### NEWS

**Pacific Union Conference Constituency Delegates Convene Sunday:** A special Constituency Session of the Pacific Union Conference is considering whether to ordain women to the gospel ministry. A two-thirds majority is required if the union is to follow in the footsteps of the Northern German and Columbia unions.

**Splinter Sect of Adventists Jailed in Rwanda for Refusing Education for their Children, ID Cards:** A splinter group of former Adventists in Rwanda is refusing to send their children to school and neglecting other responsibilities, claiming that they have left all subsistence matters in the hands of God.

**Editorial: Is the Women's Ordination Issue about Unity or Uniformity?**

Adventist Today editor David Newman ponders (1) How is the General Conference defining unity?; (2) What is unity, and why the issue of women’s ordination is actually a uniformity issue?; (3) Did the church make a mistake when it decided that women’s ordination must be a world issue?; (4) What is the importance of policy, and when can we differ from a set policy?; and, (5) What Ellen White says about rigidly following policies.

**2012 GOD encounters Conference for Young Adults Scheduled for August 30-September 1:** The Arlington church in the Dallas area is the host for the upcoming three-day GOD encounters Conference to bring youth together for spiritual enrichment, study, music, and service activities.

### OPINION

**An Open Letter to Brother Wilson:** Blogger Jack Hoehn admonishes the Seventh-day Adventist president not to confuse unity with uniformity, and suggests that positive change rarely if ever begins at the top, but works its way up into general acceptance, as the Holy Spirit leads.
Planning...: Is our vocation in life a "job" or a "ministry"? Does it matter? Blogger Katelyn Pauls writes from Thailand as she wonders if she's letting life pass her by, while teaching English to affluent young people....

Submission? A Reaction to Recent Statements by President Wilson II: Columnist John McLarty sees the recent behavior of the General Conference leadership as reminiscent of the calls for submission made by the Vatican—which seemed to consider itself "The Church" and the congregations its spiritual vassals....

Theological Introduction to Ellen White's Counsel on an Inclusive Church
[footnote 1]: Blogger Cindy Tutsch sees Ellen White as a "progressive social voice" in her day, urging the church "to restore the image of God to humanity" including the edenic parity of male/female relationships....

Churches: Columnist Rob York just returned to the US after seven years as an English language instructor in Korea. He marvels at the insularity of those he worships with today, but reminds himself not to judge his fellow parishioners. After all, they just received the "People's Choice" award for their booth at the local county fair....

SUBSCRIBERS' BONUS FEATURE

Women Who Were Called: The Adventist Today news team shares three personality sketches of women in Adventist ministry, detailing the source of their faith in those callings, as each traversed valleys and detours through unconventional pathways to venues of fruitful service....(Access available to subscribers only)

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Delegates from the local conferences of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in five western states will convene Sunday in a special session. It was called specifically to consider a recommendation from the Pacific Union Conference executive committee to end the practice of refusing ordination for women serving in pastoral ministry.

If the delegates approve the recommendation, it will be the third union conference around the world to take this step. The North German Union and the Columbia Union have already voted the same action. The Adventist Church in China has been ordaining women pastors since the 1980s.

The recommendation was approved by a vote of 42 to 2 by the union conference executive committee on May 9. It listed six reasons for the action: (1) There is Biblical support for the ordination of women in Joel 2:28-29, Micah 6:8 and Galatians 3:28. (2) Paragraphs 14 and 17 from the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church support the ordination of women. (3) The cofounder of the Adventist Church was a woman, Ellen G. White, “who remains an authoritative … voice.” (4) The North American Division Working Policy L 45 05 3 “assigns Union the final decision-making authority and responsibility with respect to ordination.” (5) The union executive committee has previously voted its full commitment to ordaining women on August 30, 1995; May 12, 2010; and March 15, 2012. (6) “The Pacific Union is enriched by Spirit-filled women who are responding to God’s call.”

In fact, if the recommendation is voted, the Pacific Union Conference will not change any procedures. It has for the last ten years processed approvals for both ordained and commissioned ministers together in one list and it will continue to do so. Local conferences will have the choice of ordaining approved women, and at least one of the conferences has already taken the step of issuing Ordained Minister credentials to the women who were commissioned in the past.

But that has not kept this meeting from being the focus of intense interest. The General Conference (GC) officers have issued two documents arguing that the delegates should vote against the recommendation. They give three reasons: (1) The GC Session voted in 1990 not to go ahead with the ordination of women to the gospel ministry although the study commission did not find any biblical reasons for not doing so. (2) At the 2010 GC Session the current GC president announced another study of ordination which was later authorized by the GC executive committee and is to result in a report to the 2015 GC Session. (3) If the union conference goes ahead of the current study it will break the unity of the denomination and result in “grave consequences.”

“Many administrators are skeptical of this study,” one retired theologian explained to Adventist Today, “because the General Conference has conducted several major studies on this topic over the last half century and each has come to the same conclusion: There is no sound biblical reason to refuse to extend ordination to women serving in pastoral ministry.”
Some Adventists argue the “male headship” doctrine which is taught by the Southern Baptist Convention, but the Adventist denomination has consistently taken a position against this doctrine as the Baptists have developed it over the last three or four decades and even conservative Adventist Bible scholars oppose it. Some even resort to the same arguments used by the papacy to defend an all-male clergy in the Catholic church.

*Spectrum,* the journal of the largest organization of Adventist academics, has published a list of three web sites that oppose the Pacific Union recommendation. “Christ or Culture asserts that ordaining women ‘presents a serious crisis that threatens to fragment our beloved church, create confusion in our homes, and cripple the progress of the three angels’ messages.’ The site purports to ‘provide biblical, historical, and church support for this position’ [and] some of the endorsers will serve as delegates to the PUC constituency session.” The other two web sites are both produced by Doug Batchelor, senior pastor of the Sacramento Central Church and director of the Amazing Facts television ministry.

Those who oppose the ordination of women have used the words “rebellion” and “mutiny” in recent weeks in response to the vote of the Columbia Union Conference constituency delegates by a four to one margin to end gender discrimination. Last week GC President Ted Wilson appealed for “unity” in an interview on the independent television channel, Three Angels Broadcasting. *Spectrum* has reported a “teleconference with union officials” in which Wilson discussed “potential sanctions against unions viewed as being out of compliance with the General Conference Working Policy,” although Adventist Today has not been able to confirm this.

Because the Pacific Union Conference includes an amendment to its bylaws on the agenda Sunday as part of the package of recommendations, that items will require a two-thirds majority vote. This opens the possibility of a mixed outcome in which the majority votes in favor of ordaining women but the bylaws amendment fails to get a sufficiently large majority to pass.

“That could result in significant anger and frustration on both sides,” a California pastor observed to Adventist Today. “Please ask people to pray for us on Sunday.” Either way, Adventist Today will report the results of the meeting.


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Splinter Sect of Adventists Jailed in Rwanda for Refusing Education for their Children, ID Cards

Submitted: Aug 14, 2012
By AT News Team

Fifteen members of a splinter group that has left the Seventh-day Adventist Church were given one-year prison sentences last week in Rwanda, according to The New Times daily paper. The convictions were for refusing to allow their children to attend elementary school and refusing to register for identity cards as required by law in the African nation. They also refuse to vote and “never own mobile phones or other ‘modern’ equipment, which they consider worldly,” reported the newspaper.

The members of the sect call themselves “Real Adventists” but are widely known as the Abagorozi. They do not own or use buildings and meet in homes for simple prayer services. Like Jehovah’s Witnesses, they believe that all members are religious workers. They also “believe Jesus is the Supreme Healer, Educator, Teacher, Judge [and] God will do everything for them without making any effort apart from praying.” They refuse to participate in the national health insurance plan.

One member of the group told The New Times reporter Jean Pierre Bucyensenge that they resist education and participation in government “because they need to concentrate on preparing [for] their final days on earth.” The member who refused to identify himself said “they draw their beliefs ‘deep from the Bible’ and other ‘holy writings,’” according to Bucyensenge.

A 14-year-old girl told the reporter she dropped out of school in the fourth grade two years ago. “I chose to leave school after I realized that God is the sole teacher. It is my right to choose.” It is likely that in the United States these individuals would have greater protection under the First Amendment than do citizens of Rwanda, although state laws would generally not allow a 12-year-old to drop out of the fourth grade.

“This an example of the extreme counter-cultural lifestyle of many Adventist groups in developing nations,” a missiologist told Adventist Today. “They believe that the end times are here and that God will care of them without education, medical care, or economic development.”
Editorial: Is the Women's Ordination Issue about Unity or Uniformity?

Submitted: Aug 13, 2012
By J. David Newman

The issue of whether women may be ordained as pastors which has been simmering for fifty years has finally boiled over, splattering a wide area of the world church. The first union to vote for ordaining women pastors received little notice. At the fifth constituency session of the North German Union Conference, meeting in Geseke on April 22 and 23, the delegates voted approval of ordination for women serving in pastoral ministry. The resolution was approved by more than a two-thirds majority of the delegates.

But when the Columbia Union of the North American Division voted on July 29, 2012 to ordain pastors without regard to gender a veritable blizzard of objections from the General Conference blanketed the landscape. As reported in a special edition of the Adventist Review, August 10, 2012 four separate documents or interviews have been published. Dire consequences are being threatened for these actions. However, no details have been forthcoming about what these consequences might be. (http://us.mg6.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=8lpe6k6lvyo5q)

The Pacific Union Conference is taking up the same issue at its special constituency session August 19. This article will explore the following points: (1) How is the General Conference defining unity? (2) What is unity? And why the issue of women’s ordination is actually a uniformity issue. (3) Did the church make a mistake when it decided that women’s ordination must be a world issue? (4) What is the importance of policy? And when can we differ from a set policy? (5) What does Ellen White say about rigidly following policies?

An appendix records the full report and recommendations from The Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This council was authorized by the General Conference Executive Committee and convened September 16-19, 1973 at Camp Mohaven, Ohio. As you read this report you will wonder why we are still studying the issue when it made very clear recommendations on the role of women and their ordination. Twenty-six papers were presented and nothing new has come to light that would change their recommendations. Yet, we still keep appointing study commissions.

General Conference Definition of Unity

World Church Leaders recently issued a document entitled Questions and Answers Regarding Current Issues of Unity Facing the Church. Question number ten asked, “What is the difference between unity and uniformity?”

There is much that could be said in answer to the other questions the document lists but this article only deals with the subject of unity. Here is how the General Conference defines 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,’ but uniformity is ‘the state or quality of being uniform,’ that is, in form being one, but
It is noteworthy that neither Webster’s nor the Oxford or Random House dictionaries were quoted, but a poor online equivalent. Note that the definition for uniformity is “the state or quality of being uniform,” which tells us absolutely nothing about the meaning of “uniformity” since it is defined by itself “uniform.” It still begs the question: What is uniform?

So we begin with an unclear definition of the difference between unity and uniformity. The document then states that diversity is important. “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.”

This is a good statement with which I agree but it does not help us detect the difference between unity and uniformity. The document then goes on to refer to the words of Jesus in John 17. “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).”

Again, this is a wonderful statement and if we only had this paragraph we would assume that unity is being one in “purpose and mission for those who believed (and would believe) in Him.” But the next paragraph blurs the distinction between unity and uniformity. “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.”

It seems that the General Conference leaders are defining unity as being united in the mission and purpose of the church which involves belief but then they add the word “practice.” And then comes the final paragraph in the document which only continues to muddle the differences.

“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.”

The part about “practice” refers, in the main, to the revisions voted to the *Church Manual*. It is common knowledge that changes come from the grassroots not from the top down. A local
church or mission or conference finds a better way to achieve the mission of the church different from what the *Church Manual* says. They report it to the *Church Manual* Committee who then decide what changes to recommend to the next General Conference in session.

This document has not explained how diversity takes place in the church. It states the principle of unity but then insists that everyone follow the practice of not ordaining women pastors. *It is actually insisting on uniformity.*

**What Is Unity?**

President Ted Wilson made an impassioned plea to the delegates of the Columbia Union Conference on Sunday, July 29, that they vote down the proposed action to ordain pastors without respect to gender. He predicted dire consequences if the union conference voted the recommended motion. However, he did not specify what those consequences might be.

Wilson’s main plea was for unity. He quoted from the prayer of Jesus regarding the need for unity, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity” (John 17:21-23, NIV).

Wilson explained that the unity of the church was at stake. However, what he was appealing for was uniformity, not unity. According to the dictionary uniformity is “identical or consistent, without variation in detail.” Unity, on the other hand, is “the state of being one, a whole or totality as combining its parts in one, as of the parts of a whole.” (Definitions from *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, second edition unabridged. 1987. New York: Random House Reference.)

In John 17 we find that Jesus is not talking about uniformity, which is what Wilson was advocating. Yes, Jesus and his Father were one, but they were not uniform, they were not identical. Jesus was a physical being. His Father was not. Jesus had physical limitations resulting from being human; the Father had no human limitations. Jesus could experience physical pain; his Father could not. Jesus could die; his Father could not. Jesus and the Father were one, but they were not uniform.

The *English Standard Version Study Bible* notes to John 17:11 says, “this is to be a reflection of the unity that has existed eternally between the Father and the Son, namely, the unity of a common mind and purpose, an unqualified mutual love, and a sustained comprehensive togetherness in mission, as revealed in the Father-Son relationship characterized by Jesus’ own ministry … The kind of unity that is central to Jesus’ high priestly prayer is not organizational but is an all-encompassing relational reality that binds believers together with each other and with their Lord—a unity that can only be achieved through the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Given such an understanding, to even suggest that not moving together on the subject of women’s ordination is disunity or even rebellion is a trivialization of the need for unity.
In Genesis 2:24 (NIV) it states, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Adam and Eve were united, but they were not uniform. They were separate people with differing characteristics, but they were united in purpose. The General Conference and the Columbia Union Conference are united in taking the gospel to the world, but they are not uniform in how to do that. This is illustrated in the debate on circumcision at the Jerusalem Council. Some conscientious believers came from Judea to Antioch and insisted that circumcision was mandatory for salvation (Acts 15:1).

Paul and Barnabas vigorously opposed them but no agreement could be reached. So the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas along with some other believers to consult with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. The leaders called a church council. The issue was debated from both sides. The conclusion was not what you might expect. No decision was made for or against circumcision. The council did not say you did not need to be circumcised. It did not say you had to be circumcised. What it did say was that we don’t want to make it difficult for people to become Christians (Acts 15:19) and then listed four agreements that they did reach a consensus on.

These agreements centered around the immorality so prevalent in society at the time and food, how Jews and Gentiles could eat and fellowship together. The Council asked Jews to be willing to sacrifice most of their laws regarding uncleanness and they asked Gentiles to be willing to adopt two of the Jewish standards: refrain from eating meat from strangled animals and refrain from eating meat with blood. (In other words, the essence of a "kosher" diet.) And they asked both groups to not eat meat offered to idols (Acts 15:20).

Each group could decide what they wanted to do with circumcision but could not enforce either belief on others. Circumcision was not a theological doctrine. It was a practice, or policy if you like, of the community of God. The challenge for us in deciding what is part of unity and what is part of uniformity is to determine what is an absolute that cannot be changed. God exists as an absolute. Not worshipping idols is an absolute. Salvation by grace alone is an absolute. But sometimes we have difficulty separating culture from God’s absolutes.

Paul addressed this issue when writing to the church at Corinth. “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:19-23, NIV).

Paul says that to win people to Jesus Christ, we must climb out of our comfort zones and become like the people whom we are trying to reach. “Wait a minute,” someone may say, “you mean that we must drink and smoke and gamble to be like the people we are trying to reach?” Absolutely not. Paul makes it clear in this passage that it is not a free-for-all in winning people to Jesus. Paul said that while he would become like one not having the law to those not having the law, he was not free from law. He is still under Christ's law. What does that mean?
Paul makes a distinction between that which is moral, eternal, and absolute and that which is cultural and relative. He will do whatever it takes to win people as long as it does not violate moral absolutes, such as the Ten Commandments. It means that one will look at things from other people's points of view, from other perspectives. One should try to understand the other person before trying to be understood.

Here is an example directly from the life of the apostle Paul. He participated in the Jerusalem Council, which decided that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to become Christians. Church leaders then sent him with others to announce this decision to the churches (Acts 15:22-31), to let people know that circumcision was not required.

However, when Paul traveled to Lystra and met Timothy, he decided to take Timothy with him on his missionary journey. There was one small problem: although Timothy’s mother was Jewish, his father was Greek, so he had never been circumcised. I am sure that Timothy was relieved that this was no longer a requirement. But Paul wanted to witness to Jews who still believed in circumcision. So true to his philosophy to live under the law with those who lived under the law, he told Timothy that he would have to be circumcised since they would be witnessing in Jewish territory. Timothy probably lost much of his enthusiasm for missions at that moment. But he agreed, so as to live as they lived (Acts 16:1-3).

On the other hand, Paul resolutely refused to circumcise Titus even when pressured (Gal. 2:1-5) because, while they traveled to Jerusalem, Titus’ responsibility was in Crete in Gentile areas. He identified with the people he was trying to reach.

Paul also was willing to disagree with the strong stance of the Jerusalem Council on meat offered to idols. The Council voted four behavioral requirements one of which said that believers were not to eat meat offered to idols because pagans would think they were worshiping the idol. But in writing to the church at Corinth, Paul says that it is clear to believers that there is only one God and eating meat offered to idols really means nothing.

He writes, “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Corinthians 8:8). But then he gives a caution, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (v. 9). He goes on to explain that if someone who does not know about the true God as well as you sees you eating the food offered to idols they might think you are also worshiping the idol. But if there is no one around to see you then it is not an issue.

The Jerusalem Council, however, did not make any exceptions. Yet, Paul’s disregard for what had been voted did not split the Church. And so today, ordaining women will not split the church, especially since we are not dealing with a doctrinal issue but one of policy.

How does all this relate to the subject of unity? Is the ordination of women pastors a unity question? Is it a moral absolute? Will the church fragment if different parts of the world are allowed to make their own decision in this matter? The answer is clearly no because the decision to allow each division to decide whether to ordain women elders in their territory did not
Elders versus Pastors

Back in the 1970s a very strange decision was made. Key leaders decided that world divisions could decide whether women could be ordained as elders but not ordained as pastors. The Council on the Role of Women in Ministry appointed by the General Conference Executive Committee to conduct a study of this topic was very clear that there was no theological reason why women could not be ordained as pastors (see below).

The 1973 Annual Council voted to accept the report of this study but took no action except a request that the divisions study the report. At the 1974 Annual Council a cautious approach was begun. The way was opened for women to be ordained as local church elders. But no decision either for or against women being ordained as pastors was made.

The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia reports that, “The 1974 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee opened the way for women to be ordained as local elders: ‘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.’ (Annual Council Actions [1974], p. 14)

“Divisions then began cautiously allowing women to be ordained as local elders. A definitive position was voted at the 1984 Annual Council: ‘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.’ (ibid.) More than 1,000 women serve as elders in the North American Division, and many more serve other divisions of the world.” (“Ordination,” The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. 1996. Review and Herald Publishing Association.)

Church Mistake

Elder Robert Pierson led the leadership of the church to decide that while divisions could make their own decision regarding women elders the world church had to agree on whether women could serve as ordained pastors. The reasoning went something like this: Local elders are appointed by the local church and can only serve in that church. Pastors, on the other hand, are appointed by the conference and should be available to serve anywhere in the world. If women are ordained as pastors in the local church in America, but other parts of the world will not accept them as pastors, then that will cause a problem.

This reasoning forgets one important point—there is no difference in the Bible between an elder and a pastor. In fact, the word pastor only appears once in the New Testament in Ephesians 4:11. The term “elder” as it applies to local church leaders appears ten times. The original Adventist understanding of this is captured in the tradition of addressing ordained ministers as “Elder So-and-so.”

It is true that an elder serves only in the local church. But if he or she moves to another church
they may be appointed an elder in that church without being re-ordained (according to the *Church Manual*). If they move to a part of the world that does not recognize women elders then they will not be called to that position.

It is the same with pastors. Yes, he or she serves a whole conference but they cannot serve outside that conference unless called by another church entity. A pastor cannot travel from America to Africa and raise up a church without the conference in that area calling him or her to do so. If an area of the world does not approve of women pastors they will not call a woman pastor. Just as if a local church does not approve of women elders it will not call a woman to be an elder.

This decision to make women’s ordination to pastoral ministry a world decision neglected to consider the role of culture in making such a decision. One of the delegates to the Columbia Union Constituency Session said that he had served in three of the world divisions. In one division the husband always walked some four steps ahead of his wife. The culture would never dream of a woman becoming a pastor. So why would they vote for women’s ordination? It makes no sense to them. If the world church had decided that pastoral ordination would receive the same consideration as elder ordination there would be no issue in the church today.

**Ellen White on Unity and Diversity**

Ellen White spoke directly to the issue of different understandings. “One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture may be especially appreciated by him; another sees another portion as very important, and thus one may present one point, and another, another point, and both may be of highest value. This is all in the order of God. But if a man makes a mistake in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid. We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists of viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement.” (“Love, the Need of the Church,” Manuscript 24, 1892; published as Manuscript Release #898 in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 11. 1981. White Estate: Washington, D.C., p. 266.)

Yet that is exactly where the church is today. Leaders are demanding that everyone move or not move at the same speed because the church has voted a particular policy. Which leads to a discussion of policy.

**The Role of Policy**

The Adventist church is run by “working policies” and there is nothing wrong with that. Policies save us from having to think through the same issue over and over again. For example, churches have established a policy on how to nominate new officers. If there were no policy each year countless hours would be spent trying to figure out the best way to nominate new officers. A policy helps things go smoothly and with a minimum of time spent.
But policies are not set in concrete and there can arise situations when an exception needs to be made to the policy. For example, at the church where I used to pastor we have a policy that families who request the church school subsidy need to be members, contribute financially on a regular basis to the church, and be involved in a volunteer ministry. However, we had a family join our church who tried to become involved in a ministry but by the time of their application had not found one to be part of. As we looked at this case we decided to make an exception and waive part of the policy. Of course, it can be dangerous when you make exceptions because other people claim they are an exception also.

There is no doubt a tension concerning how rigidly you apply policies. Some people will make no exceptions while others are generous. When I came to pastor in America my family was held up in New York for five days longer than we had planned. Staying in a hotel was expensive and eating in restaurants was even more expensive. The conference had agreed to cover all our expenses. When I turned in my expenses to the conference treasurer he explained that the per diem for one person was six dollars but the per diem for a family was eleven dollars. (There were four people in our family. I was never able to figure out how four people could eat cheaper when in a restaurant together than if they ate separately in restaurants.) But the treasurer said, “We want you to feel welcome in this conference and we will reimburse you the full amount that you spent.” He made an exception to the policy.

It is only a policy, not a doctrine or Biblical principle, that ordination of women has to be a world decision. Why is it so difficult to make exceptions to that policy? Ellen White has written about the dangers of adhering to policy too closely. In the first statement below one can detect a decided tension. It could be used to prove that the church should adopt no policies but then how could it organize itself? What is Ellen White saying here?

“In the commission to His disciples, Christ not only outlined their work, but gave them their message. Teach the people, He said, ‘to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.’ The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught. That which He had spoken, not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is here included.

“Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ's servants to teach. ‘The law and the prophets,’ with the record of His own words and deeds, are the treasure committed to the disciples to be given to the world. Christ's name is their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing that does not bear His superscription is to be recognized in His kingdom.” (Ellen G. White, Desire of Ages, 826.)

“There is no place for tradition, for man’s theories and conclusions, or for church legislation.” Ellen White is making a distinction between that which is eternal and absolute and that which is temporal and subsidiary. Policies are not to be made tests of faithfulness.

But policies have been voted by the world church therefore they must be of God. “The committee prayed for God to guide them” some will say. This is an interesting point. The Columbia Union Constituency Session also prayed and believed that God gave them a different
message than that which produced the policy.

Ellen White writes that conscience must come before policy. “God did not prevent Daniel's enemies from casting him into the lions’ den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete. ‘Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee’ (Psalm 76:10), the psalmist has testified. Through the courage of this one man who chose to follow right rather than policy, Satan was to be defeated, and the name of God was to be exalted and honored.” (Prophets and Kings, p. 543; emphasis added.)

The Columbian Union Delegates believed that they were dealing with a moral issue, that what was before them was a clear case of discrimination based on gender. It had become a moral issue. They had “to follow right rather than policy.”

Ellen White also speaks to the issue of equality. “Then as the children of God are one in Christ, how does Jesus look upon caste, upon society distinctions, upon the division of man from his fellow man, because of color, race, position, wealth, birth, or attainments? The secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ. The reason for all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ. Christ is the center to which all should be attracted; for the nearer we approach the center, the closer we shall come together in feeling, in sympathy, in love, growing into the character and image of Jesus. With God there is no respect of persons.” (Selected Messages, Vol 1, p. 259; emphasis added.)

There are women serving as pastors who are ministering in the same way as male pastors. They are recognized in exactly the same way by the laying on of hands. They receive the same salary but they cannot receive the same credentialed recognition. The church did not consider them equal. Once the church had decided that women could be pastors (finally voted at the 1990 General Conference Session) it should have been a non issue whether women could be ordained.

“In each country a man should be appointed to work in the general interests of the cause. He need not be a preacher, and he must not be a policy man. He should be unselfish, a man who loves, who honors, and fears his God. His whole time should be devoted to the work. He should plan unselfishly, and in the fear of God. Let him be general agent for that country, and let him be connected with a council composed of the very best men, that they may counsel together, and attend to the work within their borders. There should be businessmen appointed to do the same in the different states in America.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 321; emphasis added.)

There is a very interesting background to this statement. Ellen White is writing from Australia. “In the night season I was listening to one who spoke with authority. Words of counsel in regard to the responsibilities that are to be borne in the sacred work of God were spoken. The Teacher said, There should be no haphazard work. Much of this has been done. Men have assumed authority, but the people should not depend upon poor, finite, erring men. They should put their entire trust in the wisdom that finds its strength in the wisdom of God. The inconsistency of centering so many responsibilities in Battle Creek has been presented many times, but the counsels have not been acted upon. The reproofs and warnings from the Lord have been evaded
and interpreted and made void by the devices of men. There has been counter working against God, and the judgment of men has been received.” (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 319)

Ellen White writes on the same page, “In Battle Creek you have evidence that men who have had the most to say are not walking with God. There is abundant activity, but not many are working in partnership with Christ; and those who walk and work apart from Him have been the most active in planning and inaugurating their methods.”

Now I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not suggesting in any way that the General Conference leadership is corrupt or not following God. What I do want to state is that just because certain actions come from the highest levels does not automatically mean that they have clearly heard the voice of God.

Probably one of the most famous statements of Ellen White is the following. “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.” (Education, p. 57.)

Yes, there will always be tensions. Tension is part of life. Without tension between velocity and gravity planes could not fly. They would either remain on the ground or shoot off into space but when there is the right balance, the right tension between opposite forces (or points of view) progress is made.

Whatever solutions we come to we must be centered on a growing experience with Jesus. It was Jesus who explained that the real test of who are his followers is not how united they are on doctrine or on policy but on how they love each other. “By this shall all [men] know that you are My disciples, if you love one another [if you keep on showing love among yourselves]” (Amplified Bible).

J. David Newman is the editor of Adventist Today. He just retired as senior pastor of New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church near Baltimore and is former Associate Secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association and former editor of Ministry.

ATTACHMENT:

Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church
By action of the General Conference Committee
Convened September 16-19, 1973
at Camp Mohaven, Ohio

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 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.”—RH, July 9, 1895.

On the basis of the above positions, it is

**Recommended**

1. **Ordination Roles**

   a. That qualifications for church offices 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 directive 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 Roles

That, since the function of the Church involves the utilization of all its resources for the completion of its tasks, the eligibility of qualified women, representative of the women in the Church, to participate with men in leadership and administration 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 roles 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 education levels for pastoral/evangelistic roles.

4. That the General Conference Ministerial Association monitor the pilot program and prepare an interim report on 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 for the 1975 General Conference Session.
“Be present where you are” is the theme for the 2012 GODencounters Conference. The featured speaker will be Sam Leonor, chaplain for La Sierra University, and the event will convene at the Arlington Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Dallas metropolitan area. Participants will be invited to focus on the present reality of God’s Kingdom and challenged to seek the righteousness of Christ today.

This young adult ministry has successfully sustained itself for a decade as reported in the current print issue of Adventist Today which includes an in-depth interview with Allan Martin, one of the founders and general coordinator. Martin is pastor of the Younger Generation congregation based at the Arlington Church.

In addition to worship experiences, attenders will also enjoy evenings at Encounters Café, service opportunities, an experiential prayer room and a concert featuring the Younger Generation worship team. Forty days of devotion is currently underway, ramping up to the conference and all are invited to join in on line at http://blog.godencounters.org/search/label/Gospel.

“GODencounters invited me to draw deeper into my walk with God,” said Matt Gamble, last year’s conference presenter and the new pastor of a church plant in the Napa Valley of northern California. “Being in an environment that is so saturated with His presence is unforgettable and refreshing. It seems to me that He is calling young adults into a real, living, dynamic experience with Him.”

The 2012 GODencounters Conference opens Thursday evening, August 30, at 7 p.m. Central Time. There is no registration fee or other cost for the entire weekend. More information is available at: www.ygchurch.com.
An Open Letter to Brother Wilson

Submitted: Aug 14, 2012
By Jack Hoehn

ADVENTIST HEALTH
MEDICAL GROUP
1111 South Second Avenue
Walla Walla, WA 99362

John B. Hoehn, M.D.
August 8, 2012

Ted Wilson
President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Dear Brother Ted,

I don’t live in the Columbia Union, but as an informed church member in North America, I must share with you my objections to the tone and substance of the statement recently issued to that union reproduced on the Review website.

I find the tone and assumptions of that document dangerous and discouraging for the following reasons:

1.) Although the first paragraph correctly asserts that “disagreement...is neither fatal nor schismatic” your document proceeds to draw a line in the sand that makes it both dangerous and schismatic.
   a. The document appears to mistake uniformity for unity? What the Columbia Union churches must do under God is no threat to unity, except if you are demanding uniformity.

2.) You and your fellow executive officers are not “senior leaders of the world wide church”. We do have a Leader. You dear brothers and sisters are undoubtedly chief servants of the world wide church. Servants do not dictate to those they serve. They do not “exercise authority” over them.
   a. None of you officers were chosen directly by God’s command. You were voted in after prayer by us because of your administrative gifts by individual impressions made on our hearts.
   b. Is this not exactly how the long prayed-for decision to ordain women as equal with men in the Columbia Union was made?
   c. Would you ask us to believe that the Holy Spirit only worked to have us appoint you to your jobs, but not to also impel us to move forward with gender equality in Christ?
   d. If James and the churches in Jerusalem were not yet ready to freely give the gospel to Gentiles, did not Paul and the church in Antioch first get moved by the Holy Spirit to “open up that door”? Isn’t this the way God has always acted, moving where He is permitted to advance
by the willingness of His people? He taught righteousness by faith first in Bohemia, before it was later accepted in Germany, and then Switzerland.

3.) Given the choice between a serious threat to the legal and moral health of the churches in the Columbia Union, and obedience to a flawed decision to perpetuate gender discrimination in ministry by churches outside of North America; obviously Acts 5:29\(^3\) trumps a demand for uniformity.

4.) The charge that obedience to the Holy Spirit’s promptings by the delegates of the Columbia Union is a “threat to church unity”, and that your officers will “determine how to respond” feels threatening itself. May I suggest that you administrators consider noting the action with approval or disapproval, but recognizing the right of the church in session in every country to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit on debatable matters of practice, not central to the faith.

I do not expect to change your mind by my letter, but I do thank you for noting it.

Lines drawn in sand shift and the winds of time will surely blow them quite away.

Galatians 3:28\(^6\) however will never blow away.

Sincerely yours,

Jack Hoehn

CC:\(^7\)

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\(^1\)Lifelong member, entirely church school educated till graduate school, ordained church elder, four term foreign missionary, I have attended several GC sessions since 1954 in my childhood that I remember as being in the “Cow Palace” in San Francisco and hearing Elder Branson’s Parkinson’s tremor voice at his retirement sermon. I and my wife have been delegates to several General Conference sessions.


\(^3\) Matthew 20: 25,26 “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their ‘great men’ exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you…”

\(^4\) Acts 14:27 “…they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through
them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentile.”

5 Acts 5:29. “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

6 Galatians 3:28. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

7 This is a public, not a private letter and may be freely shared.
Planning... 

Submitted: Aug 13, 2012
By Katelyn Pauls

August 14, 2012
Tonight I was lying in bed wide awake, thoughts running a million miles an hour through my head. I’ve found I’m kind of an obsessive planner. So tonight I was lying awake planning my life. Of course, nothing will be happening for at least a year, but like I said I’m obsessive, so I try to have a plan in place. I think I’m mainly worried about life slipping by me. I don’t want to be without a plan for so long that by the time I have it figured out my life is over. I’m worried about being stuck doing the same old thing, day in and day out, just because I can’t make a plan. I think that’s what frightens me more that almost anything on this earth is the endless monotony of my life as it sits, unplanned, right now. So here I am at midnight on a Monday (which I guess is now Tuesday...), planning my life.

However, it’s easier said than done. I have so many possibilities right now that I can’t even keep track of them all sometimes. It’s almost making me crazy! It’s not like I just have two or three choices. My life is a web of endless possibilities. From the specific options I know about to those possibilities that are just a click of the mouse away. But I’m worried I will never be satisfied anywhere. I felt like this at home and now I’m beginning to feel the same here. I thought it was the place and what I was doing, but now I’m not so sure. It can’t be the place. I moved halfway around the world to change that. Then I thought for sure that it was the job but again I’m doubting. I totally changed jobs also. In the states I was working in a nursing home as a CNA. Now I’m teaching people of all ages (3-30) how to speak English.

I’ve asked God many times what I’m supposed to do and where I’m supposed to be. I thought that maybe He had this ideal place in mind with a perfect job, tailored to me, and I’d be happy forever. But I’m starting to think that’s not the case. I’m realizing that, like Paul, I need to learn to be content in all situations. I need to focus more on what God wants me to do. With that focus, I don’t think I’ll ever be bored or dissatisfied. That job alone will single-handedly give me more challenges than I ever dreamed of. I realize now that the problem is with me.

I’m not looking at this ministry right. That’s exactly what I should see, a ministry. Not a job. That’s what I’ve been thinking of it as the entire month that I’ve been here. It’s just another job. But it’s not. It’s a ministry. Sure, I’m not here specifically to teach these kids about God and the Bible. I’m not here to save them from an impoverished life or a deadly disease. I’m here to teach them English. And not even out of the goodness of my heart. They’re paying for it. And because they can afford it they will go on their vacations to the US to practice. These kids are hardly needy. Many of them are rich and spoiled. But God doesn’t see them any differently. Why should I?

Maybe I’m not putting 100% into this work here. There are many small ways that I could introduce them to God every day in their lessons. With the younger ones we pray every day before they go home. I don’t think it means anything to them but maybe one day it will. What can I do to make my time here more meaningful and useful? I don’t want to leave here thinking
that I’ve just completed another job and wasted a year of my life. I want to leave knowing that there are children here who now know the name of Jesus, even if they don’t understand all the consequences of that yet.

So maybe I’m just a little unfocused. God, help me see the work you brought me here to do. Give me the courage to give it my all, knowing that I’ll never be dissatisfied when I’m working for You. Help me to look past the outside and look to the inside of my students. Father, many of them need you no matter how put together everything seems on the outside. Help me to see with Your eyes. Give me the peace to know that everything I do with and for You has meaning and is not a waste of my time, no matter how insignificant. God, help me bring a little of You into all of my classes.

Am I ready to change? See as God sees? Develop a new mindset? Set new goals? Challenge accepted!
Occasionally, I come across accusations that there are Jesuits at the General Conference. I am alternately amused by the silliness of these charges and saddened by the spiritual sickness they evince. Then I read President Ted Wilson's (President Wilson II) repeated calls for submission to the authority of the church, and I recognize a theme that has characterized Catholic spirituality for a thousand years.

Anyone who has known President Wilson II for decades finds accusations that he is a closet Jesuit so preposterous it's difficult to give a coherent response. On the other hand, he is following a trajectory described by his father in the Merikay case of movement away from anti-hierarchicalism toward a form of church governance reminiscent of the papacy. A primary reason for this movement is its effectiveness. If your objective is a global, coherent, long-lasting organization, the papacy is by far the most compelling exemplar. President Wilson II's commitment to the Adventist ideal of the remnant—not merely as a spiritual movement but as a recognizable, ordered church—requires the imposition of a discipline that can only be achieved through an authoritative hierarchy.

When Wilson urges people to submit to the church, by "church" he means the top clergy, more specifically he means the General Conference Executive Committee.* President Wilson II acknowledges people may have sincere, individual differences of conviction regarding women's ordination. They may believe their respective views are supported by the Bible. Still, he insists, they must subordinate their individual consciences to the decisions of the church (i.e. the GC Executive Committee which Wilson dominates). This is another baby step toward the establishment of an Adventist papacy. Two hundred years from now historians will be writing about the efforts (successful or unsuccessful) of Wilson II to secure the unchallenged primacy of the Bishop of Columbia in the hierarchy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (a.k.a. American Universal (catholic) Church).

The teaching of submission as a virtue has a long and venerable history in Judaism and Christianity. Passages in the Bible advocate submission. Certainly, we are warned about the folly we can get into when we reject wisdom from outside ourselves. However, the great heroes of the Bible were not mildly submissive.

Abraham directly challenged God's announced plans for Sodom. Moses twice flatly rejected God's stated judgment on Israel. The Syro-Phonecian woman blithely dismissed Jesus' explicit statement that she was asking him to operate outside God's template for his ministry. In each of
these cases, God bent to the will of his challengers.

Jesus repeatedly rejected the authority of the church of his day. He gently chided Peter for acquiescing to the Jewish leaders' claims of authority over Jesus in the matter of paying the temple tax. (This would be the equivalent of messing with tithe policy in the Adventist Church.)

The great revivals in Israel were led not by the high priest but by the kings—Hezekiah, Josiah, Jehoshaphat. On the other hand, Elijah and Elisha modeled principled, sustained opposition to the authority of King Ahab. The high priest Azariah with eighty of his fellow priests confronted King Uzziah when he overstepped his prerogatives and went into the temple to offer a sacrifice. In Israel God never consolidated authority into a single person or institution. The monarchy and the priesthood each traced its roots back to an independent inauguration by God. Neither was the "final word." Then there were the prophets—wild cards in the authority structure of Israel. Their role is filled in our day by bold preachers of the left and right who call for the radical application of principles that are deeply rooted in our heritage.

Ellen White celebrates the intervention of Frederick of Saxony to protect Luther from the authority of the church of his day. She repeatedly delights in the refusal of the reformers to submit to formally constituted church authority.

When President Wilson II orders people in the church to submit, he is voicing his sincere convictions about what people ought to do. He is fulfilling his divine mandate as he understands it. He is seeking to defend the institution of the church. This is the normal (and I would argue, appropriate) role for a church bureaucrat. Reformers ought to respect the sincerity of President Wilson's convictions.

On the other hand, reformers—other church bureaucrats, pastors, laity—who oppose President Wilson II, are also acting out of sincere conviction. Their commitment to God and justice requires them to exercise all available means compatible with integrity to shape the church according to the vision God has given them.

The Bible offers no tidy formula for resolving this conflict. Passages can be cited in support of both institutional primacy and prophetic (individual) primacy. Frequently in the Bible the formal structure of religion is shown to be opposed to the will of God as voiced by minorities and individuals. Other times dissident individuals are portrayed as mere rebels.
I look for the bottom line by measuring ideas and practices with the yardsticks of the Two Great Commandments and Micah 6:8. Neither mentions institutional conformity as a primary virtue.

*Wilson writes: "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." The inclusion of "laypersons" in this list is disingenuous. This committee is dominated by clergy, primarily the higher ranking clergy.

*John McLarty is a contributing editor for Adventist Today.*
Theological Introduction to Ellen White's Counsel on an Inclusive Church [footnote 1]

By Cindy Tutsch

How does Ellen White’s example and counsel help us sift through conflicting claims in the increasingly divergent multi-cultural Seventh-day Adventist church? First, I note that Ellen White herself embodies an essential leadership concept—cultural position, wealth, power, education, gender, and physical appeal are no predictors or limitations to God’s leadership calling. Next, I present an illustration of Ellen White’s progressive social voice that helps clarify her egalitarian and inclusive empowerment of the body of Christ.

Ellen White’s clarion call is that God would have His human creation work to restore the image of God to humanity. This imago dei motif is threaded throughout her counsels to educators, administrators, parents, pastors and teachers, in short, to all who lead or influence others. In Ellen White’s view, this restoration begins with character development—the human mind becoming sanctified, by His grace, into the likeness of the mind of God. To extrapolate that motif into today’s context, when the mind of humanity becomes one with the mind of God, leaders will seek restoration of the Edenic plan of male/female relationships.

Additionally, leaders will seek restoration of God’s plan for relationships between people groups and ethnicities, as well as the restoration of Earth to its original Garden state, to the best of limited human ability.

In a discussion of the original Eden state, Joseph Coleson states, “Genesis 1:27 states very clearly that women and men are created equally in the image of God. . . Females are in God’s image. Males are in God’s image. Neither is more nor less in God’s image than the other.” Concurring with Coleson, Phyllis Trible says “Sexual differentiation does not mean hierarchy.” Hierarchy is sometimes used to deprive women of opportunities to find joy in participation in the area of church life for which they are best suited.

Ellen White also took the position of equality at Creation. “Women should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband’s equal.”

Thus, it seems evident from the Genesis account that male and female were created by God as equals, with no hierarchical system inherent. Those who oppose women in leadership and ministry may believe, however, that God put Eve in subjection to Adam as part of the consequence of her sin.

Two key words in this study are “sin” and “redemption.” Sin is the cause of female subjection. Hayter states “Man and woman have disrupted their relationship with God. This sin
leads to a disruption in their relationship with all creation, including one another.”

For Adventist Christians, the great hope, the good news, is the redemption theme, the restoration in humanity of the image of God. If God’s original creation included equality between the sexes, I could extrapolate from that pattern the premise that it is His will that equal opportunities to evangelize be extended in our present culture. I should then press on toward that ideal as part of my reception of the gospel.

“It is,” after all, “human sinfulness which initiates and maintains prejudice and inequality between the sexes.” Ellen White also decries the arbitrary exercise of authority by leaders, declaring such domination as in opposition to God’s plan for His redeemed people.

Since Jesus’ and Paul’s own teaching and practice were radically egalitarian, male dominance and female subjection in the structure of the Christian church are post-apostolic, not apostolic. Further, if man and woman were created fully equal, fully autonomous, yet interacting in complement physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually, the words of God in Genesis 3:16 are more of an announcement, i.e. descriptive, not causative or prescriptive.

Biblically-based feminism attempts a critique of the oppressive structures of society and the church. Ellen White’s counsel to leaders is not in opposition to Christian feminism, if that feminism is about independence, family balance, education, competence, and call to mission—in contrast to class, social maneuvering, hustling for jobs with sexuality, and whining about petty incidents (when many women within ecclesiastical structures are in real danger of abuse and oppression). Militant feminist activism has caused some to regard the goal of feminism to be the ascendancy of women, but biblically-predicated feminism is primarily striving toward human equality in which oppressed and oppressor, aged and youth, black and white, reconcile in a unified return to the prioritization of personal evangelism. The inclusive body of Christ united for a mission worthy of His church is a concept which Ellen White repeatedly affirms.

It is my view that if the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be true to its calling in Christ, if leaders of the church consider that the prophetic voice of Ellen White carries authority, those leaders must teach and practice the biblical equality of men and women predicated in the Creation story and demonstrated existentially in the New Testament practices of Christ and Paul. Additionally, leaders who find Ellen White’s voice authoritative must motivate and equip the church to evangelize cross-generationally and make joyful, intentional provision for diversity.

We are still in the midst of a war—the war which Ellen White called “the Great Controversy.” Men and women are presented with God’s offer of eternal life, surrounded by an enemy who doesn’t want them to understand or accept it. We are living in the final stages of this war. And when we see our lives in that context, it is easier to understand the urgency behind Ellen White’s
statements on the roles of women. Today the call to a gender-inclusive church to give its energies for God is greater than at any time in earth’s history.13

Is it possible that Jesus is waiting for the church to recognize God’s call to women and empower each person to use the talents God has given? Perhaps the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Latter Rain power will not come until we are united in our understanding of the inclusive events described in Joel 2.

Maybe God is longing to help us get past our long-held prejudices so that Jesus can come and bring the family of God home at last.

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2Skip Bell, 18 April 2005, personal email (18 April 2006).


4Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16.


7The Adventist Home (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 231.


9Ibid., 116.

10Letter to O. A. Olsen. Letter 55, 1895 written at Norfolk Villa, Prospect St., Granville, Australia, 19 September 1895. Archived at the Ellen G. White Estate, Silver Spring, MD.

11Isa 58:1-12.

It was seven years ago that I left my small-town church in Paris, Tennessee and departed for South Korea. Since it was my first trip abroad my bar was low; I was mainly hoping that I wouldn’t have to explain to Seventh-day Adventist Language Institute headquarters in Seoul that I wouldn’t be making it because I’d gotten hopelessly lost in the Nashville airport. This scenario did not come to pass.

Now, almost seven years later I’ve left Korea, making a stop in my West Tennessee hometown before moving on to the next place I’ll call home. Since it was my first extended stay back I had to set goals for how I’d interact with my former church; as many places as I’ve been and experiences as I’ve encountered, a certain snobbery is bound to set in. I only hoped that I would not look at them while they talked as though it were amazing that they don’t get lost in the church parking lot. I hope I succeeded.

In my time in Korea, most of the churches I attended were hosted within the SDA language institutes that we taught in. The other foreign members had, like me, generally come all the way to Asia to share God’s love, to experience life on the other side of the world, and to maybe lose a few pounds on a daily diet of rice and vegetables. In those churches, we attracted a steady stream of students drawn in through the saving power of … English.

They flocked to us because English was something we had in abundance, even if we used it to talk about things like an afterlife, when the students were much more keen to discuss how English could get them promoted at work, thus helping them afford an apartment so they could move out of their parents’ houses, get married, have children and pay for their children’s English lessons. Our job was to show them that there was more to life than getting promoted and standardized test scores; there’s also peace of mind, the promise of eternal life and weekly potluck lunches.

Even if they didn’t become members, it was a pleasure to spend church services with them, asking them questions about their lives (such as “Do you actually like studying English, or is it something you feel like you have to do?” and “When exactly do you sleep?”) and giving them the opportunity to ask us questions about our believes (including “Is it possible to live without pork?” and “Is it worth living without pork?”).

And with so many people joining us on a regular basis, it was inevitable that many of them would become members. We, the teachers, would frequently be moved to different institutions and churches, but that was okay, because the church was a growing and ever-changing-organism, like a butterfly, or Mitt Romney’s health care plan.
I wasn’t sure how I’d act around my hometown church because I remember how it used to be. The people there knew the benefits of avoiding not just pork, but all meat. In fact, the relationship between animal protein and the spread of cancerous tissue is one of their favorite subjects, beating out grace and coming up just behind the Time of Trouble.

Furthermore, there’s no problem with the new church attendees discovering strange things about SDAs after they show up; our church is a minority there, but has enough of a reputation that by the time they arrive they’re well-aware of our relative ignorance regarding Saturday morning television programming.

The problem rests in the church not having the same rate of new visitors to older-members whose views are so calcified they would justify the use of ur-so-deoxy-cholic acid. Growing up, I remember far too many discussions centering around who could describe the End Times in grimmest detail or who had most reliable replication of the King James Bible, and more than a few debates over whether a) everyone in government is trying to destroy us, the remnant church, or b) just the liberals.

The SDA institute churches in Korea occasionally saw differences in opinion over how to conduct outreach, largely centering around how to reach people who don’t know a lot of 1) the Bible 2) the language the teachers’ Bibles are written in. Most of us could, however, agree that there needed to be a middle ground between “This is a Bible. It is good,” and “This is the 2300 days. It is inexorable.” It was usually enough for us to know that we were there to conduct missions for us to be able to work together. There was no way to sit in the pew and simply criticize the efforts others made.

Which is why I was pleasantly surprised to find that, while I was home, the Paris SDA Church had set up a booth at the annual Henry County Fair, giving people a chance to learn about how to eat better, stop smoking and live healthier lives. There were even posters advising people about the dangers of soft drinks; doing this in Tennessee is equivalent of telling Koreans that owning your own apartment will give you Mad Cow disease.

And it seemed to work: In addition to the many visitors the booth drew, it also won the fair’s people’s choice award.

Within days I’ll be moving to Hawaii to start the next phase of my journey. When I’ve arrived and found a new church family, I’ll try to remember not to misjudge the efforts that others are capable of. Nor will I assume that I know what manner of outreach the public will or won’t respond to.

But first I have to make sure I don’t get lost in the Honolulu airport.
Women Who Were Called

Submitted: Aug 16, 2012
By AT Staff

In all the argument and counter-argument about the issue of women’s ordination, there is a little-discussed subtext. Why are there so many women who believe they have been called to the ministry? Are they right or are they wrong? Have they misunderstood or been misled? Or are they simply trying to offer themselves and their God-given gifts to be used as the Creator wishes? Adventist Today decided to ask some women pastors to simply tell the story of their call. They were asked, “When, where, and how did you become convinced that God was calling you to be a pastor?” Here are three responses.

Dr. Leslie Bumgardner, PhD, Associate Pastor at Pasco, WA Riverview Seventh-day Adventist Church:

“I see the story of my call in terms of the story of Lazarus’ resurrection. I came into the church through an evangelistic seminar during my freshman year in high school. I transferred to academy, and a woman Bible worker had a great influence on me. I began to have a vision of the possibility of ministry because of the work she did. We had a real spiritual revival my senior year, and I was in a group that went to different churches in the area, doing the worship services. I had an increasing sense of wanting to do God’s work. So I went to Walla Walla and took theology, with the hope of moving into ministry because of the work she did. We had a real spiritual revival my senior year, and I was in a group that went to different churches in the area, doing the worship services. I had an increasing sense of wanting to do God’s work. So I went to Walla Walla and took theology, with the hope of moving into ministry, whether that took the form of Bible worker or pastor. But another woman graduated a year ahead of me but didn’t receive a call to a church position, so I began to worry and decided to go to a back-up plan. I had minored in Home Ec and turned that into a double major instead. For some years I worked in various jobs, mostly in food service, and I was content. I believe we should find joy in what we are doing, and I did that. Like Lazarus, my dream of ministry was laid to rest.

Then we moved to Ohio because of my husband’s work. I began to look for a job, and found a church that was seeking a secretary. The pastor interviewed me, then told me he wanted me to be a part-time secretary and work with him in the ministry part-time. I felt God saying, “It’s time to raise this dream and come forth.” Tragically, we didn’t get the chance to unfold what that might mean, because only a few months later, the pastor was killed in an accident. The head elder and I held the church together while we sought another pastor.

When the new pastor asked if I was going to continue as secretary, I said, “Well, I’m really the secretary because I want to be in ministry.” To my surprise, that pastor said, “That’s great!” And he hired me as Assistant to the Pastor for Personal Ministry. That was in 1984. As I worked, the
internal sense of call grew as the people around me affirmed me. People tell me their lives have been touched by my ministry. I realized that—again like Lazarus—others had unbound me, helped me become what I am today in ministry. I knew God was planting and nurturing the seed, while colleagues and staff and laity watered and nurtured.

My title was officially changed to Assistant Pastor in the mid-80s, and in 1990 the Ohio conference recommended me to Columbia Union for ordination. The Union agreed, with the proviso that the ceremony not take place until after the Indianapolis General Conference Session. After the decision of that Session to table women’s ordination, the recommendation was withdrawn. But I’ve continued to work for God wherever He calls me, and I did receive ministerial credentials. I’ve always said, “God didn’t call me to be ordained, He called me to be a pastor.” But I’ve come to realize that ordination is important, too, only in the sense of affirmation and acceptance by colleagues, a recognition that this truly is the call of God.

Dr. Cindy Tutsch, DMin, Associate Director, Ellen G. White Estate; Editor, Visionary4Kids.org:

I was kind of a “rabble rouser” in college. Sometime after I rediscovered the Jesus of my childhood through reading the book, Steps to Christ, I had the opportunity to teach academy Bible classes. Determined to make the classes more interactive and interesting than what I remembered from sitting through Bible classes as a student, I soon involved my students in community witnessing and outreach activities.

After several years of teaching Bible at a couple of academies, some former students asked me to officiate at their wedding. I asked my conference president, Glenn Aufderhar, if he would “jump out from behind the foliage” and lead the couple through the vows after I preached the homily. He smiled and said, “I think I have a better idea. I have been thinking for some time that I would like the conference committee to grant you ministerial credentials. After all, you and your students prepare more people for baptism than any other pastor in the conference! You are already doing the work of an evangelist, and I think you should be granted the credential.”

I did indeed receive ministerial credentials from the Michigan Conference in 1988. The next year, the new conference president, Jay Gallimore, renewed my pastor’s credential, and even gave me a church to pastor, with my Witnessing Class, while continuing to teach Bible at the academy. After that, I pastored in the Oregon Conference, and then continued ministry as Washington Conference Youth Director and now, Associate Director of the Ellen G. White Estate.

Ministry is a sacred calling, and I’ve never doubted for a moment that my life’s path has been
Lori Farr, MDiv (working on DMin), Senior Pastor, Wooster, Canton, Carrollton, Ohio Conference:

Becoming a pastor was not something I would have ever imagined or dreamed for my life. God’s call upon me was a slow process, not that He was slow, but I was, and He was such a patient and loving God. There were many hurdles to jump and God provided a way for each and every hurdle. I imagined that I would stay at the little church in Washington state and continue to work as a lay pastor. I was happy and content there.

But God asked me to step out in faith and go to Andrews Theological Seminary unsponsored and that was a huge step of faith for me. I could not imagine it. He showed me, with no uncertainty, that I would be a senior pastor when I was done. Of course many thought that was a crazy notion, even my family. Women do not become pastors, many said.

But I trusted that God did not ask me to go on this journey to fail, He would not leave me or forsake me. I left a very good job, all of my family and all I knew that was safe and secure—but in the midst of it all the Lord gave me peace and assurance and I could not/would not refuse. Without a doubt I know the Lord had called me and would equip me to do His bidding. There were many miracles that I don’t have space for here, but God, He was faithful.

Now here I am, eight and a half years later serving in the Ohio conference as a senior pastor in a three-church district. The blessings of God have been abundant and I am blessed to be serving Him here in Ohio. I am grateful that I have listened to God’s calling on my life. I gave Him all I had and He has given to me in return. I will continue to serve Him, wherever He leads me. My motto is to “Trust in the Lord with all of my heart and to not lean on my own understanding, in ALL my ways acknowledge Him and He will direct my paths.” Proverbs 3:5, 6

I am blessed beyond measure.