

Group Three – Ordination Statement for General Conference Session, July 2015

We believe that the Holy Spirit led the Theology of Ordination Committee (TOSC) to reach a result that can guide the church on the question of ordination and gender. None of the three Positions on their own achieved even a majority of votes. But a super-majority of delegates, more than two-thirds, did agree on the following two points:

1. The world church should affirm the special role the Bible assigns to men as spiritual leaders, both as heads of their homes, providing loving, self-sacrificing, servant leadership for their wives and children, and in the role of ordained minister in the church; and
2. The world church should also recognize that biblical spiritual leaders were chosen to further the mission and unity of God's people, and that biblical examples and principles reveal that if unity and mission can be better met by female spiritual leadership, including in the office of ordained pastor, then Divisions should be allowed to do this.

Position Three is the only one that supports both these points, which were held by a sizeable majority of TOSC members. We affirm the biblical principle of male headship in the home, and the Scriptural pattern of male leadership in institutional spiritual leadership, including the office of the ordained elder/minister (1 Tim. 2:12-14; 3:1-5; Titus 1:5-6).

We acknowledge, however, that this pattern of church leadership is not presented by the Bible as an absolute moral imperative, an eternal divine command, a fundamental doctrine, or a matter of salvation. Rather, it is an organizational guideline primarily meant to promote order in the church and further its mission.

The Bible shows that God permits divine patterns for ecclesiastical organization to be adapted by His people in order to promote the mission, unity, and well being of the church. Examples in Scripture include: God calling Deborah to serve as Judge and Prophet; His accepting a king in Israel; David eating the showbread meant only for the priests (an act that Christ later approved of); and the Jerusalem Counsel allowing Jewish Christians to continue circumcisions, but not requiring it of Gentiles (giving us an example of unity in diversity) (1 Sam. 8:10-23; Jdg. 4; 1 Sam. 21:1-8; Mat. 12:1-4; Acts 15:1-16:5; 1 Cor. 9:19-22).

Adapting ritual or organizational patterns, however, stands in distinct contrast to universal moral absolutes and eternal divine commands, such as the Ten Commandments, the Edenic Institutions of Sabbath and male/female marriage. The church has no authority to vary or adapt these God-given eternal moral truths.

In light of the priority of mission, the need for church unity, and the principle of respect for Christian liberty, we propose that Divisions be authorized to decide, based on prayerful consideration of biblical teaching, whether to extend ministerial ordination to both men and women in their regions or sub-regions. In doing so, however, they must protect the religious liberty of conferences, churches, and employees that hold other convictions.