

A Note From John about Flourish..... October 2009

I believe *Flourish* was a unique conference for at least two reasons. First, as far as I know, there has never been a national conference on women's ministry for the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Second, this was a conference on women's ministry which included men and women.

You probably know at least something of the history of women's ministry in the PCA. The discussion has been dominated by the debate about women's ordination. That debate has had two effects. On the one hand, some women, even those who supported the decision to end women's ordination, have felt that there has been little encouragement for them to contribute to the life of the church beyond very traditional ways. Others, specially office bearers, have been nervous that an emphasis on finding ways for women to serve might, in the long term, create an expectation for a return to women's ordination. So there seems to have been a lack of effort and innovation in encouraging women in the PCA to use their gifts as part of the church's ministry. (Of course there have been exceptions to this and my comments here are not to disparage those exceptions.)

The 2007 General Assembly of Australia gave our committee the task of helping the church implement a report which an earlier form of the committee had presented to that Assembly. That report, *A Partnership for God's Glory*, concluded that women feel respected, valued, confident, and enthusiastic about serving the Lord in the church, when they are being:

1. taught about spiritual gifts and using them for God's service,
2. affirmed as partners in roles by the leaders in their church,
3. recognised for their gifts, abilities and strengths,
4. provided with opportunities and given encouragement to use their gifts,
5. provided with resources to equip themselves for service to the Lord and
6. given a voice in decision making in the church.

The report recognised that the PCA at the level of the General Assembly had sought to provide this and that effort was reflected in the congregations. However it also indicated that further work was required at all levels of the church. The Assembly seemed to agree since it sent a copy of *A Partnership for God's Glory* to all state assemblies, presbyteries and sessions and encouraged them to implement the report. It also asked our committee to "to oversee and further

investigate implications and implementations” of the report. *Flourish* arose from the deliberations of our committee. It was the major initiative that we have taken to help the church continue to develop women’s ministry.

Our aims were partly stimulate discussion about how the church should live out the biblical vision of the Christian life and church in complementarian partnership, to equip women for service and to develop and identify resources which help us do that. We also hope that the conference would develop good connections between people in the various states who have the same goals for women’s ministry. We also expect that things that those who attended tell us in the evaluation will become part of our report to the next GAA in September 2010.

Our prayer for you is Paul’s prayer in Philippians 1:9-11, “that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.” We realise there were many people who did not attend the conference but we invite you to have your say as we value your say about Women’s Ministry in Australia.

John McClean (Convener, NSW) for the GAA Committee on Women’s Ministries

Ngaire Moore (NSW),

Cecelia Orford (QLD),

Andrea Pryde (QLD),

Mairi Girgis (VIC),

Gillian Gilchrist (NSW, conference organiser).