

Roles and Responsibilities of Grace Downtown's Women's Leadership Council

Role 1. Leadership and Vision

- Advise, assist, and support the Session by representing the unique perspectives of women at Grace Downtown
 - Such advisement is necessary for the flourishing of Grace Downtown.
 - The WLC recognizes that even as it serves as a formalized resource to the Session, it remains one of several channels by which women in our church can communicate with the Session.
- Communicate to the Session issues, concerns, thoughts, and experiences of women at Grace Downtown.
 - Such points of discussion may originate from members of the WLC or other women at Grace Downtown, as expressed to members of the WLC
 - Other points of discussion may be originated by the Session and posed to the WLC regarding strategy, vision, or leadership issues at Grace Downtown

Why leadership and vision?

From the outset of the WLC and in recent meetings, the elders of Grace Downtown reiterated a desire that the WLC provide input to the Session regarding the strategic areas of leadership and vision. Such input, as communicated to us by the Session, helps the elders to shepherd all members and attendees of Grace Downtown –both men and women–while recognizing that all-male eldership benefits from input outside of the session to represent the unique perspectives of women in the congregation.

How has the WLC been fulfilling this role?

The WLC has been engaged in leadership and vision in partnering with the Session throughout the past two years on a variety of issues.

The WLC met with Glenn regarding the MeToo and ChurchToo movements to discuss the ways in which culture, the church, and Grace Downtown have dealt with the issues of power, abuse, and authority. The WLC has a representative on the Grace DC network taskforce that is seeking to create a policy and culture that affirms the full dignity of women as image bearers of Christ; supports the safety of women in our community; and articulates a Christ-centered Biblical framework for understanding and addressing issues of power, abuse, and authority.

Members of the WLC have met with Glenn to discuss how Grace Downtown can grow in love for the women in our church. The WLC also convenes with the Session on a semi-annual basis. Additionally, a written paper was shared with the Session describing the experience of many unmarried women at Grace Downtown who desire marriage.

How does the WLC envision growth and evolution in this role moving forward?

The WLC considers its role in providing input for the leadership and vision of the church as critical to its mission and essential for the health of the church. The WLC desires to continue to provide assistance to the Session with regard to questions that the Session would have. The WLC also seeks to continue bringing to the attention of the Session both the needs and the evidences of grace in the lives of women at Grace Downtown.

Role 2. Programming and Coordination

- Provide programming for the women in our congregation, in line with our mission of:
 - Cultivating spiritual growth
 - Fostering meaningful friendship
 - Affirming their unique role in God's kingdom
- Such programming includes organizing events such as teaching seminars, prayer meetings, and social gatherings
- Coordinate and encourage attendance at relevant local events by other organizations
 - Denomination-wide meetings (e.g., PCA women's ONE conference)
 - Seminars at Reformed Theological Seminary

Why programming and coordination?

A few months after the WLC was formed in the summer of 2017, the WLC surveyed women at Grace Downtown about the three focus areas of its mission: spiritual growth, meaningful friendship, and serving in God's kingdom. Among the most popular feedback was a need for events that allow women to meet other women outside of their community groups and to simply spend time together. Interest in social gatherings—or as some wrote “structured fun with food”—seminars, book studies, and a retreat were mentioned repeatedly.

Based upon this feedback, the WLC recognized the opportunity to meet a long-expressed need in the congregation by providing events that would be both edifying to the women at Grace Downtown and in line with fulfilling its mission.

How has the WLC been fulfilling this role?

Since its inception in 2017, the WLC has organized two Christmas cookie swaps; two teaching events; one walking tour and picnic; one seminar on hospitality; one prayer meeting; and one women's retreat. The WLC also coordinated attendance at one RTS seminar and one denomination-wide women's conference. All events were in direct response to topics or activities that women at Grace Downtown suggested in the 2017 survey.

Approximately 70-80 different women in our congregation have participated in these events. Attendees represented a diverse mix with regard to age, geography, and length of time at Grace Downtown. These events were hosted in a variety of locations across the city, including the homes of different women in the church.

How does the WLC envision growth and evolution in this role, moving forward?

The WLC anticipates that programming and coordination will continue to play an important role in providing practical opportunities to serve, bless, and equip women at Grace Downtown. Moving forward, the WLC seeks to encourage women in our congregation to not only participate in such events but also to create and organize events. In other words, the WLC does not wish to be seen as *the* group that brings women together but *a* group that helps women gather, fellowship, learn, and serve together. The WLC has sought to encourage this vision by inviting women outside of the council to host events, teach activities, suggest seminars and activities, and serve on committees responsible for specific event tasks (e.g., organizing worship time for the women's retreat or providing instruction during a seminar on hospitality).

From the beginning days of the WLC, several leaders and members of Grace Downtown have asked whether the WLC was planning to organize a formal mentorship program for women. Many women in the congregation have expressed a desire to connect, learn, and grow together together across life stage and experience. The WLC is continuing to explore how it might be able to facilitate those kinds of relationships and opportunities in the future.

Role 3. Support in Shepherding Cases

- Provide practical help to the Session for counseling and shepherding cases that are taking place
- Bring assistance to situations in which the Session feels the perspectives, experiences, and expertise of the WLC would benefit a member of the church

Why support in shepherding cases?

The Session has expressed to the WLC a need for help in certain counseling and shepherding cases, i.e. a scenario in which an elder is actively assisting, advising, and/or meeting with a member of the Grace Downtown community. There have been several instances (as outlined below) in which the invitation of a WLC member's expertise, thoughts, and advice was beneficial to the respective elder and congregant for a given situation. In meetings between the WLC and the Session, several elders expressed appreciation for such assistance and a desire for that particular kind of help as a resource to be available to them.

How has the WLC been fulfilling this role?

Members of the WLC have been asked by members of the Session to provide assistance and help for several shepherding cases. One member of the WLC played a crucial role in helping several elders to better understand and serve a woman in the congregation who was being counseled by them. In another case, an elder asked both the diaconate and the WLC if anyone would be able to support a woman in the congregation who was seeking help for a sensitive and difficult situation. The WLC was also called upon to assist an elder who felt that the presence of a female leader would be beneficial in a discussion about church membership and doctrinal belief.

How does the WLC envision growth and evolution in this role moving forward?

The WLC is willing to provide such assistance to benefit and help both the leaders and members of the church who are involved in these shepherding cases. Thus far the Session has requested the WLC's participation in these cases on an ad hoc basis. The WLC would welcome more intentional engagement in shepherding cases moving forward. Given the nature of these situations, the WLC desires to have training in this area so that WLC members can be better equipped in this role. The WLC also acknowledges that formal training is especially needed given the sensitivity and complexity of these shepherding cases, which are often deeply personal and must be held in great confidence. The WLC also recognizes that other female leaders in the church such as deaconesses, ministry team leaders, and CG leaders will continue to play a role in these matters as well and that the WLC should not be seen as an exclusive resource.

While support in shepherding situations is taking place mostly on a case-by-case basis, the WLC also recognizes the broader mission of caring for members of the congregation that relates to and encompasses its programming and leadership roles (e.g., the desire for mentorship among and between women in the church). These three roles, while distinct, are certainly interrelated and will continue to be carefully considered together as the WLC serves Grace Downtown.