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Report

of the Biblical Research Committee of the Inter-European Division

on the Ordination of Women for Pastoral Ministry

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After a careful study of the papers presented in the Biblical Research Committee of the Inter-European Division (EUD) and of those presented at the TOSC meetings of January 15-17 and July 22-24, 2013, the members of the BRC submit the following report on the issue of ordination:

1. Ordination in General

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Although the concept of setting apart for ministry is present in the Scriptures, the Bible does not specifically define what ordination for pastoral ministry is. The Bible calls on all believers to exercise their spiritual gifts, nevertheless, we find that in the Bible certain people are entrusted specific responsibilities, offices, and functions to serve God and lead the church to accomplish its mission. Such people are first called by God. The church recognizes the call on the basis of certain biblical criteria and confirms it in a public ceremony that involves among other things the laying on of hands. This practice is not a sacramental act that confers divine grace or special qualities to the persons ordained, but it emphasizes the high spiritual value of the responsibility and authority to perform certain tasks specific to the ministry of the church. Thus ordination contributes to the order of the church. The administration of baptism, the Lord's supper and marriage carries special significance for the church not because they constitute a sacrament, but because baptism deals with the initiation into the faith community of the church, the Lord's supper is a reminder of Jesus' soteriological achievements, and marriage is God's foundational and original plan for humanity. This might be an additional reason to that of church order for limiting the administration of these ordinances to ordained ministry.

2. Ordination of Women

2.1. The Bible and Women's ordination

Since most of the passages that have been studied during the process of understanding ordination do not directly address the topic itself, it is difficult to use them as arguments in favor or against women's ordination. There is a constant danger of reading something into the text that is not there.

- Therefore the following questions had been thoroughly considered before we answered the question of women's ordination:
- What offices are biblically mandated and which ones require ordination?
- Are there new offices and ministries that should be created or have already been created beyond deacons, elders, and pastors that require ordination?
- How can the headship principle be applied to the church? If Christ is the head of the Church, of whose head are men?
- Is it consistent to ordain women as local elders but not as pastors? What are the criteria of drawing the dividing line of headship?

- 1 • What is the relationship between OT priesthood, prophetic ministry and pastoral work?
- 2 • Since we recognize the leadership of women in administrative functions, on what basis
- 3 do we deny it in the pastoral ministry?
- 4 • Why do we require ordination for the administration of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and
- 5 marriage?
- 6 • Should women be silent at any time and in all places? If not, on what biblical basis do we
- 7 classify their teaching as different from that of men?
- 8 • What is the relationship between a spiritual gift and an office? Can somebody receive a
- 9 gift and not have the right to fill an office to which that gift would enable him/her?
- 10 • What is the biblical basis of differentiating between authoritative teaching and non-
- 11 authoritative teaching?
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13 **2.2 Ordination of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

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15 So far the Seventh-day Adventist church has opted for the ordination of deacons, deaconesses,
16 male/female elders, and male pastors. Historically the church has not understood biblical texts as
17 prohibiting women to speak, preach, and teach in public. The responsibilities of an ordained
18 pastor have been defined by the church, based on practical needs and not solely on biblical
19 prescriptions. The question that arises is whether the church should go beyond the current state
20 of affairs concerning ordination of women for pastoral ministry.

21 22 **2.3 BRC-EUD consensus view on women's ordination**

23 24 *2.3.1. The Bible and direct references to women's ordination*

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26 There are no direct statements in the Bible that either command or prohibit women's ordination.
27 In order to clarify the meaning and purpose of ordination scholars have to turn to biblical texts
28 that might have an indirect implication on ordination, such as the role of women in church
29 ministry, the principle of headship, etc.

30 31 *2.3.2. An assessment of biblical arguments dealing with the issue of women's* 32 *ordination for pastoral ministry.*

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34 The creation account in Gen 1-2 affirms the equality of men and women. Both men and women
35 share equal worth, dignity, and responsibilities as God's stewards for His creation. We agree that
36 in the post-fall human marriage relationship the Bible calls for both the willing self-submission
37 of the wife to her husband and for the loving and self-sacrificing attitude of the husband, as
38 Christ did for the Church. At the same time, the Scriptures call us to go back to God's creation
39 ideal of equal partnership.

40
41 It seems to us that there are no clear biblical principles that would require or guide the
42 application of headship principle in the family to the church.

43
44 There is no direct line of continuity between the OT priesthood or prophetic ministry and
45 pastoral work. The OT priesthood has its fulfillment in the unique priesthood of Christ, which is
46 the basis for the priesthood of all believers. The ministry of the OT prophets is continued

1 especially through the gift of the spirit of prophecy, which is under the exclusive control of God
2 Himself. We also recognize that the mission of the church has also a prophetic dimension in
3 proclaiming the everlasting gospel.

4
5 We recognize that there is an apparent contradiction between texts that seem to support the
6 public speaking and teaching ministry of women, and those that seem to prohibit it (Acts 18:26;
7 1 Tim 2:2 [Gr. *anthropoi* instead of *andres*]; 1Cor 11:5; cf. 1Cor 14:34; 2Tim 2:11-12; etc). The
8 distinction between authoritative and nonauthoritative sound teaching seems not be addressed in
9 the Bible and may not solve the question of women's ordination.

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11 There are many possibilities of service in which both men and women can be involved. When it
12 comes to being an ordained minister it is currently restricted to men only. What is it in being
13 ordained that requires a differentiation between genders that is not there at another level of
14 ministry before? If it is not about performing specific actions, it is not a question of ordination,
15 but something else, authority. We also acknowledge that, in the Biblical record, there is no
16 public induction ceremony to any office that involves women, yet some women function as
17 teachers, deaconesses, prophetesses, and leaders.

18 19 **3. Conclusion**

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21 Since ordination does not contradict the teachings of the Bible and might foster the mission of
22 the church, we think that there is room for the church to ordain women for pastoral ministry. As
23 the church felt free to develop its organizational structure in order to further its mission based on
24 biblical principles, we need to consider ordination not so much a doctrinal or biblical issue, but
25 something that has to be dealt with at an administrative level. Whatever decision is considered, a
26 basic unity of the worldwide church in faith and practice should be preserved.