



The Tears of San Antonio | BY BONNIE DWYER

On Wednesday, July 8, as I walked the lower level Alamodome hallway late in the day, the vote on women's ordination over, coming towards me was one of the staffers from Secretariat, the office charged with maintaining the records of the event. Tears were streaming down her face as she walked by, nodding a greeting. No words were necessary..

From there I made my way to the hotel ballroom that the North American Division had reserved. It was packed with small circles of people gathered around female pastors for whom prayers were being offered and tears being shed.

On this very emotional day, tears had also come when a group of delegates booed the speech by Jan Paulsen, former president of the General Conference, as he pleaded for understanding from the numerically superior African delegation for the work in countries with more secular societies and smaller church presence. While Mike Ryan, the chair of the session, had discouraged cheering and clapping, nothing was said about booing.

The tears of San Antonio remain in my mind more than the speeches of the day, although there were some very good speeches in favor of the vote. There were also many speeches that never got made. People who had immediately lined up at a microphone at the beginning of the day were still standing in line at the end of the session. The tally on speeches was 19 for a yes vote, 20 for a no vote, and 35 points of order in which people tried to use that parliamentary procedure to circumvent the process of one speech for yes, and one speech for no that the organizers had established. The final vote was no 1,381 (58%), yes 977 (41%), abstentions 5 (1%).

To me it was notable that although the organizers framed the conversation about ordination, the vote was actually on structure, and in no way recognized or acknowledged the woman pastors, leaders, and administrators that are already working very effectively within the

organizational structure for the church in many divisions, including the General Conference. We can have a woman vice president of the General Conference, associate dean of the Seminary, presidents of hospitals and universities, but we cannot ordain a woman for the work she is doing in the local church? Our inconsistencies and inequalities are baffling. Our ignoring of these women and their contribution to the mission of the church brings tears to my eyes.

The no vote in San Antonio against divisions being allowed to determine whether or not to ordain women was different than losing a vote on a key issue. This affected people's lives. Women pastors began receiving messages telling them they no longer had a right to their jobs. In a later business session, there was a request from the floor for clarification. What did the vote mean? General Conference President Ted Wilson came to the microphone and said that the vote had not changed policy. Women who were eligible to serve in pastoral roles as commissioned pastors before the vote would continue to be allowed to hold their positions. The vote did not change policy. It just broke our hearts.

But I remain hopeful, because hope is the Adventist response to disappointment. In this organizational challenge, I remain hopeful because of our belief in equality as expressed in Fundamental Belief #14, "Unity in the Body of Christ"; "In Christ we are a new creation, distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, 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."

Our search for that equality continues. ■

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