinking is divided into boxes that have room for one issue only. The first issue goes in the first box. The second in the second box, and so on.</p> <p>Life deals with one box at a time and one box only.</p>

Approach To Problem Solving / Action	
Women	Men
<p>Connection-Oriented</p> <p>Thoughts, emotions, experiences, etc. are all connected making every detail important. These are sorted out through discussion and reflection. This builds connection with others and is a priority for women.</p>	<p>Goal-Oriented</p> <p>There is a preference for the “boxes” that offer success and have proven effectiveness. This approach focuses on the task at hand. This way allows for the decisiveness and flexibility to quickly move from one thing to the next.</p>

Communication	
Women	Men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long conversation to explore solutions • Asks (many) questions to understand and connect • Gives advice indirectly • Relationship-oriented RAPPORT talk • Conversations are bonding events (shared experiences) • Uses and reacts more to non-verbal cues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on facts and proven success • Direct and short answers because the answer is already known • Gives advice directly • Task-oriented REPORT talk • Conversations are negotiations for status (action and storytelling) • Uses and reacts less to non-verbal cues

- We Have Unique Internal Challenges

At any given moment most women are navigating the spaghetti noodle of a particular relationship or issue while also considering the connection it has to every other possible relationship, experience, issue, reality, and even stereotype that may be connected to it.

Since everything is connected and everything relates, everything has impact and carries weight. This gives a lot of room for pause, self doubt, and hesitation in the heart of a woman.

Women also deal with a cultural expectation that they be perfect. Perfect wife, mother, sister, friend, colleague, cook, home decorator, and church member.

Because their minds are connected to everything, they are painfully aware that they are everything BUT perfect. And so, they either shy away from responsibility or unrealistically overcompensate, often without boundaries, simply because they are so excited to be included.

Men are less relational and more hierarchical.

In a conversation, either one-up or one-down; trying to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can; protect themselves from attempts to put them down and push them around; life is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure

Independence is key - a primary means of status is to tell others what to do, and taking orders is a marker of low status

Society recognizes what is wrong with men, but offers nothing to help. What does it mean to be a man? Either traditional masculinity - marked by stoicism, competitiveness, dominance, and aggression. On the whole, harmful, toxic masculinity OR the response: pursue and indulge escapism - beer, bacon, blowing stuff up

- Seek to Understand

Stay Aware-Learn about the different styles of communication used by men and women. The more you can recognize differences and adapt your style of communication to someone else's the more you're loving one another as Christ loved us.

Stay Alert-The devil is prowling around. Understand that men and women have different communication styles and don't be offended when a person of the opposite gender responds or acts in a way different from what you were expecting.

Stay Adaptable-Whether it's your genetic makeup or the environment you were raised in, many factors can dictate how you act. People may vary widely from the norms.

- Meet on Different Terms

Identify strengths that are not gender based. (Gifts vs. Gender)

StrengthFinders

Shared Experiences

Spiritual Gifts Assessments

- Study God's Word Together

Provide ample opportunity for the Holy Spirit to do His work. The goal is a godly partnership of disciples conducting ministry. Study together. Hear the differing perspectives God gives in the partnership.

YOUR TURN: What benefits do you see the opposite gender bringing to the way you do things?

D. What You Can Do to Avoid Pitfalls that Lead to Miscommunication

1. Lean into Clear Communication

Consider public representation of women in the fabric of the church E.g. Making announcements, Program or Event contact person, Use Biblical examples of women in preaching and studies. Reason: helps make it comfortable, girls should see godly examples in church (Miriam leading singing)

Full volunteer / hire job descriptions. Clearly communicate so people don't shy away or overcommit

Actively pursue women through direct conversation, don't be surprised if they are hesitant, remember they know everything on their plate and will always feel inadequate, conversation will help reveal some of that and open up pathways to solutions.

Have and hold expectations for women in service. Communicate: I see leadership in you. And specifically detail what it is OR help guide if they need redirection. The same is true for young people.

Say thank you.

In WELS ministry specifically, women are coming into a male structured environment. That doesn't mean it's wrong. It does mean the onus is on you to take the temperature of the room and be discerning in your reactions and interactions. ie:

- bounce back from sarcasm,
- be mindful your questions sound like challenges and can shut down communication
- sometimes you have to move on, not EVERYTHING is important

Be clear about what you need or can do. You might need to take the time to distill it down and make it clear, but men aren't going to try and put themselves in your shoes or see it as a priority if you don't communicate that.

If these are your people, great. But they might not be your people. Don't compromise good ministry work for an expectation of relationships.

Create a team covenant for a ministry team. Be clear about expectations, assumptions, and goals.

2. Integrate Leadership Training with Spiritual Growth

Leadership pipeline / Leadership training: for men and women.

- Regular in Bible class and worship;
- Provide easy opportunities for service that give some leadership as well to grow leaders in your congregation
- Talk about and provide ways for men and women to grow in godly servant-like leadership. It will look different. That's okay.

-Women have less opportunity for leadership training (or mentoring) even if they go to every Bible study available. Consider the natural mentoring that might happen because a pastor is a man, what can intentionally be done to provide training and mentoring for women.

3. Pair Gift Identification and Serving Opportunities

What are their gifts? How do they serve? Don't fill in a blank or an empty spot, but match the gifts with a position that fits.

4. Be/Find an "Other"

For both men and women, young and old. We grow in the context of healthy, supportive relationship. We need "other" people in our lives. They are the ones who've "got our back", encourage us, give us tough love, and act as a sounding board.

- **Male Mentor**

Focus is leadership development, advice, and navigate the "unwritten rules"

Bring back to the center and help ground in Christ

Model, give feedback, provide resources, development-oriented conversations

Relationship built on trust, honest, even if it hurts

- **Male Sponsor**

Focus is action

Open up doors, advocates for opportunities, connects with opportunities, and provides cover when you hit a roadblock or make a mistake.

Mentors give. Sponsors invest.

- **Female Coach**

Someone who gets it. They say, "Here's what's going on, now get back in the game."

	Male Mentor	Male Sponsor	Female Coach
Synod	Pastor Advisors	Adult Discipleship	WELS Women's Ministry
Congregation	Council of Ministry or Mission Action Team Member	Called Workers	Mission Action Team Member, Member, Connection Call

5. Consider your "people practices"

Bathroom breaks, flexible meeting times and places, appropriate development opportunities

YOUR TURN: Questions

E. Next steps

Understand change is hard. Transition is like walking a bridge of 5 chairs with the middle one replaced with an exercise ball. With a focus on God's design and help from one another, we can navigate the bridge to change.

Chair 1: SETTLED (stable chair) normal, familiar, home

Chair 2: UNSETTLED (wobbly chair) excited, nervous, uneasiness

Chair 3: CHAOS (exercise ball) - panicked - help me; chaos; i can't manage this, it is to hard; fearful, anxiety, don't even know what to hang on to

Chair 4: RESETTLED (wobbly chair)- feels good, but doesn't feel like home (like normal)

Chair 5: NEW NORMALI (stable chair) settled again in a new normal, in a new place

(Re)Sources

Rethinking Congregational Governance - Jay Zahn and Hailey Meier

Heirs Together-Rich Gurgel, Kathie Wendland

Spiritual Gifts Assessment-Vallesky

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Better Together-Danielle Strickland

The 5 Male Instincts-Chase Replogle

[With Gen Z, Women Are No Longer More Religious Than Men](#)

[Behind the Steep Decline in Church Attendance Among Women](#)

[GI Joe -Now I Know and Knowing is Half the Battle](#)

[The Transition Bridge](#)

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