

WASHINGTON CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE ROLE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH POLICY DOCUMENT

As agreed 24 November 2002 after 30 months study.

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GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF DECISION

	BEFORE MEN	BEFORE WOMEN	NOW MEN	NOW WOMEN
Helper	*	*	*	*
Deacon			*	
Elder			*	
Teacher of men	*		*	*
Teacher of women	*	*	*	*
Child teacher	*	*	*	*
Prayers in groups	*	*	*	*
Prayers in worship	*		*	*
Songleader	*	?	*	*
Soloist in worship	*	?	*	*
Server of the Lords Supper and passer of the Collection	*		*	
Presider	*		*	
Reader of scripture in groups	*	*	*	*
Reader of scripture in worship	*		*	*
Announcements	*	?	*	*
Speaker/Preacher	*		*	

? means that this has happened in the past either by arrangement or through necessity, though not through prior policy.

WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF THE DECISION GRAPHIC

Unless otherwise stated, the reason for change is that we were unable to find scripture that restricted men or women on each issue.

Helpers

There has been no change.

Reader of Announcements.

There has been a change.

- From Men giving announcements from the front and men and women from the floor
- To unrestricted announcements.

There is no issue of leadership or headship through the sharing of announcements.

Reader of Scriptures

There has been a change.

- From men reading within worship services and both men and women reading within study groups.
- To unrestricted readings.

Songleader

There has been a change.

- From men leading from the front and women leading where necessary from the floor.
- To unrestricted songleading according to ability.

We found that Songleading is not spiritual headship.

Soloist

The existing position that both men and women could sing solos within worship or meetings, as is suitable to bring glory to God, was confirmed.

Teacher

There has been a change.

- From men and women teaching children and men teaching adults and women teaching women.
- To unrestricted teaching roles for those of ability.

Prayers

There has been a change.

- From men offering prayers in worship services and both men and women praying within groups.
- To unrestricted opportunity.

Preacher

There is no change.

The reason is that this is perceived to be a leadership role within the assembly and it is felt that this is suitable for men.

Presider

There is no change.

The reason is that this is perceived to be a leadership role within the assembly and it is felt that this is suitable for men.

Elder

There were and still are no Elders. Nevertheless it has been determined that only men may be Elders.

The reason for this is that Eldership is seen to be an instance of spiritual headship which scripture teaches is something God expects of men.

Serving Lord's Supper trays and Collection bags.

The group did not vote in favour of any change.

It was agreed that we saw some problem with the Lord's Supper in that we do not do it as Jesus did it and so the "serving" was unbiblical.

We agreed to study the whole area of the Lord's Supper in order to consider what to do with it, if anything.

We also agreed to study in order to richen our experience and worship during the celebration each week.

Deacon

The group made a decision that only men may be Deacons. However the role of Deacon has not and is not in use and we don't know what the duties of a Deacon might be in our congregation so that the decision was of limited value. So we agreed for further study on the role and its relationship to "helper" and "sides"

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION OF POLICY

This is the policy of Washington church of Christ regarding the role of men and women in the church.

This policy is dated from 24 November 2002.

This policy can be altered by Elders, or that avenue which the church as a whole sees fit to authorise if new material is forthcoming or doctrinal error is suspected.

It is our determination that this policy *cannot* be changed because of any of the following conditions:

- Change of mind by individuals.
- New church members wanting a say.
- A review without new *fresh* material (ie, not just new material saying the same as previously studied).
- Political or legal pressure.

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- 1 Believing boys and girls (commonly defined as having undergone water immersion with testimony) are covered by the terms man and woman within this policy.
 - 2 Men and women are equally God's children.
 - 3 Both are made in God's image of love.
 - 4 Scripture does not say that men or women must be silent within worship. It does teach that people should not be disruptive and that order within worship is of great importance.
 - 5 Scripture does not teach that women must never teach men. It teaches that women must not teach men domineeringly without regard for spiritual headship or common respect.
 - 6 Scripture does not say that men have authority over women, or vice versa.

7 However God has entrusted husbands with the additional hazardous duty of spiritual headship over their family and with **some men** (with ability) spiritual headship over the church. Headship is equated to “shepherding” the overall direction of the flock. It is the opposite of the common concept of “authority” and is demonstrated by Christ as willing servanthood for the wellbeing of others.

8 Scripture teaches that not all people are called for the same form of service. People who take active roles within worship or other areas of church life do so on the basis of their ability and not as a **right** of adulthood, church membership, water immersion, conversion, gender or testimony.

9 Men and women may undertake, equally, any duty within the church, *if they are appointed, asked or are skilled*, except for the following which are for men alone:

- Presiding (worship leading)
- Preaching
- Eldership
- Serving
- Deacons

Basis : wcoc culture

SPECIFIC COMMENTARY AND CONCLUSIONS TO RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

Gen 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

(NAS)

Gen 2:15-18

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

(NAS)

Gen 3:8-13

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest {to be} with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

(NAS)

Gen 3:16

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

(NIV)

Here we see the principle of spiritual headship in process. Eve does the sin and Adam gets the blame.

Why is this?

It is because God expected him to have guided and encouraged Eve in holy living.

Evidently Adam was alongside Eve when the sin was committed and he said or did nothing to prevent it.

1 Cor 11:1-16

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has {something} on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have {a symbol of} authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man {has his birth} through the woman; and all things originate from God.

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God {with head} uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

(NAS)

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Cultural Norms & Marriage Roles

A lesson prepared for the Xenos Christian Fellowship

Introduction

Beginning in chapter 11 and through chapter 14, Paul addresses problems with the Corinthian Christians' meetings: GETTING DRUNK AT COMMUNION; TONGUES CHAOS; SELFISH USE OF GIFTS--and something else. Read vs 2-6. Some of the women were attending their meetings without veils.

Actually, Paul is addressing two different issues in his comments about women's veils. One is a time-bound cultural norm and the other is a timeless theological truth. Let's look at each of them in turn . . .

THE CULTURE-SPECIFIC PRACTICE: Women Veiled In Public

It is clear from the language of vs 5,6 that it was considered disgraceful in that culture for women to be unveiled in public. In fact, Paul says this practice will disgrace her husband ("head" vs 5) by communicating that she is like those women who go around in public with shorn or shaven heads. What is Paul talking about? What is the cultural significance of these things?

In Oriental cultures (even today), women are veiled in public as a sign of chastity and submission to their husbands. [1] From the information available to us, we cannot be certain about the shorn hair and shaven heads. But most likely, the women with short hair referred to the priestess prostitutes who walked about in public both unveiled and

with short hair to advertise themselves to men. Women with shaven heads may refer to convicted adulteresses.

From Paul, these Christian women had learned of their high status in Christ (essential equality before God; equally accepted). From Paul, they had also been liberated to minister in ways unthinkable in other religions (vs 5: "praying or prophesying"). It is ironic to realize that passages like this one, on the basis of which Paul has been branded a repressive chauvinist, are in fact evidence of his liberation of women. It would never have been necessary to correct their abuse of new freedoms if he hadn't extended these freedoms in the first place! Those who brand Paul as a repressive chauvinist ignore this fact.

But, as is often the case, they were abusing this new-found freedom (21 YR.-OLDS DRINKING; 16 YR.-OLDS DRIVING). By refusing to be veiled in their public meetings, they were causing serious problems.

They were disgracing their husbands (vs 5). They were enjoying their freedom, but it was costing their husbands their reputations in the community. This should bother them.

They were communicating to Corinthian onlookers that they were immoral women. Paul assumes this will bother them, and speaks very directly to it (vs 6). If they're unwilling to wear veils, they might as well cut their hair because others are going to view them as sexually loose. If they don't want to be known as prostitutes, they shouldn't dress like them.

More seriously, they were disgracing Christ by misrepresenting him to the non-Christian Corinthians. Imagine yourself as a visitor to one of their meetings. You've also visited the cult of Aphrodite. Here are women who appear to be sexually loose, people speaking in tongues chaotically, people getting drunk. What would you conclude? Jesus is merely the head of one more mystery/fertility cult instead of the Son of God who has come to forgive us and empower us to live according to God's moral design.

This is the main reason why Paul argues that they should wear veils. They should voluntarily limit their freedom by observing this custom so that others will not be hindered from coming to Christ. This is the contextual principle in which his comments are grounded (read 10:32-11:1). Paul has been stressing this principle ever since chapter 6. Even though in Christ we are free, we should be willing out of love to limit our freedom so others can benefit spiritually (FOODS; APOSTOLIC SUPPORT; CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION).

Should Christian women wear head-coverings in church meetings in America today? Many Christian groups insist on this, but the correct answer is an emphatic "NO." The principle is: Don't needlessly flout cultural custom. The first-century application of this principle was: Do wear veils in public. In twentieth century American culture, women do not wear veils. So the correct application is: Don't wear veils in public. Those who do, no matter well-intentioned, are ironically guilty of violating the principle of the passage by obeying its first-century application! By wearing head-coverings, they are needlessly flouting cultural custom, and people are needlessly turned off to Christianity. While we should love such Christians and relate to them with respect, we should also realize they are weak in faith and try to inform them when possible, so Christianity won't be needlessly viewed as culturally weird. (On the other hand, our female missionaries in SE Asia may need to observe this custom in some settings . . .)

THE UNIVERSAL NORM: Male Headship In Marriage

But there was another problem with their refusal to be veiled. Since veils also communicated subjection to their husbands, not wearing them implied a rejection of their husband's headship. While veils are a time-bound cultural practice, Paul argues that male headship in marriage is a universal norm--true and important for all time and in all cultures. Notice how he does this:

Vs 3 states this as a universal truth and links it to Jesus' relationship with the Father. "The man is the head of a woman" means that the husband is the head (leader) over his wife in their marriage relationship. In the same way that Jesus, although he was equal to the Father in deity (Jn. 10:30), submitted himself to the Father's leadership (Jn. 12:49), so wives, although they are equal to their husband in their humanity, should submit themselves to their husband's leadership.

Since the veil communicated acknowledgment of this truth in their culture, Paul defends the legitimacy of this custom on theological grounds in vs 7-10 (read). As in other passages, Paul explains why God has made the husband the head in the marriage relationship.

In my opinion, this authority structure within marriage became necessary only after the fall (see Gen. 3:16b). Prior to the fall, there was no need for delegated authority because both parties were in perfect communion with God. But in a fallen world, roles of authority are necessary in order to preserve order and prevent anarchy (WORK PLACE; CIVIL GOVERNMENT). Thus, God instituted the man as head in the marriage relationship. What was the basis for this choice? As Genesis 2 narrates, Adam was created first, and God made Eve from Adam and for him (to be his unique counterpart unlike the animals).

Paul's obscure reference to the angels (vs 10b) probably means that angels, who are present at Christian meetings, are acutely conscious of delegated authority in God's universe. They exist as his servants and show respect for his authority structure. We should imitate this attitude instead of rebelling against it.

Of course, this truth is very unpopular in our culture. There are two very different reasons for this.

MALE CHAUVINISM: One reason is the undeniable historical abuse of male headship in human society and in the church. Christians should acknowledge this, condemn it, and distinguish biblical headship from its abuse. Consider the following important biblical qualifications, which also help to define biblical male headship:

Difference in role does not mean superiority or inferiority as people (vs 11,12). The fact that you submit to a POLICEMAN does not mean you are intrinsically inferior to him; it means that you acknowledge he plays a legitimate role of authority. By the same token, male headship does not imply intrinsic female inferiority in any way. Paul evidently adds vs 11,12 to prevent us from concluding that role equals essence. Both men and women were created in God's image and therefore have equal value in God's eyes. Woman's origination from man in creation is tempered by men's subsequent origination from women. In Gal. 3:28, Paul states that both are equally heirs of salvation through Christ. Obviously, as Christians we should communicate this same attitude toward all people regardless of gender. How different this is from Roman and Greek moral philosophers, who described women as "worthless," "silly," and "innately inferior to men" who should "serve as slaves" to their husbands. [2]

Husbands should be subject to Christ's authority (vs 3). Paul's point in vs 3 ("the head of a man is Christ") is that husbands are not a law unto themselves; they are under

Christ's authority. Husbands should lead the way in their marriages in obeying Christ, not act like little Hitler's. This has two important implications.

Husbands should be submissive to Christ's authority not only when it is expressed directly through the Bible, but also when it is expressed indirectly through other Christians--including their wives. This is the importance of Eph. 5:21. No Christian husband has a basis for saying "It's not your place to correct me." If needed, his wife should correct him with biblical absolutes and he should submit to this correction.

Any Christian man who uses his authority to rebel against God's moral will is wrong and should not be obeyed. In cases where he calls on his wife to disobey Christ, he should be respectfully disobeyed (SPOUSE-SWAPPING; NO FELLOWSHIP), as with all delegated authorities.

Male headship is limited to certain relationships (Eph. 5:22). The wife is to be subject to "her own husband," not to all men in general. Any teaching that men are automatically in authority over women (e.g., work-place) is a caricature of the biblical position.

The husband should use their authority in love and to serve their wives (Eph. 5:25-29).. Jesus is very authoritative, and he sometimes calls on us to do what is costly and painful, but he always leads us out of love and for our good. The proof of this is the cross. Christian husbands should not use their God-given authority to selfishly take from their wives (KING IN CASTLE); they should use it to help their wives grow spiritually (as good parents use it for their children's good). They should be modeling Christ-like character, initiating sacrificial love, and creatively fostering their wives' spiritual development. For the wife who wants to mature in Christ, this is a wonderful provision, even though it may still be scary or difficult at times.

>> HUSBANDS: LEAD THIS WAY!!! WIVES: BE WILLING TO SUBMIT TO THIS KIND OF LEADERSHIP!!

MODERN SELFISM: The other reason is the view that defines submission to another person is an admission of inferiority and therefore a betrayal of one's humanity. This is the predominant secular view, which undergirds so much of feminist thinking. It rejects all authority as abusive (including God's) and makes the assertion of my rights and will the number one priority in life. This view has deeply influenced many of us, and is taught as dogma to our youth. We should reject this view because:

Biblical submission is an affirmation of true humanity because we are created by God to follow his wise & loving leadership. God's authority is legitimate because he created you and knows better than you do how you should live. Submission to his authority is the essence of what it means to be a human being--not a negation of it. Insistence on your will is rebellion against God, which is the essence of sin >> GOSPEL HERE.

It promotes the same relationally destructive error that it properly condemns in male chauvinism--demanding personal rights & power at the other person's expense. Unless there is the willingness of both people to submit to God, and to sacrifice many of our desires for the good of the other person, and to respect God's authority structure for the home, we are left with marriage as a battle ground and the children as casualties!! We are witnessing the foul fruit of this view (DIVORCE EFFECTS ON SPOUSES & CHILDREN), and it is every bit as ugly as male chauvinism!!

CHALLENGE THE CHRISTIANS NOT TO BE CONFORMED HERE, BUT TO BE LIGHTS IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED & PERVERSE GENERATION . . .

1 Cor 14:34-40

Let the women keep **silent** in the churches; for they are not permitted to **speak**, but let them **subject themselves**, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to **speak** in church. Was it from you that the word of God {first} went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize {this} he is not recognized. Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

(NAS)

See enclosure dealing with translation issues.

Briefly, where English translations tend to say “silent” this is the Greek word “sigao” which is best translated as silent or hold peace. Paul is telling the women to shut up. Notice though that in verse 28 talking to tongue speakers the same word “sigao” is used to tell the tongue speakers to keep silent if there is no interpreter. Similarly in verse 30 Paul tells prophets to be silent using “sigao” when someone else needs to speak.

The word “speak” used throughout this passage is “laleo” which translates best as “speech, babble”

The whole section from chapter 12 to 14 and particularly chapter 14 verses 27-40 is about order within the meetings. It address three groups of people who are causing a lack of order. Prophets talking all at the same time, tongue speakers talking when no-one can understand what they are saying, and women interrupting and mouthing off. Paul tells each group to shut up.

So a proper translation of

Let the women keep **silent** in the churches; for they are not permitted to **speak**, but let them **subject themselves**, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to **speak** in church.

Reads

Let these women keep **silent** in the churches; for they are not permitted to **natter**, but let them **subject themselves**, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to **natter** in church.

Gal 3:25-29

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

(NAS)

The three groups in verse 28 underscore that social, cultural and gender distinctions should not affect unity with Christ. As part of a unified diversity, unnecessary barriers and distinctions are to be replaced with reconciliation and mutual responsibility.

Eph 5:20-6:9

...always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, {be subject} to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife,

as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself {being} the Saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives {ought to be} to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also {does} the church, because we are members of His body. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and {let} the wife {see to it} that she respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

(NAS)

Realising that the term “subject” carries with it substantial negative meaning, the term “submit” is currently used to describe Christian relationships. The form of the verb used of Christian submission necessitates a voluntary action (1 Pet 1:13; Heb 12:9). In Eph 5: 21-24 Paul stipulates a mutual submission, a voluntary deference for all Christians, whatever their roles in life. This is one important way, Paul says, that Christians can “be filled with spirit” rather than “drunken with wine”.

To say that “the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church” is not to stress the husband’s authority or position, but his service – as Christ loved and died for the church, so the husband is to love, serve and give himself for his wife.

Carroll D Osburn

1 Tim 2:8-15

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, {I want} women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.

Let a woman **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**. For it was Adam who was first created, {and} then Eve. And {it was} not Adam {who} was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But {women} shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

(NAS)

See two enclosures dealing with translation issues.

This scripture is translated very badly into English by all the main translations. This process continues to the modern day mostly due to editors being more concerned about being seen to alter historical perspectives (and thus seeing their sales take a dive) rather than simply reporting a straightforward translation!

Briefly, “quietly” is “hesuchia” best translated as “opposite of bustling” or “peacefulness”.

“Submissiveness” is “hupotage” which is “subordination (in Christ)”

“Authority” is “authenteo” which is “dominate”

So a responsible translation of the Greek text for

Let a woman **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**.

Reads

Let a woman **peacefully** receive instruction with entire **submission in Christ**. But I do not allow a woman to teach **domineeringly** over a man, but to remain **peaceful**.

Why should men alone lead worship and preach?

An appeal is made to the readings in Genesis 1- 3 and also 1 Cor 11: 2-16

What is Headship ?

We consider that scripture clearly demonstrates that God calls men to exercise spiritual headship over their families. Likewise he calls **those men with ability** to exercise spiritual headship over the church community.

We consider that the role of Eldership is this role of spiritual headship within the church. It is equal in type to Pastoral Care as described in this secular text:

What is Pastoral Care?

Human beings not given a map as we enter the journey through life. There are many crossroads that require careful reflection and wise choices. Every life has passages of struggle, loss, and challenging growth. Personal pain, seemingly irreconcilable conflicts, life transitions, or crisis may cause one feel alone, blocked, or needing support. Pastoral Care is the art of bringing spiritual support, guidance, and hope to these times of crisis and new opportunities.

Pastoral care restores and strengthens the connection to inner resources of personal strength and realization and to outer resources of family and community. Compassionate and skilful pastoral care can help individuals transform pain into an experience of healing and growth.