

# **WAY FORWARD STATEMENT #3**

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1. We affirm the need to provide more opportunities and resources everywhere in the world, regardless of ordination, for women in ministry and leadership, including preaching, evangelizing, Bible work, and teaching at all levels of education (Num 11:29; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:4, 6-18; 6T 322; RH, December 19, 1878; WM 145; Ev 471; see Deborah, Hulda, Anna, Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary,” Priscilla, the daughters of Philip, Phoebe, and others [Judg 4-5; 2 Kgs; 2 Chron 34; Luke 2:36-38; Matt 28:1-7; Acts 18:2-3, 18, 26, 21:9; Rom 16:1-4, 1 Cor 16:19; DA 568; AH 204]).
2. We affirm the need to educate all members on the loving, humble, self-sacrificing, servant-leadership role that men since the Fall have been called to, as spiritual heads in their homes (Gen 18:19; Eph 5:21-23; 1 Peter 3:7).
3. We affirm that Christ is the only head of the church (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18).
4. We affirm the biblical pattern of male leadership, under the headship of Christ, in the office of the ordained minister (1 Tim 2:12-14; 3:1-5; Titus 1:5-6). However, we do not see this pattern as a moral absolute or universal divine command, or of sacramental or salvific significance. Although based on important aspects of human nature, it is primarily meant to promote order in the church and further its mission.<sup>1</sup> Based on a wide range of biblical precedents, we acknowledge that, in certain circumstances, God permits divine patterns for ecclesiastical organization to be adapted or modified in order to promote the mission, unity, and welfare of the church (1 Sam 8:10-23; Judg 4; 1 Sam 21:1-8; 1 Cor 9:19-22). This is in contrast to absolute moral commands and eternal truths, which can never be humanly abrogated or adapted.

In light of the priority of mission, the importance of church unity, and the principles of Christian liberty, we recommend that denominational leadership at a proper level be authorized to decide, based on biblical principles, whether such an adaptation may be appropriate for their area or region.<sup>2</sup> It would take a collective decision by the worldwide church to authorize the principle of regional diversity of practice (15MR 130). Also based on principles of Christian freedom, no pastor, church employee, organizational unit, or local church shall be required or compelled to support such diversity (Rom 14; Gal 5:13;

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1 In 1 Cor 14, Paul has a lengthy set of instructions concerning the public worship service at Corinth, including that women keep silent. He sums up all those instructions in terms of church order, not as absolute commands. “But all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40, ESV).

2 The Acts 15 council did not demand uniformity of practice on the church even though circumcision was not to be forced on Gentiles. Thus Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3), but not Titus (Gal 2:3). It is significant that one party in the Acts 15 dispute saw circumcision as an absolute moral and salvific issue, while the majority of the council did not.

8T 236). Such regional adaptations, wherever they are allowed, should not negate the general pattern of male-ordained leadership as understood and practiced by the world Church.

General Conference Administration, along with the leadership of its world divisions would need to carefully consider the implementation of this proposal, given our historical and current view of ordination as “a sacred calling, not for one local field alone but for the world church.”<sup>3</sup>