

**SEVENTH-DAY AVENTISTS ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION
A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

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SEVENTH-DAY AVENTISTS ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

by Alberto R. Timm

Discussions on the role of women in the church have taken place within the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its history. It is noteworthy that the first 70 years of the denomination's history were assisted by the prophetic ministry of Ellen G White (1827-1915) who, having had significant leadership functions, was never ordained by human hands to any ecclesiastical office.¹ Since the 1970s such discussions have gained a new intensity. This has significantly polarized the church between those who are pro women's ordination and those who do not endorse such a proposal.

Reflecting this polarization, the historical surveys² of the Adventist discussions on women's ordination are likewise divided between those in favor of it and those who are against it. Among those favoring it are Josephine Benton's *Called by God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers* (1990);³ Michael Pearson's *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas* (1990);⁴ Bert Haloviak's "Women in Recent Adventist History" (1995);⁵ Kit Watts's "An Outline of the History of Seventh-day Adventists and the Ordination of Women" (1995);⁶ Beverly G. Beem, "Equality in Ministry: From 1881 to Now";⁷ Randal R. Wisbey's "SDA Women in Ministry, 1970-1998" (1998);⁸ and Gary Patterson's "Analysis of What Is Happening with the Ordination of Women Pastors" (2012).⁹ Historical surveys against women's ordination include C. Mervyn Maxwell's "A Very Surprising (and Interesting) History" (1998);¹⁰ Samuel Korangteng-Pipim's

¹This matter is further discussed under the subtitle "Historical Background," below.

²This list provides only representative "historical surveys" on the development of the discussions on women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Other major sources (with different approaches) are referred to sparsely throughout the present paper.

³Josephine Benton, *Called by God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers* (Smithsburg, MD: Blackberry Hill, 1990).

⁴Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 134-81.

⁵Bert Haloviak, "Women in Recent Adventist History," *Adventist Review*, May 1995, 21-23.

⁶Kit Watts, "An Outline of the History of Seventh-day Adventists and the Ordination of Women," in Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca F. Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women* (Langley Park, MD: TEAMPress, 1995), 334-58.

⁷Beverly G. Beem, "Equality in Ministry: From 1881 to Now," in www.aaw.cc (accessed on Sept. 30, 2012).

⁸Randal R. Wisbey, "SDA Women in Ministry, 1970-1998," in Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 235-55.

⁹Gary Patterson, "Analysis of What Is Happening with the Ordination of Women Pastors" (2012), in www.atoday.org (accessed on August 16, 2012).

¹⁰C. Mervyn Maxwell, "A Very Surprising (and Interesting) History," *Adventists Affirm* (October 1998), 18-22; republished in Mercedes H. Dyer, ed., *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000), 225-30.

“Misleading and Erroneous Claims Regarding Early Adventist History” (2001);¹¹ Heber N. de Lima’s “Women’s Ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Brief Historical Overview” (2003);¹² and Wellesley Muir’s *Daughters of Inheritance: A New Look at Women’s Ordination* (2010).¹³ A more neutral historical overview appears in Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf’s *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2000).¹⁴ Additional insights on the overall discussion are provided by Ján Barna in his Ph.D. dissertation, “Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Theology: A Biblical and Theological Analysis and Synthesis of the Debate with Special Attention to Hermeneutical Matters” (2009).¹⁵ For a sociological critical perspective of this debate, see Laura L. Vance’s *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (1999);¹⁶ and Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart’s *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (rev. 2007).¹⁷

The present paper provides a brief historical overview of the Seventh-day Adventist discussions on women’s ordination. The subject is arranged under the following subheadings: (1) Historical Background; (2) Camp Mohaven Meetings (1973); (3) Autumn/Annual Councils (1973-1974); (4) Annual Council (1984); (5) Washington, DC, Meetings (1985); (6) New Orleans General Conference Session (1985); (7) Cohutta Springs Meetings (1989); (8) Annual Council (1989); (9) Indianapolis General Conference Session (1990); (10) Utrecht General Conference Session (1995); (11) Post-Utrecht Ordinations (1995-1996); (12) New Discussions (1996-2010); and (12) New Directions (2010-2012). Special emphasis is placed on official church documents (usually quoted in full length), with only sporadic allusions to the contributions made by individuals and groups representing the different segments of the discussion.

Historical Background

Nineteenth-century Adventist theological discussions usually favored women’s participation in church activities that would not require ordination. Commenting on the expression “let your women keep silence in the

¹¹Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Must We Be Silent? Issues Dividing Our Church* (Ann Arbor, MI: Berean Books, 2001), 251-70.

¹²H. Nicholas De Lima, “Women’s Ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Brief Historical Overview” (B.Th. thesis, Brazil Adventist University College, 2003), 4-15.

¹³Wellesley Muir, *Daughters of inheritance: A New Look at Women’s Ordination* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2010), 103-43.

¹⁴Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2nd ed., rev. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 464-70.

¹⁵Ján Barna, “Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Theology: A Biblical and Theological Analysis and Synthesis of the Debate with Special Attention to Hermeneutical Matters” (Ph.D. diss., University of Bristol, 2009).

¹⁶Laura L. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 172-229.

¹⁷Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 259-72.

church” (1 Cor. 14:34), Uriah Smith wrote in 1866 that in this text Paul is not forbidding women to pray or prophesy in public (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5), for the Bible mentions several women who were prophetesses (Judges 4:4-9; 2 Kings 22:14-20; Luke 2:36-38; Acts 21:8, 9) and leaders in local congregations (Rom. 16:3-16; Phil. 4:2, 3). Based on his understanding of the male headship established at the creation and fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14), Smith argued that “this order is not to be reversed, and the woman take the position which has been assigned to the man; and every action on her part which shows that she is usurping this authority, is disorderly, and not to be allowed.”¹⁸

In 1878, in the *Signs of the Times*, J. H. Waggoner published an article on “Woman’s Place in the Gospel,” in which he declared:

Neither do the words of Paul confine the labors of women to the act of prophesying alone. He refers to prayers, and also speaks of certain women who “labored in the Lord,” an expression which could only refer to the work of the gospel. He also, in remarking on the work of the prophets, speaks of edification, exhortation, and comfort. This “labor in the Lord,” with prayer, comprises all the duties of public worship. Not all the duties of *business meetings*, which were probably conducted by men, or all the duties of *ruling elders*, and *pastors*, compare 1 Tim. 5:17, with 2:12, but all that pertain to exercises purely religious. We sincerely believe that, according to the Scriptures, women, as a right may, and as a duty ought to, engage in these exercises.¹⁹

The 1883 “The S. D. A. Church Manual”²⁰ stated,

While the existence of deaconesses in the early church cannot be proved as satisfactorily as that of elders and deacons, it is, to say the least, highly probable that there was such a class of women in the apostolic days. It has been the custom therefore of some of our churches to elect one or more women to fill a position similar to that which it is supposed that Phebe and others occupied in her day. It has not[,] however, been the custom with us to ordain such women.

THE DUTIES of these women are not, therefore, such that it would be proper for them to assist in the communion service. They should ever hold themselves in readiness to render such aid to the elders and deacons in matters of church trial where members of their own sex are involved, as might be thought advisable. They should visit the sick and the poor, and interest themselves generally in works of charity. In fine, they should act the part of mothers in Israel, lending a helping hand to all who need their assistance, and striving in every way to promote the peace and prosperity of the church.²¹

In 1895 Milton C. Wilcox answered the question “Should women be elected to offices in the church when there are enough brethren?” He argued,

¹⁸[Uriah Smith], “Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches,” *Adventist Review, and Sabbath Herald*, June 26, 1866, 28.

¹⁹[J. H. Waggoner], “Woman’s Place in the Gospel,” *The Signs of the Times*, Dec. 19, 1878, 380.

²⁰See [W. H. Littlejohn], “The S. D. A. Church Manual,” 18-part series in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 5, 1883, 361-62; June 12, 1883, 377-78; June 19, 1883, 393-94; June 26, 1883, 409; July 3, 1883, 426-27; July 10, 1883, 441-42; July 17, 1883, 457-58; July 24, 1883, 474; July 31, 1883, 491; Aug. 7, 1883, 505-6; Aug. 14, 1883, 521-22; Aug. 21, 1883, 537-38; Aug. 28, 1883, 553-54; Sept. 4, 1883, 569-70; Sept. 11, 1883, 586-87; Sept. 18, 1883, 602-3; Sept. 25, 1883, 618; Oct. 9, 1883, 631-32.

²¹*Ibid.*, July 3, 1883, 426-27.

If by this is meant the office of elder, we should say at once, No. But there are offices in the church which women can fill acceptably, and oftentimes there are found sisters in the church who are better qualified for this than brethren, such offices, for instance as church clerk, treasurer, librarian of the tract society, etc., as well as the office of deaconess, assisting the deacons in looking after the poor, and in doing such other duties as would naturally fall to their lot. The qualifications for church elder are set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:7-9. We do not believe that it is in God's plan to give to women the ordained offices to the church. By this we do not mean to depreciate their labors, service, or devotion. The sphere of woman is *equal* to that of men. She was made a help meet, or fit, for man, but that does *not* mean that her sphere is *identical* to that of man's. The interests of the church and the world generally would be better served if the distinctions given in God's word were regarded.²²

But women played a crucial role in the formation and development of the church. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart even argue that

Seventh-day Adventism is the largest Christian denomination to have been founded by a woman. It has also attracted many more women than men, and although there is a preponderance of women in most Christian denominations, the Adventist ratio of 3 to 2 is unusually high.²³

Even recognizing that Joseph Bates and James White played crucial roles in the founding of Seventh-day Adventism, one cannot overlook Ellen White's prophetic leadership that shaped almost the entire denomination. Between 1878 and 1915 there were, in addition to Ellen White, 30 other Adventist women "licensed to preach."²⁴ Brian E. Strayer states that "California Conference president J. N. Loughborough regularly ordained female elders and deacons. In the 1890s, while in Australia and New Zealand, W. C. White also ordained female deacons."²⁵ On numerous occasions White preached her sermons in the presence of ordained pastors, including the General Conference President. Apparently, people did not question her right as a female to use the pulpit to communicate God's word.

From the early 1870s onward the leadership of the church granted Ellen White ministerial credentials, some of which retained the expression "ordained minister."²⁶ In 1884, when the first *SDA Yearbook* was published, her name was listed among the "Ministers" (not Licentiates), and the same continued

²²[Milton C. Wilcox], "No. 176. Who Should Be Church Officers?" *The Signs of the Times*, Jan. 24, 1895, 3.

²³Bull and Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, 259. Cf. George R. Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004).

²⁴See "Women Licensed as Ministers, 1878-1975," *Spectrum* 16/3 (Aug. 1985): 60;. Though the published list contains 31 names during that time period, "Hetty Haskell" (1900) and "Mrs. S. N. Haskell" (1902) are the same person. So the actual number of women is 30.

²⁵Brian E. Strayer, "Adventist Roots" (letter), *Adventist Review*, Oct. 11, 2012, 4.

²⁶See White Estate staff, "Exhibits Relating to the Ordination of Women: From the Lifetime and Experience of Ellen G. White" (Paper presented at the Ministerial Meeting at the 1990 General Conference Session), White Estate.

to be the case in the following *Yearbooks* and GC Bulletins.²⁷ But, according to the White Estate staff, “she was never ordained by human hands, nor did she ever perform a wedding, organize a church, or conduct a baptism.”²⁸

The first significant Adventist administrative discussion on the matter of women’s ordination surfaced at the 1881 General Conference Session, Battle Creek, Michigan. The Fifth Meeting (December 5) of the Session, with S. N. Haskell as chair and Uriah Smith as secretary, considered the following resolution,

Resolved, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.

This was discussed by J. O. Corliss, A. C. Bourdeau, E. R. Jones, D. H. Lamson, W. H. Littlejohn, A. S. Hutchins, D. M. Canright, and J. N. Loughborough, and referred to the General Conference Committee.²⁹

The *Signs of the Times* of January 5, 1882, transcribed “among the resolutions adopted” at that General Conference only the first paragraph of this report, leaving the second one completely out.³⁰ So the readers of the *Signs* were not informed that the proposal, instead of being approved, was “referred to the General Conference Committee.” But the original minutes for the 1881 General Conference, kept in the General Conference Archives, read exactly as in the Review.³¹

Ellen White did not attend the 1881 General Conference Session. Her husband had died on August 6, and two weeks later she left for California. In addition to being absent from the meeting that discussed the issue of women’s ordination, she also did not express herself about it. Some have understood her silence as an endorsement on the matter, and others, as disapproving it. Whatever the position one takes, the argument of silence is not conclusive and can lead to dangerous distortions. The fact of the matter is that the proposal was “referred to the General Conference Committee” (without any of the endorsing words such as “Adopted” or “Carried”), and it “was not heard of again.”³²

Unquestionably, Ellen G. White encouraged women to join men in the gospel ministry. Speaking of husband and wife being united in the work, she stated that “there are women who should labor in the gospel ministry. In many respects they would do more good than the ministers who neglect to visit the flock of God.”³³ In a testimony on “The Canvasser as a Gospel Worker, she

²⁷See Ellen G. White Estate, “Records Pertaining to Ellen G. White’s Ministerial/Ordination Credentials,” in www.whiteestate.org (released in Oct. 2012) (see Appendix 1).

²⁸White Estate staff, “Exhibits Relating to the Ordination of Women.”

²⁹Uriah Smith, sec., “General Conference,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881, 392.

³⁰“General Conference,” *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 5, 1882, 8.

³¹Minutes of the 1881 General Conference, in Records of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Vol. 2, Commencing Nov. 7, 1879, p. 61, GC Archives.

³²Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 131-32.

³³Ellen G. White, “The Laborer Is Worthy of His Hire,” Ms 43a, 1898; published in idem, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 472.

added, “It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God.”³⁴ But she did not directly address the issue of women’s ordination, except perhaps in the following paragraph from her article “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” published in the *Review* of July 9, 1895:

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.³⁵

Despite all the discussions around this statement, we should keep in mind that the women referred to (1) were not to be full-time workers, because they would consecrate only “some of their time to the service of the Lord”; (2) the function they would carry on would be more of a deaconess than of a pastor, for they would commit themselves “to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor”; and (3) they were “to counsel with the church officers or the minister,” thus indicating that Ellen White did not consider this “laying on of hands” to be the same as that of a minister or a church officer.

Speaking of her own call to the prophetic ministry, Ellen White wrote in 1911, “In the city of Portland the Lord ordained me as his messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth.”³⁶ But this statement does not imply that she was ordained as a pastor by the laying on of hands. In a letter of June 16, 1916, to Mrs. L. E. Cox from San Antonio, Texas, Clarence Crisler, one of Ellen White’s leading secretaries, commented on Ellen White’s attitude in regard to women’s ordination:

And may I add that Sister White, personally, was very careful about expressing herself in any wise as to the advisability of ordaining women as gospel ministers. She has often spoken of the perils that such general practice would expose the church to by a gainsaying world; but as yet I have never seen from her pen any statement that would seem to encourage the formal and official ordination of women to the gospel ministry, to public labor such as is ordinarily expected of an ordained minister.

This is not suggesting, much less saying, that no women are fitted for such public labor, and that none should ever be ordained; it is simply saying that so far as my knowledge extends, Sister White never encouraged church officials to depart from the general customs of the church in those matters.³⁷

³⁴Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 6:322.

³⁵E. G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 9, 1895, 434.

³⁶Ellen G. White, “An Appeal to Our Churches throughout the United States,” *Review and Herald*, May 18, 1911, 3; also in idem, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 252.

³⁷C. C. Crisler to Mrs. L. E. Cox, June 16, 1916, E G White Estate. See also Appendix C – “Exhibits Relating to the Ordination of Women,” in E. G. White, *Daughters of God*, 248-55.

To what extent Crisler understood or captured the basis of Ellen White's concerns is not known, but his statement at least provides his testimony that she did not offer encouragement for women to be ordained.

Yet, neither the pro-women's ordination proposal (which was not adopted at the 1881 General Conference Session) nor Ellen White's 1895 statement raised much interest on the matter of women's ordination at that time and even in the following decades. In 1950, the General Conference Officers' Meeting minutes recorded,

ORDINATION OF WOMEN

In California some women have been ordained for Dorcas Society work. Agreed, To list this item on agenda for Home and Foreign Officers.³⁸

As an unusual "ordination for the Dorcas Society work," this incident should not be considered an ordination to the gospel ministry.

Up to the late 1960s, there were only sporadic and sparse allusions to women's ordination. But several factors contributed to making Adventists more interested in the topic. From a socio-political perspective, the American Civil Rights Act of 1964, with emphasis on "Equal Employment Opportunity,"³⁹ helped more women to be employed by the denomination, and later would be referred to as requiring women to be ordained to the gospel ministry. From the financial side, there was unequal pay between men and women, and American ordained ministers usually can pay lower taxes than non-ordained church workers, which may have stimulated some people (including women) to seek ordained ministerial status.⁴⁰ From a pastoral perspective, in 1968 the Northern European Division forwarded a request from the Finland Union (which during World War II placed some women into pastoral positions) to ordain women to the gospel ministry; but that request was not followed up.⁴¹

In 1972 Josephine Benton was ordained at the Brotherhood Church in Washington, DC, by the presidents of the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union Conference, thereby becoming the first Adventist female local elder. In 1973 Benton became an associate pastor at the Sligo Church. Other women were soon ordained as local elders at the Walla Walla College Church and the Green Lake Church in Seattle, Washington.⁴² These incidents convinced the leadership of the church that a more in-depth study on the role of women in the church was needed.

Camp Mohaven Meetings (1973)

³⁸"Ordination of Women," [General Conference] Officers' Meeting, May 3, 1950, GC Archives.

³⁹See "Transcript of Civil Rights Act (1964)," Title VII, in www.ourdocuments.gov (accessed on Aug. 23, 2012).

⁴⁰Maxwell, "A Very Surprising (and Interesting) History," *Adventists Affirm* (Oct. 1998), 18-22.

⁴¹Bert Haloviak, "The long road to Mohaven," *The Adventist Woman*, Sept.-Oct. 1993, 1.

⁴²Beem, "Equality in Ministry: From 1881 to Now," in www.aaw.cc.

Adventist official discussions on women's ordination to the gospel ministry began with the Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, convened in Camp Mohaven, Danville, Ohio, September 16-19, 1973. Under the sponsorship of the General Conference, the council gathered together a group of 14 women (including Josephine Benton, Madelynn Jones Haldeman, Hedwig Jemison, Leona G. Running, and Kit Watts) and 13 men (including C. E. Bradford, Raoul Dederen, Gerhard F. Hasel, Frank B. Holbrook, Gordon Hyde, C. Mervyn Maxwell, and Ed Zinke). The committee was chaired by a General Conference Vice-President, W. J. Hackett, with Gordon Hyde (from Biblical Research Institute) as Secretary. Out of the discussions the following document emerged:

Report and Recommendations:

In recognition of the growing evidence of the imminence of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the consequent demand for the utilization of every personal resource available to the Church in fulfilling her commission, the council was led to the following positions:

1. With due recognition of evident individual differences, the equality of all believers was established by creation and is being restored through redemption in Jesus Christ (Gen. 1, 2; Gal. 3:28; 3T 484).

2. Redemption of believers in Jesus Christ is shared by them with others through the proclamation of the gospel, in which all believers participate. To aid in this sharing role the Holy Spirit has seen fit to pour gifts upon all (Joel 2:28, 29).

3. As a further aid in carrying out its mission, the Church by divine appointment bestows on certain members specific functions and recognizes the divine calling by ordination.

4. In harmony with the following statement, we see no significant theological objection to the ordination of women to Church ministries:

"Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. *They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.* In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work. Place the burdens upon *men and women of the church*, that they may grow by reason of the exercise, and thus become effective agents in the hand of the Lord for the enlightenment of those who sit in darkness" (*Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895, p. 271).

On the basis of the above positions, it is

Recommended:

1. Ordination Roles

a. That qualifications for church officers which require ordination (example, church elders and deacons) be listed without reference to sex. (The ordination of women to such offices does not seem contrary to the spirit of the gospel nor to the specific counsel of Ellen G. White given above.)

b. That, while Inspiration provides no explicit directions in this matter, yet in the view of the principles and the recommendations above, and the fact that the authority for selecting ordinands to the gospel ministry has been vested by God in His Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(1) A pilot plan be formulated by the General Conference in Annual Council, enlisting qualified women to pastoral and evangelistic ministry in selected areas;

(2) Ministerial licenses be granted to the participants with the possibility of later ordination as the pilot plan may evidence its growing acceptance by the members of the Church;

(3) As evidence is provided by the pilot program, the ordination of women to the gospel ministry be considered, if possible, by the 1975 General Conference session.

2. General Church Roles

That, since function of the Church involves the utilization of all its resources for the completion of its task, the eligibility of qualified women, representative of women in the Church, to participate with men in leadership and administrative roles at all levels, be recognized by the Church.

3. Home and Family Roles

a. That, while we are advocating some wider roles for women in the Church, we reaffirm the primacy of the home and family in the upbuilding of the Church and as a soul-winning agency, and the significant role of mothers and fathers in their responsibility of maintaining the sanctity of the home in fulfilling its purpose and high calling be fully appreciated;

b. That, in the family context, the husband-and-wife team called to the gospel ministry be recognized as an effective agency in the ministry of the Church on the terms of the counsel contained in MS 43a, 1898 (*Gospel Workers* 452, 453).

“The Minister’s Wife. The minister is paid for his work, and this is well. And if the Lord gives the wife as well as the husband the burden of labor, and she devotes her time and strength to visiting from family to family and opening the Scriptures to them, although the hands of ordination have not been laid upon her, she is accomplishing a work that is in the line of ministry. Then should her labors be counted as naught?

“Injustice has sometimes been done to women who labor just as devotedly as their husbands, and who are recognized by God as being necessary to the work of the ministry. The method of paying men laborers, and not paying their wives who share their labors with them, is a plan not according to the Lord’s order, and if carried out in our conferences, is liable to discourage our sisters from qualifying themselves for the work they should engage in. God is a God of justice, and if the ministers receive a salary for their work, their wives, who devote themselves just as disinterestedly to the work, should be paid in addition to the wages their husbands receive, even though they may not ask for this.

“Seventh-day Adventists are not in any way to belittle woman’s work. If a woman puts her housework in the hands of a faithful, prudent helper, and leaves her children in good care, while she engages in the work, the conference should have wisdom to understand the justice of her receiving wages.”

4. A Program of Education

That the General Conference initiate a program of education of the Church, which will provide a wider understanding of the principles and recommendations of this Report.

5. Areas of Further Study

That, as a result of the Council’s work, a number of areas calling for further study be recognized, such as:

a. A fuller theology of the entire concept of ordination.

b. A fuller study of the lay ministries of the Church.

c. A fuller study of the professional ministries of the Church.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PILOT PROGRAM

To implement *Recommendation 1-b* of the "Report and Recommendations" from the Council on the Roles of Women in the SDA Church, it is

Recommended,

1. That, where the "climate" in the field would appear receptive to a pilot program for women in pastoral and evangelistic roles, Conference/Mission committees in consultation with Union and Division committees take the initiative in appointing qualified women to pastoral/evangelistic responsibilities on a two-year basis, with the expectation of renewal upon evaluation of the pilot program.

2. That ministerial licenses be granted to the appointees in the pilot program.

3. That the General Conference Ministerial Association, Department of Education, and Ministerial Training Advisory Committee be asked to give study to any implications which the pilot program might have for the training of women at all educational levels for pastoral/evangelistic roles.

4. That the General Conference Ministerial Association monitor the pilot program and prepare an interim report of it for the 1974 Annual Council, as a basis for any recommendations concerning the ordination of women to the gospel ministry which would require consideration by the 1975 General Conference session.⁴³

Autumn/Annual Councils (1973-1974)

The Camp Mohaven document (see above) was submitted to and evaluated by the 1973 Autumn Council (on October 18), which responded in the following terms:

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

A report on the role of women in the Church was presented to the Annual Council. It was

VOTED, To adopt the following course of action:

1. That the report and recommendations from the Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, convened September 16-19, 1973, by action of the General Conference Committee, be received.

2. That the report and recommendations of the above Council, and selected papers presented to it, be made available to the divisions of the General Conference for study of this subject at the division level.

3. That the divisions giving study to the subject share their findings and recommendations with the President's Executive Advisory if possible in time for consideration at the Annual Council of 1974.

4. That the emphasis of the report upon the priesthood of all believers and the necessity of involving the total resources of the Church for the rapid completion of the gospel commission be accepted.

5. That the primacy of the married woman's role in the home and family, as repeatedly emphasized in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy, continue to be recognized and emphasized at all levels of the Church, in harmony with counsel such as the following from the Spirit of Prophecy:

⁴³"The original Camp Mohaven document," *The Adventist Woman*, Sept.-Oct. 1993, 6.

“There is a God above, and the light and glory from His throne rests upon the faithful mother as she tries to educate her children to resist the influence of evil. No other work can equal hers in importance.”—*Ministry of Healing*, pages 377, 378.

“When we give ourselves unreservedly to the Lord, the simple, commonplace duties of home life will be seen in their true importance, and we shall perform them in accordance with the will of God. . . . We should not feel that we are to neglect everything else, and give ourselves up to meditation, study, or prayer; neither are we to be full of bustle and hurry and work, to the neglect of personal piety.”—*The Adventist Home*, page 23.

6. That continued study be given to the theological soundness of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination and that division committees exercise discretion in any special cases that may arise until a definitive position is adopted. This continuing study will be arranged by the President's Executive Advisory.

7. That in areas receptive to such action, there be continued recognition of the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral-evangelistic work, and that the appropriate missionary credentials/licenses be granted them.⁴⁴

In line with these suggestions, the 1974 Annual Council voted on October 17 the following document:

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Annual Council 1973 recorded an action entitled, “Role of Women in the Church.” (See AC '73 General, p. 19; NADCA p. 22). Paragraph 3 requested the divisions to pursue their study of this question and share their findings with the General Conference in time for consideration by Annual Council 1974. This request was fulfilled by the divisions. It was

VOTED, To reaffirm paragraphs 4, 5 and 7 of the Annual Council 1973 action which read as follows:

4. That the emphasis of the report upon the priesthood of all believers and the necessity of involving the total resources of the church for the rapid completion of the gospel commission be accepted.

5. That the primacy of the married woman's role in the home and family, as repeatedly emphasized in the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy, continue to be recognized and emphasized at all levels of the church, in harmony with counsel such as the following from the Spirit of Prophecy:

“There is a God above, and the light and glory from His throne rests upon the faithful mother as she tries to educate her children to resist the influence of evil. No other work can equal hers in importance.”—*Ministry of Healing*, pp. 377, 378.

“When we give ourselves unreservedly to the Lord, the simple, commonplace duties of home life will be seen in their true importance, and we shall perform them in accordance with the will of God. . . . We should not feel that we are to neglect everything else, and give ourselves up to meditation, study or prayer; neither are we to be full of bustle and hurry and work, to the neglect of personal piety.”—*The Adventist Home*, p 23.

7. That in areas receptive to such action, there be continued recognition of the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral-evangelistic work, and that the appropriate missionary credentials/licenses be granted them.

Further,

⁴⁴1973 Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee (Washington, DC, October 7-18, 25, 1973)—*General Actions* ([Washington, DC]: General Conference of SDAs, 1973), 19-20; “Actions of General Interest from the 1973 Annual Council—2,” *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 6, 1973, 19.

1. To record our opinion that because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a world church which includes in its fellowship peoples of all nations and cultures, and because a survey of its world divisions reveals that the time is not ripe nor opportune, therefore, in the interest of the world unity of the church, no move be made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel ministry.

2. To request the President's Executive Advisory to arrange for a continuing study of the theological and practical implications of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

3. To request the President's Executive Advisory to also arrange for further study of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination and that division committees exercise discretion in any special cases that may arise before a definitive position has been adopted.

4. To refer to the President's Executive Advisory for further study, additional suggestions made regarding the role of women in the church. (A copy of these suggestions is on file with the minutes.).⁴⁵

A significant step toward an Adventist theology of ordination was taken by *Ministry* magazine in its February 1978 issue. That issue carried an article by T. H. Blincoe titled, "Needed—A Theology of Ordination",⁴⁶ and a helpful 16-page insert entitled, "A Theology of Ordination: A Seventh-day Adventist Interpretation", with texts by Gordon M. Hyde ("Introduction"), Raoul Dederen ("Nature of the Church" and "A Theology of Ordination"), and Gottfried Oosterwal ("Mission of the Church").⁴⁷

From 1972 onward, the General Conference Biblical Research Institute coordinated additional studies on the role of women in the church. Those studies (some of which were originally presented at the Camp Mohaven Meetings) were published in 1984 as *The Role of Women in the Church*, with an Introduction by Gordon M. Hyde ("The Roles of Women") and a series of 12 articles written respectively by Gerhard F. Hasel ("Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3"), Kenneth L. Vine ("The Legal and Social Status of Women in the Pentateuch"), Jerry A. Gladson ("The Role of Women in the Old Testament Outside the Pentateuch"), Julia Neuffer ("First-Century Cultural Backgrounds in the Greco-Roman Empire"), Walter F. Specht ("Jesus and Women"), Sakae Kubo ("An Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and Its Implications"), Frank B. Holbrook ("A Brief Analysis and Interpretation of the Biblical Data Regarding the Role of Woman"), E. Marcella Anderson ("The Roles of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Significance of Ellen G. White Counsels"), LaVonne Neff ("The Role of Women in American Protestantism, 1975"), Betty Stirling ("Society, Women, and the Church"), Fritz Guy ("Differently but Equally the Image of God: The Meaning of Womanhood"), and Raoul Dederen ("A Theology of Ordination").⁴⁸

⁴⁵1974 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee (Loma Linda, California, October 9-17, 1974)—General Actions ([Washington, DC]: General Conference of SDAs, 1974), 12-14.

⁴⁶T. H. Blincoe, "Needed—A Theology of Ordination," *Ministry*, Feb. 1978, 22-24.

⁴⁷Gordon M. Hyde, Raoul Dederen, and Gottfried Oosterwal, in "A Theology of Ordination: A Seventh-day Adventist Interpretation," insert to *Ministry*, Feb. 1978, 24A-24P.

⁴⁸General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *The Role of Women in the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, republ. in 1995); available at <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>.

Thus, by the mid-1970s significant Adventist studies on the role of women and the theology of ordination had already been done. But, perhaps to avoid uneasiness either from the pro women's ordination group or from those opposed to it, no final decision was made on women's ordination, leaving the issue open to further discussions.

Annual Council (1984)

Discussions on the issue of women's ordination continued in some denominational circles, trying to implement General Conference decisions. On August 30, 1984, the Columbia Union Conference Committee took the following action:

84-35 Women as Licensed Ministers

Voted, To respectfully recommend to the General Conference North American Division, in addition to existing policy, that action be taken which would:

- (1) Authorize participation in the ceremony of baptism by an ordained church elder, even in the presence of an ordained minister, where that local elder has received prescribed theological training from church institutions and is serving in a full-time pastoral role in the church in which the baptism would take place. We believe the absence or presence of an ordained minister should not affect either the practical acceptance or theological correctness of the act of baptism. We believe this action is consistent with the spirit of the policy and practices now considered acceptable in North America. We would hope that this can be accomplished by the end of the current calendar year.
- (2) Establish a representative study group to explore the feasibility of granting ministerial licenses to women pastors, either on world-wide basis or on a more local basis, depending on the findings of the study group. The study group should have representatives from conferences with women in ministry. This feasibility study could consider whether an enlarged policy in this area should be tried on a pilot basis prior to full implementation. If such a pilot is deemed desirable, the Potomac Conference would appreciate being involved.
- (3) Accept the fact that there are those who believe the time will and shall come in the Seventh-day Adventist Church when women will be accepted as full equals to men in their desire to serve the church and the Lord, without viewing this objective as a threat to church authority. It is our sincere desire that this objective be achieved in the not-too-distant future.⁴⁹

In response to this proposal, the 1984 General Conference Annual Council took two actions: one on women as local church elders, and the other one in direct response to the above proposal. The first action, taken on October 14, reads as follows:

WOMEN (LOCAL CHURCH) ELDERS—ELECTION AND ORDINATION

VOTED, 1. To reaffirm the Spring Meeting action on the General Conference Committee of 1975 Role of Women in the Church (GCC 75-153).

⁴⁹“Minutes of a Meeting of the Columbia Union Conference Committee Held at the Union Conference Office Building,” Columbia, Maryland, August 30, 1984 – vote 84-35.

2. To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders.

3. To suggest that the following guidelines be used in the selection and ordination of women as local church elders:

a. The concept should be carefully examined, discussed, and properly accepted at the local church level.

b. If a church contemplates such an action, the entire matter should be discussed and approved by the conference committee after the conference administration has sought counsel from the union leadership. The negotiation between the church and the conference should occur in advance of the final decision and vote by the local church.

c. The action to elect and ordain a woman as a local church elder must not be taken unless a clear consensus exists that the ministry of a woman is desirable and even essential to the spiritual well-being of the local church family. It should also be the consensus of the church that a woman elder will be respected as a spiritual leader and soul-winner. The church should also express its belief that there are dimensions of spiritual service and counsel which cannot be properly fulfilled by a male elder.

d. A clear majority of the voting members of the local church must be in favor of the action. The matter should be considered at a specially called church business meeting. Every church member should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue rather than only the few who might be present at a regular meeting where routine items of business are on the agenda. Although preliminary study could be given to this question by the church board, any final action should be taken by the church in a business meeting.

e. Whatever the decision of the church, it should result in unifying the members and not be the source of divisiveness or alienation. The body of Christ, the Church, must not be tarnished in any way. In this important issue, as in all things, the name of our Lord and Saviour must be exalted.⁵⁰

One of the main reasons presented in the above-quoted action for allowing “the election and ordination of women as local church elders” is that “there are dimensions of spiritual service and counsel which cannot be properly fulfilled by a male elder.”

In response to the proposal of the Columbia Union Conference, on October 15 the 1984 General Conference Annual Council took the following action:

COLUMBIA UNION/POTOMAC CONFERENCE REQUEST—ROLE OF WOMEN IN CHURCH

VOTED, 1. To advise the Columbia Union Conference and the Potomac Conference that their request has been carefully and prayerfully reviewed by the General Conference Officers.

2. To request the Potomac Conference Executive Committee to keep tabled the issues of ministerial licenses for women and baptism by women who are in full-time pastoral work, and who are also local church elders, until the larger issue of women in the gospel ministry is decided by the Church in harmony with the schedule outlined in 4, below.

3. To point out to those who may inquire that the issues raised by the Potomac Conference and Columbia Union cannot be resolved without deciding the central issue of women being eligible for ordination to the gospel ministry. The issues themselves are complex and many other factors are involved. However, once the central issue is decided

⁵⁰1984 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee (Washington, DC, October 9-18, 1984)—General Actions ([Washington, DC]: General Conference of SDAs, 1984), 56.

by the Church, the other issues should be resolved by logical extension of the main issue.

4. To establish the following schedule of addressing the issues raised by the Columbia Union and Potomac Conference and the larger issue of women in the gospel ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as follows:

a. Each division will be asked to discuss the issues in preparation for a meeting of representatives from the world divisions sometime early in 1985.

b. A meeting of at least two representatives from each of the world divisions will be scheduled in connection with the General Conference Committee 1985 Spring Meeting. The meeting will be coordinated by the Biblical Research Institute.

c. The report of the meeting of division representatives will be presented to the 1985 Spring Meeting and recommendations will be referred to the 1985 General Conference Session for decision.

5. The Biblical Research Institute is required to send to all delegates who will represent their divisions at the General Conference Session a balanced summary of the available theological positions in connection with this subject.

6. The decision of the 1985 General Conference Session will be definitive and should be accepted as such by the Church worldwide.⁵¹

Washington, DC, Meetings (1985)

Following the strategy outlined by the 1984 Annual Council, a committee of 66 people (including administrators, Biblical scholars, church pastors, and 15 women), representing all 10 divisions of the General Conference, met in Washington, DC, on March 26-28, 1985, to study the role of women in the church. The committee voted the following recommendations presented by the General Conference President Neal C. Wilson at the 1985 Spring Council:

1. To take no definitive action at this time regarding the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

2. To maintain the church's present position on this matter.

3. To prepare further Biblical and other studies on the question of ordaining women by assigning specific topics to scholars and theologians for research.

4. To assign discussion of the documents growing out of such research to a special representative committee which will be scheduled to meet early in 1988, its findings and report to be presented to the 1988 Spring Meeting of the General Conference Committee and eventually to the 1989 Annual Council, at which time the entire issue will be reviewed.

[. . .]

RECOMMENDED, 1. To urge that an "affirmative action" plan for the involvement of women in the work of the church be a priority with church leadership, and to request leaders to use their executive influence to open to women all aspects of ministry in the church which do not require ordination.

2. To give special emphasis to the work of Bible instructors, both women and men, and to urge that conference and field administrators restore this ministerial category to importance and accord it proper recognition in the work of the church.

3. To recognize the desirability of a pastor and his wife working together and the spiritual strength that will result through such team ministry and to urge that further study of this concept be made, including the development of a financial plan and training program that would support this objective wherever possible.

4. To recognize that a great need exists to educate our people regarding the major roles that women may fulfill in the Lord's work without ordination and to request

⁵¹Ibid., 57.

that specific plans to meet this need be developed and presented to the 1985 Annual Council.

RECOMMENDED, To institute a reformation in the church's ordination practices for the purpose of limiting ordination only to those performing direct pastoral, evangelistic, ecclesiastical, and other clearly ministerial duties.⁵²

This recommendation of "limiting ordination only to those performing direct pastoral, evangelistic, ecclesiastical, and other clearly ministerial duties" tried to confine ordination to the ministerial line of work, avoiding its extension to other important areas such as the medical work.

New Orleans General Conference Session (1985)

The 1984 Annual Council (see above) stipulated that "the decision of the 1985 General Conference Session" would "be definitive and should be accepted as such by the Church worldwide." But the New Orleans General Conference Session (1985) endorsed the recommendations of the 1985 Committee on Role of Women in the Church (see above), including the one about taking "no definitive action" on women's ordination. The actions of the Session read as follows:

Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry

Voted, 1. To take no definitive action at this time regarding the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

2. To maintain the church's present position on this matter.

3. To prepare further Biblical and other studies on the question of ordaining women by assigning specific topics to scholars and theologians for research.

4. To assign discussion of the documents growing out of such research to a special representative committee that will be scheduled to meet early in 1988, its findings to be presented in a report to the 1988 Spring Meeting of the General Conference Committee and subsequently to the 1989 Annual Council, at which time the entire issue will be reviewed.

Women's Participation in Church Work

Voted, 1. To urge that "affirmative action" for the involvement of women in the work of the church be a priority plan with church leadership, and to request leaders to use their executive influence to open to women all aspects of ministry in the church that do not require ordination.

2. To give special emphasis to the work of Bible instructors, both women and men, and to urge that conference and field administrators restore this ministerial category to importance and accord it proper recognition in the work of the church.

3. To recognize the desirability of a pastor and his wife working together as a team and the spiritual strength that will result through such combined ministry, and to urge that this concept be studied further, together with the development of a financial plan and training program that would support its implementation wherever feasible.

4. To recognize that a great need exists to educate our people regarding the major roles that women may fill in the Lord's work without ordination, and to request that

⁵²Neal C. Wilson, "Committee reports on women's role in the church," *Adventist Review*, April 25, 1985, 23.

specific plans to meet this need be developed and presented to the 1985 Annual Council.

Ministerial Ordination— Reform of Practices

Voted, To institute a reform in the church's ordination practices for the purpose of limiting ministerial ordination only to those who perform direct pastoral, evangelistic, ecclesiastical, or other clearly ministerial-type duties.⁵³

In line with those actions, the Annual Council of that year (1985) voted on October 15, "To utilize the *Adventist Review, Ministry, Journal of Adventist Education* and division and union papers as vehicles for educating our church members regarding the major roles that are open to women in the Lord's work without the need to be ordained to the gospel ministry." A special "Women's Ministries Advisory Committee" was appointed, with Betty Holbrook, GC Coordinator for Women's Ministries, as the committee chair.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, several independent women-supportive Adventist ministries appeared on the scene, some of which advocated a pro-women's ordination agenda. Among these were the Association of Adventist Women (AAW), the Adventist Women's Institute (AWI), and the Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry (TEAM).⁵⁵ In 1988 the first issue of *Ponderings—Publication of Adventist Women's Institute* came off the press, advocating the equality of genders and promoting the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. Volume 3, No. 2 of that periodical published a money bill (like a US dollar) titled, "Daughters Of Ellen" (DOE), with a picture of Ellen G. White in the center; and, on the left side, the following quotation from a letter she wrote on April 21, 1898: ". . . I will in the name of the Lord, protest. I will feel it my duty to create a fund from my tithe money, to pay these women who are accomplishing just as essential work as the ministers are doing, . . ." On the right side of the bill there was a statement asking for tithe money for the pro-women's ordination fund of DOE. The bill was distributed unofficially at the Indianapolis General Conference Session (1990).⁵⁶

Those opposing women's ordination were also active. In 1987 the independent Adventists Affirm ministry came into existence, publishing in the spring of that year the first issue of its periodical *Affirm*, with the subtitle *A Publication Affirming Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*. The title was changed in its second issue to *Adventists Affirm*, but preserving the same subtitle. This unofficial Adventist periodical became, since its first issue, an influential resource in opposition to the pro-women's ordination movement. Its first editorial board included William Fagal (editor), Hedwing Jemison (treasurer), C. Mervyn

⁵³"Session Actions," *Adventist Review*, July 11, 1985, 20.

⁵⁴1985 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee (Washington, DC, October 8-17, 1984)—*General Actions* ([Washington, DC]: General Conference of SDAs, 1985), 19.

⁵⁵See Ramona Perez-Greek, "Women's Leadership, 1971-1992: The Expanding Years," in Rosa T. Banks, ed., *A Woman's Place: Seventh-day Adventist Women in Church and Society* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1992), 85-99.

⁵⁶Audrey Perkins, in "Letters," *Ponderings—Publication of Adventist Women's Institute*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1990): 14.

Maxwell, C. Raymond Holmes, and Samuele Bacchiocchi. In 1994 *Adventists Affirm* also began to publish some of the most widely distributed anti-women's ordination books. Also in 1987 Samuele Bacchiocchi published his 295-page anti-women's ordination book titled, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church*.⁵⁷

Despite all efforts, the discussion on women's ordination continued to absorb much of the time and energies of church administrators, pastors, and some lay members.

Cohutta Springs Meetings (1989)

Significant for the ongoing discussion about women's ordination was also the meeting of the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church that took place in Cohutta Springs, Georgia, July 12-18, 1989. After much discussion, two documents emerged from those meetings. A group of 18 leaders (including the General Conference president and secretary, as well as the presidents of the 10 divisions) developed the "Presidents' Document," which was adopted on July 16 by a vote of 56 to 11 with one abstention. The document reads as follows,

The presidents of the world divisions of the General Conference reported to the commission on the situation in their fields with respect to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. In several divisions there is little or no acceptance of women in the role of pastors, ordained or otherwise. In other divisions some unions would accept women as pastors, but indications are that the majority of unions do not find this acceptable. However, in the North American division there seems to be wider support for the ordination of women.

The division presidents also reported that based upon extensive discussions, committees, commissions, surveys, etc., there exists the probability that approving the ordination of women would result in disunity, dissension, and perhaps even schism. Hence the presidents came to these two conclusions:

1. A decision to ordain women as pastors would not be welcomed or meet with approval in most of the world church.
2. The provisions of the Church Manual and the General Conference Working Policy which allow only for ordination to the gospel ministry on a world-wide (universal) basis have strong support by the divisions.

The General Conference and division officers present at the Commission meetings concur with the conclusions of the presidents.

The Commission:

1. Having listened to the arguments (presentations) for and against the ordination of women; and
2. Having sensed the needs and concerns of the world field; and
3. Having carefully considered what is probably best, and the least disruptive, for the world church at this time; and
4. Recognizing the importance of our eschatological mission, the witness and image of our spiritual family, and the need and unity of (in) the church; reports to the 1989 Annual Council of the General Conference the following results of its deliberations:

⁵⁷Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church*, Biblical Perspectives, vol. 7 (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987).

- I. While the Commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging and continuing ministry for women which is being expressed and will be evidenced in varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.
- II. Further, the Commission recommends to the 1989 Annual Council that:
 - A. In view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church, we do not recommend authorization for women to be ordained to the gospel ministry.
 - B. Those who have (without regard to gender):
 - (1) completed approved ministerial training; and
 - (2) been called by a conference to serve in a full-time pastoral-evangelistic-ministerial role, and
 - (3) been elected and ordained as local church elders; and
 - (4) been recognized as associates in pastoral care or licensed ministers, may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned, subject to Division authorization of this provision.⁵⁸

Speaking of “ordination to the gospel ministry on a world-wide (universal) basis,” the above-quoted document excluded ordinations intended to be limited to a specific geographical area.

By their turn, the 17 women who attended the Cohutta Springs sessions of the Commission on the Role of Women in the Church formed an *ad hoc* committee to give further study to the subject. A set of “Women Commissioners’ Recommendations” was submitted to the commission, which voted to refer the recommendations to the General Conference officers for further study. This document reads as follows:

The women on the Role of Women in the Church Commission recognize that there are significant concerns other than ordination that relate to the broader scope of the role of women. To affirm and address the wide-ranging talents of women, we recommend that immediate consideration be given to the following:

EQUALITY

Job description. Develop job descriptions for all positions to assure that employees are fairly assigned and compensated.

Pay and benefits. Assure that equal pay be given for equal work and benefits applied on the basis of the job rather than gender or marital status.

Hiring and firing. Assure that equal opportunities exist in the hiring process and practices of the organization and develop clear and unbiased policies on termination of employment, which are applied with fairness for all employees.

Appeals. Develop procedures which provide an appeal mechanism for

⁵⁸“Presidents’ Document, Cohutta Springs, July 16, 1989,” *The Adventist Woman*, Aug.-Sept. 1989, 2.

employees who believe they have been inequitably treated in salaries/wages and benefits. Such an appeal should protect the employee's job security during the following and appeal process.

Decision making. Include women in all levels of decision making, e.g. jobs, committees, etc., with consideration of ethnic/national backgrounds.

Bible workers. Give consideration to the problems that Bible workers face: job insecurity, variable compensation, low recognition.

Pastors' spouses. (A) Develop a system of fair compensation for pastors' spouses who are part of a ministerial team; (B) Encourage team ministry.

Service records. Assure that all part-time employees receive service credit in proportion to the amount of time worked. Service records should be maintained so that breaks in service due to parental responsibilities or spouse relocation do not penalize women.

DEVELOPMENT

Shepherdess Organization.

1. Follow Ellen White's counsel on team ministry by promoting team ministry for pastor and spouse:
 - (A) Training for pastors' spouses by continuing education seminars: basic skills necessary to a team ministry through college/seminary training such as the Women's Seminary Guild at Andrews University; continuing education in the conference/union setting. Conferences with sponsored students at the seminary should contribute to the financial load of this educational component.
 - (B) An accountability system should be established whereby a pastor's spouse regularly reports objectives and activities to conference administration. These records as well as a continuing education transcript should be maintained by the conference and should follow the spouse when the family is relocated.
 - (C) Fair remuneration should be given the pastor's spouse depending on time and level of work. If full time is given, full pay should be provided.
2. Recommend that the Shepherdess Coordinator be employed:
 - (A) Full time at General Conference and division levels.
 - (B) At least half-time at unions and conferences.
 - (C) And, that they have appropriate clerical support and office budget, and necessary travel budgets.

Women's Ministries Coordinators.

We recommend the employment of Women's Ministries Coordinators to coordinate ministries for all Adventist women, both lay and denominational employees.

- (A) Full time at General Conference and division levels.
- (B) At least half-time at union and conferences.

Better Defined Career Paths for Women.

- (A) Provide women with professional growth opportunities and recognize with increase compensation the workload they carry.
- (B) Create new job categories between secretary and elected positions through which women can move as they gain experiences and are assigned greater responsibilities.

RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

Goal 1: To include a significant number of qualified women on committees at every level of church and institutional organization.

- Goal 2:** To achieve the use of inclusive written and verbal language throughout the church in policies, publications, preaching, and in teaching.
- Goal 3:** To develop understanding, attitudes, and practices of appropriate professional relationships between men and women through interpersonal skills seminars, lectures, media presentations, etc.
- Goal 4:** To implement appropriate maternity leave policies in all areas of church employment.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions are recommended as components of an affirmative action plan for the upcoming quinquennium (1990-1995):

1. Open all leadership positions to qualified persons regardless of gender except for the categories of President and Ministerial Secretary which require ordained ministers.
2. In the upcoming quinquennial elections, nominate a woman to the following positions. If women with appropriate training and credentials lack adequate experience for the post, appoint an experienced mentor who agrees to assist her in gaining the necessary experience to succeed. Attention should be given to ethnic and national balance.

(A) General Conference.

1. General vice-president.
2. Undersecretary.
3. Associate treasurer.
4. Women's Ministries Coordinator (full time) as a General Field Secretary.
5. Shepherdess International Coordinator.
6. Undersecretary of E. G. White Estate.
7. For each Department, Service, or Office, a women as director or associate director:
 - Church Ministries
 - Communication
 - Education
 - Health/Temperance
 - Public Affairs
 - Publishing
 - Adventist Chaplaincies Ministries
 - ADRA
 - Auditing
 - Biblical Research Institute
 - Risk Management
 - General Counsel
 - Human Relations
 - Trust Services
8. Editor or associate editor for each church paper.

(B) Divisions.

1. Associate Field Secretary with responsibilities as Women's Ministries Coordinator.
2. Treasurer or Associate Treasurer.
3. A departmental director or associate.
4. NAD: An assistant to the President.

(C) Unions and Conferences.

- At least two departmental directors or associates in each union and conference.
3. In committee appointments, position entitlements should not be gender-related. Among lay members representatives, select at least 25% as women, but never less than two women. On boards and executive committees without lay members, assure

that at least two members are present by position. In constituency or General Conference delegations, elect at least 25% of the delegates as women.

4. The Women's Ministries Coordinator and one elected officer should be assigned accountability for the affirmative action plan.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PROGRESS

Whereas, the church has expressed a desire and demonstrated a willingness to promote the advancement of women within the employment of the church's administrative structure,

Whereas, it is the desire of all concerned to assure the fair and equitable application of the above recommendations, and

Whereas, an opportunity exists for this church to model world-wide administration which is in word and deed Christian,

We recommend that

1. A survey instrument be developed to be used for monitoring the implementation of those adopted procedures throughout all divisions, with the instrument to be administered at intervals appropriate to the need for information.

2. A committee be appointed with the power to collect and report to General Conference officers the results of the information gained from the survey.

3. The committee members be empowered to assist divisions in developing strategies of implementations that suit the unique needs of a division.

4. The membership of the committee be comprised of personnel who are knowledgeable relative to the recommendations and are objective, resourceful, and creative in problematic situations.⁵⁹

Annual Council (1989)

The two Cohutta Springs documents on women's ordination (see above) were discussed at the 1989 Annual Council. On October 5 the following actions were taken in response to them:

104-89GNa ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE GOSPEL MINISTRY—REPORT OF ROLE OF WOMEN COMMISSION

Prior to the vote being taken, adequate time was given for a full and lengthy discussion. Neal C Wilson then gave a summary. W Floyd Bresee offered prayer after which the attendees were requested to pray in small groups. Two secret ballots were requested—the first by all attendees and the second by only members of the General Conference Committee.

The results of the two votes were as follows:

Attendees - 187 Yes, 97 No

General Conference Committee Members - 104 Yes, 77 No

VOTED, To accept the following report and recommendations of the Role of Women Commission and to refer them to the 1990 General Conference Session for approval:

The presidents of the world divisions of the General Conference reported to the Commission on the situation in their fields with respect to the ordaining of women to the gospel ministry. In several divisions there is little or no acceptance of women in the role of pastors, ordained or otherwise. In other divisions some unions would accept women as pastors, but indications are that the majority of unions do not find this acceptable.

⁵⁹“Women Commissioners' Recommendations, Cohutta Springs, July 17, 1989,” *The Adventist Woman*, Aug.-Sept. 1989, 3.

However, in the North American Division there seems to be wider support for the ordination of women.

The division presidents also reported that based upon extensive discussions, committees, commissions, surveys, etc, there exists the probability that approving the ordination of women would result in disunity, dissension, and perhaps even schism. Hence the presidents came to these two conclusions:

1. A decision to ordain women as pastors would not be welcomed or meet with approval in most of the world Church.

2. The provisions of the *Church Manual* and the General Conference *Working Policy*, which allow only for ordination to the gospel ministry on a worldwide basis, have strong support by the divisions.

The General Conference and division officers present at the Commission concur with the conclusions of the presidents.

The Commission, having listened to the arguments and presentations for and against the ordination of women; having sensed the needs and concerns of the world field; having carefully considered what is probably best and the least disruptive for the world Church at this time; and recognizing the importance of our eschatological mission, the witness and image of our spiritual family, and the need for oneness of and unity in the Church, reports to the 1989 Annual Council of the General Conference the following results of its deliberation:

1. While the Commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the scriptures and the writings of Ellen G White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging, and continuing ministry for women which is being expressed and will be evidenced in varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

2. Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world Church, and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church, the Commission recommends to the 1989 Annual Council that

a. We do not recommend authorization for women to be ordained to the gospel ministry.

b. Those who have, without regard to gender, been recognized as commissioned ministers or licensed ministers may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned, subject to division authorization of this provision, if the following conditions apply:

- 1) The individual has completed approved ministerial training.
- 2) The individual has been called by a conference to serve in a full-time pastoral-evangelistic-ministerial role.
- 3) The individual has been elected and ordained as a local church elder.

104-89GNa ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE GOSPEL MINISTRY—REPORT OF ROLE OF WOMEN COMMISSION—CLARIFICATION

The Chairman expressed the need to discuss the action on the report of the Role of Women Commission. It has been brought to his attention that there is a difference of opinion among attendees at the Annual Council on the procedures to be followed in the handling of this item.

This difference of opinion is occasioned by the fact that the action of the 1985 General Conference Session on the matter of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry seems to imply first, that a report of the study of the subject would be made to the 1990 General Conference Session; and second, that clarification of the role of licensed ministers and associates in pastoral care should be made at the 1985 Annual Council.

There was an initial clarification of the second point at the 1985 Annual Council.

However, the second part of the Role of Women Commission Report further addresses this same matter. Therefore it seems appropriate to assume that this item should not be included in the recommendation to the General Conference Session but rather that it should be cared for by the 1989 Annual Council as a policy item. After a lengthy discussion it was,

VOTED, To record that it is the sense of this body that the action on item 104-89GNa, Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry—Report of Role of Women Commission, taken on Thursday afternoon (see GCC 89-387), October 5, 1989 be interpreted and processed as follows:

1. That the following portions of the report dealing with the ordination of women be referred to the 1990 General Conference Session for approval:

“The presidents of the world divisions of the General Conference reported to the Commission on the situation in their fields with respect to the ordaining of women to the gospel ministry. In several divisions there is little or no acceptance of women in the role of pastors, ordained or otherwise. In other divisions some unions would accept women as pastors, but indications are that the majority of unions do not find this acceptable. However, in the North American Division there seems to be wider support for the ordination of women.

“The division presidents also reported that based upon extensive discussions, committees, commissions, surveys, etc, there exists the probability that approving the ordination of women would result in disunity, dissension, and perhaps even schism. Hence the presidents came to these two conclusions:

“1. A decision to ordain women as pastors would not be welcomed or meet with approval in most of the world Church.

“2. The provisions of the *Church Manual* and the General Conference *Working Policy*, which allow only for ordination to the gospel ministry on a worldwide basis, have strong support by the divisions.

“The General Conference and division officers present at the Commission concur with the conclusions of the presidents.

“The Commission, having listened to the arguments and presentations for and against the ordination of women; having sensed the needs and concerns of the world field; having carefully considered what is probably best and the least disruptive for the world Church at this time; and recognizing the importance of our eschatological mission, the witness and image of our spiritual family, and the need for oneness of and unity in the Church, reports to the 1989 Annual Council of the General Conference the following results of its deliberation:

“1. While the Commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the scriptures and the writings of Ellen G White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging, and continuing ministry for women which is being expressed and will be evidenced in varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

“2. Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world Church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church, the Commission recommends to the 1989 Annual Council that

“a. We do not recommend authorization for women to be ordained to the gospel ministry.”

2. That in harmony with the directive of the 1985 General Conference Session, the following portion of the recommendation be final with the 1989 Annual Council with the understanding that a report will be made to the 1990 General Conference Session:

“b. Those who have, without regard to gender, been recognized as commissioned ministers or licensed ministers may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned, subject to division authorization of this provision, if the following conditions apply:

- “1) The individual has completed approved ministerial training.
 “2) The individual has been called by a conference to serve in a full-time pastoral-evangelistic-ministerial role.
 “3) The individual has been elected and ordained as a local church elder.”

104-89GNb ROLE OF WOMEN COMMISSION—SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS

The women in attendance at the 1989 Cohutta Springs meeting of the Role of Women Commission presented certain significant concerns other than ordination that relate to the broader scope of the role of women. The following concerns were largely confirmed by the responses to the survey conducted by the General Conference Women’s Ministries Advisory of worldwide denominationally employed women who have leadership and supervisory responsibilities.

VOTED, 1. To approve the recommendation on the significant concerns of women as expressed by them at the 1989 Role of Women Commission meeting and as augmented by the survey conducted by the General Conference Women’s Ministry Advisory as follows:

a. Equality—1) Job Description—Develop job descriptions for all positions to assure that employees are fairly assigned and compensated.

2) Remuneration and Benefits—Assure that remuneration and benefits are applied on the basis of the position rather than gender or marital status. Encourage expressions of affirmation and appreciation which also contribute to a sense of accomplishment.

3) Employment and Termination Practices—Assure that equal opportunities exist in the hiring process and practices of the organization and develop clear and unbiased policies on termination of employment.

4) Appeals—Develop procedures which provide an appeal mechanism for employees who believe they have been inequitably treated. Ensure that such an appeal protects the employee’s job security during and following the appeal process.

5) Decision Making—Include women in the decision-making process, with appropriate consideration of ethnic/national background.

6) Service Records—Assure that all employees (including part time) receive service credit in proportion to the amount of time worked. Maintain service records so that breaks in service due to parental responsibilities or spouse relocation do not penalize the employee’s accumulation of service credit.

b. Development—1) Shepherdess Organization—The Shepherdess Organization needs to be emphasized and strengthened on all church levels. Where it is not possible to employ a full-time Shepherdess coordinator a suitable individual should be designated as the one who will foster programs to meet the specific needs of pastors’ spouses. Budgetary provision should be made to cover travel and office expenses as needed.

2) Women’s Ministries Coordinators—A Women’s Ministries Coordinator to coordinate ministries for all Adventist women, both lay and denominational employees, should be employed as follows:

a) Full-time at General Conference and division levels.

b) At least half-time at union and local conference levels.

3) Career Paths for Women—Career paths for women should be more clearly defined by

a) Providing women with professional growth opportunities and recognizing the workload they carry with increased compensation.

b) Creating new job categories between secretary and elected positions through which women can move as they gain experience and are assigned greater responsibilities.

c) Paying special attention to the needs of pastors’ spouses as follows by

- (1) Developing a system of fair compensation for pastors' spouses who are part of a ministerial team.
- (2) Encouraging team ministry.
- d) Addressing the concerns of Bible instructors who face problems peculiar to their specific role.
 - c. Respect and Recognition—Respect for and recognition of the talents of women should be facilitated by
 - 1) Including a significant number of qualified women on committees at every level of church and institutional organization.
 - 2) Implementing the use of inclusive written and verbal language throughout the Church in policies, publications, preaching, and teaching.
 - 3) Developing understanding, attitudes, and practices of appropriate professional relationships between men and women through interpersonal skills seminars, lectures, media presentations, etc.
 - 2. To record the appreciation of the Annual Council for the above suggestions and to encourage each organizational entity and each institution to incorporate women in leadership by giving study to the foregoing concerns so as to achieve the spirit and purpose of this proposal.
 - 3. To record the following processes and recommendations to assist organizations in evaluating their status with respect to the role of women:
 - a. Review job descriptions for all positions, not subject to ordination, in order to ensure the way is open for the appointment or election of qualified persons regardless of gender.
 - b. Include women among those considered for appointment and election to positions not requiring ordination.
 - c. Provide the possibility of appropriate training and work experience where these prevent otherwise qualified women from being appointed or elected.
 - d. Include women on all committees and boards. Where committee and board membership profiles permit, as least two women should be appointed with the goal of at least 25 percent among those categories of membership where a sufficient number of women are eligible for membership.
 - e. Include at each constituent level a minimum of 25 percent women as delegates among those categories of delegates where sufficient women are eligible.
 - f. Review these recommendations and their implementation on each organizational level annually and prior to constituency meetings.
 - 4. To record that the General Conference may authorize the Women's Ministries Advisory to seek progress reports from the world divisions.⁶⁰

Thus, the above-quoted 1989 actions (1) recommended a significant increase of female representatives in church committees; (2) spoke of ministerial calls made "without regard to gender"; and (3) suggested that "commissioned ministers or licensed ministers" could "perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned."

On October 9, the General Conference Executive Committee voted to submit the basic content of the above-mentioned report to the 1990 General Conference Session.

Indianapolis General Conference Session (1990)

⁶⁰ 1989 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee (Silver Spring, MD, October 3-10, 1989)—*General Actions* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of SDAs, 1989), 34-38.

The proposal of the 1989 Annual Council not to ordain women to the gospel ministry generated strong discussion at the 1990 Indianapolis General Conference Session, especially on July 10 and 11.⁶¹ Submitted to a vote, the proposal was carried by 1,173 votes in favor, and 377 against.⁶² The procedures and the actual content of the vote were recorded in the following terms:

Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry

Prior to a vote being taken, the chairman requested all delegates and visitors to pray individually or in small groups for the leading of the Holy Spirit. The delegates were then asked to vote by a show of hands, and a count was made with the following results:

In favor of the recommendation: 1,173

In opposition to the recommendation: 377

Voted, To accept the following report and recommendations of the Role of Women Commission as recommended by the 1989 Annual Council:

The presidents of the world divisions of the General Conference reported to the commission on the situation in their fields with respect to the ordaining of women to the gospel ministry. In several divisions there is little or no acceptance of women in the role of pastors, ordained or otherwise. In other divisions some unions would accept women as pastors, but indications are that the majority of unions do not find this acceptable. However, in the North American Division there seems to be wider support for the ordination of women.

The division presidents also reported that based upon extensive discussions, committees, commissions, surveys, etc., there exists the probability that approving the ordination of women would result in disunity, dissension, and perhaps even schism. Hence the presidents came to these two conclusions:

1. A decision to ordain women as pastors would not be welcomed or meet with approval in most of the world church.

2. The provisions of the *Church Manual* and the General Conference *Working Policy*, which allow only for ordination to the gospel ministry on a worldwide basis, have strong support by the divisions.

The General Conference and division officers present at the commission concur with the conclusions of the presidents.

The commission having listened to the arguments and presentations for and against the ordination of women; having sensed the needs and concerns of the world field; having carefully considered what is probably best and the least disruptive for the world church at this time; and recognizing the importance of our eschatological mission, the witness and image of our spiritual family, and the need for oneness of and unity in the church, reports to the 1990 General Conference session upon the recommendation of the 1989 Annual Council the following results of its deliberation:

1. While the commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide-ranging, and continuing ministry for women, which is being expressed and will be evidenced in the varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

2. Further in view of the wide spread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church, we do not approve ordination of

⁶¹See "Ninth Business Meeting" and "Tenth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, July 13, 1990, 8-13.

⁶²"Tenth Business Meeting," *ibid.*, 13.

women to the gospel ministry.⁶³

In addition to voting not to ordain women to the gospel ministry, the 1990 General Conference made a few significant changes in the *Church Manual*, opening the doors for women to perform some functions allowed up to then only for ordained ministers. For example, previous versions of the *Church Manual* prescribed that “in the marriage ceremony the charge, vows, and declaration of marriage are given only by an ordained minister.”⁶⁴ But in its 1990 revised edition, the *Church Manual* stated that “in the marriage ceremony the charge, vows, and declaration of marriage are given only by an ordained minister except in those areas where division committees have taken action to approve that selected licensed or commissioned ministers who have been ordained as local elders may perform the marriage ceremony.”⁶⁵

Another significant change in the *Church Manual* was in regard to the ordination of deaconesses. The version revised at the 1985 General Conference Session contained the following statement: “Deaconesses were included in the official staff of the early Christian churches (Rom. 16:1, 2). . . . There is no record, however, that these women were ordained; hence the practice of ordaining deaconesses is not followed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”⁶⁶ But the version of the *Church Manual* revised at the 1990 General Conference Session deleted the last sentence of the statement that referred to the practice of not ordaining deaconesses.⁶⁷

It is noteworthy that in China several Adventist women who “were ordained as elders in local congregations also performed the normal duties of a minister, including baptisms.”⁶⁸ Due to the political situation in that country, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no formal organization there, and the General Conference does not have full control over their decisions. Schwarz and Greenleaf explain that, “ironically, isolation from the rest of the organized Adventist church also saved Chinese believers from debate about women’s ordination.”⁶⁹

Many discussions and publications were generated as a result of the non-approval of women’s ordination to the gospel ministry, as well as by the fear of others that the issue could come up again for discussion at the next General Conference Session (1995). Several books were published favoring women’s ordination. For example, in 1990, the Loma Linda University Press published the work of V. Norskov Olsen on *Myths and Truth about Church*,

⁶³“Session Actions,” *ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁴*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, rev. 1986 ([Washington, DC]: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), 59.

⁶⁵*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, rev. 1990 ([Silver Spring, MD]: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, [1990]), 59.

⁶⁶*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1986), 64.

⁶⁷*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1990), 64.

⁶⁸Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 531.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

Priesthood and Ordination, written from a biblical-historical perspective.⁷⁰ In 1992 the Review and Herald Publishing Association released the book *A Woman's Place: Seventh-day Adventist Women in Church and Society*, with 10 chapters by different authors, edited by Rosa T. Banks, uplifting female contributions to the church.⁷¹ The next year (1993), the Center for Christian Bioethics at Loma Linda University published a new book by V. N. Olsen titled *The New Relatedness for Man & Woman in Christ: A Mirror of the Divine*, advocating plain equality between man and woman.⁷² In 1995, the Andrews University Press published a work with 12 chapters by various authors, titled *Women and the Church: A Feminine Perspective*, edited by Lourdes E. Morales-Gudmundsson.⁷³ The same year (1995) TEAMPRESS launched a 408-page book titled *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women*, with 14 chapters and nine appendices by different authors.⁷⁴ Edited by Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca F. Brillhart, this work was one of the most important Adventist pro-women's ordination appeals published up to that time.

On the other side, two books published by Adventists Affirm questioned the claimed biblical basis for women's ordination to the gospel ministry. The first, authored by C. Raymond Holmes, was published in 1994 under the title *The Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry*.⁷⁵ The second book, written by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, was published the next year (1995) under the title *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity*.⁷⁶

As a result of previous decisions, women have been affirmed in some parts of the world more than in others, including being prepared for various positions, being encouraged to study for the ministry, and in anticipating opportunities for using their talents and skills in public leadership roles. Thus, the way was prepared for questions of ministerial ordination to arise with greater intensity. The publications listed above and other materials helped to build a great expectation about the issue of women's ordination that was scheduled to be discussed at the plenary session of the 1995 General Conference held in Utrecht, Holland.

⁷⁰V. Norskov Olsen, *Myths and Truth about Church, Priesthood and Ordination* (Riverside, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 1990).

⁷¹Banks, ed., *A Woman's Place*.

⁷²V. Norskov Olsen, *The New Relatedness for Man & Woman in Christ: A Mirror of the Divine* (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University, Center for Christian Bioethics, 1993).

⁷³Lourdes E. Morales-Gudmundsson, ed., *Women and the Church: A Feminine Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1995).

⁷⁴Habada and Brillhart, ed., *The Welcome Table*.

⁷⁵C. Raymond Holmes, *Tip of an Iceberg: Biblical Authority, Biblical Interpretation, and the Ordination of Women in Ministry* ([Berrien Springs, MI], and Wakefield, MI: Adventists Affirm and Pointer Publications, 1994). Published in Spanish as *La punta de un iceberg: autoridad bíblica, interpretación bíblica y la ordenación de la mujer al ministerio* (Wakefield, MI: Pointer Publications, 1995); and in Portuguese as *A Ponta de um Iceberg: A Autoridade e a Interpretação da Bíblia, e a Ordenação da Mulher para o Ministério*, transl. by Delmar Faria Freire (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995).

⁷⁶Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995).

Utrecht General Conference Session (1995)

Since the issue of women's ordination to the gospel ministry was not approved by the delegates of the worldwide church at the Indianapolis General Conference Session (1990), the North America Division decided to request special permission from the worldwide church to ordain women just for its own territory. Consequently, the 1994 Annual Council recorded the following vote on October 9:

305-94G NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION REQUEST—ORDINATION

VOTED, To refer to the 1995 General Conference Session the North American Division request that the General Conference in Session adopt provisions on ordination as outlined below:

The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions.⁷⁷

Paving the way for the approval of this proposal, Alfred C. McClure, President of the North American Division, published an article in the *Adventist Review* of February 1995 under the title "NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination."⁷⁸ Likewise *Ministry* magazine for April 1995 and the *Adventist Review* for May of the same year advocated the pro-women's ordination view. These are only a few examples of the large number of publications on the subject that circulated before that General Conference Session.

Finally, in the afternoon of July 5, 1995, the request of the North American Division was submitted for discussion and vote by the plenary session of the General Conference. The subject generated meaningful presentations and discussions,⁷⁹ but ended up being rejected by 1,481 votes against the proposal to 673 in favor. The development of the discussions and the content of the vote were described in the *Review* as follows:

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION REQUEST—ORDINATION

The chairman, Calvin B Rock, outlined the program for this business session dedicated to the request of the North American Division regarding ordination:

The president of the North American Division, Alfred C McClure, will make a 20-minute presentation giving the background and rationale of the North American Division's request. Then P Gerard Damsteegt from the SDA Theological Seminary of Andrews University will give a 20-minute presentation on why he cannot support this request. Raoul Dederen, also of Andrews University, will then present the opposite viewpoint of

⁷⁷ 1994 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee (Silver Spring, MD, October 3-10, 1994)—*General Actions* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of SDAs, 1994), 189.

⁷⁸ Alfred C. McClure, "NAD's President Speaks on Women's Ordination," *Adventist Review*, February 1995, 14-15.

⁷⁹ See "Thirteenth Business Meeting," *Adventist Review*, July 7, 1995, 23-31.

why he is in favor of the request. It is hoped that with these presentations, the delegates will have a good overview of both sides of the issue. The floor will then be opened for discussion by the delegates and at approximately 4:45 p.m., the chairman will call an end to the debate and Robert S Folkenberg, president of the General Conference, will make a few remarks prior to a secret ballot being taken.

Voted, 1. To limit the individual speeches of the delegates to two minutes if spoken in English, and three minutes if a translation is given.

2. To support the program for the afternoon business session as outlined by the chairman.

Prayer was then offered by Calvin B Rock.

Following the presentation by Alfred C McClure, Charles E Bradford, former president of the North American Division, was asked by the chairman to make a few comments. After the presentations by P Gerard Damsteegt and Raoul Dederen, the floor was opened to debate by the delegates with the chairman alternating between delegates standing at the for and against microphones.

Shortly after 5 p.m. an action was voted to cease debate of the motion and Robert S Folkenberg spoke for a few moments, closing with prayer in which he asked the Holy Spirit to be present and to guide in the decision of the delegates. The motion before the floor was read for clarity as follows:

“Voted, To refer to the 1995 General Conference Session the North American Division request that the General Conference in Session adopt provisions on ordination as outlined below:

“The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committees take specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions.”

Delegates were then instructed to turn in their secret ballot cards to their division representatives. A count of the secret ballots was made with the following results:

In favor of the recommendation: 673. In opposition to the recommendation: 1,481. Total number of votes: 2,154. By this vote, the request of the North American Division was denied.⁸⁰

On August 3, 1995, North American Division president Alfred C. McClure sent out an open letter to all North American Division pastors and administrator, which reads,

Dear Colleague in Ministry:

On July 5 the world church voted on the North American Division proposal that each division be permitted to decide, within its own territory, whether ordination to the gospel ministry could be gender-inclusive. Although I was praying for a positive outcome, the motion was defeated.

The question I wish to address today is: What now? What should be our reaction to this vote of the world church in session? Please let me set before you some important observations.

1. From the beginning of the discussion I have said that North America is a loyal part of the world church and that whatever the outcome of the vote, I would do everything in my power to see that this issue did not compromise that position. I want to invite you to help me honor that commitment, because you too are part of this worldwide family.

As a spiritual leader in God's church I want to urge you to do everything in your power to keep us walking together. There may be those who would challenge the session vote, as individuals or as a group, and attempt to move ahead of the world church without

⁸⁰“Session Actions,” *Adventist Review*, July 11, 1995, 30.

its approval. My appeal today is that we exercise all of the Spirit-led persuasiveness at out command so that this does not happen. We are a world movement, and we must remain so. If not, we will fragment into simply a cluster of national churches or a consortium of loosely knit independent conferences or congregations.

2. We need to keep the issue of biblical ordination in perspective and not make of it more than Scripture does. In his very helpful book *Myth and Truth* (Loma Linda University Press, 1990), V. N. Olsen, former president of Loma Linda University, reminds us that in the Roman Catholic Church those who are ordained “are endowed with supernatural power to administrate the sacraments, which in turn by the very act . . . confers supernatural grace to the recipient” (p. 121).

This is not and has never been the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Historically we have believed that ordination was a denominational recognition of the call to ministry and did not confer any kind of spiritual endowment or quality.

Olsen continues: “For most people ordination by the laying on of hands is taken for granted, and it is therefore a surprise to find that the rite is not so clearly and directly defined in the New Testament as expected. . . . The word ‘ordain’ does not appear in the Greek New Testament at all for the ministry, and in most recent translations the word ‘appoint’ is most commonly used” (p. 148).

The King James Version of the Bible translates more than 20 Greek and Hebrew words as “ordain,” each of which has its own nuance of meaning. My burden here is that we not elevate ordination to a mystical and nonbiblical level.

3. Throughout our history we have agreed that ordination to the gospel ministry is part of a process by which the world church acknowledges those who have sensed the calling of God. This process was decided on by the church as a whole. A pastor who has achieved a certain level of training, experience, and effectiveness is examined by local conference administration.

That name is then brought to the conference executive committee for recommendation to the union conference executive committee, where authorization for ordination occurs. Only when these steps are taken does the ordination proceed, and only then is the pastor given the appropriate credentials. As this process is followed, then it can be said that the individual has been ordained to the gospel ministry.

On the other hand, a commissioning or dedicatory service, even with the laying on of hands, is biblical and affirming of the call to ministry (see Acts 13:2-4 and *Review and Herald*, July 9 1895), yet does not violate the spirit or the letter of the vote of the General Conference session.

If you saw the video report that I sent to all of the churches directly from Utrecht, you know that we are initiating dialogue about ways to affirm the women in our division whom God has called to ministry. You will hear more about some specific initiatives after the North American year-end meeting in Battle Creek in a few weeks.

Meanwhile, I am asking that you be a bridge builder, that you marshal all of the gifts in your church and focus them on mission, and that you join me in praying that God will help us through this very delicate time. As painful as this issue is to many, we must not allow it to splinter our unity or divert our mission.

Thank you for your faithfulness and your focus.

Your friend,

Alfred C. McClure, President

Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America⁸¹

In this letter McClure makes a clear distinction between “ordination to the gospel ministry” and “a commissioning or dedicatory service, even with the laying on of hands.” With this distinction McClure tried to be at the same time

⁸¹Alfred C. McClure, “An Open Letter to Church Leaders,” *Adventist Review*, Sept. 1995, 7. See also “McClure Suggests Women Be Commissioned, Not Ordained,” *Spectrum* 25/1 (Sept. 1995): 44-45.

loyal to the Utrecht vote of the worldwide church and supportive of some forthcoming ceremonies of “laying on of hands” (or ordinations) within the territory of the North American Division.

Post-Utrecht Ordinations (1995-1996)

Many delegates imagined that the Utrecht General Conference Session (June 29-July 8, 2012) finally settled the Adventist debate on women’s ordination to the gospel ministry, but that was not the case. Indeed, in the post-Utrecht period several local Adventist churches in North America ordained women pastors. Pioneering the new action, the Sligo Church, Takoma Park, Maryland, took the following action at its Business Session of August 1, 1995:

WHEREAS: The Holy Bible, interpreted through Jesus Christ, the “exact imprint of God’s very being” (Hebrews 1:3), affirms the equality of all God’s children (Luke 10:38-42; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:9-11); and

WHEREAS: The 13th of the 27 “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” declares believers of every race and nation—“high and low, rich and poor, male and female”—to be “equal in Christ,” and summons them all “to serve and be served without partiality or reservation”; and

WHEREAS: Ellen White believed that God prepares both women and men to be “pastors to the flock” (*Review*, January 15, 1901), and said that women who minister should themselves be “set apart” by “prayer and laying on of hands” (*Review*, July 9, 1895); and

WHEREAS: Creative and energetic Adventists in the culture Sligo serves, particularly second- and third-generation Adventists and particularly the young, hold to the above convictions *as a matter of conscience*; and

WHEREAS: These highly able Adventists, with their potential for congregational and institutional leadership, regard timidity and indecisiveness concerning the ordination of women as a betrayal of these convictions; and

WHEREAS: The fallout of anger and disappointment is leaching morale and commitment out of Adventism, particularly in the original strongholds; and

WHEREAS: The depletion of the leadership pool in these strongholds is putting the tithes and offerings at risk, further weakening the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS: Decline in the original strongholds imperils both the idea of a world church and the infrastructure and missionary zeal that sustain it; and

WHEREAS: The recent action in Utrecht reveals the absolute necessity of a grassroots initiative on the matter of justice for women; and

WHEREAS: The window of opportunity may slam shut at any moment as disappointment careens toward indifference among many Adventists;

BE IT HERBY RESOLVED: That out of passion for the Gospel, obedience to conscience, faithfulness to mission, and commitment to the building up of the church’s spiritual and financial resources, the Sligo congregation

1.) plan, for September 23, 1995, a festival service in which eligible women working in pastoral ministry at Sligo, and related institutions, undergo the laying on of hands as a public affirmation of their call to pastoral ministry; and

2.) ask the Potomac Conference and Columbia Union Conference committees to offer their blessing and participation—including the granting of credentials for ordained ministry—in connection with this joyful and historical occasion.⁸²

⁸²“Action of Sligo Church in Business Session, August 1, 1995,” *Spectrum* 25/1 (Sept. 1995): 39.

As planned, on September 23, 1995, at 3:30 p.m., the Sligo Church ordained three women (Kendra Haloviak, Penny Shell, and Norma Osborne) to the gospel ministry.⁸³ The printed program for the event was titled “Ordination to the Gospel Ministry.”⁸⁴ The ordination certificate granted to the newly ordained female pastors read as follows,

**CERTIFICATE
of
ORDINATION**

This Certifies That
[name of the ordained women]

having given satisfactory evidence of her call to and preparation for the sacred work of the gospel ministry, was ordained at *Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church* on the 23rd day of *September, 1995*, and is duly authorized as an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister to perform all the function of the ministerial office.

SENIOR PASTOR, *Sligo Adventist Church*
VICE PRESIDENT, *Adventist Healthcare Mid-Atlantic*
PRESIDENT, *Columbia Union College*⁸⁵

The credentials given to the three women ordained at Sligo had the following reading:

MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS

This is to Certify, That [name of the ordained women] is an Ordained Minister in good and regular standing in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and is authorized to perform the duties of said office.

SENIOR PASTOR, *Sligo Adventist Church*⁸⁶

The Sligo Adventist Church ordination ceremony generated noteworthy reactions. According to Beverly G. Beem, “it was the first time in the Adventist church that a local church conducted an ordination to the gospel ministry.”⁸⁷ The ceremony was reported in *The New York Times* of September 23 as “An Adventist Church Breaks Ranks.”⁸⁸ *The Washington Times* of September 24 referred to it as “Local Adventists rebel, ordain three women.”⁸⁹ Wikipedia.org still states, “The Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland,

⁸³The whole Sligo Church ordination process is described in *ibid.*, 33-62.

⁸⁴Original copy in the GC Archives.

⁸⁵Original copy in the GC Archives.

⁸⁶Original copy in the GC Archives.

⁸⁷Beem, “Equality in Ministry: From 1881 to Now,” in www.aaw.cc.

⁸⁸Gustav Niebuhr, “An Adventist Church Breaks Ranks,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 23, 1995, Religious Journal, p. 11.

⁸⁹Larry Witham, “Local Adventists rebel, ordain three women,” *The Washington Times*, Sept. 24, 1995.

ordained three women in violation of the denomination's rules."⁹⁰

In response to these new developments, on October 13, 1995, three endorsing decisions were made at the North American Division Year-end Meeting. Firstly, the division officially adopted a new "Christ-Centered Model of Diversity in Christian Unity" intended "to create a church body that transcends all social barriers of age, class, culture, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, race, etc."⁹¹ Secondly, it was "VOTED, To authorize the appointment of a presidential Commission on Women in Ministry."⁹² Thirdly, the North American Division Union presidents released the following statement:

Because we believe that God calls both women and men to the gospel ministry, we were disappointed by the General Conference vote in Utrecht to deny ordination to women. While loyal to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we still firmly believe in the biblical rightness of women's ordination.

We appreciate the leadership role that Elder A. C. McClure, our North American Division president, exhibited at Utrecht as he represented our division's request that the decision to ordain women be made regionally by the various world divisions. We are pleased that Elder McClure has already taken steps to establish a presidential commission on women in ministry to find ways to validate our commitment to women in ministry.

Therefore, in support of the work of the presidential commission and our desire for full equality of men and women in ministry, we ask that the following steps be taken and pledge our vigorous support.

1. Authorize full equality of practice in ministry: Grant women and men full equality in the practice of ministry by eliminating all policies where ordination is a prerequisite and/or men and women ministers are treated differently, including the authority to:

- A. Hold any church office, including being a conference, union, division or General Conference president;
- B. Ordain local elders and deacons;
- C. Organize and disband churches; and
- D. Perform pastoral functions outside one's own district.

2. Enhance the commissioning service: We encourage enhancing the currently authorized commissioning service as a public affirmation of women set apart for a life ministry.

3. Increase the role of women in the church: We believe that we must take steps to increase the presence and participation of women in ministry by:

- A. Encouraging conferences to call more women into pastoral ministry.
- B. Recruiting women to greater leadership and officer roles at all levels of the church.

4. Clarify our theology of ordination: We request that the General Conference initiate a study process to clarify our understanding of ordination so that it more fully reflects biblical theology and Adventist mission. We need confidence that our practice of ministry ordination is grounded in the Word of God and not in church history. The dialogue at Utrecht regarding the ordination of women demonstrated the church's need to

⁹⁰"Ordination of women," in <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed on Sept. 4, 2012). See also "An Astonishing Event in Adventist History—The Women's Ordination at Sligo," 3-part series in www.sdadefend.com (accessed on Sept. 4, 2012).

⁹¹See "531-95Na Diversity: A Christ-Centered Model in Christian Unity for the North American Division—Guidelines" and "531-95Nb Strategies for Modeling the Diversity Initiative—Guidelines," NAD Year-end Meeting, Oct. 13, 1995 p.m., in <http://ast.gc.adventist.org> (accessed on Sept. 10, 2012).

⁹²"592-95N Commission on Women in Ministry," *ibid.* (accessed on Sept. 10, 2012).

increase our members' understanding and application of basic biblical hermeneutical principles.

While we support the vote in Utrecht, we are also committed to the goal of women's ordination. We believe that the same Holy Spirit who calls, leads and blesses women in pastoral ministry is also calling our entire church to increased faithfulness in its affirmation and validation of women in gospel ministry. We ask all our brothers and sisters in the North American Division to actively and prayerfully join that journey. Let us be "a priesthood of all believers" in proclaiming together the good news that Christ is coming soon.⁹³

In this document the North American Division Union presidents suggested not only that the church "grant women and men full equality in the practice of ministry," but also allow them to "perform pastoral functions outside one's own district." This would enlarge the concept of a female pastor ordained just by and for a local church.

Following the new trend, on December 2, 1995, the La Sierra University Church ordained two other women (Halcyon Wilson and Madelynn Haldeman) and the small Loma Linda Victoria Church ordained their female pastor (Sheryll Prinz McMillan) to the pastoral ministry. On July 6, 1996, the Garden Grove Church in California ordained a man and a woman (Jared Fulton and Margot Pitrone) to the pastoral ministry.⁹⁴ Yet, the worldwide church did not recognize such local church ordinations to pastoral ministry. Furthermore, many church members expressed their concerns about this new ordination trend.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, two special issues of *Spectrum* magazine placed the discussions of women's ordination on a socio-cultural and ethnic platform. Volume 25, No. 1 (September 1995), with a special section on "From Utrecht to Sligo," affirmed women's ordination as a moral issue of equality and social justice that supersedes ecclesiastical policies and decisions, such as the Utrecht vote.⁹⁶ Volume 25, No. 2 (December 1995), devoted to what is called "The Browning of Adventism" (from the Hispanic brown-skin color), suggested that the anti-gospel Latino "machismo" influenced not only the Utrecht vote but also "our understanding of Scripture."⁹⁷ So the post-Utrecht discussions on women's ordination moved perceivably from theology to sociology.

Further Discussions (1996-2010)

With the purpose of restudying the subject of women's ordination from a more biblical-theological perspective, the Dean's office of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, established an ad hoc committee of 15 members. As a result of the

⁹³NAD Union Presidents, "Union Presidents' Statement on Women's Ordination," *Spectrum* 25/2 (Dec. 1995): 53-54.

⁹⁴Beem, "Equality in Ministry: From 1881 to Now," in www.aaw.cc.

⁹⁵For an example of those reactions, see the 7-page handout *Yes, it has happened—The First Conference and Union Approved Women's Ordination Service*, now available in www.pdaja.info.

⁹⁶See *Spectrum* 25/1 (Sept. 1995): 30-62, special section on "From Utrecht to Sligo."

⁹⁷See *Spectrum* 25/2 (Dec. 1995): 1-62, special issue on "The Browning of Adventism."

committee's activities, in 1998 Andrews University Press published a work of 439 pages and 20 chapters under the title, *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives*.⁹⁸ Edited by Nancy Vyhmeister, the work represented a strong pro-women's ordination emphasis.

Of special significance for that committee were (1) Paul's statement that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28); and (2) the toleration manifested by the Jerusalem Council on the issue of circumcision (Acts 15:19). From this perspective, the committee concluded (in opposition to the decision at Utrecht) "that ordination and women can go together, that 'women in pastoral leadership' is not an oxymoron [that excludes one another], but a manifestation of God's grace in the church."⁹⁹

From a biblical perspective, Richard M. Davidson concluded:

We have found that the biblical witness is consistent with regard to the divine ideal for headship/submission/equality in man-woman relationships. Before the Fall there was full equality with no headship/submission in the relationship between Adam and Eve (Gen 2:24). But after the Fall, according to Gen 3:16, the husband was given a servant headship role to preserve the harmony of the home, while at the same time the model of equal partnership was still set forth as the ideal. This post-Fall prescription of husband leadership and wife submission was limited to the husband-wife relationship. In the divine revelation throughout the rest of the Old Testament and New Testament witness, servant headship and voluntary submission on the part of husband and wife, respectively, are affirmed, but these are *never* broadened to the covenant community in such a way as to prohibit women from taking positions of leadership, including headship positions over men.¹⁰⁰

Equating opposition to women's ordination with being proslavery, Walter B. T. Douglass argued,

Just as the church today believes and preaches with integrity that slavery or any form of human bondage is contrary to the will of God and the teachings of the apostles, the same church should teach with equal fervor that God chooses whomsoever he will to proclaim his Word and lead his people. If the ordination of men is a necessary condition for full opportunities in pastoral leadership and administration in the church, then justice, integrity, consistency, and the biblical principle of *shared status* within the body of Christ should move the church to embrace the ordination of women.¹⁰¹

In the year 2000 Adventists Affirm published a work of 423 pages and 22 chapters (plus four appendices) titled, *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry*, edited by Mercedes H. Dyer.¹⁰² Among the authors of the

⁹⁸Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry*.

⁹⁹"Epilogue," in *ibid.*, 436.

¹⁰⁰Richard M. Davidson, "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," in *ibid.*, 284. See also *idem*, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 22-34, 213-96.

¹⁰¹Walter B. T. Douglas, "The Distance and the Difference: Reflections on Issues of Slavery and Women's Ordination in Adventism," in Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry*, 394.

¹⁰²Dyer, ed., *Prove All Things*.

chapters one also finds Andrews University professors and alumni. P. Gerard Damsteegt, who spoke against women's ordination at Utrecht and was not invited to join the Seminary's ad hoc committee, was one of the main contributors to *Prove All Things*. In the "Epilogue" of the work, Dyer states:

Even so, in *Prove All Things* we have shown that the central conclusions of the book *Women in Ministry* are lacking the needed biblical fountain. In some cases, Bible texts are used to support the desired conclusion while other texts on the subject, leading to a different conclusion, are overlooked. In other cases, questionable information from non-biblical sources is used to reinterpret or set aside the plain meaning of what the Bible says on the subject. In still other cases, conclusions are based on imaginative or creative reasoning which is not supported by the Bible. . . .

Those of us involved with ADVENTISTS AFFIRM, the sponsor and publisher of *Prove All Things*, earnestly pray that our church's leadership will resist the temptation to compromise. The pressures of modern society for our leaders are enormous and frightening. The church cannot be neutral or please every group clamoring for its own agenda. We must hold to the Word of God. We must not depart from God's will expressed in His Word.¹⁰³

Three works by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim opposed the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry. In 1996 his 368-page book, *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle*, appeared, with some pages suggesting that the issue of women's ordination conspires against the normative authority of the Bible.¹⁰⁴ In 2001 Pipim dedicated Part II – "A Gender Agenda" of his 640-page work titled, *Must We Be Silent? Issues Dividing Our Church*, to what he called "The Ideology of Women's Ordination."¹⁰⁵ In the chapter on "The Feminist Campaign for Equality," the author argued emphatically:

We have seen how feminism's ideology of full equality lays the foundation for women's ordination. Drinking deeply at egalitarianism's foundation, feminism's fundamental opposition to Scripture's teaching on role distinctions between male and female in the church ultimately leads proponents to embrace lesbianism and witchcraft, to redefine and feminize God, to indiscriminately push for gender-inclusive language, to question the Bible's inspiration and authority, to adopt higher-criticism to reinterpret the Bible, to transpose women's ministries into feminist ministries, and to advance a questionable interpretation of Galatians 3:28.¹⁰⁶

Other significant anti-women's ordination appeals appeared in 2005 in chapters 44 (by C. Mervyn Maxwell) and 45 (by Laurel Damsteegt) of the 810-page work titled *Here We Stand: Evaluating New Trends in the Church*, edited by

¹⁰³Dyer, ed., "Epilogue," in *ibid.*, 351.

¹⁰⁴Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle?* (Berrien Springs, MD: Berean Books, 1996), 119-29; published in Spanish as *Recibiendo la Palabra: ¿Cómo afectan a nuestra fe los nuevos enfoques bíblicos?* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Casa Editora Sudamericana, 1997), 135-47.

¹⁰⁵Koranteng-Pipim, *Must We Be Silent?*

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 154.

Samuel Koranteng-Pipim and published by Adventists Affirm.¹⁰⁷ Later on, Amazing Facts published Doug Batchelor's booklet *God's Role for Women in Ministry* (2009)¹⁰⁸ and Wellesley Muir's book *Daughters of Inheritance: A New Look at Women's Ordination* (2010),¹⁰⁹ expressing similar concerns about women's ordination.

Meanwhile, many texts in favor of and against women's ordination were posted on websites, webpages, blogs, etc. Some of the main non-official Adventist pro-women's ordination websites are spectrummagazine.org and www.atoday.org. Among the ones who oppose women's ordination are www.adventistsaffirm.org and www.womenministrytruth.com. By accessing those websites one can get a general idea regarding how polarized (and even bellicose) the discussion on women's ordination has become in some segments of the church.

New Directions (2010-2012)

The issue of women's ordination was raised again in early 2010 at the General Conference President's Executive Administrative Council (PREXAD). Consequently, on January 19, a letter from Elder Jan Paulsen, President of the General Conference, was sent to the division presidents asking two basic questions:

- Question #1:** To what extent does the Church in your division endorse and encourage women in various roles of leadership, ministry and service? How does the Church in your division practice the consecration or ordination of women to such positions? Would the ordination of women to ministry be an option for your division?
- Question #2:** In what ways might the mission of the Church in your division be negatively impacted if provision was made for other areas of the world field to ordain women to ministry in situations where this is believed to advance the mission of the Church in those areas?¹¹⁰

At the General Conference Spring Meeting (on April 6, 2010), Paulsen reported to the delegates that only three of the 13 divisions "responded by saying either they were ready to affirm women in ministry by the process of ordination, or significant parts of their division would do it." Eight of the divisions "said they would not ordain women, and the people in their part of the world would be negatively affected. ... [It would] seriously undermine the unity [of the church]." Consequently, according to Paulsen, the issue of women's ordination would not be part of the agenda at the 2010 Atlanta General Conference

¹⁰⁷Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, ed., *Here We Stand: Evaluating New Trends in the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2005), 705-732.

¹⁰⁸Doug Batchelor, *God's Role for Women in Ministry* (Roseville, CA: Amazing Facts, 2009).

¹⁰⁹Muir, *Daughters of Inheritance*.

¹¹⁰Jan Paulsen to "Dear Colleagues," Jan. 19, 2010.

Session.¹¹¹ Even so, Michael L. Ryan stated at the Session that “the General Conference administration commits to establishing a process to review the subject of ordination and will report back to an Annual Council during this quinquennium [2010-2015].”¹¹²

During the October 2010 Annual Council, world church President Ted N. C. Wilson declared that “the Biblical Research Institute at the world church headquarters will coordinate the process of studying ordination with corresponding Biblical research committees in each of the church’s 13 divisions.” Artur Stele announced the timetable of the process as follows:

In November 2013, each division committee at their 2013 year-end meeting will review the study made by their division Biblical Research Committee and recommend it to the Biblical Research Institute director for consideration by a Theology of Ordination Study Committee. The General Conference Administrative Committee will also appoint a Theology of Ordination Study Committee with appropriate division representation.

From December 2013 to June 2014, the Theology of Ordination Study Committee will analyze the materials received from the divisions and prepare a combined report.

In June 2014, the report will be reviewed by General Conference executive officers and later by with [sic] the President’s Administrative Executive Council and the General Conference Administrative Committee.

In October 2014, the General Conference administration will process the report for Annual Council, which will review the report and, if needed, take any appropriate action. If voted material needs to be placed on the 2015 General Conference Session agenda, it will be processed accordingly.¹¹³

Shortly thereafter (November 2010) the Trans-European Division Executive Committee voted the following actions for the General Conference’s attention:

1. To request that the study of the theology of ordination as voted at the General Conference Session in Atlanta is prioritized.
2. To request the General Conference to review and amend General Conference policies, so that the wording is gender neutral and that all leadership pathways are open to male and female.
3. To request the General Conference to grant a variance to the model constitutions and bylaws to accommodate the unique needs of the Trans-European Division with the insertion of “conference and union presidents should be ordained/commissioned ministers” in its policy language.
We feel that this is a matter of some urgency and respectfully request that this be dealt with as soon as possible but no later than General Conference Annual Council 2011.

¹¹¹Mark Kellner, “Women’s ordination issue not on World Session agenda, Adventist president says,” in news.adventist.org (released on Apr. 7, 2010), square brackets in the quoted source. Cf. Bonnie Dwyer, “BREAKING: Eight Men Veto Women’s Ordination,” in spectrummagazine.org (released on Apr. 6, 2010).

¹¹²In “Fourteenth Business Meeting” on July 2, 2010, *Adventist Review* (GC Bulletin, No. 8), July 8-22, 2010, 34.

¹¹³Ansel Oliver, “Process, timetable unveiled for review of theology of ordination,” in news.adventist.org (released on Oct. 10, 2011).

4. To request the General Conference for permission to ordain women to the gospel ministry within the Trans-European Division thereby creating parity between female and male ministers and follow the same process and procedure as currently applies to ordained men and credentialed ministers.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, Jan Paulsen, after his retirement in the summer of 2010, became more public in advocating women's ordination, as evident in his book *Where Are We Going?* released by the Pacific Press on September 1, 2011. Admitting that the ordination of women to the ministry may split the church, Paulsen added that "not ordaining women may be every bit as likely to split the church." In his opinion, "what the North American Division requested in 1995, which was voted down by the session, should probably be looked at again." After explaining why another General Conference Session would most probably not approve women's ordination either, he suggested a new administrative strategy:

I see no prospect that some future session will resolve the question of the ordination of women differently than past sessions have. If the leadership of the church requests the session to transfer responsibility for this matter to Annual Council, then I believe we will have a forum that can deal with this question effectively.¹¹⁵

Following up on the discussion started in 2009, the North American Division changed the content of topic "E 60 Conference/Mission President" of its *Working Policy*. Up to the end of 2010 that specific topic followed the *GC Working Policy* and stated, "Inasmuch as the conference/mission president stands at the head of the ministry in the conference/mission and is the chief elder, or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission president should be an ordained minister."¹¹⁶ But on November 7, 2010, the North American Division's Executive Committee added the word "commissioned" to the expression "should be an ordained minister" in order to read "should be an ordained/commissioned minister."¹¹⁷ The modification, published in the *NAD Working Policy 2010-2011*,¹¹⁸ would open the doors to non-ordained, commissioned women ministers to become conference/mission presidents.

This wording change generated some administrative uneasiness because as a division (or extension) of the General Conference, the North American Division (and any other division) is obligated to be in compliance with the *General Conference Working Policy*. Instead of reversing its vote, the North American Division and also the Trans-European Division sent official requests to the General Conference for commissioned ministers (including women) to serve

¹¹⁴"Leadership and Ordination of Women," in www.ted-adventist.org (released in Nov. 2010).

¹¹⁵Jan Paulsen, *Where Are We Going?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011), 38-43.

¹¹⁶*North American Division Working Policy, 2009-2010* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, [2009]), E-31.

¹¹⁷Mark A. Kellner, "Commissioned ministers can lead North American conferences, leaders vote," in news.adventist.org (released on Nov. 7, 2010).

¹¹⁸*North American Division Working Policy, 2010-2011* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, [2010]), E-31.

as conference presidents in North America and as union/conference presidents in northern Europe. On October 11, after a six-hour discussion, the delegates of the General Conference Annual Council denied the request of the North American Division by a vote of 167 to 117, which by extension also denied the Trans-European Division request.¹¹⁹

A report of the Annual Council decision was provided to the North American Division Executive Committee on October 31, 2011. However, the Executive Committee voted to reaffirm its earlier decision that “a conference/mission president should be an ordained/commissioned minister.”¹²⁰ Likewise, on November 16, 2011, the Trans-European Division voted “to affirm that each union can apply parity between male and female pastors within the framework of TED’s existing policies and guidelines for ordained/commissioned minister credentials.”¹²¹

After requesting an independent review of Church governance documents and counsel in the matter, the North American Division President Dan Jackson wrote a letter on January 31, 2012, to the members of the North American Division Executive Committee apologizing for the former decision and explaining that “the North American Division Executive Committee does not have the right to establish policies which are out of harmony with the General Conference Model Constitution or General Conference Working Policy.”¹²² So, the *NAD Working Policy 2011-2012* was issued with the former expression “should be an ordained minister” reinstated.¹²³ By contrast, the Trans-European Division kept its reaffirmation action of November 16, 2011.

Meanwhile, President Ted Wilson invited the retired former President Jan Paulsen to present a devotional on April 17, 2012, during the 2012 Spring Council. Paulsen took advantage of the opportunity to address the issue of women’s ordination as a missiological concern to be decided regionally based on the values and challenges of each local culture. He even stated that in settling such issues, “Our leaders in California cannot make that decision for their colleagues in Africa; and our very accomplished mission church in South America cannot speak for struggling Europe.”¹²⁴

The influence of Paulsen’s speech is difficult to know. Even so, shortly after it was given some unions felt they should decide for themselves

¹¹⁹Mark Kellner, “‘Variance’ for North American, Trans-European Division constitutions fails Annual Council Vote,” in news.adventist.org (released on Oct. 12, 2011).

¹²⁰“2011 Year-end Meeting Report #3,” *NADNewsPoints*, Oct. 31, 2011; Adventist Review staff, “North American Adventists reaffirm commissioned ministers as conference, mission presidents,” in news.adventist.org (released on Nov. 1, 2011).

¹²¹Miroslav Pujic, “Women in Leadership,” in www.ted-adventist.org (released on Nov. 16, 2011).

¹²²Dan Jackson to “Members of the North American Division Executive Committee” (Jan. 31, 2012), accessible through Ansel Oliver, “North America retracts ‘commissioned’ ministers as top leader candidates,” in news.adventist.org (released on Feb. 14, 2012).

¹²³*North American Division Working Policy, 2011-2012* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, [2012]), E-31.

¹²⁴Jan Paulsen, “This Is What He Said,” in spectrummagazine.org (released on April 17, 2012).

whether to ordain women to the gospel ministry. So on April 23, 2012, the North German Union Conference Constituency voted to ordain “female pastors [*Pastorinnen*] like their male colleagues [*männlichen Kollegen*]” in its territory.¹²⁵ It was reported that “the most recent support for this pioneering process was given by the former president of the World Church Council, Dr Jan Paulsen, when he addressed the audience of the Spring Session of the General Conference in [*sic*] April 17, 2012 (available in ANN).”¹²⁶

Moving a step further, the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee took the following action on May 17, 2012:

1. To recognize its responsibility to act morally and ethically by expressing unyielding commitment to ordain qualified persons to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, and
2. To call a special constituency meeting for the purpose of authorizing ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, and
3. To set the meeting date for July 29, 2012, at 10 a.m., at a location to be determined in Maryland.¹²⁷

Prior to that “special constituency meeting,” the cover of the July 2012 issue of Columbia Union Conference’s *Visitor* magazine carried on its cover the title, “Weighing the Issues: Why We’re Advocating for Women’s Ordination.”¹²⁸

Concerned with those moves, on June 29, 2012, the General Conference Presidential Office released a special “appeal” approved by the General Conference officers, including the presidents of the 13 divisions of the General Conference. The document reads as follows:

AN APPEAL FOR UNITY IN RESPECT TO MINISTERIAL ORDINATION PRACTICES

Since the beginning of 2012 several union conferences have recorded actions expressing support for, or commitment to, the ministerial ordination of women. The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently engaged in a study of the theology of ordination and its implications. This study is scheduled for completion by the 2014 Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee. At that time the Executive Committee will determine the report which will be given to the 2015 General Conference Session along with whether or not any new recommendation should be considered by delegates to the Session.

In the light of this current study and the actions of several unions, General Conference officers, including presidents of the 13 world divisions, have unanimously

¹²⁵Zentralredaktion, “Norddeutscher Verband der Adventisten unter neuer Leitung,” in www.adventisten.de (released on April 24, 2012).

¹²⁶CD-EUDnews, “North German Union Conference Constituency Session Votes to Ordain Women,” in www.euroafrica.org (released on May 9, 2012).

¹²⁷“Columbia Union Executive Committee Calls Special Constituency Meeting to Authorize Ordination Without Regard to Gender,” in www.columbiaunion.org (released on May 17, 2012).

¹²⁸See *Visitor*, July 2012—special issue on “Weighing the Issues: Why We’re Advocating for Women’s Ordination,” available at <http://issuu.com/columbiaunion/docs/july2012visitor>.

communicated an appeal for unity in respect to ministerial ordination practices. The appeal calls: 1) for unity in respecting a global church action (i.e. the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions on ministerial ordination); 2) for each union executive committee to carefully review the far-reaching effects of pursuing a course of action that is contrary to the decisions of the General Conference in session; and 3) for each union to participate in the current study about the theology of ordination and its implication.

1. Respecting a global decision of the Church

The world-wide Church recognizes the General Conference in Session as the highest ecclesiastical authority for Seventh-day Adventists. The 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions with respect to granting ministerial ordination to women represent the current voice of the Church in this matter. The actions of certain unions indicate their desire to establish an alternative source of authority for a matter that already carries the authority of the world Church.

As currently understood in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, ordination to the gospel ministry is ordination to serve the global Church. No provision exists for a geographically localized ministerial ordination. Consequently the decision to change or modify ordination practices is a global one and necessitates a decision from the world body.

For any union to introduce a different ministerial ordination practice is seen, by the rest of the Church, as readiness to set aside a world Church decision and proceed in another direction. Such actions, taken at the very time when the world Church is engaged in a study and discussion of the matter, pre-empt the process and any decision that might come from it. This creates widespread confusion, misunderstanding as well as erosion of trust and also nurtures doubt about these unions acting in good faith as members of the world-wide family.

Some who would encourage unions to proceed with ministerial ordination for women draw attention to selected statements from a General Conference Executive Committee document. As used by these individuals, the statements would indicate that a union has final authority in matters relating to ministerial ordination. The intent of the document from which such statements have been taken is to emphasize the interconnectedness of Seventh-day Adventist denominational structure. The authority and responsibility entrusted to any entity of the Church is exercised within the context of beliefs, values, and policies of the entire Church. Being a part of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church obliges every organization to think and act for the good of the whole and to shun a spirit of autonomy and self-determination.

2. The effects of unilaterally pursuing a different course of action

The significance of any union proceeding in a manner contrary to a global Church decision is not limited to the specific action involved (ministerial ordination in the present instance); it touches the very heart of how this Church functions as a global family. The essence of unity in Seventh-day Adventist organizational functioning is the mutual commitment of all organizations to collective decision-making in matters affecting the whole family—and the acceptance of those decisions as the authority of the Church. The action of any union in pursuing a different course of action represents a rejection of this key value in denominational life. Unless this value (i.e. collective decision-making and the acceptance of those decisions as the authority of the Church) is maintained, all other values that contribute to unity are seriously weakened.

For one entity to express its reasoned dissent with a global decision of the Church might appear to some as a legitimate course of action. However, the implications of acting contrary to a world Church decision are not limited to the one entity. Any organization contemplating a course of action contrary to a global Church decision must ask itself, "Is this the pattern of participation in Church life that we wish to establish and

recommend for other entities to follow?” “How will we deal with the situation if an organization in our territory should decide to discontinue its participation in one or more matters under which it disagrees with the larger family of organizations?” Mutually agreed upon policies benefit the entire Church and keep it from fragmenting into independent, locally-driven units. They are the reflection of the Spirit-directed will of the body and allow each entity to look beyond itself for the good of the whole body of Christ.

3. Participation in the current study of ordination and its implications

General Conference officers welcome and invite unions to participate in the global study of ordination. This study will be the most widespread and thorough study the Church has undertaken on this topic. Earlier studies have been conducted by commissions. This is the first time that a study of ministerial ordination engages the whole Church through the 13 divisions.

Biblical Research Committees in all divisions have been asked to conduct a study on the theology of ordination and its implications. In addition, during 2012, the General Conference Administrative Committee will appoint a Theology of Ordination Study Committee, with representation from all divisions, to oversee and facilitate the global discussion process and to prepare reports for presentation to the General Conference Executive Committee. The Annual Council 2014 will determine what action, if any, should be recommended to the 2015 General Conference Session. Careful thought is being given to ensure that the study and education process is conducted with fairness and thoroughness in respect to examining the theology of ordination and its practical implications.

All unions are welcome to submit their conviction as part of the global dialog on this question. Their voices, along with others, in this matter need to be heard. Now is the time for unions to share their position on ministerial ordination, and the rationale behind it. Doing so will ensure that various perspectives will be clearly understood by the world Church.

The appeal sent by the General Conference officers to certain unions also reflects this Church leadership group’s message to other unions that may be considering similar steps with respect to ministerial ordination practices. The communication concludes: “We have shared with you our deep concerns about the course of action you have chosen. We realize that sharply differing convictions with respect to ministerial ordination for women exist in our global family. We also realize that the passage of time without finding satisfaction for the tensions on this question can give rise to frustration and the erosion of confidence that a timely and mutually satisfactory resolution can be found.”

“We therefore earnestly appeal to you:

1. That your union continues to operate in harmony with the global decisions and global decision-making processes of the Church.
2. That until such time as the Church decides otherwise, your union refrains from taking any action to implement ministerial ordination practices that are contrary to the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session actions.
3. That the union membership be informed concerning the implications for the entire Church in the event that one entity, for whatever reason, chooses a course of action in deliberate opposition to a decision of the whole Church.
4. That the union actively participates in the global discussion about the Church’s understanding and practice of ordination. The contributions of a union in this discussion can be forwarded to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee through the respective Ordination Study Committee set up by each division.

“Thank you for your willingness to receive and reflect on these things. We join you in diligently and prayerfully seeking to know the will, the blessing and the guidance of God in this and all other matters affecting our life together as a Church and our collective

endeavor to advance His kingdom.”¹²⁹

Despite the written “Appeal” from the General Conference, the Columbia Union Conference held its “special constituency meeting” on July 29, 2012. With 209 in favor, 51 opposed, and nine abstentions, the delegates of that constituency meeting voted, “That the Columbia Union Conference authorize ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender.”¹³⁰ In response to this action, the General Conference issued, on August 7, the document “An Appeal for Oneness in Christ”¹³¹ and, on August 9 the document “Questions & Answers Regarding Current Issues of Unity Facing the Church” (see Appendix 2).¹³² The first document reads,

An Appeal for Oneness in Christ: A Response by the General Conference Officers and Division Presidents to the Columbia Union Conference Constituency Meeting Action

“Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11, NKJV).

The unity among disciples for which Jesus prayed is a precious gift of God: this gift must be continually nurtured and is a never-ending and often difficult task of those gathered in His name. Thus the apostolic church could engage in vigorous discussion and even robust disagreement with the assurance that each member’s personal surrender to the Spirit would result in a God-honoring resolution to the challenges and conflicts so that the essential unity of the church was preserved and extended (Acts 15:1-29). Disagreement in such a community of faith is neither fatal nor schismatic, for each believer accepts the responsibility to fulfill the prayer of Jesus by acting and speaking to preserve the unity He expected as indicated in John 17.

Unilateralism—the premise that one individual or one group may pursue its vision of truth at the expense of the unity of the whole—was and is the great adversary of the unified Body of Christ. It ruptures the essential bond which brings people from everywhere into the remnant church, tempting them to prefer one truth above the higher and collective requirement to act in concert with each other.

Appealing for a serious recommitment to the principle of church unity, the officers of the General Conference and the division presidents issued a call for restraint in their consensus statement of June 29, 2012, “An Appeal for Unity in Respect to Ministerial Ordination Practices.” Fully aware that significant differences exist regarding the theology of ordination and the appropriateness of ordaining women to the gospel ministry, they nonetheless urged all entities and individuals in the church to respect current Church policy and General Conference Session decisions, and to work harmoniously through the

¹²⁹“An Appeal for Unity in Respect to Ministerial Ordination Practices,” in news.adventist.org (released on June 29, 2012). The document’s explanatory footnotes, withdrawn from this text, are available in its online version.

¹³⁰“Columbia Union Constituency Overwhelmingly Approves Ordination Without Regard to Gender,” in www.columbiaunion.org (released on July 29, 2012); *Adventist Review* staff with Taashi Rowe, “Columbia Union Votes Gender-Neutral Ordinations,” *Adventist Review*, Aug. 16, 2012, 8.

¹³¹“Church leaders issue ‘An Appeal for Oneness in Christ,’” in news.adventist.org (released on Aug. 7, 2012).

¹³²“Questions & Answers Regarding Current Issues of Unity Facing the Church,” in news.adventist.org (released on Aug. 9, 2012). See also Mark A. Kellner, “In Televised Interview President Appeals for Unity,” *Adventist Review*, Aug. 23, 2012, 8-9.

process established by the General Conference Executive Committee in October 2011. That action established a worldwide three-year study and discussion process culminating with a Theology of Ordination Study Committee which will review all aspects of the practice of ministerial ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church including the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, with reports provided to the October 2014 Annual Council meeting of the Executive Committee. This would allow any agreed-upon resolutions to be placed on the agenda of the 2015 General Conference Session, the body accepted by church entities and affirmed by the divinely-inspired counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy to be the official voice and the highest ecclesiastical authority of the church. The General Conference Executive Committee, the highest deliberative authority of the worldwide church between General Conference Sessions, includes nearly 120 union conference and union mission presidents as voting delegates, along with elected officers, departmental directors, pastors, frontline employees and numerous laypersons.

It was thus very disappointing to the senior leaders of the worldwide church to learn of the unilateral action taken by the delegates of the Columbia Union Conference at a special constituency meeting on July 29, 2012. That action is not in harmony with General Conference Working Policy—the collective decisions of world leadership that define the operating procedures and relationships applicable to all organizations. Further, the action sets aside the 1990 and 1995 decisions of the General Conference in Session respecting the practice of ordination. It pre-empts the process voted by the General Conference Executive Committee for the current study of ordination theology and practices by committing the Columbia Union Conference to a particular outcome before the study-and-discussion process is completed. In so doing, it asserts the right of one entity to place its conclusions above the principle of unity in the Body of Christ. By this action, the delegates have allowed for a principle of unilateralism and autonomy throughout their territory that can only be disruptive to the harmonious functioning of the Columbia Union Conference, as well as to that union's relationship with the world church family. Unfortunately, some conferences, congregations, and individuals may try now to incorrectly cite the example of the Columbia Union Conference itself as justification for pursuing any independent course of action. It is possible that some who voted for the resolution on July 29 may not have fully understood the danger their action poses to the functional unity of their own region and to the wider denomination.

The action taken by the Columbia Union Conference represents a serious threat to the unity of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, and thus, at its next meeting in October 2012, the General Conference Executive Committee will carefully review the situation and determine how to respond. In the Spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the officers of the General Conference and the division presidents again appeal to all entities, organizations, and individuals, including the Columbia Union Conference, to refrain from independent and unilateral decisions and implementing actions on issues affecting ministerial ordination, and to invest their energies and creativity in fostering a vigorous dialogue through the established process about how the Church should recognize and affirm the gifts of the Spirit in the lives and ministry of believers.

An important companion document, organized as a series of questions and answers about key assumptions, assertions and historical backgrounds discussed at the recent Columbia Union Conference constituency meeting or in related communication, will be available approximately Wednesday, August 8, through the media outlets of the General Conference.¹³³

A number of arguments have been presented in support of these union actions. One of the most influential was Gary Patterson's text "General Conference in Violation of Its Own Policy," released on August 15, 2012. The text reads as follows:

¹³³"Church leaders issue 'An Appeal for Oneness in Christ,'" in news.adventist.org.

There is a perception existing that the General Conference cannot violate policy, that whatever it does constitutes policy, but this is not so.

In a document released by the General Conference on August 9, 2012 responding to the July 29, 2012 action of the Columbia Union it is stated that "It is not accurate to say that policy follows practice." While this is recognized as true, unfortunately for the point of the August 9 document, this statement undermines its attempt to indicate that the Columbia Union action is against General Conference policy because of the fact that there is no such policy regarding ministerial ordination requiring that only males may be ordained or that females are forbidden from being ordained.

Ordination authority is clearly defined in General Conference policy. Regarding the approval of persons designated for ordination policy B 05 states, "decisions regarding the ordination of ministers are entrusted to the union conference...." Regarding such decisions the policy further states, "each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility...." Thus, in the selection and authorization of such individuals, the General Conference has no authority over the union decisions as long as these decisions are in harmony with the criteria established for ordination by General Conference policy.

As the August 9 document indicates, the General Conference does establish "the criteria for ordination...." There are fifteen such criteria listed in policy L 50, none of which refer in any way to gender. If, therefore, any individual approved by the union meets these criteria, the General Conference authority has been satisfied. Given that there is no gender reference in these fifteen requirements, the union is acting within its authority as stated in policy B 05.

As indicated in the August 9 document, policy exercises the ultimate governance over practice. But in the case of gender issues in ordination, there is no policy. However, over a century of practice has created the perception that there is policy on this matter, and one hundred years of practice certainly does establish precedent. But it remains that policy is the issue in ordination, not practice, precedent nor perception.

The August 9 document indicates that "policy itself is based on Seventh-day Adventist principles found in Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White." This statement is in interesting contrast to one made in the June 29, 2012 letter of the General Conference Officers and Division Presidents addressed to the Officers and Executive Committee Members of the Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This letter states, "Decisions (1975, 1985, 1990, and 1995) to withhold ministerial ordination to women have been made on the basis of negative impact to unity rather than on the basis of compelling evidence from the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy."

The point here is that these actions are not policy, nor were they formed on what is the stated basis of policy, leaving one to wonder what they were based on—practice, precedent, perception, or perhaps prejudice? The question as to the authority on [*sic*] the General Conference to address these matters is raised in the August 9 document, and indeed the General Conference in session is free to address anything it wishes. But unless it changes its policy and takes away the authorization given in B 05 to other levels of governance such as the local church regarding membership, or the local conference regarding employment, or the union regarding ordination, it is not free to intrude in these areas. Thus its attempt to counter the union authority in the area of ordination is a violation of its own policy.

If the General Conference wishes to address the issue of gender in ordination to ministry, it may do so, but only by changing its policy to a straight forward requirement that ordination is male gender exclusive, forbidding the ordination of females. There is no such policy presently in existence, nor has there been in the history of the church. Practice, precedent, perception and even prejudice do not constitute a policy. Only straight forward, clearly articulated policy governs the issue of gender inclusive ordination.

There is a perception existing that the General Conference cannot violate policy, that whatever it does constitutes policy, but this is not so. The General Conference can violate policy just as well as any other level of the church if it acts contrary to the

provisions of policy. Unless and until the General Conference changes policy by vote, any action contrary to policy is a violation. Thus, the unions are not out of policy on this matter of gender inclusiveness in the ordination of ministers, the General Conference itself is out of policy.¹³⁴

Aware of the General Conference disapproval of the Columbia Union Conference action, on August 19, 2012, the Pacific Union Conference voted by 79% to 21% to “approve ordination to the gospel ministry without regard to gender.”¹³⁵ General Conference President Ted Wilson attended the constituency meetings of both the Columbia Union Conference (July 29) and the Pacific Union Conference (Aug. 19). At each meeting he asked the delegates to wait for the outcome of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee mentioned above. But the majority of the delegates felt that further delay would not resolve the matter and that it was appropriate for the union organization, which normally approves ordination anyway, to determine how it would relate to the presence of women in ministry. On August 19 the General Conference Officers responded to the action of the Pacific Union as follows:

**A RESPONSE TO THE ACTION OF THE PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE
CONSTITUENCY MEETING ON SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 2012**

The 17 million members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are united through the Holy Spirit in a common commitment to Christ and the truths of His Word, an urgent end-time mission, and a divinely inspired church organization. A threat to any one of these places at risk the unity of the church. It is for this reason that the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms the Pacific Union’s action not to change their Constitution and remain in harmony with the world church. This represents a step in a positive direction. The General Conference leadership is seriously concerned, though, with the Pacific Union’s subsequent action to preempt the collective decisions of the world church regarding ordination. Unilateral actions contrary to the voted decisions of the global church seriously threaten the unity of the church.

The world church recognizes the vital role that women play in the life, ministry and leadership of the church and encourages their active involvement. Because the General Conference Administrative Committee has already voted and commenced the most comprehensive study in our history on the subject of ordination, which will include the study of the ordination of women, the action of the Pacific Union to grant Ministerial Ordination “without respect to gender” preempts the process voted for the current study of ordination theology and practices by committing the Pacific Union Conference to a particular outcome before the study-and-discussion process is completed. It also expresses a lack of trust in the integrity of the general process accepted and voted by General Conference administrators and personnel, division officers, and pastors and lay members from all the world divisions who serve on the General Conference Executive Committee, which includes the presidents of the 125 unions representing the world church, regarding how we approach common challenges.

Further, the action is contrary to General Conference Working Policy and sets aside the 1990 and 1995 decisions of the General Conference in Session respecting the

¹³⁴Gary Patterson, “General Conference in Violation of Its Own Policy,” in spectrummagazine.org (released on Aug. 15, 2012).

¹³⁵Michael Peabody, “Pacific Union Session Delegates Vote to Approve Ordinations to the Gospel Ministry Without Regard to Gender,” in pauc.adventistfaith.org (released on Aug. 20, 2012); idem, “Pacific Union Session Delegates Vote to Approve Ordinations to the Gospel Ministry Without Regard to Gender,” *NADNewsPoints*, Aug. 21, 2012.

practice of ordination. The action taken by the Pacific Union Conference represents a serious threat to the unity of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, and thus, at its next meeting in October 2012, as indicated in another recent public statement by General Conference officers and division presidents, the General Conference Executive Committee will carefully review the situation and determine how to respond. In the spirit of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the officers of the General Conference appeal to all entities, organizations, and individuals, including the Pacific Union Conference, to refrain from independent and unilateral decisions and from implementing any such actions.

It is our prayer that the “oneness” Jesus prayed for in His great intercessory prayer in John 17, and that which the disciples experienced in Acts 2, will be manifest in His church today. We pray that the result of this “oneness” will be lives transformed by His grace, united in His love, and empowered by His Spirit to proclaim His last-day message in all of its fullness to a perishing planet, hastening the glorious return of our Lord.¹³⁶

Some members supported and even applauded what they saw as the courage of both the Columbia Union and the Pacific Union in bypassing the General Conference and the worldwide church by approving ordination “without regard to gender.” Others saw the votes as rebellion, with ecclesiological consequences far beyond the ordination/no-ordination issue. In their thinking, if a union can bypass the General Conference, why cannot a local conference/mission or even a local church do the same to its own union? Still others pointed out that “without regard to gender” is an inclusive expression used today in reference to men, women, and intersexed individuals.¹³⁷ By incorporating this expression into their action, some wonder if these unions were promising in theory something that in practice they will not carry on (namely the ordination of homosexuals) or are they already contemplating such a possibility? Whatever the case, this expression is loaded with possible meanings presumably not intended by the delegates who voted the respective actions.

On August 25, 2012, at the European Pastors Conference, Rogaska Slatina, Slovenia, the Trans-European Division President Bertil Wiklander presented the following “Statement on Women’s Ordination to the Pastoral Ministry”:

The Trans-European Division is a division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It means that TED follows General Conference policy, except in cases where we request and are given permission to apply a variance to the common world-church policy. The 11 unions within the TED are all members of the General Conference (and the TED) and in their constitutions and bylaws they state that their faith, church order, and working policies shall be in harmony with the GC/TED.

These regulations in our church law explain the position taken by the TED Executive Committee on women’s ordination to the pastoral ministry.

The matter of women’s ordination for ministry has been with the TED at least since 1982, and since then almost every year there have been actions noted in our minutes regarding a discussion, a union request, an acceptance of new policies, and a granting of requests from some unions. In the 1980’s, the issues were usually about

¹³⁶ANN staff, “Church officials say Pacific Union vote on ordination preempts study process,” in news.adventist.org (released on Aug. 19, 2012).

¹³⁷See Rich Hannon, “Adventism and the Intersex Problem,” *Spectrum* 40/3 (Summer 2012): 32-34. See also the follow up reactions to the article on pp. 34-36.

women being ordained as elders and deaconesses. The former ordination was accepted by the General Conference Session in 1990 and the latter in 2010.

In May, 1989, a survey of our unions' positions on the ordination of women was undertaken and a clear majority was then not in favour of actually ordaining women as pastors although they may not have considered it biblically wrong to do so.

The policies of the General Conference from 1990 and onwards allowed for ordination of women as church elders, employment of women as associates in pastoral care (if they were ordained as local elders), and also commissioning of women in ministry for pastoral type of work in a union. This gradually led to a greater openness and even a sense of strong need for ordaining women to the gospel ministry in the TED. This was the case in some unions more than in others, possibly depending on the cultural context in which we live and work.

In response to this development in the 1990's and 2000's, TED has for several years organised regular councils for female pastoral workers. We have seriously looked at recommendations from this group. Thus, salaries, employment conditions, titles, and job descriptions for male and female pastoral workers have been made more and more equal in many unions. On 18 November, 2009, the TED Executive Committee voted unanimously to provide 'Revised Guidelines for Commissioning' where all that was possible to do within policy to create equality between the genders in pastoral kinds of ministry was established for the TED.

In January–March, 2010, the General Conference President, Jan Paulsen, initiated a survey among the 13 world divisions regarding their position on women's ordination. The TED invited all its unions to take part. The outcome was that all our unions unanimously accept that there are no biblical reasons for not ordaining women and that it would not be a problem if the General Conference granted the TED authority to let unions, who so request, the right to ordain women as pastors. Of all the 11 unions today in the TED, only one union president stated that his union would not at present ordain women as pastors, even if it was permitted, but he had no objection to this being done in other unions. However, a majority of world divisions did not share our view and the GC leadership decided therefore not bring the matter forward to the GC Session a few months later.

The issue was however raised on the floor at the GC Session in Atlanta in June/July, 2010, in connection with the discussion and acceptance of the ordination of deaconesses. It was voted that the church would study the theology of ordination and seek a better biblical understanding of what ordination really means: If the church can ordain women as church elders and deaconesses, then why not also as pastors? We now have a detailed time table for this study, and it is clear that it is going to be a very comprehensive work that includes women's ordination and all aspects of ordination in the church. Each division has been asked to provide a research report through their biblical research committee, getting input from the unions, voting it in their executive committee, and sending it to the GC Biblical Research Institute. The TED is now fully engaged in this work and our executive committee will be asked to authorise our research report in November, 2013. A co-ordinating body at the GC will then study the research from all 13 divisions and provide a report which will go to the GC leadership in the summer of 2014. If recommended by the GC Annual Council in October, 2014, a motion will go to the floor of the GC Session in San Antonio in 2015. We take the view in the TED that we actively participate in the study of ordination and then we wait and see what will be the outcome, believing that the Spirit of God will lead this matter to a good solution for his church.

In November 2010, the TED Executive Committee voted a document called 'The Leadership and Ordination of Women'. Its purpose was to address the tension between the extraordinary mission challenges facing the church within our territories and the need to mobilize all our members, male and female, on the one hand, and church policy on the ordination of women, on the other. Four requests were made to the General Conference. Those requests and the responses were as follows:

1. *To request that the study of the theology of ordination as voted at the General Conference Session in Atlanta is prioritized.* The General Conference has granted this.

2. *To request the General Conference to review and amend General Conference policies, so that the wording is gender neutral and that all leadership pathways are open to male and female.* No formal response has been received and we will continue to work with the GC Secretariat on this point.

3. *To request the General Conference to grant a variance to the model constitutions and bylaws to accommodate the unique needs of the Trans-European Division with the insertion of "conference and union presidents should be ordained/commissioned ministers" in its policy language. We feel that this is a matter of some urgency and respectfully request that this be dealt with as soon as possible but no later than General Conference Annual Council 2011.* This was brought to the floor in October 2011, but it was not voted on formally, since a similar variance only relating to conference presidents was requested by the NAD. Their request was voted down and by common consent the TED motion therefore also failed.

4. *To request the General Conference for permission to ordain women to the gospel ministry within the Trans-European Division thereby creating parity between female and male ministers and follow the same process and procedure as currently applies to ordained men and credentialed ministers.* This point is in abeyance awaiting the outcome of the study on the theology of ordination.

In November, 2011, following the vote at Annual Council, the TED prayerfully considered how to respond to it. We consulted widely and received input from the unions. We recognise and understand that we are part of a global church and need to listen to and be in harmony with the decision of the church at large. The Committee voted:

1. To affirm again the role of its women leaders, pastors and lay members.
2. To pro-actively work to support the development of women in leadership within the TED and to present a road map to the TED Spring Meetings 2012 as to how this could be done. This work is on-going.

The big question is of course what the Bible says about women's ordination. We will provide an answer from our perspective in November, 2013, based on a very comprehensive research. In the meantime, I would ask you all to pray for this study. Without the Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ we can do nothing. But I would add that you can do more than praying. You can also study the matter for yourself, so that you understand what the word of God teaches on this point.

One way for you to get acquainted with the matter is by reading pastor John Lorencin's booklet on women's ordination—it is available in English with the title *Priestly Ministry in the Old and the New Testament: Should Women be Ordained?* (2012) Pastor Lorencin was the Yugoslavian Union President until 1994 and used to be very much opposed to women's ordination. He admits that he took a traditional view and under the influence of his cultural context where there were three main religions: Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic Christian, and Islam. He had not formed his opinion on the basis of the Bible, so when he retired he decided to study ordination in the Bible. In his book, as a pastoral Bible reader, in simple language, he goes through the whole Bible. He finds that in the New Testament, Christ has taken over the sacrificial priestly office from the Old Testament, so it is no more. Instead, Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial system and become our high priest in heaven where he now offers his benefits for us to God. As our high priest, he is also the head of the body of Christ, the church, which consists of the priesthood of all believers, which makes no distinction between male and female. He also points out that there is no word for 'ordination' in the Bible. It is used in the King James Version from 1611, but it is there based on old Roman Catholic translations from the 14th and 15th centuries. In fact, pastor Lorencin warns against letting the pastoral ordination be influenced by the Roman Catholic, unbiblical practice, which is rooted in the pagan Roman system of being promoted (Latin *ordinatio*) to a higher 'order' (Latin *ordo*) in the state offices. Any sense of the rite of ordination conveying a special status or character that is not already there through the gift of the Holy Spirit is unbiblical. Ordination is therefore a work of the Spirit and only recognised and confirmed by the church. Many of the points raised here have also been pointed out in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, in the article on 'ordination' (1996).

And there is of course other literature on the topic. The teachers at Andrews University collected a number of papers on the topic in a volume called *Women in Ministry* (edited by Nancy Vyhmeister, Berrien springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998) and this valuable book is still available. I can add mention that Dr Jan Barna, one of our esteemed teachers at Newbold College, has written his doctoral thesis in 2009 on this topic and he is in negotiations to have it printed. His emphasis is the view of the Bible and the hermeneutics being applied in dealing with the matter of women's ordination.

I want to say to you that I have never made a secret of my own personal conviction. I accept women's ordination as being biblical and appropriate. But I am also very concerned that we manage this important matter in harmony and cooperation with the world church. I know that the Lord will bless our joint efforts to explore his word and to share it with our brothers and sisters world-wide. And I think the best thing we can do is to pray for the Spirit of God to lead his church to understand this matter in harmony with his will. As keepers of the heritage of the Protestant reformation, let us see this matter from a spiritual perspective and ask God to lead us to an understanding of his truth. And let us do it in a spirit of respect for each other, knowing that we all seek the truth and that Christ has promised that the Holy Spirit will 'guide us into all truth.'¹³⁸

The documents quoted and publications referred to in this paper reflect a discussion that took over important segments of the church. This discussion has been taken also to the pulpit by preachers like Dwight K. Nelson (favoring women's ordination)¹³⁹ and Doug Batchelor (speaking against women's ordination).¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, on September 5, 2012, "the Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee approved fourteen women and two men for ordination."¹⁴¹ Soon after, ordinations of women to the gospel ministry took place at both the Pacific Union Conference and the Columbia Union Conference.

The General Conference responded to these moves at its 2012 Annual Council. On October 16, after a sermon by Mark A. Finley on "The Acts Model: Settling Differences in the Context of Mission" (see Appendix 3) and much prayer, the delegates voted the document, "Statement on Church Polity, Procedures and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination." Approved by 264 votes in favor and 25 opposed,¹⁴² the document reads as follows:

STATEMENT ON CHURCH POLITY, PROCEDURES, AND THE
RESOLUTION OF DISAGREEMENTS IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT
UNION ACTIONS ON MINISTERIAL ORDINATION

¹³⁸Bertil Wiklander, "Statement on Women's Ordination to the Pastoral Ministry," in www.ted-adventist.org (accessed on Sept. 2, 2012).

¹³⁹See e.g. Dwight Nelson, *The Last Days, Part 2: "Of Perfume and Tears and Grumpy Old Men"* (sermon delivered at Pioneer Memorial Church, Andrews University, on January 21, 2012), in www.pmchurch.tv and www.youtube.com (accessed on Sept. 4, 2012).

¹⁴⁰See e.g. Doug Batchelor, "Women Pastors: A Biblical Perspective" (sermon delivered at the Sacramento Central SDA Church, Sacramento, California, on Feb. 6, 2010), in www.amazingfacts.org and www.youtube.com (accessed on Sept. 4, 2012).

¹⁴¹Jared Wright, "Pacific Union Conference Approves Fourteen Women for Ordination," in spectrummagazine.org (released on Sept. 7, 2012).

¹⁴²Mark A. Kellner, "After debate, Annual Council votes Statement on Church Polity," in news.adventist.org (released on Oct. 16, 2012).

Foundational principles for Seventh-day Adventist Church structure and operations are rooted in the Bible and draw heavily from the teachings of Jesus, the apostles and the experience of the early Church. In the New Testament the people of God are urged to demonstrate unity (John 15 and 17, Ephesians 4); to engage in worldwide mission (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-8, Acts 10-11); to acknowledge differences/disagreements and to have a process for their resolution (Acts 6, 15, Galatians 3:26-29, Philippians 2); and to live as a transformed and transforming community in a fractured and sin-burdened world (Ephesians 2-4).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to preserve its identity as a united global family while addressing mission opportunities and challenges in widely differing cultural, political and economic environments. The desire to hold two objectives, global unity¹, and global mission, in creative and dynamic balance has led to an organizational structure that shares and delegates responsibility for mission within a framework of participation in and respect for collective decision-making processes. Within this organizational structure, decisions of a General Conference Session represent the highest authority²—the voice of the whole Church in respect to beliefs, procedures and relationships.

It is natural to expect that in response to diverse and ever-changing circumstances differences will arise in determining the most appropriate ways of accomplishing mission while also preserving Church structure and relationships. The articulation of different viewpoints and the expression of disagreement are important ways by which the Church gains new insights and more fully understands the global impact of decisions. Speaking and listening, when done respectfully, are essential to the operational health of the whole body and its continuing effectiveness in mission. The process adopted by the Church for the resolution of disagreements involves forums where all those affected by a decision are represented in the exploration and adoption of decisions.

The call, by both individuals and organizations, for change in ministerial ordination practices illustrates one expression of disagreement. This subject has been on the global agenda of the Church at General Conference Sessions for several decades. Thus far the General Conference Session (by actions in 1990³ and 1995⁴) has chosen the pathway of uniform practice worldwide—ministerial ordination for males only. A recurring question is whether or not the authority to grant ministerial ordination without regard to gender could be granted to divisions without making the provision mandatory everywhere. Several unions in various parts of the world have voiced support for this kind of change in ministerial ordination practices. Three union constituency sessions have authorized their executive committees to approve ministerial ordination without regard to gender. Of these, two have recently chosen to proceed according to the constituency decision.

Decisions to pursue a course of action not in harmony with the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Session decisions (with respect to ministerial ordination) represent not only an expression of dissent but also a demonstration of self-determination in a matter previously decided by the collective Church. The General Conference Executive Committee regards these actions as serious mistakes. They directly challenge two world Church decisions on the matter of ordination. They create doubts about the importance of collective decision-making as a basic feature of denominational life. They weaken the fabric of Church life and operations by giving opportunity for other entities to follow this example in order to justify independence and autonomy in other matters rather than maintaining a mutual commitment to collective decision-making.

The world Church cannot legitimize practices that clearly contradict the intent of General Conference Session actions. This applies to ordination decisions as well as to other matters in which a local organization may feel constrained not just to voice its disagreement with the world Church but to proceed along a pathway that directly conflicts with the expressed will of the worldwide Church. Accordingly, the world Church does not recognize actions authorizing or implementing ministerial ordination without regard to gender.

This statement deals with Church structure and procedures. It does not address the question of ministerial ordination practices per se. The central issue is one of Church polity—how the Church defines its organization, governance and operations. Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed on the principle of interdependence rather than independence. A course of action contrary to the will of the whole places the organization at risk.

Discussion and debate about ministerial ordination practice is a separate matter and is under global study and review. General Conference Session decisions (1990 and 1995) did not authorize ministerial ordination without regard to gender, either globally or regionally. Any change in this practice requires action by a General Conference Session. Every Church organization in the world has been given the opportunity of participating in the current global study. This can be accomplished through interaction with the respective division-appointed Biblical Research Committee. Division Biblical Research Committees will interface with the General Conference-appointed Theology of Ordination Study Committee. The study is to be completed by 2014 with a report from the Theology of Ordination Study Committee presented to the General Conference Executive Committee at its 2014 Annual Council, which will decide what to refer to the General Conference Session in 2015.

The role of women in ministry and leadership has been a long-standing question. It is one that attracts strong yet differing convictions and can readily divide families, congregations and constituencies. The process toward finding acceptable solutions must not obscure the contribution that women have made and continue to make in many areas of Church life and leadership.

The General Conference Executive Committee specifically affirms the important roles that women fill in the life of the Church. Their giftedness and commitment is a blessing to the whole Church and a necessary part of its work in mission.

Moments of tension in denominational life can be opportunities for both learning and enhancing relationships. The presence of conflict and the expression of difference can help make the Church stronger. In such moments the commitment of all to informed and collective decision-making processes is the best way to resolve matters while keeping the Church together as a world family.

The General Conference Executive Committee appeals to all organizations—local churches, local conferences/missions, unions, institutions and divisions—to consider thoughtfully the impact and implications of decisions beyond the boundaries of each entity’s territory of operations. General Conference *Working Policy*, the *Church Manual*, and General Conference Session decisions are designed to assist the Church in demonstrating the unity for which Jesus prayed and at the same time to provide a structure that advances the gospel commission in every part of the world.

This appeal is also addressed to individual Church members everywhere. Drawing upon Paul’s analogy of the Church as a body (1 Corinthians 12) it is a call for all parts of the body to perform their individual service, to express their unique giftedness with the realization that each is part of something much larger—a worldwide family that seeks to do all things in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17).¹⁴³

Even so, in November 2012 it was reported, “16 Female Pastors Approved for Ordination” by the Columbia Union Conference;¹⁴⁴ and “Seven

¹⁴³“Statement on Church Polity, Procedures and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination,” in *ibid.* The document’s explanatory footnotes, withdrawn from this text, are available in its online version.

¹⁴⁴Visitor Staff, “16 Female Pastors Approved for Ordination,” in www.columbiaunion.org (released on Nov. 8, 2012). Cf. Taashi Rowe, “How Josephine Benton Blazed the Trail for Women in Ministry,” in *ibid.* (released on Nov. 19, 2012).

More Women Approved for Ordination by Pacific Union Conference.”¹⁴⁵ By adding “seven more” to the 14 approved two months earlier, the Pacific Union total came to 21 female pastors. Meanwhile, the General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee is scheduled to meet four times (January 15-17, 2013; July 22-24, 2013; January 21-23, 2014; June 2-4, 2014), after which some concrete decisions should be made.

Concluding Remarks

Since the early 1970s Seventh-day Adventists have been discussing the subject of women’s ordination to the gospel ministry. Many actions, documents, and publications have been produced with the intension of settling the disputes. But already in 1999 Laura L. Vance could describe this as “the most persistent and pervasive dispute among Adventists (with the possible exception of the dispute concerning the relative degree to which justification and sanctification are necessary for salvation...).”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, many of those who oppose or at least do not favor women’s ordination are convinced that sufficient discussions have already taken place, and that the decisions of the 1990 and 1995 General Conference Sessions are still valid and should be respected. However, for many in favor of women’s ordination it seems that the matter will remain unresolved until the church finally approves it or at least allows every division or union to decide what is to be done in its own region. But there is also a third group that, without a specific agenda to push, is waiting for the church to produce a clearer exposition of the biblical testimony on this subject.

Further studies on the *nature of ordination* (as suggested in 2010) can clarify some issues involved in the overall discussion. But there are other correlated areas that cannot be overlooked. One is the matter of *ecclesiastic authority*. By glancing through the documents quoted above, one ends up with some basic questions: How abiding and authoritative are the General Conference Session actions for the worldwide church? To what extent can a division, union or conference/mission accommodate its practices to its local culture without breaking the overall unity of the church? In regard to women’s ordination, an increasing number of voices are claiming that it should be seen as a cultural option to be decided on a local basis without interference from the worldwide church. Others see it as a moral obligation for the entire church. But do these perspectives reflect the biblical understanding of the subject?

Another crucial area is the relationship between women’s ordination and other prevailing forms of so-called *social injustice/discrimination*.¹⁴⁷ Mark Chaves concludes his insightful book *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Harvard, 1997) by stating that

¹⁴⁵Alexander Carpenter, “Seven More Women Approved for Ordination by Pacific Union Conference,” in *spectrummagazine.org* (released on Nov. 16, 2012).

¹⁴⁶Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis*, 192.

¹⁴⁷Some other forms of so-called social injustice/discrimination are addressed in the section “LGBT Community News and Conversation,” in *Spectrum* 40, Issue 3 (Summer 2012).

rules about women's ordination largely serve as symbolic display to the outside world, and they point to (or away from) a broader liberal agenda associated with modernity and religious accommodation to the spirit of the age. From this perspective, a denomination's formal policy about women's ordination is less an indicator of women's literal status within the denomination and more and more an enactment of its position vis-à-vis the liberal and modern agenda of institutionalizing individual rights.

Women's ordination, then, is about something more than females in religious leadership. This book has tried to say what that "more" is.¹⁴⁸

In general, those Adventists who favor women's ordination more from a biblical perspective try to deal with it as an isolated matter. Some who defend women's ordination see it as part of a larger social-justice concern that might be extended in some cases to include even homosexuality.¹⁴⁹ Only a more thorough analysis can determine to what extent the church will be able to deal with the topic under discussion without absorbing the broader social agenda of modern culture. Helpful in that process would be a comparative study between the Adventist experience and the experiences of other Christian denominations that also have dealt with the issue of women's ordination.

Despite all the challenges the church is facing today, we must trust in God's leadership and pray for the leaders of the church in these difficult days when authority in all its forms is being undermined. After all, Ellen White reminds us,

There is no need to doubt, to be fearful that the work will not succeed. God is at the head of the work, and He will set everything in order. If matters need adjusting at the head of the work, God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong. Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 192. See also Nancy Carol James, *The Developing Schism within the Episcopal Church (1960-2010): Social Justice, Ordination of Women, Charismatics, Homosexuality, Extra-Territorial Bishops, Etc.* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

¹⁴⁹The issues of women's ordination and homosexuality are treated in *Spectrum* 40/3 (Summer 2012).

¹⁵⁰Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 2:390.

Appendix 1

RECORDS PERTAINING TO ELLEN G. WHITE'S MINISTERIAL/ORDINATION CREDENTIALS

A. Ellen White's Biographical Information Form

On March 5, 1909, Ellen White's biographical information form was filled out by her assistant, Mary Steward, as requested for General Conference records. Question 19 asked, "If ordained, state when, where, and by whom." The line was marked with an "x" indicating that she had not been ordained, just as an "x" was recorded for question 26, "If remarried, give date, and to whom."

B. Conference Credentialing Records in the *Review and Herald*

Ellen White's name is not found in lists of Michigan Conference credentialed ministers prior to 1871. (See, for example, lists published in RH, May 31, 1864, May 28, 1867, and May 26, 1868.) She was first issued ministerial credentials on February 10, 1871, by the Michigan Conference:

"Moved and voted, That Sr. Ellen G. White receive credentials from this Conference."—RH, Feb. 14, 1871, p. 69.

Her credentials were renewed by the Michigan Conference annually thereafter through 1887.¹⁵¹ The 1886 report was introduced with the words: "Your committee on credentials and licenses would present the following names of ordained ministers for a renewal of their credentials the ensuing year." (Ellen White was not listed in the Michigan Conference report for 1888.)

C. Listings in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook & General Conference Bulletin*

The first listing of ministers in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* was in 1884. Ellen White was listed under both "General Conference" Ministers and "Michigan" Ministers. The listings appeared the same in 1885, 1886, and 1887. In 1888 she was listed under "California" Ministers, as well as under "Michigan" Ministers and "General Field" Ministers. She was also listed under "Ministers" (not Licentiates) in the "Alphabetical List of Laborers."

¹⁵¹See RH, Sept. 10, 1872, p. 102, Sept. 16, 1873, p. 110, Aug. 25, 1874, p. 79, Aug. 26, 1876, p. 63, Oct. 5, 1876, p. 106, Oct. 4, 1877, p. 107, Oct. 17, 1878, p. 127, Oct. 16, 1879, p. 134, Oct. 14, 1880, p. 253, Oct. 11, 1881, p. 237, Oct. 10, 1882, p. 637, Oct. 9, 1883, p. 636, Oct. 21, 1884, p. 668, Nov. 17, 1885, p. 717, Oct. 26, 1886, p. 668, Nov. 1, 1887, p. 684.

Beginning in 1889, all the workers were listed alphabetically, as well as by territory, with letter codes inserted to indicate whether the worker was (l) licensed to preach or (m) an ordained minister. Ellen White was listed under “General Conference” Ministers only (not “Michigan” or “California”) and an (m) appeared after her name in the directory. She was listed the same way from 1890-1894. No yearbooks were published from 1895 to 1903, however, “Workers’ Directories” were published in the *General Conference Bulletin*.

In the 1895/1896/1897/1898 *Bulletins*, Ellen White was consistently listed in the “Workers’ Directory” with the code for “Minister” (m) in the absence of any separate coding for ordained ministers in the directory, as well as appearing in the list of “General Conference” Ministers. In the 1899/1900 *Bulletins*, the Ministerial Directory listed (m) for ordained minister and (l) for licensed minister. Ellen White was listed with the (m) code, and in the list of “General Conference” Ministers.

In the 1901/1902 *Bulletins*, the codes were not used, but a distinction between Ministers and Licentiates was made in territorial listings. Ellen White was listed in the General Conference “Ministers” list rather than the “Licentiates.” No directory was published for 1903, but she was granted “ministerial credentials” from the General Conference by action reported in the *General Conference Bulletin*, Apr. 14, 1903, p. 216.

In the 1904 *Yearbook*, Ellen White was listed in the Ministerial Directory and with “Ministers Under the Direction of the General Conference.” There was no separate coding for ordained ministers in the directory. In the 1905/1906/1907/1908 *Yearbooks*, she was listed in the Ministerial Directory and with Ministers listed under “Laborers Engaged in General Work and in Mission Fields, Under the General Conference.” Again, there was no separate coding for ordained ministers in the directory.

In the 1909/1910/1911/1912/1913 *Yearbooks*, Ellen White was listed in the Ministerial Directory and with Ministers under “Laborers Engaged in General Work Under the General Conference” (with no separate coding for ordained ministers in the directory).

In the 1914/1915 *Yearbooks*, Ellen White was listed in the Ministerial Directory and with Ministers listed under “General Laborers Holding Credentials From the General Conference” (with no separate coding for ordained ministers in the directory).

D. Ellen White’s Paper Credentials

The White Estate possesses six paper credentials that were issued to Ellen White. The first credential is dated October 1, 1883, from the Michigan Conference. The second is dated December 6, 1885, from the General

Conference. On that one credential, the word “ordained” was crossed out. The third is dated December 27, 1887, from the General Conference. The fourth is dated March 7, 1899, from the General Conference. The fifth is dated June 14, 1909, from the General Conference. The sixth is dated June 12, 1913, from the General Conference.

E. Statement by Ellen G. White’s Family

In a letter dated Nov. 17, 1935, Dores E. Robinson replied on behalf of W. C. White (Ellen White’s son and Robinson’s father-in-law) in response to a query concerning Ellen White’s ministerial credentials. He wrote: “[W. C. White] tells me that Sister White was never ordained, that she never baptized, nor did she ever give the ordination charge to others.”

Summary

From 1871 until her death in 1915, Ellen White was issued ministerial credentials. From 1871 to 1887 she was credentialed by the Michigan Conference, and from 1884 until her death, she was credentialed as a General Conference Minister. On one of the credentials (1885), the word “ordained” is struck through. (In the 1888 *Yearbook* she was also listed among the California Ministers.) Throughout the years, her name was listed along with ordained ministers rather than licentiates, although her biographical information sheet and the testimony of her family indicates that she did not receive ordination at the hands of church officials.

Compiled by the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.
October 2012

SOURCE: Ellen G. White Estate, “Records Pertaining to Ellen G. White’s Ministerial/Ordination Credentials,” in www.whiteestate.org (released in Oct. 2012).

Appendix 2

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS REGARDING CURRENT
ISSUES OF UNITY FACING THE CHURCH**

Aug. 09, 2012 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

The following document addresses issues raised regarding the unity of the church, the authority of the General Conference, and its relationship to other levels and entities of the world church in connection with the current discussion on ordination to the gospel ministry. This document does not address whether ordaining women is appropriate but rather clarifies and corrects arguments that have been used throughout the discussion.

1. Does the General Conference have authority to determine the criteria for ministerial ordination at the union level and below, or does the union conference have the delegated authority within its territory to establish such criteria, including gender?

Decisions of the General Conference Sessions profoundly impact the church at all levels, including General Conference/division, union conference/mission, conference, and local church. While it is true that local churches approve candidates for baptism, and local conferences recommend to unions for approval all requests for ordination, none of these levels establish the criteria for baptism or ordination. A local church board determines who is going to be baptized; it does not determine the criteria for baptism. The 28 Fundamental Beliefs and the baptismal vows have been mutually agreed upon by the world church. This keeps the church unified internationally. In the same way a union conference has the delegated authority to approve candidates for ordination based on their satisfying the criteria for ordination established by the world church; it does not have the authority to ignore this mutually agreed-upon criteria. That is why the unions are not authorized to move forward unilaterally with ordination without regard to gender. If the church were to accept such a premise, there would be varying standards of ordination and criteria for ministry. Such a path would not likely end there. It would open the door to varying standards for baptism, church membership, etc. The issue here is not women's ordination per se; it is which level of church organization has the constitutionally given authority to determine what qualifies a person for ordination. This can only be done by the General Conference in Session, or the General Conference Executive Committee, which acts between General Conference Sessions (General Conference Working Policy L 35).

Notice how the Church Manual describes the relationship between the various levels of church organization:

In the Church today the General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the Church. The General Conference Executive Committee is authorized by its Constitution to create subordinate organizations with authority to carry out their roles. Therefore all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the Church will recognize the General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, as the highest ecclesiastical authority, under God, among Seventh-day Adventists.¹

The requirement for all church entities, including conferences and unions, to follow existing policies is made clear in the Bylaws of the General Conference: “Administrations of all organizations and institutions within a division’s territory shall be responsible to their respective executive committees/boards and operate in harmony with [the] division and General Conference Executive Committee actions and policies.”² For the above reasons, the recent action taken by the Columbia Union Conference Constituency Session to approve ordination without respect to gender represents a violation of these policies.

2. Is the worldwide Theology of Ordination Study Committee, requested at the 2010 General Conference Session and established at the 2011 Annual Council, also studying the issue of the pastoral ordination of women?

Yes. The process for studying the theology of ordination voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee was handed out and reviewed by the 2011 Annual Council. As the document explains, “each division is asked to request their biblical research committee [BRC] to make a study of the theology of ordination and its implications for church practices.”³ As has been consistently explained verbally and in writing, these practical implications involve many questions related to ordination, including the ordination of women. For example, in a letter from the Biblical Research Institute to all the division presidents and BRC directors sent on May 1, 2012, numerous issues and questions were listed that could be considered by the division study committees. A number of these items relate directly to the question of ordaining women as pastors, including “Does the Bible teach leadership role distinctions between male and female in ministry?”

The Biblical Research Institute has provided the necessary materials for the divisions to establish biblical research committees, and all 13 world divisions are in various stages of the study process. In addition, the General Conference Administrative Committee will be appointing a Theology of Ordination Study Committee, to which each division is invited to send representatives who will be able to represent the study done by their division on this larger, worldwide committee. A report of the worldwide study committee will be presented to the General Conference administration, which will report the findings to the 2014 Annual Council. This would allow any agreed-upon resolutions to be placed on the agenda of the 2015 General Conference Session. Further details of this process are available through the Adventist News Network: <http://news.adventist.org/en/archive/articles/2011/10/10/process-timetable-unveiled-for-review-of-theology-of-ordination>.

3. Was it constitutionally appropriate for the General Conference Sessions of 1990 and 1995 to discuss and vote on the issue of ordaining women to ministry?

Yes. “The General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the Church.”⁴ The General Conference in Session can deal with matters of global importance to the Church as well as matters referred to it from the General Conference Executive Committee. The General Conference in Session is the final place of appeal in matters of difference among organizations. “When differences arise in or between churches and conferences or institutions, appeal to the next higher constituent level is proper until it reaches an Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee or the General Conference Session. Between these meetings, the General Conference Executive Committee constitutes the body of final authority on all questions. The committee’s decision may be reviewed at a General Conference Session or an Annual Council.”

The 1990 General Conference Session addressed a report and recommendations that were referred to it by the General Conference Executive Committee.⁵

The 1995 General Conference Session addressed a matter that originated as a request from the North American Division (NAD) officers and the NAD union presidents. This request was processed through the General Conference Executive Committee and placed on the agenda for the General Conference Session.

4. Did the 1881 General Conference Session vote to authorize the ordination of women to the gospel ministry?

No. However, a surface reading of the minutes of the session could leave a wrong impression. It was common to introduce motions at GC Sessions of the time with “Resolved.” In our day, it sounds as if it has been decided, but in fact it was merely the accepted way to place a motion up for consideration. Then it would be discussed by the delegates and put to a vote. The resolutions voted on and passed at the 1881 General Conference Session are clearly listed in the minutes as “adopted.” With regard to the ordination of women, the following resolution was presented for discussion: “Resolved, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.” Eight individuals are listed as speaking to this resolution prior to it being “referred to the General Conference Committee.”⁶ It is never listed as having been adopted, nor is there any evidence it was ever taken up again, either at this Session or at any subsequent GC Session.⁷

5. If female pastors have already been ordained by some organizations in China, why not allow the ordination of women to the ministry in other regions of the world?

Women have and are doing a powerful work for God in ministry in China. They are serving as pastors and church planters. Of more than 6,000 pastors in China, approximately 4,000, or 70 percent, of them are women. While a few (currently, 20 women) have been ordained, we need to understand the complexity of the situation in China and the reality of life there. In China, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a formal church organization. There are no conferences or unions. There is no official Adventist Theological Seminary in China. There is no standardized ministerial training. Pastors typically are chosen from the members of a local congregation as they demonstrate a calling for ministry by teaching Sabbath school, lay preaching, and church planting. Chinese pastors, male or female, are usually ordained in one of two ways: either by the local congregation with the participation of Adventist senior pastors from their region, or by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement operates under the China Christian Council and is a nondenominational entity approved by the Chinese government.

Female Adventist leaders in China are not in agreement among themselves about the appropriateness of ordination: there is no uniform approach to the issue among the women who pastor Adventist churches in China. Some allow themselves to be ordained, some do not; while the large majority has not engaged in the discussion because women's ordination has never been an issue among women pastors in China. While the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledges the fact of women's ordination in China, it neither recognizes it nor endorses it. It doesn't seek to initiate, guide, or control the process. The church in China functions in the context of its environment and with the limitations imposed upon it by the government where it exists. However, because of this anomalous situation, its practices with respect to the ordination of female pastors cannot be cited as a model for the world church.

6. Is the ordination of female pastors in China recognized by the world church?

No. Ordination in China is not officially recognized by any entity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church outside of China. The document, "An Appeal for Unity in Respect to Ministerial Ordination Practices," written and approved by all General Conference officers (25 persons) and division presidents (13 persons) worldwide, makes this clear:

... these ordinations were not authorized or conducted according to the policies of the Church. Nor are these ordinations approved or recognized/endorsed by the Northern Asia-Pacific Division. The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have an officially organized structure in China that is comparable to other areas of the world. Government regulations do not permit outside involvement in church affairs within China. The practice,

*in China, of ministerial ordination for women is acknowledged as a reality that has arisen in China and is beyond the influence of the world-wide structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*⁸

7. How is General Conference policy determined, and how is it related to practice? What is the connection between decisions voted by the General Conference Executive Committee, the General Conference Session, and policy?

Policy is thoughtfully developed, based on sometimes lengthy deliberations over issues both theological and practical, and recommendations made for consideration by duly appointed and elected representatives at these sessions and meetings of the world church. It is not accurate to assert that policy follows practice. It is more accurate to say that practice informs policy but that policy itself is based on Seventh-day Adventist principles found in Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White. A recent example of how this process works in practice is the use of tithe. For several years, a committee at the General Conference has studied principles of tithing found in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. Based on this study and discussion, the committee has formulated recommendations for General Conference administration that have been refined, adopted at the Annual Council, and then included in the Working Policy.

However, certain policies cannot be acted upon at Annual Councils but only at a General Conference Session. These sessions, held every five years, address matters of global importance that impact the entire world Church, such as the election of world leaders (officers and department directors serving from the General Conference office and officers of divisions), revision and approval of Fundamental Beliefs, amendments to the Church Manual, amendments to the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws, appointment of the General Conference Auditing Service leaders and board, etc.

The General Conference Church Manual and General Conference Working Policy contain the decisions that define the operating procedures and relationships among the various levels of church organization (churches, local conferences, unions, and the General Conference with its divisions). The policies of the Church Manual are determined by General Conference Sessions and those of the Working Policy are determined by the General Conference Executive Committee at Annual Councils. Between General Conference sessions the General Conference Executive Committee is delegated to act on behalf of the General Conference Session. A General Conference Session is not prevented from establishing policy by virtue of having given to the Executive Committee that prerogative between Sessions. Membership on the Executive Committee includes General Conference and division officers; presidents of all the unions worldwide; as well as representation, recommended by divisions, from laity, pastors and frontline employees within each division.

8. Is it obligatory for all entities of the world church to be in full agreement with the General Conference model constitution and working policies, or are they permitted to be only in “general” agreement?

The model constitutions and bylaws contain basic templates of language and concepts to be included in the constitution and bylaws of an organization such as a union or local conference. Some of the material in the model documents is optional. Other material, represented by bold lettering, is obligatory. The obligation for organizations to operate in harmony with General Conference Session and Executive Committee decisions is also shown elsewhere in the Working Policy. No organization is able to claim an exemption from such obligation merely because it has not adopted such language in its constitution and bylaws:

Local churches, local conferences/missions/fields, union conferences/missions, unions of churches, and institutions are, by vote of the appropriate constituency, and by actions of properly authorized executive committees, a part of the worldwide organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Whereas each has accepted the privilege and responsibility of representing the Church in its part of the world, each is therefore required to operate and minister in harmony with the teachings and policies of the Church, and the actions of the world Church in the General Conference Executive Committee or in General Conference Session. While individual units of the Church are given freedom to function in ways appropriate to their role and culture, no part of the worldwide organization of the Church has a unilateral right to secede.⁹

9. What did Ellen White say about the authority of the General Conference?

In the years preceding the reorganization of the church in 1901, Ellen White made several statements about the General Conference no longer being the voice of God because the General Conference president and his advisors were not willing to heed the messages from the Lord. An example of this is a statement in 1898: “It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God.”¹⁰ With the rapid growth of the church during these years, it was also clear that three or four leaders at the General Conference office in Battle Creek should not be making day-to-day decisions for fields half a world away. However, after the reorganization at the 1901 General Conference Session, Ellen White’s attitude was very different:

1909—“God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing is in giving to the mind and judgment of one man, or of a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has invested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.”¹¹

1911—“God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.”¹²

10. What is the difference between unity and uniformity?

The difference between “unity” and “uniformity” is in how these words end. They both start with “uni”—a Latin prefix meaning “one,” but it is what comes after that “one” that explains the oneness. Unity is “the state of being one, being united, as of the parts of a whole,”¹³ but uniformity is “the state or quality of being uniform,”¹⁴ that is, in form being one, but not in heart, mind, and soul.

As evidenced from the Creation account to the story of the Earth made new, God is clearly a God of diversity. He did not make only one kind of animal, plant, flower—or even human. Instead, He created the diversity that we see in the world around us.

But God is not the author of confusion, nor did He intend the world to be fragmented and divided. The purpose of Creation was to give Him glory, and the purpose of the Church is to point people toward God as revealed in His Word.

When Jesus prayed, “That they all may be one” (John 17:21, NKJV), it was in the context of purpose and mission for those who believed (and would believe) in Him. He pleaded with His Father to “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (vs. 17). Regarding mission, He prayed, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (vs. 18). Summing up the unity Jesus desires for His followers, He prayed, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as you have loved Me” (vss. 22, 23). Our goal is to work unitedly toward the realization of the kingdom of God. This is accomplished as a worldwide body of believers by coming together in belief and practice.

Nowhere is this more evidenced than during every quinquennium when the worldwide church comes together in a General Conference Session to pray, worship, fellowship, and conduct the business of the church. It is here, with the input from a wide diversity of representatives from every part of the globe, that the voice of the entire church is heard. It is here where our statements of belief and practice are voted. It is these beliefs—based on the truth of God’s Word and the practices that outline how best to accomplish our mission—that guide us and keep us united as we move together in mission.

¹ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 18th ed., rev. 2010, p. 31.

² Section I.4 of the Bylaws of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, rev. 2011, p. 11. The yearbook in PDF is available at: <http://www.adventistarchive.org/docs/YB/YB2011.pdf>.

³ Minutes of the General Conference Executive Committee, GCC 11-105.

⁴ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 18th ed., rev. 2010, p. 31.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Minutes of the 1881 General Conference Session, 197 GCS 63-88, published in *The Review and Herald*, vol. 58, no. 25 (Dec. 20, 1881), p. 392.

⁷ A short outline of General Conference and North American Division decisions relating to women and ordination, including this item, together with images of the original supporting documents, may be found at: *GC and NAD Actions Related to Women’s Ordination* (PDF).

⁸ An Appeal for Unity in Respect to Ministerial Ordination Practices,” June 29, 2012 (p. 2, n. 5; the full document is available by [click here](#).

⁹ From General Conference Working Policy, B 10 25 Structural Stability, p. 57.

¹⁰ 17MR 216; this and similar statements can be found in LDE 50, 51.

¹¹ 9T 260, 261; this and similar statements can be found in LDE 55, 56.

¹² AA 164; also in LDE 56. For further reading, see George E. Rice, “The church: voice of God?” Ministry, December 1987, pp. 4-6, available at the Ellen G. White Estate: <http://drc.whiteestate.org/files4483.pdf>.

¹³ From dictionary.com at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/unity>.

¹⁴ From dictionary.com at <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/uniformity?s=t&ld=1089>.

SOURCE: “Questions & Answers Regarding Current Issues of Unity Facing the Church,” in news.adventist.org (released on Aug. 9, 2012).

Appendix 3

THE ACTS MODEL: SETTLING DIFFERENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF MISSION

Mark A. Finley

Their fear was gone. It danced away like a fading shadow. The dark night of their gloom was over. Morning had come. Faith filled their hearts. They no longer cowered in fear trembling in the upper room. They were filled with faith. Hope overflowed in their hearts. One glimpse of their resurrected Lord changed their lives. Jesus gave them a new reason for living. He gave them what has come to be known as the Great Commission. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

Now they were clinging to the great promise. For without the great promise they could not fulfill the great commission. Imagine that you were in the upper room with the disciples two thousand years ago. The integrity of God's word is at stake. His reputation is on the line. The honor of God's throne depends on the fulfillment of His promise.

The Great Promise

In spite of overwhelming obstacles and insurmountable odds the disciples clung to that precious promise. "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me.'" "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:4, 8.)

The disciples clung to Jesus word. They trusted the Savior's promise. They were confident that if they fulfilled the conditions He would fulfill His word. They waited. They confessed their sins. They prayed. They believed. And heaven answered. The Holy Spirit was poured in abundant measure on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was not simply because the disciples met the conditions. Certainly the Holy Spirit would not have been poured out if they had not met the conditions, but meeting the conditions of receiving the Spirit alone was not enough.

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost as a signal to the early church that Jesus sacrifice was accepted by the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. Luke makes this clear in Acts chapter two. "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." (Acts 2:32, 33)

The mighty outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost was heaven's gift confirming the Father's acceptance of the magnificent sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross. The three thousand baptized that day were an eloquent testimony of the risen Christ's power to change lives. The fullness of the Spirit testifies to the fullness of Jesus power.

The disciples gathered in the upper room that day numbered one hundred twenty. The challenge of reaching the world with the gospel seemed impossible. The best population estimates for the first century range in the one hundred and eighty million range.

Although there certainly were a few more Christians than those gathered in the upper room, the percentage of Christians to the world population was infinitesimal.

For example if we use the 120 figure there would have been one Christian to each 1.4 million people in the world.

If you compare that to the number of Seventh-day Adventists in the world today there is approximately one Adventist to every four hundred and twenty two people in the world today. In an age of Roman military might and materialism, Greek philosophy and pagan religion their task would have appeared much more daunting than ours.

These early believers did not have mass media, radio, television or the internet. They did not have the social media network like *face book*, *twitter* or *text messaging*. They did not have a network of satellite television stations. They did not have seminaries, publishing houses and a worldwide hospital system. They did not have a worldwide church organization, but this they had, the fullness of the Spirit. They had Jesus promise that through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit they would impact the entire world with His message of love and truth.

Explosive Growth in Acts

The results were astounding! Journey with me through the book of Acts and catch the inspiration as we stand back in awe at the moving of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts reveals what God can do through consecrated men and women in a very short time c who believe His promise and act upon His Word.

When the disciples woke up on the day of Pentecost they had no idea that the church would add three thousand new members that very day. Acts 2:41 records, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." And this was just the beginning. Acts 4:4 adds, "However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

You will notice that the text says the number of men was five thousand. If we add women and children the numbers dramatically increase. Most estimates are by the time of Acts 4 the Christian Church numbered fifteen to twenty thousand. In just a few short weeks the church exploded in growth. This amazing phenomena continues in Acts 6:7, "And the word of God spread and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

As the disciples preached under the influence of the Holy Spirit the risen Christ touched the hearts of many Jewish religious leaders. Many of them along with their congregations accepted this newfound faith. The New Testament Church continued to impact the world in remarkable ways.

One Roman writer put it this way, "You are everywhere. You are in our armies, you are in our navies, our senate and market places," referring to the wide spread reach of Christianity.

Pliny, the younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the north coast of modern Turkey wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 110. Pliny's statement is significant because it was nearly eighty years after the crucifixion. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. He stated, "For many of every age, of every social class, even of both sexes, are being called to trial and will be called. Nor cities alone, but villages in even rural areas have been invaded by the infection of this superstition (Christianity). (*Epistulae* 10. 96, gjr)

This is a rather remarkable quote from Pliny. He shows us that in a remote, out of the way province Christianity had invaded every level of society in a few generations. Ninety years later around A.D. 200 Tertullian, a Roman lawyer turned Christian, wrote a defiant letter to the Roman magistrates defending Christianity. He boasted that, "nearly all the citizens of all the cities are Christians." (*Apologeticus*, 37.8,

gjr) The story of the book of Acts is the story of remarkable growth of the Christian Church in a very short period of time.

The Devil's Strategy

In light of this explosive growth and this passionate commitment to mission, the devil attempted to break up the unity of the church and thwart its outreach. Let's study three very specific instances in the book of Acts where the unity of the New Testament church could have been easily fractured and discover lessons for the church today.

1. Acts 6 – The issue of fairness, justice and equality threatens to fracture church unity.
2. Acts 10, 11 – The issue of personal opinions and prejudice in the light of divine Revelation threatens the unity of the church.
3. Acts 15 – Strong cultural traditions with the possibility of unilateral actions and conflict between Jew and Gentile threatens the unity of the church.

Let's carefully look at each of these scenarios and discover not merely the outcome but the process the disciples used to solve these differences.

I. A Conflict over Food Distribution

In Acts the sixth chapter there was a serious conflict between the Jewish Christians of a Greek background and the Jewish Christians from Palestine. The Greek widows felt they were being treated unfairly in the distribution of the food. They believed there was an inequality. Acts 6:1 states the issue succinctly, "Now in those days when the number of disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution..." Notice carefully that the "disciples were multiplying and there arose a murmuring..." When the Holy Spirit works powerfully, the devil brings in dissension. Dissension places a stranglehold on mission. It stifles growth. It limits soul winning effectiveness. Conflict is the anesthetic that puts a passion for witness asleep. Unity is the very culture where witness flourishes. Commenting on the conflict in Acts 6 Ellen White makes this insightful statement, "Satan knew that so long as this union continued to exist, he would be powerless to check the progress of gospel truth; and he sought to take advantage of former habits of thought, in the hope that thereby he might be able to introduce into the church elements of disunion." (AA 87)

Conflict saps our energy and absorbs our attention.

Dissension distracts us from mission.

The devil is well aware of this so he introduces elements of mistrust and conflict.

The Holy Spirit led the disciples to find a way through the difficulty. The challenges the church faces today are nothing new and I am confident that the Holy Spirit will help us find a way through them. How did the early church solve problems that had the potential to divide the church and blunt their soul winning effectiveness?

Here are three vital lessons from Acts 6:

1. The disciples Acted Promptly. Dissension does not solve itself. Conflict usually does not go away. Leadership must be courageous enough to find solutions. Commenting on the conflict in Acts 6, inspiration puts it this way,

“Prompt measures must now be taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction, lest the enemy triumph in his effort to bring about a division among the believers.” (AA 88)

2. The disciples sought consensus. They met with those involved, discussed the situation and proposed a solution. A representative body was called and their counsel sought. (Acts 6:2)
3. Seven men were chosen to solve the problem. Look at the group that was chosen. Two are very well known, Stephen and Phillip- choosing those who are well known in any community gives credibility to the choice. Four were relatively unknown but were honest, spiritual, and wise. One was from Antioch. Most of the names were Greek names so the Greek widows must have had a perception of fairness.

Here is our first principle in resolving conflict in the church over real or perceived differences.

Leadership must act promptly, seeking consensus, with a representative group to propose just, equitable solutions.

Problems do not go away, leaders must solve them.

II. Conflict over Peter’s Witness to Cornelius

We now turn our attention to the second major conflict in the book of Acts. It is found in Acts Chapters 10 and 11. You know the story well. A Roman Centurion named Cornelius was visited by an angel during his prayers and instructed to send his servants to Joppa to find Peter. At the same time Peter was praying and was given a vision by God and told to “rise and eat” a sheet full of unclean animals. (Acts 10:13) Peter was totally confused. While he attempted to discover the meaning of the vision, a knock came on his door and the men from Cornelius arrived. Up until this point Peter believed the Gentiles were unclean. God used the vision to impress upon His mind the necessity of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Peter responded positively to Cornelius servants’ invitation and accompanied them to Cornelius house. In Cornelius, he found one with an open mind and receptive heart. The centurion and his entire household accepted Jesus and were baptized. Peter was thrilled but the Jewish Christians were deeply offended. Acts 11 reveals Peter’s course of action. He went up to Jerusalem to meet with his brethren and explain his actions. His meeting with the “brethren” did not start out well. “When Peter came up to Jerusalem those of the circumcision (Jewish Christians) contended with him.” What was Peter’s defense? Divine Revelation. Peter calmly explained that his actions were based directly on instructions from God. God had given him a vision and he could not deny it. As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit changed the minds of those who opposed him. Notice the marked contrast between these two verses.

- a. Verse 2 – They “contended with him”
- b. Verse 18 – They “glorified God.”

Ellen White describes this amazing change in Peter’s strongest opponents this way, “On hearing this account, the brethren were silenced. Convinced that Peter’s course was in direct fulfillment of the plan of God, and that their prejudices and exclusiveness were utterly contrary to the spirit of the gospel, they glorified God, saying, ‘Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.’”

Thus, without controversy, prejudice was broken down, the exclusiveness established by the custom of ages was abandoned, and the way was opened for the gospel to be proclaimed to the Gentiles.” (AA 142)

A conflict which could easily have divided the church if Peter’s attitude had been different or if he would have failed to spend time in dialogue with his brethren was avoided.

Here is a vital second principle of resolving church conflicts in Acts.

Principle #2 – When an issue threatens church unity, don’t judge too quickly or harshly. Discover the facts. Listen to another’s point of view. The Holy Spirit may be speaking to you through your brother or sister. Honest people can have differences of opinion. Consensus often comes through discussion and dialogue.

Peter calmly explained his actions were based on divine revelation and his opponents were touched. Prejudices were broken down, walls centuries old crumbled, and the unity of the church was preserved. The Holy Spirit enabled them to find a way to preserve their “oneness in Christ.” But it took the willingness to listen to one another.

Acts 15 – Seeking Consensus

There is a third issue that could have easily divided the early church. It is found in Acts 15. The issue is whether or not the Gentile believers should be circumcised. The process and the lessons learned are vital in understanding how to resolve difficulties. A group of Jews visit Antioch and demand that the Gentile converts accept and practice Jewish customs. They claimed salvation depends upon it. Acts 15:2 reveals that Paul and Barnabas had “no small dissension and dispute with them.” If we think we have challenges at times, the early church had them too but the Holy Spirit helped them find a way through them. In the context of this debate they determined that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders” to find a solution. (Acts 15:2, last part)

What if Paul and Barnabas would have argued, “These are our conscientious convictions and called council meeting in Antioch and never worked for a collaborative solution with church leadership in Jerusalem? By that unilateral action they may have caused considerable misunderstanding and conflict.

The language of Acts 15 is extremely instructive. Verse 4 informs us that the representatives from Antioch were, “received by the church.” Verse 6, declares, “they came together to consider the matter.”

“When dissension arose in a local church, as later it did arise in Antioch and elsewhere, and the believers were unable to come to an agreement among themselves, such matters were not permitted to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted.” (AA 95)

In verses 7-21, Peter speaks first, then Paul and Barnabas add their counsel, then James, the apostle who presided at the Jerusalem Council, proposed a solution – The Gentile Christians need not follow the exact same pattern of life as the Jewish Christians. The disciples were united in their commitment to their Lord, His message and His mission. They were committed to constructive dialog and solving problems together.

“In the church at Antioch the consideration of the question of circumcision resulted in much discussion and contention. Finally, the members of the church, fearing that a division among them would be the outcome of continued discussion, decided to send Paul and Barnabas, with some responsible men from the church, to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the apostles and elders. There they were to meet delegates from the different churches and those who had come to Jerusalem to attend the approaching festivals. Meanwhile all controversy was to cease until a final decision should be given in general council. This decision was then to be universally accepted by the different churches throughout the country.” (AA 190)

Once the solution was accepted by the “apostles and elders along with the whole church” representatives were sent to the local congregation with a letter or the voted action of the Jerusalem Council to clearly explain the action to avoid misunderstanding. The essence of unity is not uniform action, it is respecting one another enough to listen carefully, respond thoughtfully and decide together. On this matter of church policy, the entire NT Church would not march in lock step but they would decide together. There would be differences of opinion. The Jews certainly had strong convictions. Paul and Barnabas were men of conviction. The convictions of both were respected as they made their decision together. They were united through the Holy Spirit in a divinely appointed church structure. What Ellen White calls “insurmountable difficulties” were resolved as early church leaders met together, prayed, and surrendered their personal opinions to the decision of the larger corporate body.

Here is the third principle for resolving conflict in the early church.

God has established church structure to preserve its unity and keep it from fracturing. When the church makes decisions together not everyone will always be pleased but mature Christian leaders accept the consensus of the body. The “oneness” for which Christ prayed is more important than individual opinions or personal agendas.

Here is a clear, unambiguous statement, “God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.” – AA 164 (1911)

When the church faces challenges, when difficulties loom on the horizon, when strong opinions are formed and positions hardened, our loving Lord invites us to come together, to graciously express our varying viewpoints, to listen to one another, to dialog, to propose solutions and then under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to decide together. If we are committed to a spirit-directed collaborative process of decision-making and respect the decisions of the corporate body, Jesus will be honored, the devil will be defeated, and the church will triumph.

May we face our challenges together, committed to solving them in the Name of Jesus with the absolute assurance that in Jesus and by Jesus and through Jesus, His church will triumph at last. The Holy Spirit will be poured out on a praying, united church and our Lord will soon come... Amen