

## **Nominations Open for New Elders and Deacons for Arlington Church of Christ; Its Existing Elders Detail Their Conclusions about Women's Voices in Worship Services**

Today, **September 19, 2021**, the Elders announce two important opportunities. First, we open nominations for new elders and deacons for this congregation. Second, in this congregation's worship services, individual women will no longer be prohibited from certain forms of speech. We will implement these decisions over the next few months.

The Elders conducted a three-month Bible study of the Pastoral Epistles during June through August 2021. This study covered what 1-2 Timothy and Titus teach about congregational leadership and women's participation in study and worship. On April 11, 2021, when we announced that we would conduct this study, we also said that soon after its completion, we would open nominations for new congregational leaders.

Today we fulfill that promise by making available a nomination form for new elders and deacons. We encourage you to complete the on-line form [here](#). Alternately, paper copies of the form are available on the table at the back of this auditorium. Forms completed electronically will automatically be submitted to the congregation's existing Elders. If you prefer to complete a form on paper, you must place it in the green box labeled "New Leader Nominations" at the rear or of the auditorium or hand it to Stuart Platt or Lloyd Randolph. The deadline for completion of these forms is October 17, 2021, four weeks from today. We hope to install new congregational leaders early in 2022. After new deacons are appointed, we will retain our existing structure of ministry groups headed by ministry coordinators.

Now for a brief explanation of the Elders' decision that individual women should be allowed to speak in some ways in worship assemblies. The Elders reached this conclusion on Sunday, September 12, after a lengthy period of prayer, extensive study and very broad consultation with persons in the congregation. For months, the Elders and others in the congregation have been praying fervently about this issue. The Elder-led study included more than three hours of detailed Biblical instruction and questions and answers on whether individual women's voices should be allowed in worship assemblies. Thirty-seven persons participated live in one or both of these classes. The Elders taught these classes in English and encouraged Spanish-speaking participation - by teaching at a time that Spanish-speakers said was convenient to them, and by providing contemporaneously generated Spanish subtitles in the classes. The video recordings of two these classes posted on the congregation's website have been viewed more than 40 times. The website also contains other material on the subject, including a detailed annotated bibliography with numerous hyperlinks.

The Elders' study of this subject tentatively concluded that Scripture permits individual women to sing and speak in worship assemblies, provided they do so without

- i. Presuming to teach authoritatively,
- ii. Disrupting worship, or
- iii. Dishonoring their husbands

Specifically, the Elders concluded that when dressed modestly, women may:

- a. Make announcements
- b. Direct or assist in leading congregational singing
- c. Read scripture and
- d. Pray aloud

The Elders made clear that these conclusions are consistent with the principles that

1. Each husband is the head of his own wife
2. A congregation's Elders should be male and
3. A congregation's Elders provide its authoritative teaching

The Elder-led classes explained that passages considered by some to bar women from speaking in worship addressed contexts in which women disrupted worship with their speech and perhaps also dishonored their husbands. These classes also explained that the passage sometimes construed to prohibit women from teaching men barred teaching only by women who, like Eve, had been misled and so lacked the knowledge or character to teach. These context-specific prohibitions do not negate New Testament examples of well-qualified women's teaching men or speaking in worship while dressed modestly by the cultural standards of their time.

After completing these classes, the Elders listened extensively to congregational feedback on their tentative conclusions. We sought feedback from everyone in the congregation. We received feedback from 55 persons, mostly in a series of seven discussion groups over a meal. In August and September, 43 congregants participated in seven face-to-face Elder-hosted discussion sessions. The Elders encouraged every other congregant to participate in such discussion sessions and would have hosted more of them if congregants had expressed a willingness to participate. Twelve more persons provided written or oral feedback on the Elders' tentative conclusions.

After prayerfully considering all of this input, the Elders have decided that their tentative conclusions were correct. A growing body of scholarship within Churches of Christ supports the conclusion they reached, as evidenced by the annotated bibliography. Congregations around the nation are changing their practices to reflect this scholarship. Moreover, feedback provided to the Elders in the last month suggests that most congregants favor allowing individual women's voices in worship assemblies in the limited ways the Elders have outlined. Specifically, 76 percent of the English-speaking respondents agree with allowing women's individual voices to the extent identified in the Elders' study. Most respondents from the remaining portion from the English "campus" recognize that their objections are based not on Scripture but on their experiences and the traditions underlying them. By contrast, most Spanish-speaking respondents oppose allowing women's voices in worship.

In light of these divergent opinions, the Elders expect their decision to allow women's speech will be implemented gradually. Some congregants differ on what forms of female vocalization, if any, are problematic. For example, Spanish-speakers have long allowed women to make announcements in face-to-face worship, provided they do not make announcements from the pulpit. In English-speaking worship assemblies over the last 18 months, individual women have spoken, including by seeking prayers in blended live/Zoom worship assemblies, and in Zoom assemblies, by reading scripture or offering scripted prayers. To accommodate to the extent practicable these divergent views and experiences, we will implement our decision incrementally, and at a different pace in the English- and Spanish-speaking worship assemblies. The Elders will monitor implementation of their decision and consult frequently in coming weeks with those planning worship assemblies to achieve it with sensitivity to variations in participants' experiences.

The Elders express their thanks to those who joined them in prayer, participated in the studies and provided follow-up input on the question of women's individual voices. The Elders also express their gratitude for those who will promptly submit nominations for new elders and deacons.