

1 PREXAD/GCDO14AC/14AC/155-14GS to TNCW-15GCS

2
3 140-15GS THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MINISTERIAL
4 ORDINATION

5
6 RECOMMENDED, To approve the document, “Theology and Practice of Ministerial
7 Ordination,” which reads as follows:

8
9 THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF MINISTERIAL ORDINATION

10
11 INTRODUCTION

12
13 Seventh-day Adventists believe that the gospel commission is addressed to all followers
14 of Jesus Christ. As an expression of discipleship and engagement in the gospel commission, men
15 and women have held important leadership roles in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
16 at all levels of denominational structure. Since the late 1960s, much attention has been focused
17 on the role of women in leadership positions requiring ordination. Several General Conference-
18 appointed commissions¹ as well as individual authors have studied this question from the
19 standpoint of theology, ecclesiology and mission.

20
21 The General Conference Executive Committee voted in 1973 that continued study be
22 given to the “theological soundness of the election of women to local church offices which
23 require ordination...and that in areas receptive to such action, there be continued recognition of
24 the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral-evangelistic work...”² The 1974 Annual
25 Council reaffirmed sections of the 1973 action and added its opinion that “...in the interest of
26 world unity of the church, no move be made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel
27 ministry.”³

28
29 General Conference Sessions have also expressed decisions regarding the role of women
30 in church work. The 1985 Session urged that “‘affirmative action’ for the involvement of women
31 in the work of the church be a priority...and to request leaders to use their executive influence to
32 open to women all aspects of ministry in the church that do not require ordination.”⁴

33
34 The 1990 Session, upon recommendation of the 1989 Annual Council, accepted a report
35 and recommendations from the Role of Women Commission. In its report the Commission stated
36 that it “does not have a consensus as to whether or not the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G.
37 White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry... Further in
38 view of the wide-spread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the

¹ Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Camp Mohaven, Danville, Ohio, September 16-19, 1973; Committee on Role of Women in the Church, Washington, DC, March 26-28, 1985; Commission on the Role of Women in the Church, Cohutta Springs, Georgia, July 12-18, 1989; Theology of Ordination Study Committee met four times in 2013-2014.

² 1973 Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee

³ 1974 Annual Council of the General Conference Committee

⁴ “Session Actions”, *Adventist Review*, July 11, 1985, p.20

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1 world church, and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the
2 mission of the church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry.”⁵
3

4 The 1995 Session denied a request from the North American Division that each division
5 might be given “the right to authorize the ordination of individuals within its territory in
6 harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable,
7 a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender.”⁶
8

9 During the 2010 General Conference Session a delegate requested an official Church
10 study of ordination. In response to this request, General Conference administration informed the
11 Session of its commitment “to establishing a process to review the subject of ordination and will
12 report back to Annual Council during this quinquennium.”⁷
13

14 Consequently the General Conference Administrative Committee suggested a process of
15 study for the division Biblical Research Committees and appointed a Theology of Ordination
16 Study Committee. Committee membership included more than 100 persons of both genders
17 serving the Church as theologians, pastors, administrators and laypersons. As in previous
18 commissions, the Theology of Ordination Study Committee did not arrive at a consensus
19 regarding a biblical position or Ellen G White’s counsel on the matter of whether or not
20 ministerial ordination should be gender inclusive. Diverse interpretations of Bible passages give
21 rise to firm convictions in favor of or in opposition to the ordination of women to gospel
22 ministry.
23

24 However, the commission did reach a high degree of accord concerning a biblical
25 theology of ordination.⁸ This statement summarizes several important aspects of ordination as
26 practiced in the early Church and recorded in the New Testament. Two foundational concepts in
27 this Statement are: 1) that “Seventh-day Adventists understand *ordination*, in a biblical sense, as
28 the action of the Church in publicly recognizing those whom the Lord has called and equipped
29 for local and global Church ministry”, and 2) that “While ordination contributes to Church order,
30 it neither conveys special qualities to the person nor introduces a kingly hierarchy within the
31 faith community.”
32

33 The proceedings of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee and division-appointed
34 Biblical Research Committees provided opportunity for a global conversation in the Church
35 regarding its understanding and practice of ordination. The Theology of Ordination Study
36 Committee’s report⁹ was presented to the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2014

⁵ “Session Actions”, *Adventist Review*, July 13, 1990 p.15

⁶ “Session Actions”, *Adventist Review*, July 11, 1995, p.30

⁷ In “Fourteenth Business Meeting” on July 2, 2010, *Adventist Review*, July 8-22, 2010 p.34

⁸ “Consensus Statement on the Theology of Ordination”, Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report, June 2014, p.21-22

⁹ The Theology of Ordination Study Committee report is available at: www.adventistarchives.org/final-tosc-report.pdf

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1 Annual Council. This report included theological and hermeneutical rationales for conclusions
2 on both sides of the question. The Committee suggested three ways forward but did not make a
3 consensus recommendation concerning the practice of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist
4 Church.

5
6 Differing interpretations of the Bible on this matter and conscientious convictions based
7 on those interpretations may be found in virtually all areas of the world. As a result, the question
8 becomes one of how Church members will live in harmony and unity while acknowledging the
9 presence of differing views on a variety of issues.

10
11 Recognizing the importance of this question with respect to understanding the Bible, the
12 multinational and multicultural nature of the Church and its mission, and the biblical example¹⁰
13 of addressing differences that do not directly involve fundamental beliefs, the General
14 Conference Executive Committee chose to again call for guidance from the global Church. The
15 decisions of the Church in a General Conference Session are recognized as the will of the
16 Church. Ellen G White affirmed this view as follows: “I have been shown that no man’s
17 judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the
18 General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised,
19 private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”¹¹

20
21 REQUEST TO THE 2015 GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

22
23 WHEREAS, The unity for which Jesus prayed is vitally important to the witness of the
24 Seventh-day Adventist Church, and;

25
26 WHEREAS, The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to engage every member in its
27 worldwide mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ among people from every nation, culture
28 and ethnicity, and;

29
30 WHEREAS, Various groups appointed by the General Conference and its divisions have
31 carefully studied the Bible and Ellen G White writings with respect to the ordination of women
32 and have not arrived at consensus as to whether ministerial ordination for women is unilaterally
33 affirmed or denied, and;

34
35 WHEREAS, The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms that “God has ordained that the
36 representatives of His Church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General
37 Conference Session, shall have authority”¹²,

38

¹⁰ See Acts chapter 15 on how the early church dealt with the tension regarding circumcision.

¹¹ Ellen G White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 3, p.492

¹² Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual*, 18th edition, p.18 quoting from Ellen G White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 9, p.
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1 THEREFORE, The General Conference Executive Committee requests delegates in their
2 sacred responsibility to God at the 2015 General Conference Session to respond to the following
3 question:
4

5 After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White,
6 and the reports of the study commissions, and;
7

8 After your careful consideration of what is best for the Church and the fulfillment of its
9 mission,
10

11 Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in
12 their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No