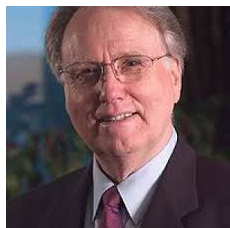


IT'S TIME



Jan Paulsen
*General Conference President,
1999-2010*

“The role of women in ministry.” We have studied this item, looked at it from every perspective, prayed about it, and argued it from various

convictions. We have done this for 40 years with no outcome, except possibly greater polarization in our church than we have had in modern history. The distances in our church between “east and west, north and south” are painfully apparent.

This matter is now on the agenda for the 2015 Session in San Antonio, and its handling and outcome may, more than any other item, define this Session.

It is good for us to remember that we have never as a church—whether at an Annual Council or a GC Session—come to the conclusion that there is clear, unambiguous inspired counsel that prevents us from ordaining women to ministry. (There is an abundance of private opinions, but as a church, in council, we have never taken that position.) By default, like it or not, we are saying: “Time and culture will define the right action and the right moment.”

It is my settled conviction that we must say Yes in San Antonio. I fear that serious damage will be done to the global unity of our church if we do not allow those parts of our global family, for whom time and culture have come, the right and authority to grant women equal access with men to the ministry of our church.

This places no obligation on the church elsewhere to act precipitously in this matter. We must all be sensitive to what is in the best interest of mission and unity at the time and place in culture where we find ourselves. And we do this without compromising the biblical doctrines we have identified and which we will proclaim and defend.

My plea to our church in areas of the world with the most rapid growth is: Have understanding in this matter and for what must happen elsewhere so that we can move forward in global unity! If that understanding is not obtained in San Antonio, I fear fracture. The ripple effect is likely to do damage to other areas of the life of our church.

My prayer is that we will say Yes. If we do not, both history and the Lord will, I fear, judge us severely.

“And God, who can read human hearts, showed his approval by giving the Holy Spirit to them as he did to us.”
—Acts 15:8

Adventist Elder Statesmen: Retired Adventist leaders whose ministries have been on a global scale, with impact on the church throughout the world.

Speaking from the heart to support a Yes vote at the General Conference Session to recognize World Division decisions in the ordination of women.



Charles Bradford
*President, North American Division
1979-1990*

As we enter the third millennium, we can expect the pace of life in general, and of God’s redemptive purpose with the church specifically,

to pick up as we move on from grace to glory. The church should move to take full advantage of women’s talents. On women’s sense of call to gospel ministry, we must move beyond where we are. We must shake off the vestiges of Romanism. We don’t stand where Luther stood—we’ve moved on. If the Lord calls a Samuel, let Eli listen up; and if the Lord calls a Debra or Phoebe today, let us listen up. Let’s not be arguing about ordaining women in ministry; let the Holy Spirit do His work.

Ordination is not a question of rights. No one has a right to be ordained. But the church has an obligation to recognize the gifts God gives it. We have an obligation to affirm those gifts and those gift bearers. Do not make ordination into a theological club of the good old boys. He that would be greatest among you, let him be your servant. We are to facilitate the gifts in others—draw them out, give them the best use.

We don’t need a text in the Bible that says, “Thou shalt ordain women” to move ahead. We serve a big God, a God we can’t limit. As Jesus told Nicodemus, the Holy Spirit blows wherever He wants to blow. And if He wants to blow on women, it’s the same as when He blows on men.

The practice of ordination should bring unity to the church, and at the same time be missional. The secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ. “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them, and sent them off” (Acts 13:2, 3, NIV). It is as if the praying community asked the Lord to bless the labors of the chosen ones and to assure them that they had their backs. “They placed their hands on them and sent them off.” The whole church must be involved. Paul and Barnabas were their “boys” and they were responsible for their support. The ones who faithfully “stayed by the stuff” are part and parcel of the same

mission. This is all that we can take away from the text. Nothing more—nothing less.

Finally, there will be in time and history a demonstration of the ideal community. The Spirit's rule will be unchallenged; every member of the community will be affirmed and participate in ministry. As it nears the end, the community will conform more and more to the liberating rule of Christ, where "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, RSV; see also Romans 10:12 and I Corinthians 12:13). Freedom and justice will prevail. Every potential will be maximized. And the gifts of the Spirit will come into flower in a radiant church (Ephesians 5:27).

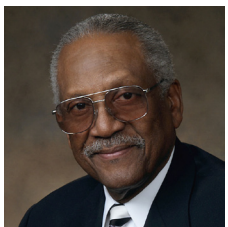


Alejandro Bullón
Pastor/Evangelist, South America
1969-present

I am sure that the General Conference's Autumnal Council, in its last meeting, was inspired by God to recommend that the world church, represented by its delegates in San Antonio, decide with a "yes" or a "no" to allow the world divisions to set the policies that govern the ordination of women.

The church has grown. A small group of faithful people at the end of the 19th century has become a multi-cultural family with almost 20 million believers worldwide. That growth has a price: to respect the diversity of races, languages, and cultures among the unity, which is what Jesus dreamed when He said, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21, NIV).

As I preach the gospel in different countries around the world, I rejoice in seeing the diversity of our worldwide family, and for that reason I support the "yes." I am in favor of allowing each division to decide if they should or should not ordain our sisters. To do this is to accept the challenge of continuing to be a united church among the diversity.



Calvin B. Rock
General Conference Vice-President
1985-2002

Could it be that the manifestation of not just the desire but the "gift" of ministry increasingly demonstrated in our female membership is a fulfillment of God's promise in Joel 2:28, 29 of intensified "last-day" gospel proclamation? I believe so. One reason is that this surge of desire and gifting did not occur in Paul's day, or during the Dark Ages, or in the pioneer days of our church, or in the generations immediately following. In other words, it did not occur in those eras when women could not speak in church or own property or, as in more recent times, hold office or vote.

I believe so because just as evolving societal attitudes and degenerating societal conditions in the mid-nineteenth century combined to launch the Three Angels

of Revelation 14:6-12, so have they produced in our day a world desperately in need of the non-discriminatory anointing articulated by Joel, authenticated by Paul (Galatians 3:28), and validated by John (Revelation 1:6).

Since 1863, when we men rightfully (given the times) assumed the reins of church direction, we have sincerely tried but failed to position God's people for Pentecost. We have done so all the while being careful to restrict female participation in our authoritative counsels. Ordination alone can reverse this practice and allow the untapped talents of consecrated womanhood to bless our decisions at the most sensitive stages of planning.

Reflecting upon the fact that we, the seventh generation since our origins, remain frustrated with respect to Latter Rain status, and understanding that this ministry-boosting action does not alter any our 28 fundamental beliefs, I concur that the time has come for those Divisions that recognize women as recipients of the gift of ministry and whose societies are not hostile to their function should grant them full ministerial privileges. Their gifts are obvious, their sacrifices are equal, their services are urgently needed.



William G. Johnsson
Editor, Adventist Review
1982-2007

For the past 40 years the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been preoccupied with the role of women. I have followed developments with great interest and now, looking back, have reached a settled conviction: we need the involvement of women in all phases and at all levels. Therefore, the vote at General Conference Session in San Antonio calls for a resounding Yes in order that the mission of the world church can go forward and unity be preserved.

Women did not force themselves upon the Church. Beginning in 1976 the Church took a series of steps to bring us to where we are today: we authorized women elders at the local church level, then encouraged women who felt called to attend the seminary. We opened up places for them to serve alongside their male counterparts, and eventually authorized them to perform all the chief functions of pastoral ministry: preaching, baptizing, officiating at the Lord's Supper, and conducting marriages.

Only in one respect were women ministers kept separate—they were not ordained like the men.

Three General Conference Sessions discussed the role of women: in 1985 (briefly) and at length in 1990 and 1995. During the last five years yet another commission has focused on the same issues. The time and expense involved in all these deliberations has been large. It is time now to bring matters to a close and to move on.

While the Scriptures do not provide unequivocal direction in this matter, I believe that the Holy Spirit does. "By their fruit you will recognize them," counseled Jesus concerning the true and the false (Matthew 7:16, NIV). After 40 years we can see clearly the fruitage of women in ministry, and it is wonderfully, powerfully of God.

If God has given His stamp of approval to women in ministry, who are we to withhold official recognition? We cannot go back, we must go forward. We must vote Yes in San Antonio.



Angel Rodriguez
Biblical Research Institute
1987-2011

The question of the ordination of women to the ministry has in practice been solved by the church by considering this topic to be a matter of personal opinion. Let me explain. For years this topic has been debated by church members on both side of the issue—those who support it and those who do not. The discussions at the General Conference Sessions have always considered anyone holding either of the two positions to be an Adventist in good standing. No church discipline has been applied based on the position taken on this specific issue. The only thing requested from all was to wait for a final decision to be made by the world church in a General Conference session.

What is now being requested by those who support the ordination of women to the ministry is that the church's acceptance of different opinions on the topic be taken a step further by allowing women's ordination in those segments of the world where ordaining women to the ministry would not negatively impact the church. In other words, the recognition that ordaining women to the ministry is not a doctrinal matter, but rather is one where different opinions are acceptable, should now be implemented in the actual life of the church where feasible. This important step is justifiable on several counts.

First, for the first time in the history of the church, the world church (at least in many of its different administrative levels) is very well informed about the topic and its complexity. This has been the result of study of the topic in Biblical Research Committees in all the Divisions, as well as the study and discussion of the topic that took place in the Theology of Ordination Study Committee that was appointed by the General Conference, and the dissemination of the results of its work around the world.

Second, it is now clear that there is not a biblical passage or a statement from Ellen G. White that clearly commands or opposes the ordination of women to the ministry. In other words, the delegates to the General Conference Session do not have a unanimous biblical mandate on which to decide whether the church should ordain or not ordain women to the ministry in all Divisions.

Third, for the first time it is clear within the world church that this is not about rejecting or modifying any of our biblical doctrines. This is not a doctrinal topic but a matter of tradition. We have not traditionally ordained women to the ministry, but this does not mean that it is incorrect to ordain them. We should be careful not to constitute a tradition that lacks a clear biblical foundation into a doctrinal position.

Fourth, we have clear evidence that the Lord has been leading the church to ordain women to the ministry in places where this is indispensable. I am specifically

thinking about the church in China. This is an important case, in that this decision cannot be considered to be an act of "rebellion" against the decisions of the world church. It was rather the work of the Spirit leading the church in China to make its work more effective in the fulfillment of the mission of the church. What they have done has demonstrated to be a blessing for the church in that part of the world.

The time has come to move forward in faith, knowing that in ordaining women to the ministry we are not violating the teachings of the Bible or the guidance of the Spirit through Ellen G. White. Fear should not paralyze us. Let us do what is right and good for the church. The best option we have is to allow Divisions that are ready to have a gender inclusive ordained ministry to do it. May the delegates to the General Conference Session raise their hands to the Lord in prayer and bless their brothers and sisters who, under the guidance of the Spirit, are ready to ordain women to the ministry.

It's Time

After much prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the General Conference Annual Council voted to place before the delegates in San Antonio a proposal to allow the world divisions to set the policies that govern the ordination of women. This follows the findings of the Theology on Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) that there is no Biblical consensus on this issue, and thus it must be treated as a matter of practice and not theology.

As the body of Christ seeks to fulfill the Lord's commission to evangelize the whole world and live out the character of Christ in all communities around our globe, a vote of Yes on this initiative provides the most sure way forward for the church. A vote of Yes honors the differing convictions in diverse place around the world by affirming and supporting our brothers and sisters both in those parts of the world where women are accepted in leadership roles and in those places where they are not.

If affirmed, the action enables the world divisions to guide decisions that impact mission and ministry methods within their regional territories. The proposal recognizes the current diversity of convictions regarding women in ministry and seeks to leave room for the continued leading of the Spirit.

A vote of Yes recognizes our diversity, empowers our mission, affirms our young people in their passion for the proclamation of the last-day message, and provides an effective pathway forward for our unity of purpose and ministry, as we diligently seek the leading of the Holy Spirit.

While a vote of No, rejecting this proposal, would leave the question to be settled some other way at some other time, a Yes vote enables all church members in all parts of the world to put their different opinions on this issue aside now and unite in support of one another for the completion of the work God has assigned us.

Through this process, the General Conference has provided the delegates to the General Conference Session, as representatives of Seventh-day Adventist believers throughout the world, an opportunity to vote Yes—for unity even in our great diversity, for mission effectiveness, and for the cause of Christ.