

The Blackley Declaration - January 2007

Recognising our call as God's people to be a witness to God's Kingdom that has both come in Jesus and is still to come in its fullness, we call our churches to further reflection and action on the place of women within the leadership of church life, and especially in what is commonly called 'the ministry'.

We are grateful for all who have led us on this matter in past and present generations, but we remain troubled that having been one of the first denominations to recognise the ordained ministry of women, there is still such a low percentage of women on the BUGB Accredited List of Baptist Ministers.

Whilst there is no formal bar on women's calling as Baptist ministers being recognised within our churches, we believe that the slow rate of change in our actual practice shows that there is cultural resistance.

As a people who take seriously the authority of the Bible, we believe this situation exists because we have an inadequate way of understanding and interpreting those Scriptures that are commonly seen as being directly relevant on this matter. We call on our fellow ministers and church leaderships to re-engage with Scripture and with one another, listening carefully to what each has to say.

We must further examine the cultures of which we are a part to be more alert to the sexism we believe exists amongst us. We believe such sexism is part of our fallen nature, from which Christ came to deliver us, and that we are called to repent and behave differently in Christ's Kingdom.

We challenge the attitude that regards this as an issue of relative unimportance in being witnesses to the Gospel. The first calling of God's Church in mission is always to be a community that bears witness to the truth of God's Kingdom in the way it lives, demonstrating that the world is worldly, and that there is an alternative way. We believe that currently in this matter our lived witness points the opposite way to the vision, values and habits of Kingdom life. Further we believe that society can find good reason not to listen to us on other matters if our manner of life is so permeated by cultural sin in this respect. We therefore believe that our lack of attention and unchanging practice in this area is symptomatic of our failure to be a beacon of the hope of the Kingdom in our society.

Therefore we call for the churches of our denomination to give sustained attention to how we understand and live out the Scriptures and the gospel, watching over one another until we see significant movement that indicates a change in the way we live before a watching world.

Mainstream North Leadership Team