“The Heart of the Matter”

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

—1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

As a follow-up to Gary Fling’s announcement concerning the roles of women at Church of the Saviour, David Small interviewed Ann Spooner and Marnie McCoy, who have served in leadership positions at the church. Below are excerpts:

Q: How does the announcement of women’s involvement in corporate worship impact you?
Ann: “I am encouraged by the principles outlined in the document of using the gifts to build the Body of Christ. I’m further encouraged to see the renewal of women’s participation in corporate worship. It will help me personally to see a greater visibility of women (in the service). I see it as a good first step to using the gifts of women in a more inclusive way. The downside is, now that we’ve spelled out the dos and don’ts, it will be easy for us to think problem solved. Without heart change and encouragement to use all spiritual gifts by both genders, the opportunity for lasting change will be lost.”

(The five areas of corporate-worship inclusion do not impact Ann personally, as her gifting lies in the area of exhortation, shepherding and administration.)

Marnie: “It’s wonderful for women with the gifts of serving, praying and singing.”

Although the announcement doesn’t really hit her gifting sweet spot either, she is excited to see women have the opportunity to share their gifts for God’s glory in corporate worship services. Marnie’s gifts are more in the area of administration, leadership, shepherding (encouragement), discipleship and group facilitation.

Q: Have you ever felt marginalized at Church of the Saviour?
Ann: “Within the context of the Women’s Ministry, I have been fortunate to be able to do the personal ministry I have wanted, and I have been affirmed in the use of my gifts. However, I have witnessed areas of decision-making or conflict resolution where I believe women should have been consulted for input by male leadership and were not. When that has happened, I have felt marginalized as a female member and leader in our church community. It would be helpful if male leadership would ask women questions to demonstrate ongoing interest in the ministries, struggles, dreams and accomplishments of women in our congregation. I am hopeful that the winds are changing their course here, as well. In fact, this interview is evidence of that change.”

Marnie: “I feel very similar to Ann. I have been fortunate, as well, to have served in the Women’s Ministry for a number of years in various roles, all providing me an opportunity to
grow and serve within my gifting. I agree that there has been an absence of seeking input from women on certain matters. That being said, I have had first-hand experience with the ‘winds of change’ as Ann calls it, specifically when I was asked to be part of a task force of women and elders to think through the participation of women in the corporate worship service, and now participating in this interview.”

Q: What gifts are you most interested in sharing with our congregation?
Ann: “My main gifts are exhortation, shepherding and administration. God has given me the ability to ask people a variety of questions that help them go to deeper and deeper levels of reflection and action.”

This seems to be part of her role as a professional therapist and member of the women’s leadership team where she supports, trains and strategizes with other women leaders.

“I use my gifts within the Women’s Ministry, but would like to use them humbly as part of a joint task force or leadership team of men and women. I think that people with high EQ could provide stimulation and support to those who struggle in their communication style and in conflict resolution. It is my passion to see joint task forces and leadership teams that are gift-driven as opposed to gender-driven. The church body would be richer.”

Marnie: “I find myself in a unique season of ministry. I recently stepped down as the coordinator of the Joy in the Evening women’s Bible study, a role that relied heavily on the gifts of administration and leadership. While one-on-one discipleship, encouragement and small-group facilitation were still a part of that role, I struggled to balance the responsibility of leading the whole group and the desire to minister specifically to individuals and their needs. My heart is ultimately to see people grow in their knowledge and understanding of who God is, as per Scripture, and see folks able to apply that knowledge and understanding in their daily lives... to see hearts deeply rooted in the truths of the gospel that produce real life change for God’s glory. I just finished taking the first part of the How People Change class that Dina Previti teaches, and I am praying about the next steps that God would have me take.”

Q: In what ways do you see women complementing men at our church?
Ann: “I envision men in leadership and the women’s leadership team coming together to pray and use their gifts in strategizing and determining the direction of ministries. The next level of leadership would see men and women coming together as co-laborers. They would work together in many different ministries such as adult Sunday schools, life groups and the Student Ministry. Where there are weaknesses, blind spots and even strengths in the ministry, they could be pointed out. In that way the two genders working together would be richer than apart.”

Marnie: “Two areas where I have seen men and women co-laboring well together are in the High School Ministry and Global Partners Ministry.”
If Marnie does have one struggle with the document “Findings Related to Women’s Participation in Corporate Worship” made available on November 23rd, it is the word “complementary.”

“It is such a formal, academic word, which for me does not have the hands and feet to it that a word like ‘helper’ does. I guess for me the concept that God has given to man—from his very own flesh—a helpmate, feels empowering, not demeaning, to me as a woman. I see in that word the concept of community and the need for each other—men and women in the effort of co-laboring together for the glory of God. A number of years back I had the privilege to serve on Youth Family, which was a group of men and women who served as small-group leaders, mentors and disciple-makers to Church of the Saviour’s high school students. In that ministry, one could really see the effort of co-laboring together to bring students to a greater knowledge of the gospel.

While serving on Youth Family, Marnie also led two short-term trips to the Dominican Republic at then-Youth Pastor Scott Clifton’s encouraging.

“The efforts around the COSMOS conference is another ministry where I have really seen the co-laboring together attitude—not ‘men can only do this and women can only do that’ but an attitude that we’re in this together.”

Ann: “I like the idea of being co-laborers. It gets across the idea of looking at each man and each woman in ministry as being a complete individual who becomes more effective working together than apart, rather than viewing one person as being incomplete in some way and another person as completing him or her.”

Marnie: “I recently heard male leadership defined as ‘the unique leadership of the man in the work of establishing order for human flourishing... and through Scripture we see that he is to do that through self-sacrificial love (Matt Chandler of The Village Church). I have appreciated the picture of this as seen at the annual Women’s Christmas Brunch, where the men serve as waiters during the meal. My hope is that by engaging women in the activities in the corporate worship service and by providing Biblical preaching on this topic from the pulpit in the near future, further clarifying what God’s word calls us to, that we would see flourishing within the church body. The focus of this effort should not just be about women getting to do things that we have not in the past; it should be about empowering men to God’s calling for them as well, and sacrificial love across the board.”

Q: What brought you to Church of the Saviour? What is your take on things now?
Ann: “One of the things I noticed when I first started attending Church of the Saviour was the absence of women; I didn’t see any women leaders up front in the service when I expected to see them. However, I discovered that certain key people were relational as well as Biblical. Jackson Crum was hugely supportive of women being involved in ministry during the service. He drove this! He would pull me out of the pew at the end of the service when people went down
front for prayer and he needed me to minister to someone who had come forward. It has been a very long time since this type of involvement of women in services has occurred."

Marnie: “What I saw here at Church of the Saviour was more of a Biblical picture from where I fellowshipped before. What particularly drew me here was that the men led, the men were more involved in ministry and it was not just the women doing all the work of ministry, as in my previous church. There was more of a balance. However, in recent years I have noticed a shift away from that balance. There has been more of an attitude of ‘men do this’ and ‘women, you serve over here in these select places’.”

Ann: “The climate has gone through different winds. There was some real encouragement. You saw people pulled out and pressed into action. Now it’s men can do ‘x’ and women can do ‘y’. I’d like to see Church of the Saviour become a place where both genders find freedom in the ways they serve and don’t feel driven or scripted by their gender.”

Marnie: “My hope is that we can have some open dialogue about the heart of this shift. And the ongoing dialogue won’t just be about ‘women can do this and men can do that’ but ‘Let’s dialogue about the attitudes and beliefs that dictated that shift to begin with—to keep the gospel in the forefront. This dialogue will build trust and unity. In the How People Change class, we deal with the heart (as depicted in the roots of a tree) underneath our behavioral responses (fruit on the tree). The implementation of women now participating in the five activities of corporate worship mentioned earlier are good steps (good fruit), suggesting true repentance and heart change. But I believe that our forward-looking focus needs to be not just on tactical changes, but on being sure that our heart attitudes (beliefs about God and each other) are deeply rooted in the gospel and Scripture. If the roots of those beliefs and attitudes are not rooted in the Word, those tactical changes will just become rotten apples on a tree with no life.

Q: What would you like to accomplish in our church?
Marnie: “I’d love to see this church be a safer place for people—for current members, attenders and folks from the community—to come... for it to be a place where we can be honest with our sin and struggles... a place where grace will be experienced and lives radically transformed by the power of the gospel.

Ann: “Leadership from the top down needs to model transparency, not just teach it. We need to be willing to give specific examples of struggles that we have faced and how God has brought us through them or meets us in the midst. Tom Walsh has modeled this well. In addition, we need to be honest about the level of vitality in our walk with the Lord. For example, a ministry leader might admit, ‘I do have dry spells with God.’ We will not be effective disciple-makers if we’re not first honest with ourselves about where we are spiritually.”

Q: How do you see us accomplishing our mission of glorifying God by making disciples of Jesus Christ in Wayne and beyond?
Marnie: “By really living out some of the things Ann and I just mentioned. As we as a community seek to live and minister, with self-sacrificing love for each other, it will be a powerful picture of Christ for the community of Wayne and beyond.

Ann: “I agree with Marnie. We have to accomplish it by living it. We have to be able to disciple one another. We have to know what the good news of the gospel is; if we have the vitality of the gospel in our lives, it becomes the engine that empowers us. We need to preach the gospel to ourselves daily, fully admitting our sinfulness, but also fully embracing that we are forgiven and lavishly loved by God, who designed us and wants us to act as his adopted children who have all the ‘riches of his inheritance’ as we follow him. We have been made in his image and this is a good thing to celebrate, even though we continue to do what we don’t want to do. If we truly embrace all of these truths, we will live transparently, confidently and even joyfully, no matter our circumstances. By God’s grace, then people in Wayne and beyond will notice something that is intriguing and inviting about us at Church of the Saviour.”

Editor’s note: We appreciate Ann’s and Marnie’s willingness to be honest and transparent, as they have taken a bold step in being interviewed for this article. Please pray for our church to continue having an honest dialogue on how we can all work together to build God’s kingdom.