

ORDINATION - LOOKING AHEAD - NORUC

NORUC Excecutive Committee - September 20, 2015 – Voted Document

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The situation after the GC Session 2015 in San Antonio

A. Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) 2014

After the General Conference (GC) Session in 2010 the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) appointed a committee - Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) – to study the concept of ordination. The committee has presented a *Consensus Statement regarding A Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination*.¹

The *Consensus Statement* was presented at the GC Annual Council 2014. The final report of TOSC - 127 pages - was also submitted at Annual Council in 2014 and approved.²

B. Voting in San Antonio in 2015

The *Consensus Statement* was distributed to the delegates of the GC Session in San Antonio in 2015, but was not discussed/voted at the session. What was placed before the Session to be voted on, was a question whether the divisions would be given authority to decide on the matter of ordination of women within their area. This is the wording of the question to the delegates:

¹ *Consensus Statement*: <https://www.adventistarchives.org/consensus-statement-on-a-seventh-day-adventist-theology-of-ordination.pdf>

² TOSC committee report: <https://www.adventistarchives.org/final-tosc-report.pdf>

Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No. (GC Session Document p. 69³).

The result of the vote Wednesday, July 7, 2015 was as follows:

977 (41%) voted yes and 1,381 (59%) voted no.

C. Disagreements in the understanding of the term "ordination"

There are marked differences of opinion in SDA in the understanding of what the term "ordination" entails, especially in relation to the ordination of pastors. This is the conclusion to be drawn after several occasions when the theme ordination has been up for discussion, most recently in GC Session in San Antonio in July 2015. This is also admitted in the TOSC report.⁴ Through the course of history the term "ordination" has been given many non-biblical overtones. A distinction between clergy and laity has been created, a distinction that is unfamiliar and unknown in the NT. "The first generation of Christians knew nothing about an essential spiritual distinction between clergy and laypeople." (Daniel Augsburger, *Women in Ministry* p. 95 f.⁵) Such a distinction seems to be part of the understanding which characterizes the discussion in SDA today and which results in the stalemate within the SDA.

D. Ordination in the time of the pioneers

In the time of the SDA pioneers, ordination of pastors was introduced at the very beginning of the organization of the church. Practice in Christian evangelical churches at the time, was the cultural backdrop for the pioneers. The proposal that all Adventist pastors had to be ordained in an Adventist setting, was put forward to ensure that preachers in the newly established Adventist congregations were grounded in the Advent message. The emerging SDA organization used a familiar term for protecting a church that was being established. "...ordination was something that Adventists did, not something to which they gave a lot of theoretical thought." (George R. Knight, *Women in Ministry* p. 112.)

E. Service versus authority

The way the exchange of viewpoints emerge in the international discussion in SDA circles today, one is left with the impression that for many ordination is about power, authority and the right to lead, rather than the church appointing people for service. The *Consensus Statement* that fills a little more than one A4 page (5 paragraphs), bears strong evidence of this. The following three clauses illustrates this: "Scriptures identify certain specific leadership positions" (paragraph 2), "the New Testament identifies the following categories of ordained leaders: the elder/supervising elder ... and the deacon ..." (paragraph 3) and "In the act of ordination, the Church confers representative authority upon individuals for the specific work

³ [https://www.adventist.org/.../gcsession.../files/.../2015-gcs-agenda-websit...- PDF\]GC Session agenda - Seventh-day Adventist Church](https://www.adventist.org/.../gcsession.../files/.../2015-gcs-agenda-websit...- PDF]GC Session agenda - Seventh-day Adventist Church)

⁴ The TOSC report says: «Over the course of Christian history the term ordination has acquired meanings beyond what these words originally implied. Against such a backdrop, Seventh-day Adventists understand ordination, in a biblical sense, as the action of the Church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped for local and global Church ministry.»

⁵ <https://www.andrews.edu/universitypress/catalog.php?key=147>

of ministry" (paragraph 4) (emphasis added). The concept of service is absent in the Adventist understanding of ordination as presented in the first four paragraphs of the statement.

There seems to be a derailment of the *New Testament* concept of the servant role that Jesus mentioned repeatedly in his meeting with the scribes and apostles (Matt 18:4; 23:8-12; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; 11:43; 14:8; 20:46; 22:24,26; John 13:12-15). It is only in the last paragraph of the *Consensus Statement* that we find a reference to Jesus and his example: "... the ultimate model of Christian ministry is the life and work of our Lord, who came not to be served but to serve." In the main section of the *Consensus Statement* this concept is absent, in spite of the fact that the TOSC report underlines the importance that our definition of ordination must be biblical.

F. Ordination - NT

The term "ordination" as we see it today, is a term that cannot be traced back to an established practice from relevant texts in the New Testament.

The *King James Version* of the New Testament (the Bible that Ellen G. White used) uses the word "ordain" 20 times to translate 13 different Greek words. In the texts that are relevant in the current discussion about ordination, the *New King James Version* (NKJV) does not use the word "ordain" at all. In those instances the NKJV uses mostly the word "appoint".

On the basis of the NT it cannot be deduced that whoever had the gift of preaching, had to be ordained by an established pattern/ritual.

G. Ordination in SDA

Ordination as it is practiced today in SDA for both female and male elders and male deacons, takes place as they begin their task (see *SDA Church Manual* p. 72 and 77, 2010 edition). This kind of ordination is task focused. Pastoral ordination within SDA breaks with this pattern in that it happens maybe 4-6 years after employment. It thus becomes a kind of "approval" of pastors.

NT texts that are relevant in connection with the discussion of the term "ordination", indicate that the persons concerned were appointed to a task rather than a kind of approval that took place several years after they had taken on the task.

There is no support in early Christian history for an ordination attached to the person of the minister rather than to his mission. Thus Adventist ordination that is valid worldwide reflects a later, Augustinian concept of ordination. (Daniel Augsburg, *Women in Ministry* p. 96).

This form of pastoral SDA-ordination has evolved to split the church, in that Jesus' basic attitude towards the gift-based servant role that He calls believers to, has developed into a power struggle which for some takes its starting point in a "Headship Theology". Theologians at the SDAs Theological Seminary rejects most strongly "Headship Theology".

Neither Scripture nor the writings of Ellen White apply the language of headship in the Church to anyone other than Christ. Further, neither Scripture nor the writings of Ellen White endorse any transfer of the role of head in the home to roles within the Church

body. (*On The Unique Headship Of Christ In The Church, A Statement Of The Seventh--Day Adventist Theological Seminary*, p. 4.)⁶

H. Spiritual Gifts - royal/holy priesthood - male and female pastors

There are different spiritual gifts, according to the grace God has given to each individual. (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:11). The gifts of the Spirit are given to men and women. (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:16). The believer is called to be part of a royal/holy priesthood – men and women. (1 Peter 2:5,9).

SDA recognizes that men and women have received gifts that make them fit to perform the pastoral task. Both women and men are invited to speak in the Adventist Church, yes also at the GC Session. SDA's policy allows women to be employed as pastors. Four to six years after employment there is a differential treatment of employed pastors, based solely on whether the employee is male or female. Only men can be ordained to pastoral service according to SDA's *Working Policy*, the way the GC Secretariat interprets policy.

I. Basic equality

Without a reassessment of the practice of ordination in SDA, the church will not be able to practice one of the fundamental human rights: equal treatment of human beings, a fundamental principle which is in line with both how God views us as his children (Gal 3:26-28) and how God has called us to service in the common priesthood that assumes that all believers, men and women who accept Christ, receive gifts as the Spirit sees best (see for example 1 Cor 12:11).

SDA's own policy states:

BA 60 05 Basic Principles— ...

The Church rejects any system or philosophy which discriminates against anyone on the basis of race, color, or gender. The Church bases its position on principles clearly enunciated in the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White, and the official pronouncements of the General Conference.

BA 60 10 Official Position—The world Church supports nondiscrimination in employment practices and policies and upholds the principle that both men and women, without regard to race and color, shall be given full and equal opportunity within the Church to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the building up of the Church. Positions of service and responsibility (except those requiring ordination to the gospel ministry*) on all levels of church activity shall be open to all on the basis of the individual's qualifications.

...

*The exception clause, and any other statement above, shall not be used to reinterpret the action already taken by the world Church authorizing the ordination of women as local church elders in divisions where the division executive committees have given their approval. (*GC Working Policy*)

Basic human rights and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation (see *The European Social Charter* Article 20⁷) are essential principles that underlie the laws of the

⁶ http://www.andrews.edu/sem/unique_headship_of_christ_final.pdf L

⁷ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/163.htm>

Norwegian democracy. The continuation of a discriminatory practice based on *Working Policy* in SDA, will most likely not be able to stand in a legal process in our country. NORUC is not willing to continue a doubtful legal practice when it is not based on a "Thus saith the Lord."

J. Time for Time-out

When the SDA ordination tradition to such a degree is dividing the church, it is time to take a time-out.

NORUC does not want to continue a tradition that:

- lacks a clear basis in the Word of God,
- is in contrast to Jesus' words about the call to serve,
- disregards the pastoral Spiritual Gift that the Holy Spirit has given to both women and men,
- violates the fundamental equality and dignity of women who are employed in SDA as pastors, an employment which is fully in line with current policy,
- is divisive for the church.

F. Voted:

1. NORUC requests the world leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to revisit the recommendations from TED Biblical Research Committee's report to TOSC⁸ and find a practice for how God-given gifts in men and women are to be recognized in line with the fact that the church has called men and women to be pastors. The practice should highlight mission and service rather than person and power. This must be done in harmony with SDA's Fundamental Belief number 14: "In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and 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...".
2. On the basis of Biblical truth over tradition and SDA Policy, NORUC will discontinue the traditional Adventist practice of ordaining/commissioning men and women for pastoral ministry.
3. NORUC will for both women and men conduct a prayer session for pastoral interns when they begin their assignment. This ceremony does not make void guidelines in the *Church Manual* regarding who may officiate at the communion service etc.
4. When the internship is over, NORUC will have a prayer session for a woman or man who enters into the ministry as a regular pastor. In this way the church acknowledges his/her gift and personal calling. Furthermore, this verifies the church's appointment of him / her as a regular pastor, authorizing him/her to fully perform the tasks of a pastor that he / she is called to perform.
5. NORUC will discontinue listing pastors in the categories of Ordained and Commissioned in the list of Credentials. Instead, NORUC will operate with the following groups: Pastors in regular service and pastoral interns.

⁸ <http://www.ted-adventist.org/feature-and-analysis/theology-of-ordination-study>

6. Until a classification of pastors without a distinction based on a fundamental discrimination against female pastors has been established, NORUC will not report employed pastors who are serving in our area, to the *SDA Yearbook*.

Based on information from well informed sources, the GC is requested to appoint an impartial commission to investigate allegations that some delegates at the GC Session in San Antonio in 2015 were required to vote no on the question concerning ordination, and that they would be held accountable for their vote on returning to their home area. If there are realities behind these allegations, this is both a violation of the basic democratic vision within SDA and a threat to the democratic processes used by SDA at all levels. In case these statements describe a real situation, this raises a serious question regarding the value of the entire vote that was conducted in San Antonio. On the basis of the votes cast, a mere 203 no votes changed to yes votes, would have changed a no majority to a yes majority.

12 votes for - 2 votes against