

Equal and Different: Men and Women in AMiE

It is hard to describe the discomfort I have felt over the years in a pew as some preachers have expounded passages concerning the role of men and women in the Church. Is this because I reject Pauline teaching, and my rebellious heart does not want to listen? While I acknowledge I continually need to examine my heart, the anxiety I feel is not about someone seeking to faithfully teach scripture but my fear that the preacher is about to over-read scripture and teach a limiting cultural perspective. It comes from experiences when the speaker has authoritatively promoted cultural stereotypes as biblical. It hurts because it alienates women (and men) from the gospel and one another. At its worst, it diminishes the potential of men and women working together for Christ's sake and damages the Church. Some will have similar concerns about AMiE because it falls into the complementarian camp, and they fear what that might mean. It is a fear I know only too well.

It is hard to describe the joy of being part of a group of church leaders committed to faithfully adhere to scripture and address the past mistakes concerning the role of men and women in the Church. It may surprise some people to know that AMiE is not formally 'complementarian'. Early on, it was noted that this term carries a lot of baggage which does not explain what AMiE stands for. AMiE is committed to men and women being both equal and different.

Our final constitution, Article 4:3 says this:

AMiE affirms the equality of men and women as created image-bearers of God and that the ministry of men and women is equally valid, valuable and necessary in God's eyes. AMiE also affirms that scripture teaches that there are proper differences in roles and responsibilities in marriage and Christian ministry. We want men and women to flourish in the Church, use their spiritual gifts, exercise leadership and have training for discipleship and ministry of the highest quality.

While rejoicing in the ministry of women, we resolve as we seek to follow scripture that only godly and gifted male candidates will be ordained Presbyters and consecrated Bishops in AMiE, in order to protect and nourish the entire body of Christ. Relationships between us matters because, in Christ, we are one.

I rejoice that in AMiE, we are working to help both men and women flourish in the Church, use their spiritual gifts, exercise leadership and have training for discipleship and ministry of the highest quality. I have been appointed as Women's Ministry Director to help in this task.

We have begun by examining what it means for men and women to work together as partners for the gospel. I have led two sessions recently to help start our thinking. The graciousness of those present reinforced to me the seriousness that our leaders have in seeking to honour one another rightly and encourage women to be engaged in ministry.

Accusations of misogyny, disregarding women and their gifts swirl around the Christian Church. In AMiE, I have met brothers who similarly grieve at unhelpful things said and done in the past and are keen to work out what healthy relating in church life looks like. Together we have considered examples of well-intentioned unkindness, e.g. refusing to give a women worker a lift home or failing to supervise a female staff member, both done to try and avoid inappropriate contact between the sexes. It is these day to day events that have had a place in some complementarian cultures and caused much hurt. We want to take 1 Timothy 5:1-2 seriously and relate well to one another as brothers and sisters. There will be many ways this will play out but at the very least it means helping your sister when she needs a lift home. It means ensuring your co-worker has the support, supervision and opportunities for development that they need. It means showing publicly on our websites and in our services that women are respected and matter. It is so good to be with faithful brothers who care about these things and who are comfortable asking the question, “what unhealthy attitudes do we need to address?”

AMiE is in many ways still in its infancy with a small number of churches and employed staff. Each Church will work through what it means to have women doing ministry. There will be different expressions. But all are concerned to reach out to women and bring all women to maturity in Christ. Some women are among the employed ministry staff, but not many. There are many women engaged in ministry, leading bible studies, creating evangelistic initiatives, pastoral care, student work, children’s and youth ministry. I am excited by the potential for future ministry among these faithful sisters and look forward to developing more formal training pathways for women in leadership.

I recently met with a student for an evangelistic bible study. She had grown up in Church but had lots of criticisms of it. She particularly disliked the phrase ‘equal but different. Her observation was that the word ‘but’ is negative and undermines women. She has a point. In AMiE, we acknowledge equality *and* difference. It’s early days, but it has been a good start.