



Women in Ministry

Landmarks in Women's Ministry since Utrecht

The number of women in ministry is growing in North America. Eleven have been ordained in the past five years. The latest ordination/commissioning service took place at the Arizona camp meeting on June 10.

The Southeastern California Conference (SECC) Executive Committee voted on March 16, 2000, to treat men and women ministers equally by issuing them the same credentials. The Southeastern California Conference is the first Seventh-day Adventist conference in the world to take this step (pages 28-31).

More than a dozen women pastors work full-time in the Southeastern California Conference. Although not all have been ordained, six of the most recent women to be

ordained have been from SECC. Furthermore, Hyveth Williams serves as senior pastor of the Campus Hill Church in Loma Linda.

Congregations are choosing women to serve as local elders, too. In the most recent survey by a conference, Southeastern California found that 51 percent—79 of its 155 churches, companies, and groups—now have women elders, and approximately 20 percent have had or currently have a woman as head elder. An important footnote to the SECC study is that 75 percent of Adventists in the conference attend one of the seventy-nine churches that include women as elders. During 1999, more than 44,000 people belonged to gender-inclusive churches, whereas only 15,000 did not.

No national survey of women elders has been done since 1988, when the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University reported that 960 ordained women elders were serving beside 14,495 male elders in North America's 3,036 Adventist churches. The researchers who completed that study discovered that women elders could be found in churches of every racial and cultural background, "disproving the notion that women as elders were only a Caucasian phenomenon," according to Randal Wisbey, who reported on the survey in the book *Women in Ministry*, published by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.

Debates on ordination at the past two General Conference sessions and the subsequent negative votes by delegates have slowed the growth of ordination of women ministers. In 1995, delegates defeated a motion to allow divisions to set some policies within their own borders that may differ from those of other divisions. "This is still interpreted officially to mean that women's ordination was defeated," says Kit Watts, director of the Women's Resource Center at La Sierra University, "since the presentations by two seminary professors and all discussion on the floor focused on women's ordination."

The unity that the delegates to the General Conference sought to preserve baffles Jennifer Scott. "I don't understand this fixation with unity," she says. "How can we let our concept of unity be more important than rightly representing God's character. He treated men and women equally."

Scott's ordination-commission by the Loma Linda University Church came shortly after the Southeastern California Conference voted to give men and women pastors equal credentials, which made her the first person to receive the new designation. Her ordination service made front-page headlines in San Bernardino and Riverside, and drew well-wishers from the community, as well as from the church congregation itself.

Called by the University Church after her graduation from Columbia Union College, Scott has had a nine-year ministry at the church marked by extensive involvement in community outreach. She completed a master's degree at Fuller Theological Seminary. One of the youngest women to be ordained, she says that her professional women friends who have succeeded in medicine and law do not understand why barriers still exist for women in the ministry.

Despite very real barriers, there have been some gains over the past decade. As director of La Sierra University's Women's Resource Center, Kit Watts keeps close watch on the achievements of Adventist women in ministry. She notes the following high points in the five years since the last General Conference at Utrecht.

Eleven Women Ordained

- September 1995: Kendra Haloviak, Norma Osborn, Penny Shell, Sligo Church, Takoma Park, Maryland
- December 1995: Sheryll Prinz McMillian, Victoria Loma Linda Church; Halcyon Wilson, Madelynn Haldeman, La Sierra University Church
- July 1996: Margo Pitrone, Garden Grove California Church
- August 1997: Margaret (Peg) Hempe, Loma Linda University Church
- April 2000: Jennifer Ferrell Scott, Loma Linda University Church
- June 2000: Jenny McBride, Catalina Hills Arizona Church
Pat Hart, Oracle Arizona Church

1995

- Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary asked to prepare material on issue of women's ordination by North American Division (NAD) union conference presidents

1996

- Women's Resource Center approved by La Sierra University board of trustees

1997

- British Adventists authorize first woman pastor to baptize candidates in England.

1998

- Andrews University Press publishes *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Nancy Vyhmeister
- First Women and the Word seminar held in Riverside, California, as a pre-session to the Association of Adventist Women Conference. The seminar, conducted by the Women's Resource Center, attracts 100 pastors, administrators, and supporters, who hear women discuss Scripture and issues in the Church that affect them

1999

- Duane Schoonard appointed associate director of the NAD Ministerial Association
- Second annual Women and the Word seminar held in Orlando, Florida
- Trans-European Division invites Hyveth Williams to conduct meetings in Oslo, Norway, for professional development of eighteen women pastors

2000

- Walla Walla Church's Equality Committee and the Association of Adventist Women sponsor retreat for women in ministry in the Northwest. Approximately twenty-five attend.
- Andrea Luxton, president of Newbold College, is included as presenter at the General Conference's international professional growth seminar for ministers, which is broadcast live via interactive satellite
- Southeastern California Conference votes equal credentials for women in ministry