

Church of God says women can't be bishops

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The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) has decided to permit women to serve on local church councils but to maintain its rule that they cannot be ordained as bishops.

By a narrow vote during its recent General Assembly, the denomination changed its policy on congregational councils by deleting the word *male* from its previous statement saying "members of the Church and Pastor's Council shall be loyal male members of the church."

Just prior to the meeting, which concluded July 30, more than 62 percent of the denomination's bishops voted not to consider changing church policy prohibiting women from being ordained as bishops—a status necessary to be appointed to the church's Executive Council.

Charisma News Service reported that there was sharp disagreement during assembly debate.

"This has nothing to do with women not being smart enough or good enough or qualified enough," said Britt Peavy, senior pastor of West Ward Church of God in Douglas, Georgia. "The issue is, did God know what he was talking about? And whether we like it or don't like it . . . if our rules, our standard, is biblical text, then we have to be faithful to biblical text even in a contemporary society that sees it as bigoted or old-fashioned."

Bishop T. Scot Carter, spokesperson for the Pentecostal denomination, said women are ordained as pastors in the denomination and are appointed to its national and international boards but are barred from the bishops-only Executive Council.

Cheryl Bridges Johns, professor of discipleship and Christian formation at the Church of God's Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, expressed disappointment that there was not more support for women bishops. She said female students at the

seminary seek more affirmation from the church.

"I think many of them feel betrayed—not only by the actions of the General Assembly but by some of the language of the assembly that was quite derogatory toward women as a whole," said Johns, a leader of the group Free Our Church of God Women to Serve. —RNS