

WAY FORWARD STATEMENT #2

THE WAY FORWARD #2

Aware of our high calling as Seventh-day Adventists, we eagerly anticipate the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We passionately believe that “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms” (GC 596). The Scriptural affirmation that God shows no partiality (Gen 1, 2; Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:11-17; 1 Peter 2:8-10; Acts 10:34) and the urgency of our mission (Matt 28:18-20; Matt 24:14; Rev 14:6-12) drive us to include all believers, both men and women, in using the gifts God has given them and appropriately affirm them in their ministry. God created men and women in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) and, although this ideal was disrupted by sin, Christ restored the ideal, and in the New Testament we see both men and women ministering. God works continuously to complete this restoration. We see the restoration of this ideal in: (1) Paul’s affirmation of the restoration of equality (Gal 3; Eph 2:14-22; cf. Rev 5:10); (2) participation of women in the ministry of the early church (Luke 8:1-3; Rom 16:1, 2, 7; Acts 18:2, 26); and, (3) the Spirit’s working in the ministry of women in the church today.

The recently adopted consensus statement on ordination declares, “ordination is an act of commissioning that acknowledges God’s call, sets the individual apart, and appoints the person to serve the church in a special capacity.” Furthermore, it is an invocation of “God’s blessing upon those chosen to the work of ministry.” This understanding of ordination is consistent whether we ordain a deacon or deaconess, an elder or a pastor.

Throughout Adventist history we have often faced theological and ecclesiastical issues that have caused differences among us. Despite vigorous debate at times, we have remained united as one body under Christ pursuing our unique God-given mission. “We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light... Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christ-like forbearance” (Ellen G White, “Love, the Need of the Church,” 11MR 266).

Fundamental Belief #14 on “Unity in the Body of Christ” states that “distinctions of race, culture, learning, nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another. We are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.” On the basis of this Fundamental Belief, the General Conference has established policies regulating responsibilities within the Church including employment practices recognizing women in leadership roles (see GC Working Policy BA-60). These policies reflect our convictions on the doctrine of spiritual gifts: that the Holy Spirit calls both men and women to service and that all spiritual gifts are gender inclusive (1 Cor

12:11; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:17-21). The Church has taken action to allow for the ordination of deaconesses and female elders and the commissioning of female pastors. Although these church policies and practices are implemented differently throughout the world, the church has remained a unified, worldwide organization pressing together in mission and message.

Following the Bible and the counsel of Ellen White, the Church acknowledges the need to adapt its practices to the needs of the people it seeks to reach. Regional diversity in the practice of women's ordination will ensure that no entity will be compelled to do so against the will of its constituency. As in other matters, faithfulness to Scripture and mutual respect for one another are essential for the unity of the Church.

Therefore, because we accept the Bible's call to give witness to God's impartiality and believe that disunity and fragmentation will be the inevitable result of enforcing only one perspective in all regions, we propose that:

- Each entity responsible for calling pastors be authorized to choose either to have only men as ordained pastors or to have both men and women as ordained pastors [This choice will be protected by guarantees in the relevant documents of each union, division and the General Conference, so that no entity can be directed against its will to adopt a position other than the one to which the collective conscience of its constituency points].
- The union, at which organizational level decisions for ordination have historically been made in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, be enabled by its division to make the decision as to whether to approve the ordination of both men and women to gospel ministry.

We hereby rededicate our lives to God and pledge allegiance to His Word as we fulfil the Great Commission the Lord has entrusted to His Church. *Maranatha*. Come, Lord Jesus.