**FAQs regarding the separation of Alliance Bible Fellowship from the C&MA**

**1. On what basis was the separation made?**

The immediate reason for separation is that the C&MA changed its church bylaws to erase the distinction between the consecration of women for ministry and the ordination of men. Under the revised bylaws women can now be called Pastor or Reverend and can preach in the gathered assembly of the church. They cannot become yet elders. We believe these changes are unscriptural for the following reasons.

* The terms pastor (=shepherd), elder, and overseer are used interchangeably in the New Testament (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). To apply the term “pastor” to women introduces an element of confusion into the New Testament terminology.
* The clear New Testament responsibilities of the pastor/elder/ overseer are (1) to lead the flock; (2) to guard it from false teaching and dissension; (3) and to provide authoritative teaching based on the deposit of truth left by the apostles. (See the passages referenced above.)
* In the context of those responsibilities, Scripture says, “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:11-12) This teaching authority is linked to the responsibility of the overseer (1 Timothy 3:1-5). Some have suggested that Paul’s injunction of silence was needed because some women in the assembly were being disruptive. There is no indication of that in the text, but even if it were so, his reason is not based on cultural needs but on the creation order (2:13-14). (Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul based male headship on creation, but he based his instructions regarding head coverings on what “nature” teaches, in other words, on what seemed natural in that culture.) For more on the requirement to remain quiet, see the discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 below.

**2. Why was this a big enough reason to separate from the C&MA?** Since churches are not required to have female pastors, why couldn’t we just live and let live under the big C&MA umbrella? Why was this a big enough issue to add one more to the thousands of denominations, fellowships, and associations already in existence?

* First, we were distressed that the push for the change in polity was primarily based on cultural needs and expectations rather than on a clear Scriptural mandate. It is not enough to say, “Well, people have different interpretations of Scripture, so let’s just live together.” That can be, and often is, used to whitewash serious deviations from the clear teaching of the Bible.
* Second, we see this as the top of a slippery slope. A recent review of denominations that endorse homosexual marriage and other sexual deviations noted that all of them began the downhill slide by ordaining women pastors. The connection between female ordination and homosexual marriage is not inevitable, but the two are both often defended by the “needs” and “rights” of the affected groups. We believe that the C&MA will soon permit women to become ruling elders as well as pastors.
* Third, male leadership in the church is linked to male leadership in the home (1 Timothy 3:4-5). There is a very strong cultural push in our day to eliminate all role distinctions in marriage. We believe that remaining in a denomination that allows women to be pastors sends a signal that any role distinctions between men and women ought to be dismissed.
* Fourth, we as elders were very troubled by the thought of adding one more group to the existing denominations and associations of churches. We did not separate from the C&MA lightly. Our unanimous decision to separate followed an extensive discussion in which many of us expressed heart-felt concern over this painful necessity.

**3. Why was the decision made so quickly?**

It was not made quickly. Two years ago we anticipated this change in the C&MA bylaws, so we adopted the position paper on complementarianism that is available on the church’s website. It is possible that we could have done a better job of preparing the congregation for what we knew was coming. However, Pastor Scott has made the church’s position clear in his preaching at various times.

**4. Why wasn’t the congregation included in the discussion?**

The simple answer is that this is not a congregational church. It is an elder-led church. Acts 20:28-29 tells the elders to guard the flock from the wolves. It does not tell the congregation to guard itself. Of course, the congregation is supposed to listen to its pastors with open Bibles to see whether the preaching they hear lines up with Scripture (Acts 17:10-11), but this is different from the responsibility of the elders to guard the flock. In many cases, congregational discussions only lead to further division and acrimony between opposing sides. We wished to avoid that outcome. We want everyone who is currently at ABF to feel that they are welcomed and valued even if they do not agree with the leadership on this issue.

**5. What will the new fellowship of churches look like?**

This is a work in progress, so only a few essential points have been decided.

* Pastor Scott will not be the head of a new denomination. He has no time or desire to undertake this responsibility.
* The new fellowship will not be a traditional denomination with a central office and all the machinery and staff that mark such organizations.
* As of October 2023, three former C&MA churches have been meeting to outline how they will cooperate in the areas of pastoral fellowship, accountability, missions, and ordination. When this has been finalized along with a doctrinal statement, then other interested churches will be invited to join the fellowship. Pastor Scott has heard from interested churches in 15 states. Several of them are in the process of transitioning out of the C&MA. It has been difficult because some district superintendents have moved to seize the physical property and all the financial assets of churches that are trying to leave.
* The new fellowship will probably be guided by a steering committee.

**6. How do you answer arguments that are sometimes made from Scripture to support the ordination of women?**

We can only give brief responses here. Whole books have been written on this subject. In addition to the resources listed in our complementarian paper, you might consult *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem.

* Scripture mentions a number of women who were prophets, and 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 clearly indicates that they were allowed to exercise their gift in the gathered assembly of the church.

Yes! We fully agree. Deborah, Huldah, and the wife of Isaiah are Old Testament examples. The four daughters of Philip are clear New Testament examples. However, we need to think clearly about the role of prophets in the New Testament and why women were commanded to be silent in the churches in 1 Corinthians 14:34. D. A. Carson argues “... that prophecy in the New Testament is an extraordinarily broad category, extending all the way from the product of the pagan Muse (Titus 1:12) to Old Testament canonical prophecy. In common church life, it was recognized to be Spirit-prompted utterance, but with no guarantee of divine authority in every detail, and therefore not only in need of evaluation (1 Corinthians 14:29) but necessarily inferior in authority to the deposit of truth represented by Paul (14:37-38). In certain respects, then it is perfectly proper for Paul to elevate teaching above prophecy, especially if the teaching is considered part of the non-negotiable apostolic deposit that serves in part as one of the touchstones enabling the congregation to weigh prophecies that are granted to the church, and especially if the prophecies themselves, unlike the apostolic deposit, are subject to ecclesiastical appraisal” (in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, p. 153). Therefore, when women were commanded to keep silent, only a particular kind of silence was enjoined. They were permitted to prophesy, but not to judge prophecies, which was the responsibility of the teaching elders.

* Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos at home, and Priscilla may have taken the lead in this since she is sometimes mentioned first. This is a weak straw to sustain the weight of women’s ordination to the pastorate. A discussion of doctrine at home involving a woman, her husband, and another man is not the authoritative preaching of truth to the whole church. Phoebe, the deaconess, probably carried Paul’s epistle to the Romans, and she may have clarified Paul’s meaning when asked, but that does not make her a teaching elder of the church.

**7. Women have frequently had more opportunities to teach in mixed gatherings on the mission field. Isn’t restricting them in the States a double standard?**

God uses situations that are not ideal. It is lamentable that many women missionaries are thrust into roles that might more properly belong to male colleagues. We ought to commend them for their excellent work without using them as normative patterns for women in ministry. We have an example of this in the prophetess Deborah. She properly exercised her God-given gift of prophecy, but when Barak refused to go to battle without her, he forfeited the honor that should have come to him. God used her in a role that was not properly hers. Our standard for what women should do in ministry comes from the commands of Scripture, not from our recognition of what women have done or are capable of doing, for many women are wonderfully gifted teachers.