

Appointing Helen Bell to the Pastoral Team

Session is seeking to fulfill our church's long held desire to appoint a suitably qualified woman to the Staff Ministry Team by appointing Helen Bell to the role of Training Pastor. Set out below is:

1. A brief introduction to our understanding of and commitment to the ministry of women and men in the work of the gospel
2. The role to which we wish to appoint Helen
3. Our reasons for wanting to appoint Helen
4. FAQ's addressing concerns the appointment may raise
5. The process from this point.

1. An introduction to our understanding of and commitment to the ministry of woman and men in the work of the gospel.

Those of you with long memories will know that the Winter Teaching Series in 2021 was devoted to looking at both the Scriptural foundation and the good of the complementarian understanding of the relationship of women and men, the view that "while we believe that women and men are both made in the image of God and are equal in being, status and value from the beginning, and women and men are equally saved by grace, children of God, co-heirs of eternal life we also believe that women and men, the one humanity, are different in ways that complement each other, and taught by Scripture those differences find appropriate expression in the ways we organise and structure our church life and in the ways husbands and wives relate in marriage."

It was also observed in that series that while we can be convinced that complementarianism is the teaching of Scripture and that we should seek to have a genuinely complementarian pattern of ministry – one that expresses the reality that we need both women and men to exercise their distinctive gifts in ministry together for God made men and women to complement each other in all of life, we can be uncertain about how that conviction finds expression in the life of our own local church. This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that those who share the same conviction can have different practices which are often affected by the history of their church, the form of church government they practice, and the denomination they belong to.

To give clarity to the way we see our complementarian conviction is expressed in our church Andy May prepared the following helpful paper for Session at the beginning of 2023. For the exegesis of the biblical passages that underly this paper, I encourage you to refer to the 2021 Winter Teaching Series, or to the following helpful books.

Claire Smith God's Good Design Matthias Media 2012

Kevin De Young Men and Women in the Church Crossway 2021

Sharon James God's Design for Women Rev. EPBooks, 2010

Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher Embracing Complementarianism The Good Book Company 2022

Ed. Kostenberger, Schreiner and Baldwin Women in the Church. A Fresh analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Baker 1995

Complementarianism at Bundoora Presbyterian Church (BPC) (Andy May Jan 2023)

We hold to God's infallible word as the means of determining the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the church and in marriage. Our position is not determined by pragmatism or culture although no doubt will be affected by culture in its practice.

We believe that God made people in His image - male and female (Gen 1:26,27). Men and women have inherent and equal worth and dignity in God's eyes. This is true in marriage where husband and wife are one flesh (Gen 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). This is also true in the church where our common identity as one in Christ means that there is no unhelpful division in dignity and worth between men and women (Gal 3:26-28).

We believe that although equal in dignity and worth, God has made two distinct genders with different roles and responsibilities in church and in marriage. In settled congregational life, we affirm orderly worship (1 Cor 14:34-35) where women are not to teach or to have authority over men (1 Ti 2:11-15). In marriage we affirm that husbands should exercise Christ-like headship in sacrificial love and not harshness and women should submit to and respect their husbands as fitting to the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 5:21-33, Colossians 3:18,19).

We affirm that men and women should be actively involved in the life and ministry of the gospel. Jesus appointed twelve men as apostles but there were many women involved and supporting his wider ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Paul worked with Timothy who appointed male elders (1 Tim 3:1-7) but Paul also had many co-workers who were women (Rom 16).

We grieve the sinfulness of men and women and sin's ongoing consequences on relationships between people and between people and God (Genesis 3). We acknowledge that all men and women are sinful and have fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:22,23).

We affirm the need of sinful men and women to receive Christ as Lord and Saviour. Jesus ministered to men, women and children during his earthly ministry and died as a substitutionary sacrifice for men and women alike (Heb 9:26-28). Men and women need to express their need for Jesus as Lord and Saviour through repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins (Romans 10:9-11).

We denounce interpretations of Scripture that are used to justify sinful behaviour expressed in forms of abuse in marriage, family and church life. This abuse may be spiritual, sexual, emotional, financial, verbal or physical. Coercive, controlling and manipulative behaviour does not reflect Christ in anyway and does not lead to human flourishing.

In Christ, there are to be no dividing walls of hostility for any reason including race, age, gender and demographic background (Eph 2:11-22; Gal 3:26-29; Col 3:11). Rather, men and women are included in God's household, given the Spirit of God and gifted by the grace of Christ (Eph 4:7-13) for the ongoing work of building up the body of Christ in love as each part does its work.

At BPC, Complementarianism outworks in the following way:

Restrictions

- Eldership and the public preaching on Sundays is restricted to suitable and godly men based on our understanding of 1 Timothy 2,3
- Male Growth Groups are led by men and female Growth Groups are led by women

Encouragements

Where suitably qualified in life, doctrine and gifting we encourage men and women:

- To lead Sunday Services
- To lead prayers
- To lead public praise in singing
- To read the bible publicly
- To serve as Deacons or members of the Board of Management
- To lead mixed Growth Groups together
- To teach Sunday school
- To be Youth Group leaders
- To be trained for gospel ministry including youthMETRO and METRO apprenticeships

- To be trained for full-time ministry of God's word in Australia or overseas
- To be engaged in personal or small group evangelism
- To do pastoral visitation in wise and appropriate ways

Where possible, we encourage most of our ministry to be done by men and women in complementary ways. This means that most of our meetings will be conducted in mixed gender groups. We acknowledge that there may be appropriate need for single gender groups for specific purposes or limited times. For example, but not limited to:

- Single gender Growth Groups for women or men who cannot join a growth group with their spouse due to child care.
- Bundy Women's Conference to help women connect with women across the church
- Men's Evangelism events in reaching men

In households we exhort men and women to take responsibility for personal godliness in marriage and parenting. But we acknowledge that with greater authority there is greater responsibility. Husbands take on greater accountability for the use of their God-given authority in Christlike ways. Fathers also bear the responsibility of their God-given authority to instruct their children in the Lord and not exasperate them (Ephesians 6:4)

In God's household, men who are appointed as elders also bear greater responsibility for their responsibility in teaching God's word (James 3:1). Elders should not use their God-give authority for selfish gain but as Christ-like Shepherds who promote the well-being of God's flock under their care (1 Peter 5:1-4).

We believe that there are appropriate times outside of the Sunday gatherings for a woman to be teaching God's word to men in specific situations. We see this in Scripture where both Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos God's word (Acts 18:26). We believe that these situations are not the same as the public preaching of God's word in settled congregational life and are therefore permitted and even encouraged. For example:

- An older woman preparing a young couple for marriage can teach the young man in that couple
- A female youth leader can partner with male leaders in teaching younger male youth in a mixed youth group
- A DVD study used by a Growth Group might have a woman gifted in Evangelism teaching men and women how to evangelise better.

2. The role to which we wish to appoint Helen: the job description.

Proposed title for this role: Training Pastor

1. Training – Evangelism, Growth Groups – doing, supervising, expanding. Training female Metro trainees
In relation to this training role attending the morning services 1x a month
2. Co-ordinating a meeting of women's ministry leaders, encouraging the leaders and helping them to continue to grow and develop, as believers and in their service. Providing guidance for those who want to pursue further training or theological study.
3. Pastoral support in the 5:00 pm congregation alongside the senior pastor.

Service leading and Prayer

Training of service participants

Helping Organise the follow up and discipling of new believers

4. Attend Session monthly by invitation – contributing both to the discussion and to an understanding of the reception of Session’s decisions in the congregation.
5. Participation in preparation of devotions and writing Growth group material for one or two terms in sync with the preaching program;
6. Preaching – contexts to preach to women including Friday Women’s Growth Groups, Women’s conference and new opportunities that might arise within the church and denomination.
7. Full participation in the weekly pastors and staff meetings
8. Occasional speaking at larger interdenominational and AFES events, in consultation with senior pastor

3. Our reasons for wanting to appoint Helen

Firstly, it has been Session’s long standing desire, and the congregation’s long standing desire, to have a trained woman on the ministry team. We have wanted our commitment to the complementarian understanding of the relationship between women and men to be evident at every level for Scripture teaches us we need each other. We have also wanted to encourage suitably gifted women to train in the skills needed to teach God’s word and promote the gospel in our society and showing that such training can lead to full time opportunities for service in congregations as well as in parachurch organizations like AFES is an important aspect to that encouragement.

Secondly, we have a need, especially in training and the co-ordination and support of our women leaders. Clinton and Andy have been doing these things, but they are never the focus of their work and it would benefit from someone who can focus on these two areas, especially after the disruption to our training through Covid. This will free up Clinton and Andy for preaching and pastoring.

Thirdly, Helen’s character. Helen is a godly and wise person, who has shown that she is able to work well on a team of men and women. She has a love of the lost and has persevered over many years in seeking to bring them to know the Lord Jesus through the gospel.

Fourthly, Helen’s gifts, skills and abilities. Helen is intellectually able, theologically well trained, and has had years of experience in student ministry training people in small group leading and evangelism. She has also over the years been involved in the training of many ministry apprentices.

Many of us have known Helen for years, and many have benefitted from her ministry during her time at La Trobe. Though it may embarrass her to read what is written above, we know it is true and have had the opportunity to see her gifts and character mature over the years. She knows us, and Andy and Clinton in particular know Helen well and recognise that her gifts complement theirs.

4. FAQ’s addressing concerns the appointment may raise.

The job description and the appointment may raise a range of concerns for some, and we have tried to anticipate them and answer them below. The senior minister will also preach on the relationship of men and women in the work of the gospel on March 10th and 17th and there will be a question time after the evening service on the 17th. The elders are also available to answer questions and would welcome conversations about Helen’s appointment if you have concerns.

- A) Why call this role the ‘Training Pastor’? Aren’t the elders, and especially the teaching elders, pastors [Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 5:2]? Doesn’t the title ‘pastor’ suggest some overturning of the biblical order?

We are not particularly wedded to the title, but let me tell you firstly how we landed on the title. We want to communicate that Helen is a full and equal member of the ministry team with significant responsibility and generally speaking those on the team are called pastors e.g. youth pastor, children's pastor. It is a secondary use dependent on the expansion of ministry teams beyond elders. We did think about other possible titles but none commended themselves:

'Minister'. On the one hand in the bible the word which lies behind 'minister', diakonos or doulos – both meaning servant or slave, someone who ministers [serves] to others, is the most widespread word for those in gospel ministry and serving churches. But in our system 'minister' is reserved in the code for ordained minister, and this would be even more confusing.

Co-ordinator. This sounded too administrative and did not reflect the equality and responsibility involved in the role.

Worker or co-worker. If we called all those on the ministry team 'worker' or co-worker than it might work, but as we don't it does not again convey the full and equal membership of the ministry team that we want conveyed.

As I was reflecting on this I realised that if we had called Helen 'Woman's Pastor' nobody would probably have difficulties with the word 'pastor' in the title. It is the suggestion in the Title "training pastor" that Helen will be involved in training men that makes the 'pastor' difficult for some. I will comment on that below, but we should note that Helen will be involved in teaching and supporting women [paragraphs 2 and 6] of the job description, activity that is genuinely pastoral.

We don't want anyone to stumble at a title. If you can think of a better one that communicates being a full and equal member of the ministry team, let me know.

B. We realise that the job description may raise some questions about faithfulness to the instruction in 1 Timothy 2:13 where Paul writes "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man".

This concern I think relates to paragraphs 1 [training of growth group leaders] and 4 [attending Session by invitation] of the job description. Let me make some observations about the role and some observations about Scripture's teaching.

Some observations about the role:

I [Neil] do distinguish training from the authoritative congregational teaching that goes on week by week in our mixed gatherings and which is done by the elders [or, occasionally suitable people who are either training for or contemplating the ministry of the word]. Training involves gaining skills and while always to be founded upon and informed by the Word it is not the exposition and application of the Word in the congregation. Hopefully all those who participate will learn from the training, but not all we learn from is teaching in the sense of 1 Timothy 2.

Let me use service leading as an analogy. What our service leaders do and say must always be founded upon and informed by God's word. And hopefully we are always informed and encouraged by what they say, as everything in the service should edify [1 Cor. 14:26], and we can learn from what the service leader says and does, just as we can learn from and be encouraged by our songs and prayers. But it is not the teaching of the word, and in our services that is clear. The Bible is not opened up and systematically expounded and applied with authority to our lives.

Further, training is not compulsory, while for believers attendance at the gathering of believers Sunday by Sunday is commanded [Heb. 10:24-25]. Those who have concerns need not attend and where necessary accommodation can be made.

And finally, like all the ministry team who are not on Session, all that is done is under the authority of Session and accountable to Session through the Senior Minister. This is not the case with teaching in our gatherings. The preacher who is not a member of Presbytery is accountable to the Presbytery through the senior minister, who is himself accountable to Presbytery for what he teaches. There are significant differences between what goes on Sunday by Sunday and training in evangelism and small group leader training, and the distinctions should not be dismissed.

Some observations about the Scriptures.

I have, as said at the beginning, expounded the Scriptures at length in the Winter Teaching Series, but in relation to Helen or any other woman running training for both men and women the issue is the application of Scripture, of what it means today to honour Scripture's teaching about both the participation of and the manner of participation of women and men in our gathering. I do think that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is talking about behaviour in the mixed gathering of believers, with its instruction about prayer and dress and the way women learn. That means that any application outside the gathering of 1 Timothy 2:12 is an extension of the principles behind Paul's instruction for a woman not to teach or to exercise authority over a man in the public meeting of the church, which is then supported by the instructions about who to choose for overseers.

That application plainly does not enjoin complete silence in the gathering, for women can pray and prophesy. Nor does it stop women teaching men in conversation, for we are taught to 'teach and admonish one another' [Col. 3:16], and there seems no gender boundaries on that instruction. What the New Testament does teach [1 Cor. 11:2-16] is that in those interactions we should be respectful of our own and others relation to their husbands or wives, conduct ourselves in ways that support the order of our homes and churches.

As well as this it is quite plain that women are equal partners in the work of the gospel. They are witnesses to the resurrection, mentioned by name so their testimony could be consulted. They are present in the upper room and amongst those on whom the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost [Joel 2 specifically included men and women]. They host prayer meetings and churches, are active in acts of mercy, are entrusted with important communications by the apostle [Romans 16:1-2]. Priscilla is a partner to Aquila in running the church in their home and in instructing Apollos more fully in gospel truth [Acts 18:26], Euodia and Syntyche are called fellow workers [Phil. 4:2-3], and Junia is said to be of not, of good reputation, amongst the apostles [Rom. 16:7]. None of this is prescriptive, but it is descriptive of a lively partnership in the gospel. We should welcome that partnership and promote it in our own context, and not seek to set limits to it that Scripture does not set.

And while women should not be elders and teach in our regular gathering of the whole congregation men should be able to learn from women. Men should listen, for example, to the women's testimony to the resurrection. Aquila learnt from Priscilla as well as Aquila. Joab from the wise woman of Abel [2 Sam. 20:16-22]. Wisdom itself is portrayed as a woman, and wisdom embodied is found in the noble wife 'who opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.'

We live in a different social context to the first century. We need to be thoughtful in the application of Scripture, and such an application should lead to the flourishing of the ministry of women and men, and our ability to learn from the wisdom and experience of all, women and men. Having Helen run the training for the congregation would seem to be a good application of Scripture and an encouragement to the ministry of all.

And Helen's presence at Session meetings does not mean she is an elder. It just means that Session recognizes it could do with help, the kind of help Helen can give as a wise and godly woman whose position will bring her into contact with many people in the congregation.

C. A concern that Helen's role does not focus on pastoral support of women in the congregation, and a related concern that this might leave Andy and Clinton with an unsustainable pastoral burden.

Helen's role does not focus on pastoral support of women, but it does focus on the support of women leaders in the congregation and this we are convinced will strengthen the pastoral care of all women in the congregation. Most of our pastoral care is comes through the love and encouragement we show each other, and this is the way it should be. The 'one anothers' are the heart of our life together. Supporting the women of the congregation in continuing to show love to one another and training them to do this more effectively will only decrease, not increase, the other pastor's work load. And while it the pastoral care of the women in the congregation is not the focus of Helen's work there is no doubt that she will do some, particularly in the 5:00 pm congregation.

Helen's appointment will bring a net increase in pastoral care, not a decrease.

D. A concern about the financial cost of Helen's appointment, especially the impact it may have on the search for a new senior Pastor.

We can pay for Helen's appointment in the short term. It is my intention to decrease to two days a week when Helen commences, which should increase my longevity while the search for the new senior pastor continues. We are also hopeful that some of you who have been supporting Helen's work with AFES will prayerfully consider transferring that giving to the congregation so that the appointment has ongoing support. We have already been offered a gift to make appointing Helen easier, a donation that will decrease over three years.

Session does want the search for a senior Pastor to continue uninterrupted. Helen's is not a substitute appointment but a needed appointment. Session are proposing it because we need the help Helen can give and her appointment will strengthen the work of the congregation. But we also need a senior pastor. The senior pastor can come from within the congregation [Clinton] or from outside the congregation, but that decision can only be made with confidence if the selection committee continues its work. If Clinton is called to the role it is Session's view that we will still need a third congregational pastor, returning to the situation when Chris was here of four trained people ministering to the congregations.

It will be up to the congregation then to decide whether they are willing to make that possible through their giving. But giving to sustain the ministry of the congregation is giving to the work of the gospel, and we should be ambitious to store up treasure in heaven.

5. The process from this point.

With this paper we have now circulated to you the job description and Session's reasons for seeking to appoint Helen to the role of Training Pastor.

Session, at its March meeting, will move formally to support the minister's application at Presbytery to appoint Helen.

The Senior Minister will preach on the work of men and women in the gospel on the 10th and 17th March at all services, Lord willing, and we will have a question time after the evening service on the 17th.

Board will incorporate the arrangements for Helen's appointment into the Budget and will seek its approval by the congregation at the Annual Congregational Meeting, which looks like being on Monday 8th April.

I would encourage you that if, after reading this paper, you have any questions or concerns, to get in touch with the pastors or elders and talk with us. We want to move together in this, and we don't want there to be any cause for stumbling for anyone's faith or thankful participation in the life of the congregation in this appointment.

Conclusion

We are very grateful to God that Helen, with her experience, gifts and character, is willing to join the ministry team. Her appointment will supply help in areas that need help and fill in what has been a gap in the encouragement of gospel ministry amongst the women in the congregation. We think it will more fully model a complementarian understanding of the relationship of men and women in life and ministry, where we can welcome with thankfulness the gifts God gives us in each other, including in the distinctive contributions of men and women. We hope you will enthusiastically support her appointment by your prayers, giving and words.