

Ten Ways for Men and Women Thriving in Ministry Together

How can we equip our leaders to serve and engage with someone of the opposite gender in healthy life-giving ways? If you would like to create a culture of flourishing, where men and women are working in shared leadership roles, there are some gender dynamics we should consider. The Leadership Diversity Women's Ministry is discovering some of these dynamics and would like to share them with you. We believe that knowing and practicing ways to cultivate a culture for men and women to thrive together in shared leadership helps individuals, ministries and congregations fully use the gifts of the Body of Christ.

Men and women bring gifts according to God's word, as stated in Romans 12:5-6, where the apostle Paul teaches, "So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us."

Ten Ways for Men and Women Thriving in Ministry Together is an empowering resource for individuals, partnerships and small groups.

- 1. Practice genuine curiosity and a non-judgmental stance in listening to each other.** Take into consideration in discussions and decision-making meetings, different perspectives. Listen to each other and ask non-judgmental questions to allow for more fruitful conversations. Consider a variety of experiences and levels of expertise in developing new ways of handling problems. Receive help from others in learning what you do not know is offensive to others and be a good listener. Doctors, dentists, and optometrists listen before providing care.
- 2. Recognize opportunities and challenges in pastoral care.** Remember, in some situations, it is natural to interact with the same gender, and in some cases, it is unnatural. Be mindful and make room for gender differences by accommodating the person you want to assist. Be willing, if necessary to make these decisions in advance.
- 3. Affirm use of gifts and shared leadership.** Encourage individuals to use their gifts for service in a variety of roles according to one's giftedness, calling and affirmation of the Body of Christ. Resist allowing gender to hinder the use of gifts. Experiment with shared leadership roles by discovering new ways for fruitful ministry. In what ways does your church value shared leadership? Set an example for children to see and experience men and women leading together.
- 4. Create a safe ministry environment.** Allow individuals the freedom to express their preferences in meeting with church leaders. Find out who people are most comfortable talking and sharing with. Use a shared leadership model such as a female elder and a male elder to meet with couples, families, single men and women, and a vulnerable person. Rely on each other in creating a safe ministry environment. As always, pray for wisdom in serving others.
- 5. Promote intentional ways to mutually respect one another, encourage and give supportive feedback.** Remember that together, male and female mirror the image of

God. Practice humility. Do not miss teachable moments to strengthen your ministry relationship.

6. **Speak up when you or someone is offended or hurt by someone else's behavior or words.** Be prayerful and courageous. Being silent may give the impression that doing wrong is correct. Encourage dialogue if necessary. Practice the biblical principle of letting someone know when their words or behavior were offensive. Be careful about distasteful jokes and stories. Use language like, "This is how I felt or what I thought when you ____."
7. **Commit to lifelong learning.** Good leaders have a willingness to learn and an openness to new ideas, practices, and models. Learn from your successes, failures and past fears to grow personally and relationally.
8. **Identify unconscious bias and stereotypes.** Understand the importance of identifying how some attitudes and behaviors are unintentional and deeply rooted, potentially causing harm to others. People are balancing home and career stresses, women and men. Include unconscious bias and stereotypical training for leaders and/or congregation. See a Network post titled Gender Dynamics in Church Leadership <https://network.crcna.org/leadership-development/gender-dynamics-church-leadership-shared-leadership>
9. **Practice biblical hospitality.** Learn what is biblical hospitality. Cultivate a willingness to listen and not take over or interrupt each other. Take time to learn from women about how to prepare for the first woman in a position generally held by men. Find ways to welcome, respect, and support her, including access to resources and a place at the table when decisions are made. Show genuine interest in learning from her and hearing her voice. Offer the same hospitality and privilege assumed or given to men. See the following article titled The Power of Biblical Hospitality <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2019/august/power-of-biblical-hospitality-entertainment-jesus.html>.
10. **Invest in the future of ordained and non-ordained women.** Establish mentoring relationships and support systems for emerging and mature women. Grow leaders by integrating women in new and existing roles in informal and formal leadership and ministry contexts. It is not unusual for women to be mentored by men or men to be mentored by women. All relationships must be healthy. Utilize assessments to help women become self-aware. See Pastor Church Resources <https://www.crcna.org/spe/vocational-ministry-assessments>.