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## 2. National Conference Petitions Church Leaders on Role of Women

by Judith P. Nembhard

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At a time when, for the first time, a woman is running for the office of vice president of the United States, several developments within the denomination have focused attention on the role of women in the North American Adventist Church: the General Conference has established an *ad hoc* commission on women; Dr. Helen Ward Evans was appointed the vice president of academic affairs at Loma Linda University—the first woman to hold such a position at an Adventist college or university; and women pastors are beginning to baptize new members into the church (see *Spectrum*, Vol. 15, No. 2).

But one of the most important of recent events was the conference organized this summer by the Association of Adventist Women, July 11 to 15, on the campus of Andrews University. The National Conference of the association brought together 120 registered participants from places as diverse as California, Washington, Kentucky, and Canada. From these meetings, three topics or actions emerged as particularly significant: the progress of women in ministry 11 years after the Biblical Research Institute held its own conference on the subject; the resolutions adopted by the conference concerning major issues facing Adventist women; and the recognition by the association, in its Women of the Year awards, of

the often-overlooked achievements of Adventist women.

The principal organizers of the conference were Kit Watts, of the James White Library of Andrews University, and Iris Yob, on leave from Avondale College in Australia. They, with other women of the Michiana Chapter of the association, planned and executed the two-part conference: a two-day pre-session concentrating on a review of the 1973 Biblical Research Conference at Camp Mohaven ("Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church"), and the regular national conference of the association. The national conference began with a banquet on Thursday evening and ended with an awards luncheon on Sunday.

### *Women In Ministry*

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The pre-session reviewed the scholarly papers presented at the Camp Mohaven symposium. That 1973 conference was significant as the first official step taken by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to study the role of women in church ministry. In giving the historical background to Mohaven, Gordon Hyde, then the director of the Biblical Research Institute, pointed out that in 1973 other denominations were already moving vigorously ahead on the question of ordaining women. At Camp Mohaven, scholars and administrators deliberated for five days, presenting 27 scholarly papers on the role of women in the church. Ten years later, at

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the pre-session, the Biblical Research Institute made a bound, mimeographed volume of some of the papers available for the first time.

Participants in the pre-session raised the question of how far the church has come since 1973. Gordon Hyde, now chairperson of the religion faculty at Southern College, responded, "My cynical reaction is—not very far," and he suggested that research be done to determine the extent of progress. However, at the pre-session, some developments that have favored women were noted.

First, in response to resolutions made at Mohaven, the General Conference gave limited approval to ordaining women as local elders. A growing number of women now serve the church in this capacity; in some churches women hold head elderships.

Second, the category of "Women in Pastoral Care" has been introduced into the ministry of the church. The Potomac, Southeastern California, and Upper Columbia conferences have each employed several women pastors. In addition, all three women in pastoral ministry in the Potomac Conference have been baptizing. On May 16, the Potomac conference executive committee voted to grant these pastors ministerial licenses (see *Spectrum*, Vol. 15, No. 2).

A third development is the *ad hoc* committee on women, appointed by the General Conference Office of Human Relations. The nine-woman panel met on March 17. After electing Alice Smith, a former associate director of the department of health and temperance, as its chairperson, the group recommended that the committee be extended, rather than disbanding after a second meeting, as was originally intended by the General Conference.

Finally, the ordination of women, the issue which brought the Mohaven participants together 11 years ago, is still being discussed. According to Gordon Hyde, it is "the most emotionally-laden cause in the church," but he can see "no justification for the attitude." The consensus of the scholars

at Mohaven 11 years ago, as well as the consensus of many of the church's scholars and administrators in North America today, is that there is no theological basis for refusing to ordain women.

## *Resolutions on Women*

*Among the resolutions adopted by the 1984 national conference of the Association of Adventist Women were the following resolutions concerning women in the Adventist ministry.*

—The Editors

**WE RESOLVE** that the Office of Human Relations be asked to request the Biblical Research Institute to make available copies of The Mohaven Papers and the BRI papers on women to leaders of the church, such as pastors, administrators, and teachers.

**WHEREAS** the 1973 and 1974 Annual Councils, and the 1975 Spring Meeting prepared the way for women to become local church elders, and to become associates in pastoral care, and

**WHEREAS** various church bodies—local, conference, and union—and particularly the Southern California, Southeastern California, Upper Columbia, Potomac, and Oregon Conferences and the Lake Union have responded to these actions.

**WE THEREFORE RESOLVE** to request the Association of Adventist Women to express appreciation to those conferences who have recommended the ordination of women as local church elders and those local churches who have elected them, and

**WE FURTHER RESOLVE** to request the Association of Adventist Women to express appreciation to these conferences and their respective unions, as well as other churches as they come to the attention of the Association of Adventist Women: 1) for their recognition of women as capable of serving the church in the pastoral ministry, 2) for encouraging and fostering the role of women in this capacity, and 3) for continuing to support these women who have responded to the call of God to serve the body of Christ.

**WHEREAS** the 1973 and 1974 Annual Councils, and the 1975 Spring Meeting prepared the way for women to become local church elders and to become Associates in Pastoral Care, and

## Resolutions for Action

The Association of Adventist Women, officially organized June 13, 1982, has as one of its goals that of acquainting the Adventist community with the potential and

### in Ministry

WHEREAS a period of ten years has passed with increased numbers of women filling these roles in a number of areas in the world field, and

WHEREAS there are areas of ministry in which a woman is uniquely qualified to serve, and

WHEREAS there continue to be women who recognize the call of God to the sacred work of the ministry,

**WE THEREFORE RESOLVE** to request the General Conference Officers to review the progress made in the past decade in the experience of women as local church elders and as Associates in Ministry, and

**WE FURTHER RESOLVE** to request the General Conference Officers to make provision for a pilot program(s) in parts of the world field where the local conference committee votes it, for granting ministerial licenses to qualified women candidates. We further request that this pilot program(s) be evaluated prior to the 1990 General Conference Session.

WHEREAS achieving the goal of ordination for women involves complex factors of culture, church structure, and changes in traditional roles, and is currently a controversial direction,

**WE THEREFORE RESOLVE** to request that the Association of Adventist Women Executive Board appoint a special nation-wide task force of articulate persons astute in church structures, to serve as a liaison and source of information between the church and the Association on issues relating to ordination. In order to have sufficient time and energy to devote to the task force the members should not be officers of Association of Adventist Women or those charged with other tasks. A local Washington, D.C. person should serve as an anchor and contact, and a continuous network of information should be maintained. The task force should arrange for active discussions with church leaders, for monitoring the progress and development of church discussions and actions, and for providing updates to the Association of Adventist Women Board as needed.

achievements of women in the church. The resolutions adopted by the conference (not by the executive committee or by the membership of the association) lead to this goal. The various resolutions call for women to participate more fully in the official affairs of the denomination, to recommend ways that the laity can be informed of the role of women in the church, and to propose actions to counteract the erosion of the Seventh-day Adventist family.

Reflecting the concerns of the pre-session, the conference adopted a resolution requesting the executive committee of the Association of Adventist Women to appoint a special "nationwide task force of articulate persons, astute in church structures, to serve as a liaison and source of information between the church and the association, on issues relating to ordination." Participants also resolved to express their appreciation of local church conferences that have encouraged the ordination of local women elders and of licenses for women pastors (see box).

Citing the conflict between lay members and church employees who still believe that there are theological and biblical reasons for barring women from participating in ministry and those who are convinced that there are no such barriers, the group called for the Office of Human Relations to communicate with the editors of the *Adventist Review, Ministry*, and the union conference papers, encouraging them to feature articles on the role of women in the Adventist Church. Another resolution calls for the Association of Adventist Women to commission a series of monographs on women and to set up a lending library on women, which will operate through the mail. The association is also to request that the North American Division include a workshop on women in its 1985 "Compleat Administrators Seminar" and make the workshop available to workers' meetings and to campmeetings.

As Pat Habada, from the General Conference department of education, and Nancy Vyhmeister, assistant professor of Missions

at Andrews University, noted during the pre-session, women are not adequately represented on any level of Adventist church administration. The conference also noted that many positions not requiring ordination exist in the church, and it adopted a resolution requesting that the North American Division officers widely publish the openings for these positions. A related resolution requests that C.E. Bradford, vice president for North America, and the office of the North American Division both encourage organizations and institutions to increase the number of women on appointed committees and boards to a minimum of 10 to 15 percent within the next two years.

These resolutions seem to be in tune with current thinking at church headquarters. Gary Ross, Neal Wilson's official representative to the conference, in his address Thursday evening, spoke of Wilson's personal commitment to a "decisive and radical increase in the number of women in the decision-making process in the Seventh-day Adventist Church—local conference, union conference, and General Conference."

To help women become more fully acquainted with the administrative structure of the church and to acquaint church leaders with women's leadership capabilities, one resolution calls for the North American Division Board of Higher Education to establish a center or centers for women's studies on selected campuses within the next quinquennium. Further, the conference resolved to request that the Board of Higher Education establish a Commission on Women on each college and university campus; one of the functions of the commissions will be to develop courses in women's studies.

Another resolution for which the participants voiced strong support was one which requested the North American Division Curriculum Committee of the General Conference department of education to include family management skills as part of the education of Seventh-day Adventist

youths. These skills include building strong family relationships and learning sound financial management.

## Women of the Year Awards

The third area of the conference that has generated enthusiasm was the efforts of the association to identify and commend women in the Adventist Church for their contributions to home and community life, work life, and church life. Under the direction of Peggy Harris, a business person from Maryland, a panel of General Conference and Association of Adventist Women leaders selected the 1984 Women of the Year Awards: Lenora McDowell, Avon Park, Fla., was cited for her many accomplishments as home and school leader of Walker Memorial Junior Academy; Anita Mackey, Santa Barbara, Calif., was selected for her career contributions as a social worker and civic leader; and Mary Walsh, Glendale, Calif., was honored for her many contributions as a Bible worker, church pastor, camp meeting speaker, and author.

An awards booklet, edited by Viveca Black, director of development for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington, lists brief biographical sketches of not only the three women who received awards, but also of each of the other 65 women who were nominated. The awards booklet reveals a pool of Adventist women with diverse skills and occupations. One has written seven books and has served as vacation bible school director; another is co-founder of a city-wide, inter-church, sharing organization; a head elder conducts Five-day Plans and stress control clinics, and is active in the Dorcas Society; a retired physician uses her time to conduct blood pressure tests in shopping centers. Others include retired missionaries, teachers, nurses, homemakers, ministers' wives, Bible workers—all serving the church in some way.

The second national conference of the Association of Adventist Women—unlike the first—has led to increased communication between Adventist women and the General Conference leadership. President Neal Wilson sent a representative. Warren S. Banfield, director of the Office of Human relations; Jocelyn Fay, managing editor of the *Adventist Review*; Elizabeth Sterndale and Iris Hayden, associate directors of the General Conference department of health and temperance; and Edward Zinke, associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, attended as well. These General Conference representatives presented a half-hour report

on the conference to the General Conference Executive Committee.

On July 23, after the conference, some of the conference organizers and participants exchanged views with J.R. Spangler, editor of *Ministry*, and Neal Wilson, president of the General Conference, on several subjects which included the licensing and ordination of women. During his 45 minute statement on a variety of topics, Neal Wilson made it plain that he thought no conference in North America should license women as pastors until the world church approved. No doubt, Adventist women in subsequent meetings will continue to discuss and seek action on this and on other vital issues.

### 3. Official Report of 1973 GC Council on Women

*The 23-person Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church was chaired by W.J. Hackett, then a General Conference vice president and chairman of the Biblical Research Institute. The secretary was Gordon M. Hyde, then the director of the Biblical Research Institute. The council met September 16-19 at Camp Mohaven in Ohio. Within days, the report printed below was submitted to Annual Council. The 1973 Annual Council voted to receive the report and send it to the world divisions for their study. Because of objections from the world divisions the 1974 Annual Council refused to move towards ordination of women as ministers, but acknowledged that women were being ordained as local church elders.*

*In April, 1976 the Biblical Research Institute General Council voted that "it sees no serious*

*theological objection to the ordination of women to various offices, including the ministry."*

*—The Editors*

In recognition of the growing evidence of the imminence of 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 and 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 other 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.” (*Review and Herald*, July, 9, 1895, p. 271.)

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 view of the principles and the recommendation 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 Church Roles

That, since the function of the church involves the utilization of all its resources for the completion of its task, the eligibility of qualified women, representative of the women of the church, to participate with men in leadership and administrative 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 main-

taining 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 (GW 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 the 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.