

A provocative R.E.M. song is Losing My Religion. As an Elder at MVC for ten of the past 13 years, I have weighed the impact of Women in Ministry. This formational conversation freed me to lose my religion. For me, religion is all about me, me, me. I want convenience and cooperation from others. Viola! I'm satisfied with my self-seeking religious experience. Unfortunately, I become god-like and squeeze God out of my life. Fortunately, our triune God is more concerned with my redemption and restoration than my religion. As I read the gospels, Jesus models and teaches a come-away-and-die lifestyle, where I seek to surrender my egotistical desires. As an openhanded leader at MVC, I live out the paradox of losing my life in order to find it.

This paradox presented a challenge in 2007 and 2008, when we elders studied the topic of women in ministry and concluded with a policy statement that prohibited a female from being an elder or pastor. The past four years, we elders have interacted with the paradox anew and determined that our beloved Creator and Companion is restoring the limitations placed on females at MVC. Elders, in step with the Holy Spirit, have concluded that scripture presents leadership as a non-gender gift, where the kingdom of God seeks to advance women in leadership rather than to backwash women to some back burner, to simmer and to stew without the full aroma of Christ. The aromatic advancement of the Kingdom of God can be sweet for MVC, but mixing the ingredients of congregants' concerns and their theology has been somewhat of a strain.

As the chairman of the elder board from 2016-2018, I attempted to guide the other elders open-handedly, not manipulatively. Listening to Dr. Nystrom and reading authorities on both sides of the issue allowed all of us to weigh the evidence personally and discuss concerns collectively. At times, I sensed we elders procrastinated; however, the Holy Spirit allowed us to discover unity and to follow the By-laws:

4. Motives

Elders are not to serve in pursuit of personal agendas. An elder's primary motive is to help advance the kingdom of God through service at Monte Vista Chapel. If the same Spirit guides all the elders and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unity in the decisions they make. (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 1:27, 2:2). If there is division, all elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Elders demonstrate unity as they live out this principle.

Consequently, we studied, we prayed, and we sought God's will for folks who call Monte Vista Chapel home. Two poignant experiences transpired. First, I can describe it as a prophetic moment at one of our 2019 elder meetings. I felt as though my words of encouragement to the others to present a By-laws amendment were offered by the Holy Spirit. Second, the elder meeting when we all agreed to present a "unity in the decisions" to congregants was a sacred moment, as though literally we were on holy ground. For these kingdom advancing experiences, I am grateful. Whether or not a congregational vote modifies our current By-laws is not the issue; the issue illustrates how elders have modeled unity and now present their findings to the congregation of Monte Vista Chapel, a house of God...not a house of religion.