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THEOLOGY OF GENDER EQUALITY

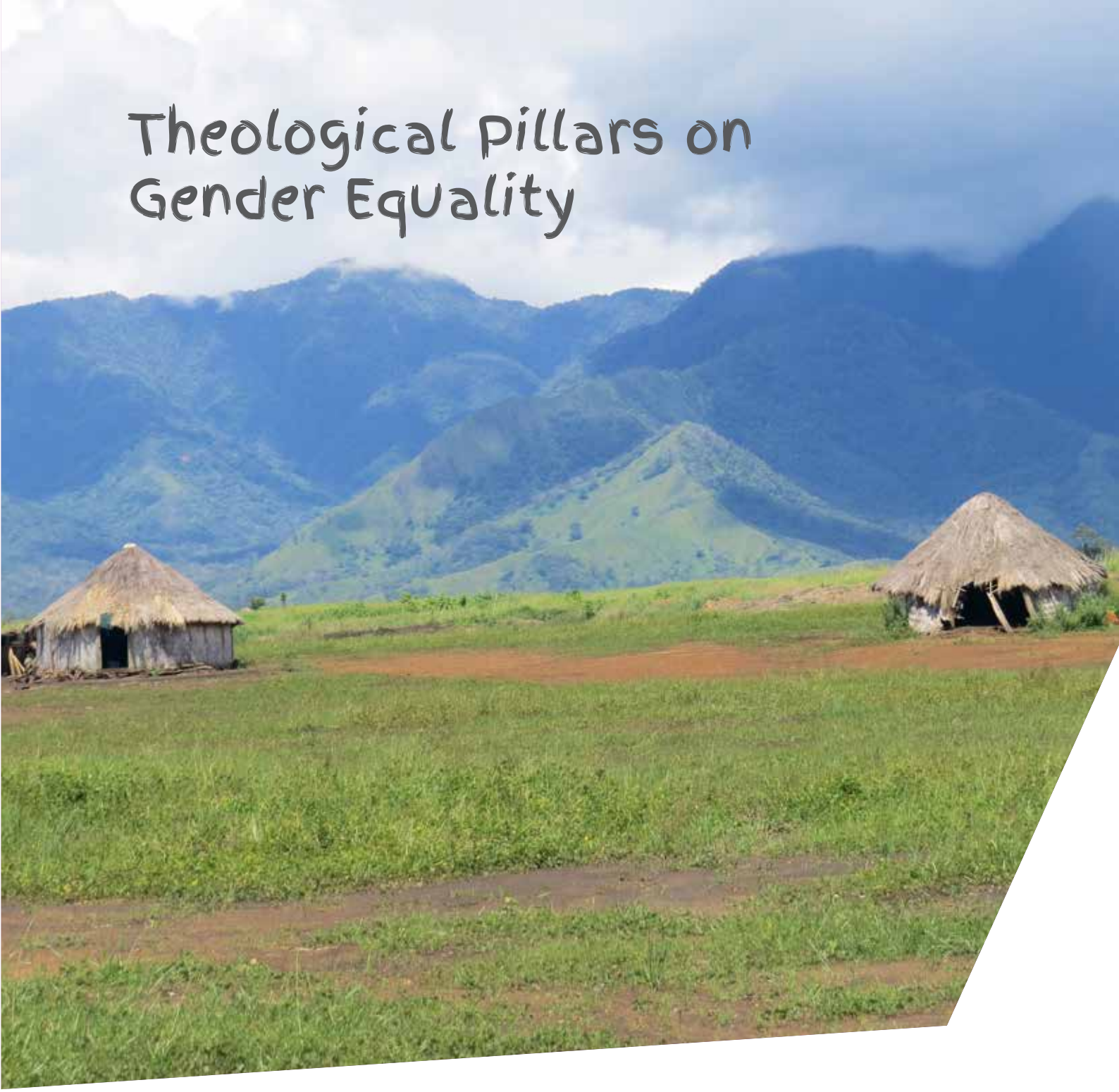
In God's Image – Towards Full Humanity and Abundant Life

What is Gender Equality?



Gender equality (equality between women and men - boys and girls) refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for male and female. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's opportunities, and responsibilities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of women, men, girls and boys are taken into careful consideration.

Theological Pillars on Gender Equality



The Theology of Gender Equality is built upon ten, theological principles that enable participation and inclusion of both men and women in creating and sustaining communities that reaffirm, respect, and celebrate that being female and male are divine gifts. For after creating the man and woman God saw that it was very good (Gen 1:31).



Pillar 1 Being Human is a Birth-Right

To be human is a birth-right for each and every girl and boy, man and woman. And He has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth (Act 17:26 NKJV). This transcends all cultures and contexts and is to be affirmed. Thus each person has the same and equal privilege to live in dignity and to be treated with respect. This birth-right for all culminates in the glorious scene in Revelation when John saw a large crowd with more people than could be counted. They were from every race, tribe, nation, and language, and they stood before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev 7:9).



Pillar 2 Created in God's Image and Likeness

Adam and Eve were created in God's image and likeness. God said, "Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. So God created humans to be like himself; he made male and female. (Gen 1:26, 27) It was after God created the Man and the Woman that He looked at what He had made and declared all of it was very good (Gen 1: 31 -Thus male and female were created equal and different and this pleased God.



Pillar 3

Incarnation Affirms our Common Humanity

In Christ both the Logos (Word) and Sophia (Wisdom) became human. "The Word became a human being and lived here with us" (John 1:14). Christ lived, ate, drank, slept, mourned and suffered together with those He came to serve . Incarnation is the divine affirmation of the common and shared humanity of female and male .





Pillar 4 The Gospel Affirms Human Equality

Human dignity and equality is restored through the Gospel. Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman. (Gal 3:28), Hence in the Christian community all human beings are equal and precious to God. Differences in sex, race, class, disability, age or religion do not negate this equality in Christ.





Pillar 5 Abundant life (Gutpela sindaun)

Jesus declared his mission was to bring abundant life to humanity. I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest (John 10:10). He demonstrated the inclusiveness of His mission by inviting all into his kingdom - the wealthy Matthew and the poor widow, the little children and respected Nicodemus, the foreign Syrophoenician woman and the Galilean fishermen - all were invited to this abundant life. The Christian church is called to extend this invitation to all.



Pillar 6 God's Kingdom as Servanthood

God's Kingdom involves a transformed world where women, men, boys and girls live and relate to one another in the ways that God intends. In contrast to Foreign kings [who] order their people around (Luke 22:25) Jesus said "I have been with you as a servant" (Luke 22:27) and modelled this Kingdom principle. The most important one of you should be like the least important, and your leader should be like a servant (Luke 22:26). Serving others restores their dignity and allows them to fully participate in the Kingdom. Serving has the power to transform cultural, institutional and structural injustices.



Pillar 7

Mutuality in Christian Relationships and Marriage

Mutuality in relationships characterizes the kingdom of God. Honor Christ and put others first (Eph 5:21). This mutuality in relationships also characterizes Christian marriage. The twofold instruction of Paul regarding marriage affirms this mutuality. A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord (Eph 5:22) is balanced by a husband should love his wife as much as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). This mutuality is also reflected in the sexual relationship in marriage. Paul declares a wife belongs to her husband instead of to herself, and a husband belongs to his wife instead of to himself (1Cor 7:4). Both husband and wife submit to each other as unto the Lord. Submission affirms valuing each other as total human beings.



Pillar 8 The Gifting by the Holy Spirit is Inclusive

The Spirit gives Christian believers both fruit and gifts for the work of ministry. The fruit, God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful (Gal 5:22) and the gifts, when he went up to the highest place, he . . . gave gifts to people (Eph 4:8) are inclusive. There is one God who is the Father of all people. Not only is God above all others, but he works by using all of us, and he lives in all of us (Eph 4:6).The New Testament declares that these gifts are given to both male and female. Peter quoted the Old Testament Prophet, "I will give my Spirit to everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy (Act 2:17, 18). The inclusiveness in the gifting by the Spirit recognizes that all are blessed with distinct yet equally important fruit and gifts of the Spirit..



Pillar 9 Empowering the disempowered.

Through Jesus' radical compassion and challenge to traditions and practices that excluded the vulnerable and most marginalized, He exemplified and lived out the principles and values of the Kingdom of God. (Among these were women and children and those deemed unclean because of disability or illness). It is within the very essence of God's ministry through the Christian community to continue to seek out and strive to empower the least and most vulnerable in society. "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me" (Mat 25:40).

Pillar 10

Sex and Gender Roles

There are roles that are biologically sex specific to a woman and roles that are biologically sex specific to a man. These roles have to do with, but not confined to, procreation through sexual intercourse.

Gender roles are assigned by society and/or culture to a woman and to a man. Thus, it is people who construct cultures and gender roles. It is also people who must change cultures that dehumanize and deny certain groups of people their God-given humanity, dignity and equality. It is important to recognize that women, men, girls and boys are equal, yet different in their make up.



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Rev Dr Cliff Bird is a distinguished Pacific theologian and Minister of the United Church in the Solomon Islands. He has a background in economics and a Ph.D in theology from Charles Sturt University. Previous to his role with UnitingWorld Cliff was a Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of Theology and Ethics and the Pacific Theological College in Fiji.



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Church Leaders Council pose for a photo after considering the Theology of Gender Equality.



Church Leaders Council advocating for rights of people living with HIV/AIDS in 2015.

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