



Sligo's Action: The Documents

Toward a documentary history of how and why Sligo chose to ordain women to gospel ministry.

The July 5, 1995, vote of the General Conference in session denying divisions the opportunity to ordain women to the gospel ministry has generated many responses. Two days after the vote in Utrecht, the La Sierra University church in business session adopted a statement. Less than two weeks later the Sligo church board also responded.

The documents that follow proceed chronologically from the La Sierra University church action (see page 38). Increasingly, they revolve around the deliberations and actions of Sligo church.

For more than 22 years, Sligo church has included at least one woman among its associate pas-

tors. Eleven years ago these pastors began baptizing. On July 18, the Sligo church board (with only one dissenting vote) selected an ad hoc committee to prepare a statement for a church business meeting. Two weeks later, the ad hoc committee (with only one member abstaining) moved to adopt the document reproduced on page 39. What follows begins with excerpts from the two-hour church business meeting that adopted (138 to 21) the action reprinted on page 39. A more complete account can be read in Bryan Zervos' article, "A Sacred Moment at Sligo," beginning on page 33.

—The Editors

Excerpts From the Sligo Church Business Meeting, Aug. 1, 1995

Carol Hooker: I'm concerned about the legal implications of what we do, and I'd like to hear from—I know there's at least one person from the legal department of the General Conference that could speak to that.

Bob Visser: I assume she has in mind Mitch Tyner.

Mitch Tyner: When you say *legal*, I presume you're talking about the jurisdiction of a civil court. No civil court in the United States in its right mind is going to take jurisdiction over the employment, the ordination, the credentialing of a minister of the gospel. That act itself, by a court, would be excessive

entanglement, which would be a violation of the Establishment Clause. No court, quite literally, is going to take jurisdiction in that question.

Mary Lopez: Thank you. Before I cast my vote, I would like to know, after this, will Sligo be an independent church or will it be in conflict with the General Conference? Because when I accepted this Seventh-day Adventist message, I accepted it under the impression that the General Conference is the head of the church, so what will happen then?

Charles Scriven: I would just like to say that I think that's a fine question—it's an excellent question. There would be a kind of response to this action in Utrecht that would go like this: Let's just abandon the world church and become a congregational church. Let's start withholding our tithes. Why should we pay tithes to a community like this?

The proposal before you is an effort to counter both of those points of view. It is based on a deep conviction that we must save the world church. It is based on a deep conviction—you saw it, you can

see it right before you—that we must save the tithe base. The premise is, the only way to save the world church and to prevent the tithe from dissipating, is to stand for conscience and to allow liberty of conscience inside the remnant church in an effort to save the remnant church.

Dave Lamoreaux: I feel much elation on hearing and seeing this report from the committee. I was concerned what might come out, what might be recommended, and I'm absolutely delighted and certainly in favor, totally. One of the things that I wanted to talk about was the absolute necessity of grassroots initiative on the matter of justice for women. Grassroots efforts have a long and honorable tradition inside and outside of the church in bringing good things to pass. . . . When I was in Utrecht and heard the news [I] was disappointed. My own opinion was that this is where it will probably come to pass, one place at a time. . . . It will be a grassroots kind of thing. So when I heard those words in this report, I was pleased. I urge us to support this.

Frank Hooker: The report mentions the granting of credentials for ordained ministry. Will this credential have any value outside of the Potomac Conference? . . . My guess is it cannot have any relevance outside the conference. Am I correct? And if it has no value outside the conference, why involve the conference at all?

Rudy Torres: Sligo cannot ordain. Sligo doesn't have that kind of authority. Only the conference can ordain, and the normal procedure would be for the conference to make a request from the union, so it would have to be voted by the union and by the conference. And if those two decided to do it, then obviously that credential would be accepted within those jurisdictions.

Frank Hooker: Why are we put-

ting them [the Columbia Union] in a position to support us when the world body has already said No? It creates undue tension among the higher organizations, who are pretty much sworn to abide by the Utrecht decision. If we want to [follow] our own course, then let Sligo do something on its own, and not involve Potomac, or Columbia Union whatsoever.

Les Pitton: I'd like to respond to that. I think what he's saying is, if the Potomac Conference and the union do approve what Sligo decides to do, is there any validity of that credential outside this union? Absolutely, because the credential

La Sierra University Church Urges Women's Ordination

July 7, 1995

Whereas we, the La Sierra University Church, affirm our commitment to and affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist world church, and

Whereas we appreciate the effort made by this conference and its various committees, including the Gender Inclusiveness Task Force, on the question of Women's Ordination,

The La Sierra University Church prayerfully requests, urges, and expects the South-eastern California Conference and the Pacific Union Conference to honor the trust and voted actions of the Southeastern California Conference constituents by authorizing formal pastoral ordination for women to the gospel ministry by November 1, 1995.

is given for a three-year period. If they were to transfer to another church within that three-year period, that credential is still good; that ordination is still intact, unless someone annuls that ordination. I was ordained in the Florida Conference; when I went to Potomac Conference, that didn't mean that my ordination was annulled. Someone would have to make a specific action to annul that ordination.

Ed Burnett: There seems to be quite a misunderstanding in some people. There's nothing forbidding the ordination of women in the Adventist Church that I know of. The specific steps which were suggested were not approved, but no one has ever said that you cannot ordain women, not the General Conference at any time in its history. So if we approve this we're in no way . . . in rebellion . . . against any action of the General Conference.

Roy Branson: There are two parts to ordination: one is the laying on of hands in a worship service, and in the way that is endorsed by Scripture, and this is similar to a marriage ceremony or baptism. Then in addition, just like in those other ordinances, there is a license or certificate that is granted.

The first part—the ordination of people who have shown they have the gifts of the Spirit—can be performed by a community that wants to recognize those people, and wishes to recognize those people, in a worship service. The piece of paper that comes afterward, in our denomination, has usually gone through a process of a conference deciding who this is going to be, going up to the union, the union agrees, the conference gives the piece of paper.

Now, the question of who gets the piece of paper and who gives it is clear. It's the conference or the union. It is also clear that there is this worship service activity, which

is an acknowledgment of the community of people who have shown that they have the gifts of the Spirit. This proposal that you have here suggests that this congregation can perform that service in showing that we believe that these people are full, gospel ministers.

Les Pitton: I just wanted to speak on behalf of the chaplains of some of our hospitals. I think the hospitals and the healthcare system in the Adventist Church has long supported women in ministry, and I

think that, just like a college institution would support their chaplain or their lady from their institution, the Adventist Health System would also be recommending somebody to Sligo church for [ordination].

Shana Visser: We're getting into the logistics of everything here, and I understand that that's very important, but I would just like to say, . . . as a member of the younger generation . . . that it's very important to me that we're . . . doing this.

I mean, whether this passes or [not], it's very difficult—I know many people who are my age who feel this way—that it would be extremely difficult for us to stay in a church that patently supports discrimination against women, and this is important to me that we're doing it, no matter what happens.

. . .

James Greene: The concern I have is that the document does not address the issue that was raised by someone over here, what happens

Action of Sligo Church in Business Session, August 1, 1995

WHEREAS: The Holy Bible, interpreted through Jesus Christ, the “exact imprint of God’s very being” (Hebrews 1:3), affirms the equality of all God’s children (Luke 10:38-42; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:9-11); and

WHEREAS: The 13th of the 27 “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” declares believers of every race and nation—“high and low, rich and poor, male and female”—to be “equal in Christ,” and summons them all “to serve and be served without partiality or reservation”; and

WHEREAS: Ellen White believed that God prepares both women and men to be “pastors to the flock” (*Review*, January 15, 1901), and said that women who minister should themselves be “set apart” by “prayer and laying on of hands” (*Review*, July 9, 1895); and

WHEREAS: Creative and energetic Adventists in the culture Sligo serves, particularly second- and third-generation Adventists and particularly the young, hold to the above convictions *as a matter of conscience*; and

WHEREAS: These highly able Adventists, with their potential for congregational and institutional leadership, regard timidity and indecisiveness concerning the ordination of women as a betrayal of these convictions; and

WHEREAS: The fallout of anger and disappointment is leaching morale and commitment out of Adventism, particularly in the original strongholds; and

WHEREAS: The depletion of the leadership pool in these strongholds is putting the tithes and offerings at risk, further weakening the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS: Decline in the original strongholds imperils both the idea of a world church and the infrastructure and missionary zeal that sustain it; and

WHEREAS: The recent action in Utrecht reveals the absolute necessity of a grassroots initiative on the matter of justice for women; and

WHEREAS: The window of opportunity may slam shut at any moment as disappointment careens toward indifference among many Adventists;

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED: That out of passion for the Gospel, obedience to conscience, faithfulness to mission, and commitment to the building up of the church’s spiritual and financial resources, the Sligo congregation

1.) plan, for September 23, 1995, a festival service in which eligible women working in pastoral ministry at Sligo, and related institutions, undergo the laying on of hands as a public affirmation of their call to pastoral ministry; and

2.) ask the Potomac Conference and Columbia Union Conference committees to offer their blessing and participation—including the granting of credentials for ordained ministry—in connection with this joyful and historic occasion.

if—this document makes no commitment on the part of Sligo church that we are and want to continue to remain a part of the sisterhood of the churches in the Potomac Conference. I would be opposed to any action that would take Sligo church outside and make it a congregational independent of the Potomac Conference, and I wish this document had language that specifically stated that we are pledged and continue to remain a part of the sisterhood of churches and continue to support the Seventh-day Adventist Church through our tithe and offerings. And it's silent on this point. It alludes to the fact that we're fearful that we're going to lose tithes and offerings because we don't take this decision which, personally, I believe morally the church needs to be doing, but I wish the document had that commitment that we're stating very clearly, not only to the Potomac Conference but to the world field, we're not trying to take Sligo church out of the sisterhood of churches, and we support the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and we also support this church with our tithes and offerings.

Les Pitton: The second item is asking for the conference and the union approval, so why even make the statement?

Charles Scriven: . . . I want to try something out, and I wonder if both Les and Jim might agree with this. Suppose that, right after "Be it hereby resolved"—are you with me?"—that out of passion for the gospel, obedience to conscience, faithfulness to mission, and commitment to the sisterhood of Seventh-day Adventist churches, and to the building up of its spiritual and financial resources." I'm asking Jim whether that would sort of do it without having a major rewrite—"Commitment to the sisterhood of Seventh-day Adventists churches and the building up of its spiritual and financial resources."

Beverly Habada: I really think that . . . we're breaking new ground, and I don't think there are any rules of the road on this, I really don't. And if the conference says No, . . . you think strategically: What do you do next? From my position as city manager of the City of Takoma Park, I'm constantly, in the morning, at night, at noon, thinking of ways to position my city to protect it, and I think in this instance, the same applies to this decision. We're not making a decision that's in the norm; it's unusual, and therefore we have to be prepared to take the next step, whatever that is, if it comes. If I was thinking strategically about this, from my position, I would say that we can go ahead and on September 23rd make a symbolic gesture, regardless of what anybody else does, Potomac Conference or Columbia Union. It sounds to me, though, from what Chuck Scriven said, that we have a good chance of getting the support of the Columbia Union. So why not proceed? On the other hand, if we wanted to go beyond the symbolism of what Sligo is going to do, and make a difference for women throughout the country, in other parts of the United States and Canada, I would say that probably a plebiscite of all Sligo members would have a stronger . . . base to say, "2,000 people supported this measure."

However, let me tell you how I am going to vote tonight, if we proceed with this. And nobody has said much about how they're going to vote. I'm going to vote for it, regardless of the strategic element of what happens next and what do we do next. I think we think that through as we proceed, and take it from there. I don't think there are any rules of the road on this; there's no parliamentary procedure written on this, and we're going to have to proceed and hope that we have the support of our sisters—

sister congregations and our—the conferences, both the Columbia Union and the Potomac Conference, and quite frankly I think that we need to be thinking strategically beyond what happens here tonight.

Nancy Lamoreaux: Thank you, Beverly, for your comments. I am an employee of the Columbia Union and have worked there for 10 years. I am a director of a department; I direct the computer department—a little unusual for this church. I have consistently been affirmed, backed, and assured of a job in that office. I was hired for my ability as a woman, and for what I could do. Sex played no role in my job at the Columbia Union.

I am very proud of the Columbia Union and of where I work. I am very proud of the way that they affirm women in our office. I believe in my heart that the Columbia Union will stand behind this decision at Sligo church because they have stood behind me for 10 years and helped me to achieve [my] goals and have looked at my ability regardless of my gender.

Karen Simons: I want to validate what the young woman said in the front row here. I don't know what generation I am—somewhere between X and the yuppies—but my family is deeply rooted in the Adventist Church. My great grandfather converted my grandmother, my mother was born and raised an Adventist, and I have been raised in the Adventist Church as well. My grandmother is 88 years old and is disappointed that women do not have a fair opportunity in this church, and actually, if she lived here or were a member here, she would be here tonight, supporting it. She probably wouldn't speak, because she's shy, but she'd be supporting it. And I look at the church and at my future: Were I to have children, would I want to raise my children in an organiza-

tion that openly discriminates against people based on their gender? To be quite frank with you, I would not. While I've been raised an Adventist, and I do think it is the right religion—whatever that means—based on what I've read, I could not, in all good conscience, raise my children in a place where they would be discriminated against based on their gender.

Roy Branson: The parallels between race and this question are dramatic, it seems. The question of equal treatment of people of different races is the same principle as equal treatment of people of different genders. I had a chance to talk to an E. O. Jones who, when I was at Selma, was a pastor of a black church and also a teacher . . . in that area. He led, literally, the first march of teachers in the State of Alabama in a civil rights march, and he did it with two crutches.

I called him when I got back from Utrecht, and I asked him, "What do you think of what Sligo is thinking of doing?" This is what he said I could say. He said, "I don't see how women can be ordained as elders and not ordained as pastors. They shouldn't be treated as half a person, but as full persons. I don't see why we shouldn't go forward. Some group must be a Martin Luther King on this issue; the time is now to get rid of this issue and get on to finishing the Lord's work."

Now I hope that when we vote this, we realize that this is not just a question of policy; it's a question of basic, fundamental principles. And unity that really lasts and that we can be proud of has to be based on fundamental principles—moral principles such as justice.

This is suggesting that, rather than going through the cycle—please, asking, waiting, and then being told No, which has been going on for about 20 years in this church—Sligo church is saying, "We're not going to get away from

the request, but we're going to do the one thing that we can do." That will make a statement, and we can, as was said before, invite other churches to join us.

We have to set a date if they are going to take us seriously. So, yes, this says that if the Potomac Conference or the union does not go forward, Sligo church, if there are women who are ready to go forward, willing to go forward, qualified to go forward, *we will go forward*—and also ask.

Patricia Nash: I didn't think this would affect me this way, but I feel very emotional tonight. I'm nervous; I'm excited. I think there's a great sense of feeling like we're finally taking a step forward, so I hope that we do that. As most of you know, my background [is in public relations]. I think we'd make the greatest impact and send the greatest message to people if we knew the Potomac Conference would go for this, that the Columbia Union Conference, that even the women who we're talking about would be willing for this to happen, but I think none of those questions are important. I think it's time to vote what we know is just and right, and I don't think there's a wrong time for that to start.

Bronwyn McQuistan: I speak to you tonight from three different aspects of my life. Number one, as a woman who has spent eight

years in ministry in hospital chaplaincy; two, as a woman who was an observer for the past three years of other women in ministry and the dilemma they face due to a power and authority struggle amongst many of our Adventist Church leaders; and number three, I speak tonight as a staff person at the GC Session in Utrecht, where I sat through the three-and-a-half hour discussion.

Where do I find myself after all that? I find myself as part of a church which thrusts me into a religious dichotomy: (a) I learn from my Bible that I am a child of God, a precious jewel, beautiful, a delight, a joy, and that I should celebrate and rejoice in this . . . in God's creation of me as a woman; (b) I learn, from my church, that if I don't have male genitalia, my calling by God to the gospel ministry is not good enough to be affirmed in the same way as the men of my church.

For me, the ordination of women is not just a status symbol, but a recognition of the gift and calling God has given me. Not to ordain women is to betray our church's heritage.

What I saw in Utrecht was a live portrayal of female abuse. One division leader literally pulled his wife out of her seat, to the microphone, and he spoke for her. And as I watched the tears glisten in her eyes on the screen that was right in

Sligo congregation and visitors respond to Senior Pastor Rudy Torres' homily



front of me, I saw the pain, and I wanted to say to him, "If you treat her like this at a General Conference Session, how do you treat her at home?" Actions speak louder than words.

The document presented tonight has helped restore my faith in a world church which, until now, has trivialized ordination and made it a symbol of maleness.

Ralph Thompson: [Unintelligible] by the way, that person was *not* a commissioned leader; he was a layperson from South America.

...

[End of Cassette No. 1]

... to do this; and the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union Conference were to endorse it, then they will have to be answerable, of course, to the North American Division and the General Conference. But if they don't, Sligo church is saying to whole world body of churches, "We are on our own. We are going to defy every single church manual and working policy of the General Conference that binds the entire world church together." Because this issue you're dealing with is a world issue, laid down in our policies.

I'd like to say I'm a loyal member of Sligo; I'm preaching—speaking as a Sligo member, and I rarely—while I may hold sympathies, and my hope in God for women's ordination—I think this action is premature. I think it is *not* really well thought out as to its ramifications and, down the road, it will be splitting the church that could be held, yes, in rebellion, and then some of us have to make decisions whether or not we belong to a rebellious church—where our membership will go. This thing has further implications than many of us think here, right now, sitting here tonight. So I personally, Brother Chairman, will have to vote against it. I'm in favor of women's ordination, I want you to know. But this

procedure, of Sligo by itself—ordination is not a local church thing. It doesn't belong to us. I will have to vote against it on that basis, and I know that this question is going to be something that is going to become quite a challenge, quite a problem, first of all for the conferences and the unions and the North American Division, and of course the General Conference is back there, but first of all its going to be a real division challenge, and I just want to make that statement tonight.

Jonathan Scriven: As a member of the aforementioned Generation X, I know that we oftentimes get a bad rap in the press, et cetera. But whether or not you like our generation, we are the future of this church, and as much as I appreciate the comments from today's leadership, I would like to now just make a comment . . . as someone who could be in the future of the church.

Our generation doesn't understand this concept, because to us equality is something that we just have grown up with—it's something that just comes naturally to us, and while I agree with what Shana said earlier, I appreciate how we are now discussing this, I would just like to add that discussing it is not enough. The generation that I belong to does not have a very strong foundation in this church, and if we want to have a bright future, not only is it important to discuss this, but it is vital that we pass this resolution, if we want this strong future.

Ben Miller: I'd just like to say I'm only 14 but it really saddens me to think that this even has to be an issue. I agree a lot with [Jonathan Scriven] about how our generation has grown up with equality . . . as something in our homes every day. I don't think that whether this ordination of women passes or not

will conclude whether I'll leave the church; I mean, I'm going to stay. But I think that one of the main objectives that we stand for in this church is equality, and that we live for the love of Jesus Christ, and do you think even though Jesus Christ washed the feet of his disciples, do you think he would, you know, stop and not wash the feet of a woman disciple? I mean, which would Jesus choose . . . ? And it's really important to me and I just want you to know that it makes it a whole lot easier to think about revolving my life and my career around the Adventist Church knowing that this is something that is being brought up. So thank you.

Marianne Scriven: You know I'm the choir director here at Sligo, so I bring my handy hymnal wherever I go. But seriously, there's a hymn in here that came to me during dinner tonight and I want to share it with you because it speaks so relevantly to this issue. It's number 606 in your books. I'm sure you all know which one it is. Let me just read part of it:

"Once to every man and nation/
[Once to every congregation]/
Comes the moment to decide,/In
the strife of truth with falsehood,/For
the good or evil side;

"Some great cause, God's new
Messiah,/Offering each the bloom
or blight,/And the choice goes by
forever/Twixt that darkness and
that light.

"By the light of burning martyrs,/Christ,
Thy bleeding feet we track,/Toiling
up new Calvarys ever/With the cross
that turns not back.

"New occasions teach new duties,
/Time makes ancient good uncouth;/
They must upward still and onward,
/Who would keep abreast of truth."

So, I feel like the decision we're about to make here tonight does not have to do with policy, it does not have to do with politics, it doesn't have to do with prece-

dent—none of those “P” words. It has to do simply with principle. So I hope you’ll join with me in voting for the *principle* of justice.

Bert Haloviak: I’d like to speak in favor of the resolution. I would hesitate on the issue were it not for the Ellen White counsel. It was Ellen White that resolved this issue about 100 years ago. Two of her statements are found in the proposed resolution. She also said this: “This issue is not for men to decide; the Lord has decided it. You are to do your duty to the women who labor in the gospel.”

Actually, we have a very strong heritage of local action taken to resolve significant issues. In 1855, the Battle Creek local church—*local church*—held Bible studies and concluded that the Sabbath began at sundown, not at 6:00 p.m. as it had been kept for the previous nine years. It’s not a light issue that was settled by that Battle Creek church. I have a list of a number of others, similar to that, [but] I’m going to pass them by to get it in two minutes.

In the 1870s, the New York State Conference took it upon itself to license a woman as a minister. Other states soon followed. We’ve already mentioned the 1881 GC Session where three individuals were wrestling with this question. And then in the 1890s, in the Australasian Union—not a GC Session; the Australasian Union—they decided to ordain women as deaconesses. This was in the aftermath of the Ellen White counsel that’s quoted in our resolution.

Ellen White’s own son ordained several women as deaconesses. The ordination issue is settled. Ellen White has hundreds of statements approving women as ministers. What logic would say that a woman can be ordained as a deaconess, as an elder, but not as a pastor?

In our own day, a Spring Meeting, in 1975, in violation of the

Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, voted to allow for the ordination of women as local elders. That policy was not in harmony with the church manual until the manual was modified in 1990.

I have a nice statement from a Miss Opal Stone. It is very interesting. Poor Miss Stone died before she got to see what she was hoping for. She wrote this to the—to the commission that was studying this question in the 1970s. She wrote this to Gordon Hyde. She said, “The idea is abroad that the Biblical Research Committee believes that little feeling of inequity existed among women until quite recently—that it was possibly sparked by women’s lib. If that is correct, the committee has been misinformed.

“In earlier years, women held departmental secretary positions at local conferences; they spoke at the worship hour week after week as they visited churches. True, their reception varied. In four years as a local conference Sabbath school secretary, I learned to expect anything, but for the most part I was accepted.

“I recall one church elder who declined to sit on the same platform, but at the close of the service somewhat gruffly said, ‘Too bad you aren’t a man. But come again, anyway.’

“The sad part of the inequities is that many well-qualified women

have left denominational employ because of it. And some of them kept going all of the way out of the church. Their loss? Yes. But a loss to the church, too.

“God used a woman to guide this denomination, yet women have had a hard time in the church. It seems peculiar.

“I’ve been retired for some years. I have no bitterness; I was as fairly treated as the rest of the women. But I would like to see the present generation of women workers have a better chance. Please don’t believe that women were asleep all the past years, and have suddenly awakened.”

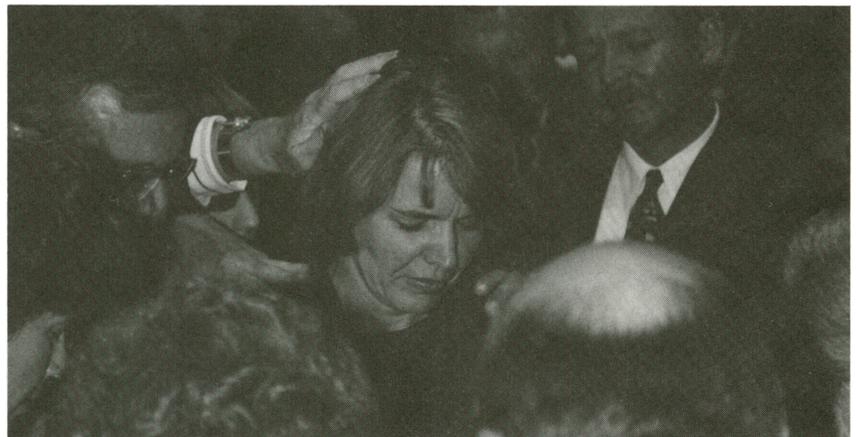
Opal died in 1973, at the age of 79, before her hopes were realized. Thank you.

E. G. Moses: This is my Adventist background, or upbringing. I raise my hand; I wait.

You know, one of the major reasons . . . I am an Adventist, not a Catholic, is because Adventist [members] *can* follow the conviction of their conscience. And tonight, I am glad to hear a church—a vast number of you— . . . speaking with conviction on principles of justice and equality.

Whichever way the vote goes, I intend to remain an Adventist; I intend to pay tithe to this church. But I am glad, finally, that we are beginning to recognize a vote that was really taken at the General

Ordination to gospel ministry of Norma Osborn, associate pastor, Sligo SDA Church



Conference more than 100 years ago. . . . What Sligo church is doing is being faithful to our legacy of our forefathers, and I strongly support this recommendation.

Bryan Zervos: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm reading from Psalm 133, for those of you that have your Bibles with you: "How good and how pleasant it is to live together as brothers in unity. It is like fragrant oil poured on the head and falling over the beard; Aaron's beard, when the oil runs down over the collar of his vestments. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on the mountains of Zion. There the Lord bestows his blessing: life forevermore."

Not a soul in this room denies that unity is a biblical principle. Indeed, unity is an ideal that should be taught and even nurtured. But like everything else that is human, unless unity is undergirded by justice, unless unity is holding the hand of fairness, and unless unity, my dear brothers and sisters, is redeemed, it only becomes an ecclesiastical club by which we bludgeon the members of the body of Christ.

The gospels repudiate this kind of unity. Let's vote Yes this evening in support of this resolution.

Dorita Boulden: I don't want my membership in the church to be discussed tonight. That's not the issue here; the issue is, How can I stand in God's way and prohibit his ordination of whoever he chooses and refuse to recognize, in front of my peers, in front of people I work with, the people that I witness to, the people I'm in church with—do I want to stand before my Father when he comes the second time and say, "The church told me that I couldn't recognize this woman's gift; the church told me that I couldn't do this. An organizational structure stood between me and what I believed. You showed me that this individual, regardless of the color of their skin, regardless of their reproductive organs, regard-

less of any other reason, you ordained them; you've given them gifts; I recognize them."

That is the *only* issue we are discussing here—the only administrative issue that stands between a woman pastor and whether or not she gets a card, is her eligibility for certain jobs at the General Conference, certain jobs at the union level, and certain jobs at the conference level. I am not willing to stand

before my Maker and deny what he puts before me.

Bob Visser: Now, we're going to vote by secret ballot.

. . . .

I've been given the results of the vote, and I've been assured that the vote was counted three times by different people to assure accuracy. The vote count is, in favor, 138, and opposed, 21. So, the motion did carry.

McClure Suggests Women Be Commissioned, Not Ordained

August 3, 1995

Church Pastors and Administrators
North American Division

Dear Colleague in Ministry:

Subject: Gender-inclusive Ordination

On July 5 the world church voted on the North American Division proposal that each division be permitted to decide, within its own territory, whether ordination to the gospel ministry could be gender-inclusive. Although I was praying for a positive outcome, as you know, the motion was defeated.

The question I wish to address today is, What now? What should be our reaction to this vote of the world church in session? Please let me set before you some important observations.

1. From the beginning of the discussion, I have said that North America is a loyal part of the world church and that, whatever the outcome of the vote, I would do everything in my power to see that this issue did not compromise that position. I want to invite you to help me honor that commitment because you, too, are part of this

world-wide family.

As a spiritual leader in God's church, I want to urge you to do everything in your power to keep us walking together. There may be those who would challenge the session vote, as individuals or as a group, and attempt to move ahead of the world church without its approval. My appeal today is that we exercise all of the Spirit-led persuasiveness at our command so that this does not happen. We are a *world* movement and we must remain so. If not, we will fragment into simply a cluster of national churches or a consortium of loosely knit independent conferences or congregations.

2. We need to keep the issue of biblical ordination in perspective and not make of it more than Scripture does. In his very helpful book (*Myth and Truth*, 1990, LLU Press) V. N. Olsen, former president of Loma Linda University, reminds us that in the Roman Catholic Church those who are ordained "are endowed with supernatural power to administrate the sacraments, which in turn by the very act . . . confers supernatural grace to the recipient . . ." (p. 121). This is not and has never been the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Historically we have

believed that ordination was a denominational recognition of the call to ministry and did not confer any kind of spiritual endowment or quality (to use the term used by Ellen White).

Olsen continues, "For most people ordination by the laying on of hands is taken for granted, and it is therefore a surprise to find that the rite is not so clearly and directly defined in the New Testament as expected. . . . The word 'ordain' does not appear in the Greek New Testament at all for the ministry, and in most recent translations the word 'appoint' is most commonly used" (p. 148).

The King James Version of the Bible translates more than 20 Greek and Hebrew words as "ordain," each of which has its own nuance of meaning. My burden here is that we not elevate ordination to a mystical and non-biblical level.

3. We have agreed throughout our history that ordination to the gospel ministry is part of a process by which the world church acknowledges those who have sensed the calling of God. This process was decided on by the church as a whole. A pastor who has achieved a certain level of training, experience, and effectiveness is examined by local conference administration. That name is then brought to the conference executive committee for recommendation on to the union conference executive committee, where authorization for ordination occurs. Only when these steps are taken does the ordination proceed, and only then is the pastor given the appropriate credentials. As this process is followed, then it can be said that the individual has been ordained to the gospel ministry.

On the other hand, a commissioning or dedicatory service, even with the laying on of hands, is biblical and affirming of the call to ministry (see Acts 13:2-4 and *Re-*

view and Herald, July 9, 1895), yet does not violate the spirit or the letter of the vote of the General Conference session.

If you saw the video report which I sent to all of the churches directly from Utrecht, you know that we are initiating dialog about ways to affirm the women in our division whom God has called to ministry. You will hear more about some specific initiatives after the North American year-end meeting in Battle Creek in a few weeks. Meanwhile, I am asking that you be a bridge builder, that you marshal all

of the gifts in your church and focus them on mission, and that you join me in praying that God will help us through this very delicate time. As painful as this issue is to many, we must not allow it to splinter our unity or divert our mission.

Thank you for your faithfulness and your focus.

Very sincerely,

A. C. McClure
President
North American Division

Scriven to Potomac: Prove SDA Passion for What Is Right

August 9, 1995

Elder Herbert H. Broeckel, President
Potomac Conference of SDA

Dear Elder Broeckel:

I am a member of Sligo church and a member, as you know, of the Potomac Conference Committee. I have very strong feelings about the need to prove to energetic Adventists, particularly those of the second and third generation, that our church is fully open to the creative guidance of the Holy Spirit and truly passionate about what is right and true.

I look forward to meeting with you and our other colleagues in late August. Meanwhile, I am thinking long and hard about the proposition from Sligo church that we will be asked to consider. Potentially, there are four candidates for the ordination the congregation is asking us to authorize. They are each friends of mine and each is gifted. Esther Knott and Norma Osborn, pastors at Sligo; Penny Shell, a chaplain at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital; and Kendra Haloviak, a CUC religion teacher,

are in my mind and on my heart. Understandably, they each have mixed feelings about everything that is going on. But what they all would love is a public affirmation of their ministry that includes the endorsement of the Potomac and Columbia Union conferences.

Because I want to be a support to them, I am sharing with you a document entitled "The Sligo Action: Talking Points." I've written it just for our committee, although at a later date, perhaps after revisions you may suggest, I will share it more widely.

Let us pray for one another as we approach our meeting at Blue Ridge.

Sincerely,

Chuck Scriven, President
Columbia Union College

Talking Points

Doesn't the Bible itself give women second place to men?

Yes, it does—in places. The Bible is an inspired story, but a story of a people moving forward (and sometimes backward) in the knowledge

of their saving God. This fact means you can quote Scripture to back up slavery, say, or the stoning of rebellious young men. The key to the complex challenge of interpretation is Jesus. Jesus is the one and only "exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:1-3). And Jesus' mission, against the spirit of his age, was to obliterate in-group/out-group distinctions. He welcomed women as the full equals of men (Luke 10:38-42).

Wasn't the biblical priesthood limited to men?

That was the case, on the whole, before Christ. But the journey of the people of God led up to Christ, and after Christ the whole community of believers become priests. That is why Luther, alluding to 1 Peter 2, was so vigorous in affirming "the priesthood of all believers."

Isn't the General Conference God's "highest authority" on earth?

Both the writings of Ellen White and the actions of the General Conference itself declare this to be so. As for Ellen White, however, she, in 1901, clarified her views by saying the General Conference is the voice of God only when its policies agree with Christian principle. It "ought to be" the voice of God, but asserting this when "wrong principles are cherished" is "almost blasphemy" (Ms. 37, 1901, April 1, 1901).

Didn't Ellen White oppose the ordination of women?

She believed that God prepares both women and men to be "pastors to the flock" (*Review and Herald*, January 15, 1901), and said that women who minister should themselves be "set apart" by "prayer and laying on of hands" (*Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895).

Won't ordination cause still further division in the church?

Division is certain and irreparable as long as official policy upholds discrimination against half

the human race. Healing of that division is painful, like surgery or strong medicine. But the only hope for healing is that the healing process should begin. The equal and enthusiastic affirmation of women pastors is essential to that beginning.

Wouldn't it be best to wait?

There is no reason to wait and every reason to make haste. Utrecht shattered the hope that church governance at the highest level would affirm Christ's vision of equality. The danger now is, first, that the energy for justice already seeping out of the church will soon stream away in a torrent, and, second, that indifference to the Adventist community itself will mount with every day that passes. More and more people, especially in the second and third generation, and especially among the young, do not care to be part of an organization claiming to be the Remnant yet holding on to a policy of discrimination against women. What the vote in Utrecht revealed is the absolute necessity of grassroots initiative on behalf of women. In the long run this initiative, like yeast in dough, will transform the entire church.

Shouldn't we at least wait until the North American Division year-end meetings in October?

According to policy and tradition, the division has no role whatever in ordaining any pastor, chaplain, or teacher of religion. If the division were to grant "permission" to other bodies to ordain women, that permission would be as dubious, relative to General Conference action, as initiative taken at the grassroots level. But what is more to the point, NAD initiative (NAD "permission") is unlikely. The voted action will hang heavy on division shoulders, in part because the division simply *is* the General Conference in North America. Further, delegates to the

year-end meetings, coming from different places with different histories concerning the ministry of women, will likely disagree about solutions.

If neither the Potomac Conference nor the Columbia Union decide to grant a credential for ordained ministry, won't these ordinations be "meaningless"?

To imply that these two church entities will shrink from courageous action is rash. Both executive committees show great interest in equality for women. Both deplore timidity and indecisiveness on matters of Christian principle. What is more, both the Potomac and Columbia Union conferences have leaders who are sensitive to moral initiative and have no interest in climbing the organizational ladder.

Yes, but won't ordination of the proposed women candidates be "meaningless"?

Handwringing de-energizes. If Christ is risen, credentials will come. That being so, our business is to move beyond pessimism by intensifying our advocacy for women and beginning immediately to support and assist members and leaders of the two Executive Committees on their journey to moral courage and right action.

Again, address the question: Won't the ordinations be meaningless without the credential?

Even if this were more than a stalling tactic, it is not persuasive. Would a baptism be "meaningless" if, for political or other reasons, the participants could not receive certificates? The Reformation pioneers who revived biblical practice by undergoing adult baptism got no piece of paper. Nor did the Ethiopian baptized by Philip, yet he "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). The situation for women is as dramatic and revolutionary as the situation for biblical and Reformation Christians. To stifle joy by

telling women, "The service will be nothing without the card," is unbiblical and unadmirable.

Yes, but . . . ?

It's true that despite every effort of persuasion, the Potomac and Columbia Union executive committees could refuse this moment of destiny. But the service at Sligo would still be the *most important and most jubilant ordination in the history of Adventism*. Remember that before American blacks moved up to the country club, they moved up to the front of the bus. Rosa Parks, the woman who took this giant step for her people, was hugely important for civil rights. Those ordained at Sligo will be hugely important for women in ministry. And although the credential matters, and must be fought for, the service of public affirmation matters most. Waiting for the credential may guarantee, after all, that it will never come.

Suppose opponents of the Sligo proposition say, "Don't do this now because we men will soon eliminate the 'ordained minister' credential and take the same credential as you women"?

First, don't bet on "soon." Twenty-five years of dilly-dallying is a fact. And that fact matters because Adventists with leadership ability are, as you read this, slipping out the back door like rush-hour commuters leaving the subway. Second, this would itself challenge the decision—at least, the spirit of the decision—that was made in Utrecht. Relative to General Conference authority, it has no advantage whatever. Third, since the women candidates at Sligo already have the "commissioned minister" credential, if that credential is good enough after all, the whole argument that Sligo's service won't matter without the card simply collapses.

Shouldn't we at the very least—somehow, for some reason—choose

some later date than September 23?

Again, why? The Annual Council in October will be, given the changes made in Utrecht, more conservative than ever, and opposition to North Americans living by their consciences will increase, not decrease. What is more, both energy for justice and commitment to Adventism will continue to dissipate in North America unless bold action—taken now, not indefinite months or years from now—ignites new hope. And for that to happen, our witness must be timely as well as courageous.

Bert Haloviak Insists that Policy Must Not Replace Morality

August 21, 1995

Dear Potomac Conference Committee Member:

U ntil the recent Sligo business meeting, which I believe was blessed by the Church in heaven, my approach to the ordination of women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been more academic than "evangelistic."

I had done the research on the question both in the 19th-century and 20th-century sources. I had explanations about how lack of ordination of women caused them to lose the leadership positions they had held before the 1920s. I knew how tax questions forced SDA women into a two-track ministerial system in the 1970s. I had studied the issues relating to the Potomac Conference-GC confrontation that led to the Potomac capitulation to GC pressure in the mid-1980s.

Despite the policy manipulations of the 1970s, the evidence from the writings of Ellen White has been so overwhelming that I could hardly consider the issue to be in question. In addition, the evidence from Scripture, when closely analyzed,

The startling moral valor of the American civil rights movement created a new context. Within that context, the president and the U. S. Congress successfully legislated new levels of justice for Americans. The success came about because Martin Luther King and his colleagues, though facing pressure from every side to "wait . . . wait . . . wait," respectfully persisted. Because the time for Adventist action on behalf of women will never be as ripe as it is right now, we must not dawdle. We must proceed.

is even more compelling.

So why am I addressing you now?

Because I as a member of the Sligo Church believe the Sligo action is crucial. In my opinion it offers a biblical solution to this question.

Policy has come to replace morality on this question and this shows how completely nullified Ellen White's ministry has become. Ellen White was fully aware of such a danger.

In 1889 she affirmed, "It has become habit to pass laws that do not always bear the signature of heaven." [Ellen White references will be supplied upon request.]

In 1890, she reflected upon a previous GC session and said, "The enemy took possession of minds and their judgment was worthless, their decisions were evil, for they did not have the mind of Christ."

That same year she also said, "I do not expect to be at your General Conference, I would rather run the other way."

By 1898 she reported that "it has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God."

And in 1901 she observed that

working upon wrong principles nullified the GC as being the voice of God.

I don't believe any administrator who has been in touch with this issue since the 1970s will affirm that it has been handled in harmony with the morality that Ellen White called for.

Given that situation, I firmly believe that the Lord has led us, perhaps against our presuppositions, back to the Scriptures for the local church resolution of the question.

Where in the Scripture does it tell us that the *Church Manual* or *Working Policy* or Conferences or Unions or General Conferences deal with the question of ordination?

In contrast to that position, we can observe many examples where local areas handled such questions in the church of Ellen White's day.

In the 1870s, it was the New York State Conference that took it upon itself to license a woman as a minister. Other states soon followed.

It was in the 1890s within the Australasian Union that SDA women for the first time were ordained to local church offices. That was in the aftermath of the statement of Ellen White that is quoted in the Sligo

resolution.

Ellen White's own son, William C. White, ordained several women in that local area and it was apparently the first time in SDA history that anyone had done so. And this was without the approval of a General Conference session action.

Why is not the ordination issue settled? Ellen White has dozens of statements approving women as ministers. What logic would say that a woman can be ordained as a deaconess and elder but not as a pastor?

Ellen White should not be used to resolve questions of doctrine. But this is not a doctrinal question. Throughout Adventist history, Ellen White has had authority in the areas of practical church policy.

As she said in the 1890s concerning equality of salary for women who labored in the gospel, "This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it."

I hope you, as a member of the conference committee, will support the resolution approved by the Sligo church.

Sincerely,

Bert Haloviak

Kendra Haloviak: Equality for Pastors is Equality for Women

August 22, 1995

Dear Potomac Conference Committee Member,

In the past I have hesitated to speak publicly on the ordination of women issue, believing that concentrating on my own ministry would be my best witness. However, I must share a few thoughts at this important time. I share because the very ministry in which I have participated for six years—ministry especially focused on

young adults who have been or are part of Adventist communities—is in jeopardy.

Prior to the General Conference Session, I wrote a letter to Elder Folkenberg that included the following: "It is challenging enough to minister to young adults (and adults) who have left our church out of apathy. How do we minister to those who leave out of conviction?" I continue to ask that question. Right now our conference has a chance to offer an answer.

On August 1 Sligo church voted

in business session a service that would uphold justice and equality. Such a business session best mirrors the way that the New Testament church operated. I hope that the Potomac Conference sees the wisdom of this approach; that the committee endorse the granting of full ordination credentials to qualified women. Otherwise we are left with a flawed policy for ministerial candidates that has placed women and men on different tracks since the 1970s. Policy must always be secondary to biblical principles.

Young adults are eager to see an end to discrimination and inequality in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The vote at Utrecht was not only a vote against the 34 women pastors in North America who are eligible for ordination, it was a vote against every Adventist woman and girl. Currently our church has a policy that says every woman and girl is unequal to every man and boy. Such a policy must be challenged. Any action that doesn't directly challenge the Utrecht vote is suspect.

Last week I received a note from a young woman currently completing her undergraduate degree from one of our colleges. She is a potential Adventist leader. In many ways, she is already a leader. Committed, energetic, thoughtful, her presence is a gift to our church. After she heard of the Sligo congregation's decision to celebrate the ordination service for qualified women on September 23, she wrote me the following: "I wanted to write again and say how thankful and relieved I am that some Seventh-day Adventist members and leaders have finally found the strength to act upon their convictions. I assume (and hope) you will be flying back home and will be ordained on the 23rd."

Many Adventists have been encouraged by the action voted by

the local church at Sligo. I hope that the Conference Committee affirms the decision; seeing that principles from Scripture are more important than policies.

We who believe that Jesus is coming again can embrace that hope anew. We can make our hope

Doing What is Right is Doing What is Wise

August 24, 1995

Dear Potomac Conference Committee Member:

In 1984 the Potomac Conference found itself in a remarkably similar position to the one it faces today. On May 16, 1984, the conference postponed implementation of its own action granting women ministerial licenses "until after Annual Council, 1984," in order, the conference said, "to give the North American Division appropriate time to study Potomac's concern for women in ministry." Three months later, on August 16, the Potomac Conference "tabled" its action granting women the same ministerial licenses then being given to men.

Eleven years later, to the month, women pastors in the Potomac Conference remain unordained and still do not have the same ministerial licenses granted to men. Eleven years later, some members of the Potomac Executive Committee are members of the present executive committee. Eleven years later, Potomac is still being told to wait until after Annual Council and the North American Division's year-end meetings. Why? To give the brethren *more* time to study what to do about women in ministry.

As a member of the board of Sligo Church, a leader—for some 20 years—of an active Sabbath school class, and a member who

concrete by treating each other equally now.

Prayers are with you on August 27.

Sincerely,

Kendra J. Haloviak

has been blessed by the ministry of women pastors, I plead with you to complete what the Potomac Conference began over a decade ago: Do the right thing by ordaining women now to the gospel ministry and granting them the same licenses given to male pastors.

At this moment in our church's history, both the creation of a North American Division as a genuine community of conviction, and continued support for the world church depend on the Potomac Conference ordaining women now.

Why so? *Because Utrecht has happened.* The recent vote on ordination of women was the most widely publicized action ever taken at a General Conference Session. For more than 20 years, ordination of women has been discussed and debated by North American members. With this background, the members who provide much of the institutional and lay leadership of the North American church, the professionals who give a great deal of the financial support for the denomination, many of the young adults who comprise the next generation of denominational leaders, all watched what the General Conference would do on this issue of fairness. The action at Utrecht devastated all of these groups, including some of the church's most loyal supporters—those who feel keenly the contrast between the community applauding them for treating

women fairly in their offices and denominational leaders preventing them from treating women equally in their church. The vote on ordination of women at this General Conference Session was not simply inconvenient; it was tragic.

Because the basic issues were well known, and the actions of the 1995 General Conference Session publicized as never before, all half-way proposals to avoid ordaining women as ministers of the gospel perpetuates the moral insult inflicted at Utrecht. Maybe a decade ago talk by leaders of the North American Division urging explorations of how to interpret Scripture—instead of actually proceeding to ordain women—could have sounded sincere. Not now; not by a membership that has seen with their own eyes how theologians have managed to argue for two decades over interpretations of scripture relevant to ordination of women. To refuse now to ordain those women who are already qualified, is a little like Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the Civil War, refusing to declare slaves to be citizens, equal to their former masters, and instead recommending that it was time to redefine citizenship.

Similarly, talk of reducing ordination from its present "Roman Catholic" understanding to something else, which can then be given to both men and women, might have been persuasive at some initial stage in the discussion. Not now; not after the leaders of the church plunged the denomination into this divisive debate precisely because ordination was too precious to give to women. *Utrecht has happened.* Those who *now* argue that instead of ordaining women, we must adopt new definitions of ordination cannot help but sound as though they have accepted the premise of Utrecht: Full ordination to the gospel ministry is

too important to give to women.

Finally, assurance at this stage—after 20 years of discussion—that some sort of ordination will come “after the year-end meetings,” or “maybe in three months,” or “after the 1996 year-end meetings,” simply rings hollow. *Utrecht has happened.* For the leadership who were a part of bringing about the vote in Utrecht to now say “trust us,” simply further undermines their credibility. What is more Roman Catholic—the ordination service, or the refusal to treat women in ministry as equal to men? Will the world church be fooled by any clever new redefinitions not being a violation of actions by the General Conference in session? Is a consensus likely to be achieved among men throughout the North American Division to receive a license or credential that doesn't mean as much as their older colleagues received? Are the Potomac Conference and Columbia Union going to be regarded as significantly more in harmony with the world church if they proceed with some redefinition of ordination than if they proceed to grant women the same licenses and ordination services men now receive?

Unity cannot be forced. Unity is often preserved within complex communities (like the United States and the Seventh-day Adventist Church) by permitting diversity.

The General Conference in Session was never asked to vote on whether Europeans could wear rings, on whether Vietnamese could eat shrimp, on whether Germans or Koreans could bear arms, on whether Adventist church school teachers could be paid by African governments. When discussion of ordination of women began more than 20 years ago, some idealistic souls no doubt hoped that the entire world church would treat women equally to men in the gospel ministry. That goal died at the 1990 General Conference in Indianapolis. The hope then shrank to equal treatment within the North American Division. That was crushed at Utrecht. Now, there are those who oppose the Columbia Union, or the Potomac Conference ordaining men and women equally.

Utrecht has happened. Therefore, some say, women pastors should not be treated equally anywhere in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This understanding of unity permits Adventists to kill for conscience, but absolutely prohibits Adventists treating women as equals in ministry. Taking ordination of women to a General Conference Session is the rash and reckless act that has threatened the unity of the church. Unity can only be preserved if those centers that

wish to ordain women as gospel ministers are welcome to do so.

An Adventist Church born with a tradition of fair treatment of blacks and whites, leading to full equality among all races within the gospel ministry, must not turn its back on justice, fairness, and equality among men and women. To do so would be to violate who we are as a church.

And why so desperately avoid doing the right thing? Doing what is right is also doing what is wise and practical. If we act as we know we ought to act, and ordain women to the gospel ministry now, we will be astonished at the energy that will be released. At the church business meeting at Sligo, one young person after another said that the resolution revived their faith in the church. A prominent lay person who had just two weeks earlier argued for withholding tithes as a form of protest, made a speech emphasizing that Sligo acting to ordain women meant that he would happily increase his financial support of the Adventist Church. Performing an ordination service at Sligo is the moderate, positive alternative to the radical action of withholding tithes.

After Sligo adopted its resolution, I heard expressions of despair turn to joy. One professor at an Adventist college exclaimed, “I'll be there!” Another said he had already told his son, headed for Yale Law School, about Sligo. “I told him not to give up on the church just yet, there was still hope.” A young Adventist lawyer in Boston, who had refused lay leadership roles because he despaired of being able to convince “my generation” to become enthusiastic about the Adventist Church, said, “I'm flying down the 23rd.”

Unfortunately, *Utrecht has happened.* More than ever, if we are to have a vibrant Adventist Church in North America, it is imperative that

Ordination to gospel ministry of Kendra Haloviak, assistant professor of religion, Columbia Union College



the Potomac Conference lead by doing the right thing. I plead with you to ordain women now to the gospel ministry and grant them the same license that you give to male pastors. Only through such acts of conviction can North American Adventism continue to attract the morally sensitive; only through such

acts of conviction can Adventism radiate what it truly means to be a community of conscience.

Cordially yours,

Roy Branson
Senior Research Fellow
Kennedy Institute of Ethics

Southeastern Women Pastors: Use the Word *Ordination*

August 24, 1995

To the SECC Conference Administration & the Women Pastors in Potomac Conference:

Many have spoken on behalf of women pastors regarding ordination, but with the numerous proposals for ordination currently on the table we feel a need to express ourselves.

After meeting today, although differing in detail, we have reached a consensus on the following points at this time:

1. Each of us feels a commitment to continue in ministry regardless of official ordination. However, ordination supports and acknowledges in a tangible way our ministry to our congregations. In following God's call to ministry, we would hope to have the church's spiritual support of God's gift.

2. Our commitment to ministry mandates our advocating equality—for the sake of our ministry, for the hope of the young people in our churches and to be true to the gospel that Christ modeled.

3. With regard to ordination itself, we feel that the following are important:

a. Something needs to happen very soon. Time is of the essence. Continued postponement is detrimental to us and to the future of our church. The church needs to move

forward to other things, and a spark of hope is needed now. The window of opportunity mandates immediate action.

b. The word *ordained* needs to be included in whatever service occurs and credentials issued. Our local congregations and other denominations understand ordination as the official sanction to function in ministry (see attached, points No. 5 & 6).

c. We are open to many proposals currently being discussed, but feel a need to speak to them and be involved in their implementation.

4. Whatever the outcome, we feel a need for officially organized support and prayer.

5. To help in developing proposals, we have attached the following sheet with which we agree.

We will continue to pray that this issue be resolved in a timely and healing manner. We are continually thankful for a conference and leadership that actively supports our ministry. May God grant us courage to move forward.

Ordination? Or "Other" Credentials?

The idea of changing the name of the credentials we give to ordained persons, as a way to respond to the Utrecht vote, may have merits that have not yet been fully explained.

Problems

But, whatever the merits, such a proposal has serious problems to overcome:

1. It could perpetuate inequality for another 50 years.

That is, unless all NAD men who now possess the "ordination" credential gave it up now, we would have a two-tier system until they died.

2. Inequality could be perpetuated for *longer* than 50 years.

If the new credential were not division-wide, and were issued in a few places such as Potomac and SECC, the inequity (two-tier system) could persist longer. That is, if a particular conference continued to *ordain* ministers and did not adopt the *new* credential for another 20 years (until 2015), the inequity between men and women could persist until all these men died.

3. Men may not be satisfied to receive the new credential.

If only issued in a few places (Potomac and SECC) will men think twice about becoming ministers in those conferences? If some conferences ordain and others don't, the inability for men to get a true ordination credential in some places could become a deterrent in attracting them to ministry there.

4. Men possessing the new credential would have options that females would not have.

If the new credential is not universal from the NAD president down, when males with the new credential transfer to another conference—would not they automatically be "upgraded" to "ordained" status? If men can secure ordination credentials by transferring, *women* ultimately would be the only ones *confined* to receiving the other (second-class) credential.

5. To change the word *ordination* for ministers would affect the

terminology of *ordination* for elders and deacons.

To be consistent, we would need to *commission* deacons and elders. The alternative—to leave the word *ordination* as okay for elders and deacons but NOT ministers—is defenseless.

Today, at least, Seventh-day Adventists DO give women true equality by ordaining them as elders and deacons on the same basis as men. To revoke this policy would be a major loss for women.

6. *Ordination* is the term universally understood by professional groups, the government, and other churches in the U.S. and Canada as referring to clergy authorization.

As a church, we can anticipate on-going confusion and resistance from many quarters if we change this.

Objections

Three objections to creating a new word for *ordination*:

A. The word *ordination* has served Seventh-day Adventists well for 150 years. Since 1851-1853, more than a decade before we became an official denomination, ordination as a way to authorize our ministers has been practiced among us.

B. Prior to women's being considered for ordination no one has been worried whether it was "biblical" or whether it was "Catholic."

To study the theology of ordination and perhaps to adopt a new term may be useful. But Adventists should ordain women *first*.

The two issues should not be confused. (1) Equality of men and women authorized as SDA ministers is one issue. (2) The theology of ordination is a separate issue.

C. Changing terminology seems good to some because it could be argued that the Utrecht vote would not apply to it. This appears to be an appeal to the letter of the law (wording) and not the spirit of the

law (which was a fundamental objection to women's equality).

Changing terminology (a policy response) seems to sidestep the underlying *moral* issue of moving the church toward the equality of

gender. This is an important task, as the apostles learned when moving the early church to accept the equality of Jew and Gentile.

August 7, 1995

Guy Argues Gospel Creates Imperative to Ordain Women

For Seventh-day Adventists, ordaining women in ministry is a moral imperative that arises from the gospel of Christ, the overall teaching of Scripture, and our own Statement of Fundamental Beliefs: "We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation" (paragraph 13). Even with the recent General Conference vote in Utrecht, we must proceed to ordain women in ministry on the same basis we ordain men: their spiritual experience, their knowledge of Scripture, their competence for the tasks of ministry, and the fruitfulness of their ministry.¹ We must publicly affirm and fully authorize their ministry in and for the church. It is the right thing to do, and we must do it without delay. We have waited long enough.

Ordaining women in ministry is required first of all by Jesus' instruction that we treat others as we want to be treated—a principle of mutuality and respect which "is the law and the prophets," belonging to the very essence of God's will for human relationships (Matt. 7:12). Ordaining women is required secondly by the New Testament principle of spiritual equality in Christ; a person's value, role, or function is not defined by gender any more than it is by socioeconomic status or race (Gal. 3:28). And ordaining women is required thirdly by the leading of the Spirit, calling both

women and men to ministry in the church (Acts 2:17, 18).²

On the other hand, refusing to ordain a whole group of persons solely because they are not male, and without regard to their calling, ability, experience, and effectiveness, contradicts the inclusiveness of the gospel and expresses a gender prejudice that is morally wrong. Make maleness a prerequisite for ordination is the same kind of moral issue that slavery was a century and a half ago and that racial discrimination was a generation ago. Would it not be a moral issue if the church were to refuse to ordain ministers who were not Caucasian?

Whatever spin is put on it, whatever rationalizing is done to explain it, whatever narrow reading of Scripture is alleged to support it, restricting ordination to men constitutes a public declaration that women ministers are unworthy of ordination, simply and solely because they are women.³ This is wrong not only in the light of Scripture and of morality, but also in the light of Adventist history, which includes in addition to the extraordinary role of Ellen White in Adventist theology, piety, and mission, the notable contributions that have been made since the 1860s by women evangelists, editors, missionaries, Biblical scholars, teachers, pastors, chaplains, and administrators.⁴ And it is wrong in the light of theology, because it turns ordination into a symbol of maleness.⁵

We are becoming increasingly aware that ordination to ministry as a life-long, world-wide vocation and status is biblically and theologically problematic.⁶ But this observation should not be used as yet another justification for failing to ordain women. The formal ordination of ministers is the historic and universally-recognized practice of Christian churches, and it has been the consistent practice of Seventh-day Adventists since the 1850s (before there were any organized conferences to authorize it). Until Adventist women in ministry were being considered for ordination, there was no objection to ordination as “unbiblical” or “Catholic.” The two issues—the ordination of women in ministry, and the theology and vocabulary of ordination—are related; but they are separate issues, and they should not be confused. We do need to develop our theology of ordination, and we may eventually decide to use different language in a symbolism that better expresses what we mean. But first of all we must ordain the women whose lives and service demonstrate the genuineness of their calling and leading of the Holy Spirit. We must give them the same affirmation, validation, and authorization we have given men in ministry for 140 years. This is the immediate moral imperative for Seventh-day Adventists.

It might seem that by using alternative language such as “dedication,” “consecration,” or “commissioning,” and making corresponding changes in the constitutional documents of various church entities, we could establish the full equality of women and men in ministry without placing ourselves in direct opposition to the General Conference vote in Utrecht. But this strategy has several weaknesses. In the first place, it depends on the same sort of literalism that is used by many to justify their continuing

discrimination against women; in the second place, it could easily be regarded as an obvious attempt to evade the spirit of the General Conference decision while complying with its letter; and, in the third place, it fails to confront the moral issue, which lies not in the specific language of the vote in Utrecht but in its fundamental meaning. It was a vote to perpetuate the ecclesiastical superiority of men—a relic of medieval Christian prejudice still venerated by some Adventists, a relic we could and should have discarded 114 years ago, or at least 22 years ago.⁷

The vote in Utrecht against allowing equality for Adventist women in ministry was a grievous error. It constitutes a blot on the history and character of Adventism, and it must be rectified as early, as clearly, and as widely as possible. A proper response to this vote must address its meaning; to try merely to circumvent it verbally and procedurally is to ignore the stark reality that it was morally wrong. What we need to be doing now is not finding ways to affirm women without ordaining them, but finding ways to ordain them without resulting in too much turmoil.

Some practices and structures (such as the distribution of tithes, the organization of conferences, and the use of various communication media) are matters of church policy, and they can be settled by a majority vote according to practical and cultural considerations. In such cases we accept decisions even if we disagree with them. But the full equality of women and men in ministry is a matter of moral, spiritual, and theological integrity, in which we must be guided by the teaching of the whole Word of God and the spirit of the gospel of Christ. While we have great respect for a vote of a Gen-

eral Conference session because it is the broadest representation of the community of faith that is our spiritual home,⁸ we must live in accordance with the Word and the gospel.⁹

We are painfully aware that in response to the vote in Utrecht, any action in opposition, or even any statement of dissent, may be misinterpreted as disloyalty to the church as a whole. This causes us great personal and spiritual sorrow; but we must live with integrity, motivated by an even higher loyalty to the principles of truth and love on which the church itself is founded. Opposing an action of the General Conference on moral grounds is a far more authentic expression of loyalty to and love for the church than is passive or grumbling compliance. For it is from the church that we have learned to “call sin by its right name” and to “stand for the right though the heavens fall.”¹⁰ In obedience to conscience we cannot, by failure to speak or act, participate in the continuing discrimination against Adventist women in ministry.

Since the General Conference Session failed to recognize the moral imperative of ordaining women in ministry, the responsibility for doing so now rests on others, beginning with the largest and most comprehensive organizational structures. The mission of the church will be best served if this responsibility is accepted by the North American Division. If the division fails to accept the responsibility, it will pass to the union and local conferences. If these organizations fail to accept it, the responsibility for ordaining women will pass to the congregations served by women ministers.

Adventist women in ministry are not on trial; they have recognized the leading of the Holy Spirit and demonstrated the reality of their calling. It is the rest of us Advent-

ists—members, men in ministry, church officials, and various committees—who are on trial. Our actions, or our refusal to act, will show whether we too are willing to follow this leading of the Spirit.¹¹ Ordaining women in ministry is a moral imperative that we must obey without any further delay.

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1. *Seventh-day Adventists Minister's Manual* (Silver Spring: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1992), pp. 77, 78.

2. The role of women as spiritual leaders and active participants in the communication of the gospel is well attested in the New Testament (Luke 8:1-3; 24:10; Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1-4, 6, 7, 12; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phil. 4:3). This evidence is part of the overall movement of the New Testament toward gender equality and inclusiveness. It is this trajectory that provides the context within which the theological and practical significance of the well-known Pauline restrictions on the behavior of women (1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12) are to be determined. As it was in the case of slavery, it is wrong here to make a particular practice into a prescription for every time and place. Nor have these Pauline restrictions been generally interpreted by Adventists as absolute and universal; such an interpretation would, among other things, logically undermine the ministry of Ellen White.

3. No one claims that women are identical to men. There is a wide array of anatomical, physiological, and psychosocial differences that contribute to a person's identity as female or male. The question is whether any of these differences, or all of them combined, in any way justify a refusal of full recognition and affirmation of the Spirit-led ministry of women. The answer is obviously and emphatically no. On the contrary, the differences between women and men show that the fullness of humanity created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) exists in the complementarity of female and male

humanness—a complementarity that is essential to the fullness of ministry in the name of God and that can be adequately expressed only by the ordination of women as well as men in ministry.

4. For names and identification, see "Selected List of 150 Adventist Women in Ministry, 1844-1944," compiled by Kit Watts and published in *The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women*, Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart, eds. (Langley Park, Md.: TEAM Press, 1995), pp. 359-81.

5. The imagery of "headship" (Eph. 5:23, 24) has no relevance at all to the ministry of women in the church. This metaphor occurs in a discussion of household relationships, not the church. The same passage says explicitly that it is Christ who is the head of the church. In Scripture, ordination to ministry is a recognition of God's call to service and servanthood (Mark 10:42-45), not a conferral of status or authority. Just as "headship" has nothing to do with the church, so ministry has nothing to do with "headship."

6. See, for example, V. Norskov Olsen, *Myth and Truth About Church, Priesthood and Ordination* (Riverside: Loma Linda University Press, 1990), pp. 121-125.

7. At the General Conference session of 1881 a resolution "that females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry" was introduced, discussed by eight speakers, and then referred to the General Conference Committee (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881, p. 392; see also *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 5, 1882, p. 8, which includes this item "among the resolutions adopted," but seems to be mistaken in this regard). Unfortunately, the resolution was never heard of again. Ninety-two years later, in 1973, a conference of scholars appointed by the General Conference was convened at Camp Mohaven in Ohio and concluded that there were no theological obstacles to the ordination of women. But again there was no action. The fact that, so far as is known, no Adventist woman in ministry has ever been formally ordained is a result of the dominance of narrow Biblical exegesis, eccle-

siastical tradition, and cultural influence over the truth of the gospel and the spiritual dynamic of Adventist belief.

8. See Ellen White's 1875 description of the General Conference as "the highest authority that God has upon the earth" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 492), as well as her 1909 statement: "When, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body" (*ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 260). The current issue, however, is not a matter of "private independence and private judgment"; it involves decisions of the Southeastern California Conference constituency, the Pacific Union Conference executive committee, and the North American Division.

9. See the resolution adopted by the General Conference session of 1877, reprinted in the most recent (1990) edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 17: "Resolved, that the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and rights of individual conscience." The vote against allowing equality for women in ministry can indeed "be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience."

10. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 57.

11. Adventists have long been aware that revelation is progressive, leading to an expanding understanding of spiritual truth (John 16:13). See, for example, Ellen G. White's ringing statement: "Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. . . . This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the

end" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 706). This progressive understanding of truth was evident in Adventist opposition to the practice of slavery in spite of the fact that there was no clear

opposition to slavery in Scripture. It is likewise evident in the growing Adventist recognition that God's Spirit calls, leads, and blesses women in ministry.

Ellen White's Changing Views On GC Session as Voice of God

"I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered" (3T, 492 [1875]).

At the 1888 General Conference Session, an improper spirit nullified the GC as being the voice of God: "I was then informed that at this time it would be useless to make any decision as to positions on doctrinal points, as to what is truth, or to expect any spirit of fair investigation, because there was a confederacy formed to allow of no change of ideas on any point or position they had received any more than did the Jews" (EGW to "My Dear Brethren," c April 1889, B85-1889).

In 1889, Ellen White focused upon the virtue of localized resolution of issues and observed that, at times, GC sessions passed actions not bearing the "signature of heaven": "The question of the great need of the soul deserves in these meetings of the [General] Conference far more attention, and many questions that are tossed into the Conference should never appear, but be worked out in your State Conferences. It has become habit to pass laws that do not always bear the signature of heaven" (EGW, Nov. 4, 1889, Ms. 6-1889).

That next year, Ellen White reflected upon the 1888 GC Session

and even allowed the possibility that GC Session decisions could be "evil": [At the 1888 GC Session] "the opinion of men was looked to as the voice of God. The enemy took possession of minds and their judgment was worthless, their decisions were evil, for they did not have the mind of Christ. They were doing continual injustice to the persons they talked about, and they had a demoralizing effect upon the conference" (EGW, "Light in God's Word," Feb. 1890, Ms. 37-1990).

That same year, Ellen White, far from considering GC Session actions to inherently reflect the wish of God, wrote the GC president: "I do not expect to be at your General Conference. I would rather run the other way" (Ellen White to O. A. Olsen, May 8, 1890, O46-1990).

In 1898 she wrote, "It has been some years since I have considered

the General Conference as the voice of God" (EGW, Aug. 26, 1898 in 1899 GC Bulletin, p. 74).

Indeed, in 1901 she emphasized that working upon wrong principles nullified the GC as being the voice of God: "It is working upon wrong principles that has brought the cause of God into its present embarrassment. The people have lost confidence in those who have the management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the Conference is the voice of God. Every time I have heard this, I have thought it was almost blasphemy. The voice of the Conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not, because some in connection with it are not men of faith and prayer, they are not men of elevated principle" (EGW, April 1, 1901, Ms. 37-1901).

Ellen White stated this in 1909: "When, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body" (EGW, 9T, p. 260 [1909]).

Penny Shell, Kendra Haloviak, and Norma Osborn embrace following their ordination. Fritz Guy, professor of theology at La Sierra University, looks on



Arthur Torres' Ordination Homily: The Future Is Now

It was approximately 12 years ago that my little daughter first expressed her desire to drive an automobile. How can I ever forget the occasion? We were driving down the Santa Monica Freeway at 75 miles an hour, the busiest highway system in the entire world, and she looks at me and she says, "Dad, one of these days," she says, "I am going to drive and then you can be my passenger in the back seat, and read."

I managed to say a "Good!" half-heartedly, between "Gulp! Gulp!"

To be frank with you, I could not visualize the point in time when my five-year-old daughter, Allison, would be big enough to see over the dashboard, to say nothing of being able to negotiate the busy highway systems of Southern California with the expertise needed to jockey wherever she wanted to go.

What was fantasy for me was vision for Allison. For me it was fantasy to think that I, Rudy Torres, would come to the point in time when my nerves would be so calm that I would be able to sit in the back seat and read Kafka and leave the driving to her. What was fantasy for me was vision for Allison.

The prophet Joel, too, saw a vision—not of what might be but of what would be. What I love about prophets is that prophets are never limited by the paradigm of the present; they are not limited by what is. They are able to take the present very seriously albeit: They understand historical and cultural limitations; they understand difficulties; they understand some of the hurdles that have to be negotiated and overcome, but they never allow the present to define their future. They live with their feet firmly planted in *terra firma*. And

yet they don't see *terra firma* as a destination or even a final resting place. They do not ascribe to *terra firma* eternal qualities. They see it as a steppingstone to the stars.

Prophets: They live in the present, but they see a glorious future. Now Joel's present was fraught with tragedy. A religious male hierarchy of priests had not provided the spiritual leadership needed to keep Judah from immorality and apostasy. It saw God's grace as very limited. I see this as a paradigm of scarcity. This hierarchy of male priests guarded the grace of God like beefeaters guard the crown jewels: you can see from a distance, but don't touch, and absolutely never wear.

And there they were, dispensing God's grace by pipette. And if I correctly remember my pipette days, pipette measure in thousandths of milliliters—that's *millionths* of liters. You talk about scarcity. You talk about spiritual scarcity. You can take it to the bank: When there is a scarcity of God's grace there is immorality, and where there is immorality there is apostasy.

And this is precisely the situation that prevailed, and here they were, measuring out God's grace by pipette. It became a precious commodity—a commodity that was so limited, that when it came time for individuals to be counted for God, there was nothing but apostasy and immorality. But the prophet wasn't limited by that situation.

Now as if to highlight the scarcity—the spiritual scarcity—it became accompanied by a material scarcity: the locusts moved in. And if God's grace, according to the paradigm, was limited, the locusts were unlimited. They came by the billions, and they marched across

the landscape and the vegetation, they ate the crops, and they left the landscape like the surface of the moon.

Now you might have thought that the prophet would have said, "Ah, what's the use? Let's go to Bali."

Not so the prophet. The prophet sees a glorious future. The prophet is able to look at the situation, to read the nuances of the times and interpret it, not in terms of temporal implications, but in terms of eternal implications. And he saw this as God's judgment upon the people, not to punish them, but to lead them to repentance. But alas, a bankrupt priesthood did not have the spirituality needed to lead a nation into corporate repentance.

He saw a glorious future. He saw a time when the paradigm would not be defined by scarcity, but the paradigm would be defined by abundance. He understood the situation as being very dire, but he understood the future as being very glorious, and he penned these words—Joel, the second chapter, verses 28 and 29—"Then afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy"—Kendra, Norma, Penny, thank you very much; it's prophesied. It's the Word of God; and what the Word of God predicts, let no one put asunder—"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit."

That is abundance, not by pipette, but by monsoon.

For Sligo, that future has begun. Now, let's not take upon ourselves any credit, because that future began at the cross. *At the cross*. Jesus didn't tire of telling the people, "*The future is coming and now is. The Kingdom of God is coming and*

now is." And he would look at the people and he would say, "You have eyes, but you can't see. Open your eyes; look at the situation spiritually. Look on the fields: can't you see that they're ripe, ready for the harvest? Pray therefore, the Lord of the harvest, and he will send reapers, male and female."

The age of the Holy Spirit begins at the cross and it is carried forward in the Resurrection and in Pentecost. And so Sligo is a Johnny-come-lately. But the important thing is, *we are a Johnny-come-lately.* And it's OK; it's OK to be late, as long as we aren't *too* late, and we're not.

For Sligo, the future has begun. We have seen it begin in your ministries—and now I'm going to get very personal—we've seen it in your ministries.

Norma, I have seen your face light up when you talk about children. You come to staff, and your face just lights up. You talk about an individual, a little child, that you have led to Jesus Christ. I have seen you get down on children's level, and see them eye to eye. I have experienced your calling.

Kendra, your calling came when you saw Desmond Ford under attack. You saw an individual who was so willing to stand up for the gospel that you said, "I, too, need a cause that is worth living for, and dying for," and you have found that cause in Jesus Christ.

How can we say any other, that you, Norma, and you, Kendra, have been appointed and ordained by the Holy Spirit?

And Penny, you experienced your calling after you had been a successful English teacher. And I'm quoting you: You heard a woman chaplain express what she did in the course of a day, and you scratched your professor head, and you said, "I didn't know women could do that. That's who I am." And the rest is history.

You have been appointed by God, not only by your calling, but you have been empowered to do your work. I have seen you baptize. You have won individuals to Jesus Christ. There are people here who can testify to the power of your ministry, and they are right here. You have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. The future has indeed begun. You have also been called to ministry because you understand that ministry is not a status, but servanthood.

Where in the world we got the idea that ministry, that ordination, is to some kind of a post, I'll never understand. But the Holy Spirit unctionizes us; the Holy Spirit is calling us to servanthood. Tell me, some Friday night, at two and three o'clock in the morning, when I am struggling with the sermon and asking for the Holy Spirit to give me enlightenment, when I understand that my feet are clay and my knees are quaking, that pastoral ministry is a status symbol.

And tell me, when I get another poison letter . . .

“So send I you, to labor unrewarded. Ministry is servanthood. We're all ministers; we have all been called of God. When Joel talks about the Holy Spirit falling on all of us, and commissioning all of us, and appointing all of us to do ministry, he is talking about the priesthood of all believers; the priesthood of all believers would supersede the male hierarchy of priesthood that never worked.

We are living in the age of the Holy Spirit; the function of pastors is that we are servants to the servants. And where we ever got this idea that ordination to gospel ministry is a status symbol—now please don't misunderstand me; I wouldn't trade it for anything. But I always did enjoy being a servant. It's my role; it's my calling. I love to study hard, and study deep. And what

gives me a tremendous satisfaction is for something that I say—that you say, right? We know what we're talking about, where all of a sudden you'll just see somebody's eyes, like you expressed it, Kendra, you said you were talking to an individual who wasn't understanding the gospel and all of a sudden he understood the gospel, and you could see it in his eyes, and in his motions, and from that time on he was a different person—that we are called to servanthood.

Our ministry is not status, but servanthood. And Joel saw this vision.

Last week, my daughter, Allison, called me on the telephone, and she says, "Dad," she says, "I passed my driver's test." And I went, "Gulp!"

Do you see why we need a new generation? Do you see why we need a new vision? A new vision that is not limited to the old paradigm. A vision that doesn't see God's grace as precious commodity that is limited, and meted out by pipette, but a worldview, a paradigm, that sees the Spirit of God falling on his people—and by his people I mean every man, woman, and child who lives in the world. The Holy Spirit falling upon his people in such a powerful way and calling them to ministry. We need that kind of a vision. And Allison saw that kind of a vision in a small way, and led her dad to finally be able to visualize the possibility that he could, in fact, sit in the back seat of an automobile going down the Santa Monica Freeway with his lovely 17-year-old daughter chauffeuring him from the steering wheel of an automobile and reading Kafka, and enjoying it.

That's vision. That's vision.

This, too, is vision. "Then afterward"—after what? You know, we church people have a difficult time seeing the point in time when prophecy becomes present tense, right? We're always looking for the

grandeur to come, maybe—no. *Afterward*, after Pentecost. That happened almost 2,000 years ago.

“Afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves”—that’s pastors; that’s pastors—“Even on the male and female slaves in those days I will pour out my Spirit.”

We have seen that the future has begun. We’ve seen it in your ministry, Norma, Kendra, Penny. You

have ministered to us. I have been led to the throne of grace by your prayers, and by your funerals, Penny. I have been led to the throne of grace by your Scripture reading, and that sermon you preached here last December I will never forget. I have been led to the throne of grace by your beautiful ability to nurture, and to come up to me, when I was pretty low, you know, about three weeks ago, you didn’t know it, but you said, “You are terrific,” and I felt terrific.

Let the future begin.

Charles Scriven’s Charge to the Newly Ordained Women Pastors

Who today can doubt that Christ is risen?

We have been wandering between two worlds: In one, men seize advantage over women and hold their advantage sacred, and in the other, all God’s children share. Each serves, and each is served, without partiality or reservation.

We know that the former world is dying, yet the latter, though heralded by Jesus’ resurrection, seems powerless to be born.

Today, the new world is a-borning.

So this is a moment of joy, not only for you, the newly ordained pastors, but also for you, the people of God who have come here to attest and celebrate their calling.

As for you, Kendra Haloviak, Norma Osborn, and Penny Shell, this day, in this place, the body of Christ has, by the laying on of hands, set you apart for leadership in the church’s ministry of reconciliation. Your ordination brings you no higher status before God, nor any blessing of the Spirit denied to others. But it does give you a new infusion of that Spirit and it does confirm, on earth as in heaven,

your calling as a pastor, and it does authorize you to practice your calling wherever you are needed.

In that light I now charge you to embrace your work in the gospel ministry—in *pastoral* ministry—with all your hearts and souls and minds.

You are called to teach. I therefore charge you to enhance understanding of the gospel wherever you can. Teach honestly, teach creatively, teach courageously.

You are called to preach. I therefore charge you to summon all who will listen to the table of fellowship and the pathway of service. Make disciples; expand the circle of compassion by your proclamation of the gospel.

You are called to care. I therefore charge you to offer yourselves as a bridge for others. Stay by human need; listen and assist; counsel and console as Jesus did.

You are called to organize. I therefore charge you to awaken and guide the church’s energy. By your gifts of administration and by the grace of God, shape the community of Christ to faithful, effective mission.

You are called to preside in worship. I therefore charge you to make Christian gatherings into celebrations. Through the praise and prayer you lead, keep joy and generosity alive; help those you serve look ever backward with thanks and ever forward with hope.

I charge you to embrace these responsibilities—teaching, preaching, caring, organizing, and presiding in worship—and to seek, each day, through prayer and meditation, the renewal of heart and soul and mind that your work of ministry demands.

If you give your assent, then, before God and before this congregation, repeat after me these words: “By God’s grace, we accept our ordination.”

[Ordinands respond]

Amen. Amen.

As for you, the people of God: This day, in this place, each member of Christ’s body is honored, and each uplifted, by the presence of God. Each of you is God’s partner in creation, and each, through baptism, is set apart for ministry.

You, too, have responsibilities in the community of Christ, but your daily work and witness take you often where Christ is unknown or unappreciated, and if the church’s mission is to serve and change the world, you are the vanguard.

You are Christ’s vanguard in the surrounding workplaces, playgrounds, and neighborhoods, and in that light I charge you to renew your vows of ministry today. Celebrate the calling of these women, but celebrate as well your own calling, for we are, all of us, blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others.

So renew your welcome of God’s blessing, and renew your passion for God’s mission.

And as for the torch of justice lit today by the Spirit through this

church and these women, bear that torch far and bear it wide.

I so charge you.

Hearing this charge, if you will now go forth as ministers of Christ,

then, before God and before one another, repeat after me these words: "By God's grace, we will."

[Audience responds]

And all the people said, "Amen."

The Women Pastors Respond: Haloviak, Shell, and Osborn

Kendra Haloviak

The first time I ever stood on this Sligo Church platform was the spring of 1970. I was three-and-a-half. My brother, who was just a few months old, was being dedicated, and I remember my parents making it very clear that I was to quietly stand right beside them during the dedication service.

It was Sabbath. It was Sligo. There were smiling faces looking at us. There were tears of joy. There was a prayer.

Some moments live in your mind forever. Some moments are sacred moments.

Twenty years later, I looked up at this Sligo platform with wonder. It was Thanksgiving Sabbath and Sligo was celebrating its annual Festival of Praise. My eyes felt too small to take in all that was happening before me.

Gorgeous banners decorated the front and sides of the sanctuary. Musicians filled the choir loft with color and joyful sound. People of all ages stood, weaving themselves from the back and the balcony to the front, food in their arms, singing, giving, praising, placing their gifts in a huge collection of food covering the whole platform.

It was Sabbath. It was Sligo. And it was a sacred moment.

That Sabbath at Sligo was the best image I have of what the celebration of Israel's Sabbath, Jubilee year, must have been.

I am the Lord your God; on that

day, "you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants."

Society's arbitrary labels for people were destroyed. Demolished was any hierarchy of humans. People treated people as God treats people: debts forgiven, slaves set free, the fear of hunger eliminated. Jubilee.

Sligo's Adventist hope and belief in a world without hunger transformed bags of canned goods into the Messianic banquet for all nations. In that sacred moment, Sligo members and friends were drawing the future into the present. In that sacred moment, we were truly being Adventist. For Adventists believe that the Second Advent of Jesus Christ will make tangible the realities of his First Advent: peace, justice, equality, wholeness, holiness.

What could be more Adventist than experiencing a bit of that future in the present?

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. . . .

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God's people, and God will be with them."

On Sabbath, September 23, 1995, I knelt on this platform, surrounded

by this church family, our friends, and Adventists from around the world. This Sabbath is a sacred moment—for me, for Sligo, for the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Today we let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Today we are more Adventist than we were last Sabbath, because today we draw the future into the present.

Today we proclaim that there does not exist a hierarchy of human worth before God or before us.

Today our love of the Adventist Church and our moral convictions of equality are *not* in conflict.

Today immoral policies cannot be upheld, or we would cease being Adventist.

Today we do justly, love mercy, and we walk humbly with our God.

Today we stand and proclaim that our vision of the world to come shapes how we live in the present—a vision that is at the heart of Sligo's history; a vision that is at the very heart of our Adventist heritage; a vision that is the reason for our worship and our witness.

A vision that makes this moment a sacred moment.

Penny Shell

I think only those who are women in ministry without ordination have any idea what's involved in that, when you are in a public ministry where ordination is expected. I'm not going to detail that before you, but I'll tell you, even more difficult than not being ordained when it's expected is to belong to a church that will not ordain women.

I no longer belong to such a church, and it's a great joy.

I want to give my special love to my sisters who are in ministry and who are still waiting and longing;

the *now* and the *not yet* are both here together today. And particularly, I want to remember a dear friend, a creative, bright person, who is not here at all because she was killed this summer in Greece, and that's Gayle Saxby.

Gayle is a beautiful spirit who kindly and firmly called her church to account on this issue. Ah, Gayle, I wish you were here today.

Norma Osborn

A year ago, we gathered together in this church for another celebration, and the Scripture we read at that time was very, very powerful, and I'd just like to read a short selection from that Scripture, found in 2 Corinthians,

chapter 5: "We are always full of courage. . . . For our life is a matter of faith, not of sight. . . . We know what it means to fear the Lord, and so we try to persuade others. God knows us completely, and I hope that in your hearts, you know us well.

If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them, and was raised again.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

The *New York Times*: "Adventists Break Ranks, Ordain Women"

Two decades after some major Protestant denominations began ordaining women as clergy members, the presence of a woman serving as a pastor of a Protestant church has become progressively less remarkable.

Yet barriers to women in the clergy remain. Some are firmly fixed, some more symbolic.

For the latter, one could look to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one of whose founders was a woman, Ellen White. The denomination, best known for its extensive hospital system and its Saturday worship, allows seminary-trained women to do just about everything one would expect of a minister: they can baptize, perform marriage

and burial ceremonies and serve as pastors.

But they cannot be ordained. In Adventist tradition, only men can take part in the spiritually significant ceremony in which a minister kneels in the front of the church, while other ministers lay their hands on his head and shoulders, thereby symbolically endowing him with his authority.

Today, the second-largest Adventist congregation in the country will challenge that rule. Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Md., a congregation of more than 3,000 members, will hold an ordination service for three women, a ceremony whose organizers say will be otherwise no different from the ones held for men.

"I do think it's a historic event for the church," said Kendra Haloviak, assistant professor of religion at Columbia Union College, a church-affiliated institution in Takoma Park.

Historic, too, for her, as she is one of the three women who will take part.

Ms. Haloviak, a sixth-generation Adventist who traces her family's religious roots to the denomination's 1863 founding, added: "I don't know if there are words that can adequately express how thrilled I am."

The Sligo Church decided to perform the ceremony in direct response to a closely watched vote by delegates to the Seventh-day Adventist World Congress on July 5, who solidly rejected a move to allow women's ordination.

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in the United States in 1863, its growth overseas in this century has far outstripped membership in this country. Worldwide, there are more than 8 million Seventh-day Adventists: Fewer than 10 percent of that number live in the United States and Canada, the nations that make up the worldwide church's North American Division.

At the World Congress, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, officials of the North American Division asked that decisions on whether to ordain women be left to each of the worldwide church's 11 divisions. According to a church news report, Alfred C. McClure, president of the church in North America, urged the delegates to vote yes, saying that younger members of the church in the United States and Canada favored women's ordination and would be "seriously disillusioned by a negative vote."

Monte Sahlin, an assistant to the church president, said the request ran aground on cultural divisions within the church. "We're very, very multicultural," he said. While Americans, Canadians and many Europeans saw women's ordination as a matter of "social justice," he said, other members of the

Gustav Niebuhr is religion editor of the New York Times. Reprinted from the Saturday, September 23, 1995, edition of the New York Times. (Copyright © 1995 by the New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.)

church did not. "In many parts of the world, I have heard people express a fear that it undermines traditional family values and structures," Mr. Sahlin said.

Less than a month after the vote, the Sligo Church voted to hold Saturday's service. "Sligo has a long history of utilizing women in ministry," said Robert Visser, a member of the church who has helped plan the service. He said the church has two women on a six-person ministerial staff. Saturday's service is intended to "affirm women in ministry," he said.

Another member of Sligo Church, Roy Branson, predicted that the service would set a precedent that could be followed by smaller, like-

minded congregations throughout the denomination. Other congregations "could say, 'Well, Sligo did it.'" said Mr. Branson, who is also editor of *Spectrum*, an independent Adventist magazine.

Ms. Haloviak saw another result growing from the service: a chance to build support for women's ordination among a new generation of Seventh-day Adventists. She spoke about how she thought the service would look through the eyes of children and teen-agers in the congregation.

"Every single little girl will realize she can be called by God to grow up and be a minister, just like the little boys she's in school with," Ms. Haloviak said. "This is for all Adventist women."

The Washington Times: "Sligo Rebels, Goes Against Vote"

A Seventh-day Adventist church in Takoma Park yesterday broke ranks with its world fellowship and ordained three women, the first such act since prophetess Ellen G. White founded the group in 1863.

Amid hundreds of friends and supporters gathered at Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, the faith's second-largest congregation in the country, ordained clergy laid hands on the women in prayer to transmit the divine call.

"We are convicted, O God, that you have called and ordained them today," said the Rev. Louis Venden in the prayer of ordination.

The ordinands were Kendra

Haloviak, a religion teacher at Columbia Union College in Takoma Park; Norma Osborn, associate pastor at Sligo church; and Penny Shell, a chaplain and manager of pastoral care at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in Rockville.

In unison, the three women said, "By God's grace we accept our ordination."

A vote by the July assembly of the world church, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, rejected a motion to allow the nine geographic divisions to decide on allowing women's ordination.

And the regional body governing Sligo church, the Potomac Conference, will not issue the women ordination credentials.

Leaders of the ordination "are at peace with the fact that the Potomac Conference will not issue credentials to these women," said Monte Sahlin, assistant to the president of the North American church.

"An ordination service in and of itself is not a defiant act," he said, noting that 100 women in the American church have been ordained as "local elders" to assist pastors.

Columbia Union [College] President Charles Scriven, in charging the women to teach, preach, organize, lead worship, pray and do acts of caring, said the ceremony "does authorize you to practice your calling wherever you are needed."

The Rev. Arthur Torres, pastor of the 3,200-member Sligo church and a leader of the ordination, said he expects it will have a ripple effect and knows of a few American churches that may follow suit.

"The priesthood of all believers supersedes the monopoly of the male priesthood," Mr. Torres said in his sermon.

The North American church had made motions at the 1990 and 1995 world assemblies to allow women's ordination. The recent failure prompted Sligo's "grassroots initiative," said a congregation vote.

Though the church was founded in North America, only 10 percent of its 8.5 million membership now live here. Most are in Africa, Asia or Latin America, where women as church leaders are culturally less acceptable, some Adventists say.

Ronald Ninala, a native of India and head elder of the Takoma Park Seventh-day Adventist Church, attended the ceremony out of friendship, though he opposed the action.

"We could misguide people," said Mr. Ninala, whose father was an Adventist minister in India, where his mother often preached in the pulpit. "We don't believe in splinters," he said, arguing that the move to women's ordination should be made by the whole church.

At the ordination service, the sermon, reflections and prayers were about the equal calling of men and women, control by the

Larry Witham is a religion reporter for the Washington Times. Reprinted from the Sunday, September 24, 1995, edition of the Washington Times. (Copyright © 1995, the Washington Times. Reprinted by permission.)

“male hierarchy” and the liberating work of the Holy Spirit in the latter days.

“Today we let justice roll down like mighty waters,” said Ms. Haloviak. “Today we are more

Adventist than we were last Sabbath.”

Ms. Shell said it was hard being a chaplain and not ordained, but harder still was “belonging to a church that will not ordain women.” Now it does, she said.

While each Protestant denomination has a history of the battle to ordain women, the Adventists—much as the Southern Baptists—are a conservative church trying to adhere strictly to biblical precepts. Adventists emphasize Saturday worship, health and the imminent return of Christ.

The more liberal mainline Protestant denominations began ordaining women in the 1970s. Their seminaries now report from a third to a half female enrollment.

But recent studies have shown a drop in women seeking ordination in those denominations, often because they can’t gain leadership of big churches.

Surveys also have shown that the emphasis on feminist studies at seminaries has made female clergy almost uniformly liberal on social, doctrinal and moral issues.

“I don’t see that kind of liberalization taking place” among Adventists, said the Rev. Mike Stevenson, associate pastor at Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church. “But this event would be viewed by some as liberal and even rebellious.”



Penny Shell, director of pastoral ministries at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, responds to ordination charge: “. . . It’s a great joy.”



Charles Scriven, president of Columbia Union College, delivers the ordination charge: “Bear the torch of justice far and bear it wide.”