

1 PREXAD(Oct14) to GCDO(Oct14) to AC14 to GCS15
2 THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MINISTERIAL ORDINATION

3
4 *Introduction*

5
6 Seventh-day Adventists believe that the gospel commission is addressed to all
7 followers of Jesus Christ. As an expression of discipleship and engagement in the
8 gospel commission men and women have held important leadership roles in the life of
9 the Seventh-day Adventist Church at all levels of denominational structure. Since the
10 late 1960s much attention has been focused on the role of women in leadership
11 positions requiring ordination. Several General Conference-appointed commissions¹ as
12 well as individual authors have studied this question from the standpoint of theology,
13 ecclesiology and mission.

14
15 The General Conference Executive Committee voted in 1973 that continued
16 study be given to the "theological soundness of the election of women to local church
17 offices which require ordination...and that in areas receptive to such action, there be
18 continued recognition of the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral-
19 evangelistic work..."² The 1974 Annual Council reaffirmed sections of the 1973 action
20 and added its opinion that "...in the interest of world unity of the church, no move be
21 made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel ministry."³

22
23 General Conference Sessions have also expressed decisions regarding the role of
24 women in church work. The 1985 Session urged that "'affirmative action' for the
25 involvement of women in the work of the church be a priority...and to request leaders
26 to use their executive influence to open to women all aspects of ministry in the church
27 that do not require ordination."⁴

28
29 The 1990 Session, upon recommendation of the 1989 Annual Council, accepted a
30 report and recommendations from the Role of Women Commission. In its report the
31 Commission stated that it "does not have a consensus as to whether or not the
32 Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination

¹ Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Camp Mohaven, Danville, Ohio, September 16-19, 1973; Committee on Role of Women in the Church, Washington, DC, March 26-28, 1985; Commission on the Role of Women in the Church, Cohutta Springs, Georgia, July 12-18, 1989; Theology of Ordination Study Committee met four times in 2013-2014.

² 1973 Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee

³ 1974 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee

⁴ "Session Actions", *Adventist Review*, July 11, 1985, p.20

1 of women to pastoral ministry... Further in view of the wide spread lack of support for
2 the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world church and in view of the
3 possible risk of disunity, dissension and diversion from the mission of the church, we
4 do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry."⁵
5

6 The 1995 Session denied a request from the North American Division that each
7 division might be given "the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its
8 territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not
9 render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals
10 without regard to gender."⁶
11

12 During the 2010 General Conference Session a delegate requested an official
13 church study of ordination. In response to this request General Conference
14 administration informed the Session of its commitment "to establishing a process to
15 review the subject of ordination and will report back to Annual Council during this
16 quinquennium."⁷
17

18 Consequently the General Conference Executive Committee appointed a
19 Theology of Ordination Study Committee. Committee membership included more than
20 100 persons of both genders serving the Church as theologians, pastors, administrators
21 and laypersons. As in previous commissions, the Theology of Ordination Study
22 Committee did not arrive at a consensus regarding the Bible's position or Ellen G
23 White's counsel on the matter of whether or not ministerial ordination should be gender
24 inclusive. Diverse interpretations of Bible passages give rise to firm convictions in favor
25 of or in opposition to the ordination of women to gospel ministry.
26

27 However the commission did reach a high degree of accord concerning a biblical
28 theology of ordination.⁸ This statement summarizes several important aspects of
29 ordination as practiced in the early Church and recorded in the New Testament. Two
30 foundational concepts in this Statement are: 1) that "Seventh-day Adventists
31 understand *ordination*, in a biblical sense, as the action of the Church in publicly
32 recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped for local and global Church
33 ministry", and 2) that "While ordination contributes to Church order, it neither conveys

⁵ "Session Actions", *Adventist Review*, July 13, 1990 p.15

⁶ "Session Actions", *Adventist Review*, July 11, 1995, p.30

⁷ In "Fourteenth Business Meeting" on July 2, 2010, *Adventist Review*, July 8-22, 2010 p.34

⁸ "Consensus Statement on the Theology of Ordination", Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report, June 2014, p.21-22

1 special qualities to the person nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the faith
2 community.”

3
4 The proceedings of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee and division-
5 appointed Biblical Research Committees provided opportunity for a global
6 conversation in the Church regarding its understanding and practice of ordination. The
7 Committee’s report was presented to the General Conference Executive Committee at
8 the 2014 Annual Council. This report included theological and hermeneutical rationales
9 for conclusions on both sides of the question. The Committee did not make a
10 recommendation concerning the practice of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist
11 Church.

12
13 Differing interpretations of the Bible on this matter and conscientious convictions
14 based on those interpretations may be found in virtually all areas of the world. As a
15 result, the question becomes one of how Church members will live in harmony and
16 unity while acknowledging the presence of differing views on a variety of issues.

17
18 Recognizing the importance of this question with respect to understanding the
19 Bible, the multinational and multicultural nature of the Church and its mission, and the
20 biblical example⁹ of addressing differences that do not directly involve fundamental
21 beliefs, the General Conference Executive Committee chose to call again for guidance
22 from the global church. “I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be
23 surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General
24 Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised,
25 private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be
26 surrendered.”¹⁰

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28

29 *Request to 2015 General Conference Session*

30

31 *Whereas* the unity for which Jesus prayed is vitally important to the witness of
32 the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and;

33

34 *Whereas* the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to engage every member in its
35 worldwide mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ among people from every nation,
36 culture and ethnicity, and;

37

⁹ See Acts chapter 15 on how the early church dealt with the tension regarding circumcision.

¹⁰ Ellen G White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 3, p.492

