

Seventh-day Adventist® Church



Has General Conference Session approved ordained female church elders?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS NOVEMBER 17, 2017

Q: Has the ordination of women as local church elders ever been approved by the General Conference in full worldwide session? Is it provided for in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual? – Ian, from the United States

A: Ian, in response to your particular questions, the specific topic of women being ordained as local church elders has not been brought to the worldwide representative delegates at a General Conference Session. As a matter of observable information, the Church Manual, which is only voted on at General Conference Sessions, does not specifically mention women serving as local church elders.

However, actions were taken at Annual Councils of the General Conference Executive Committee relative to this subject which have impacted the General Conference Working Policy.

To understand how change in procedures and working policy were made regarding the ordination of women as local elders, it is probably helpful to briefly review some historical facts and actions taken at Annual Council meetings during the 1970s and 1980s due to the expense of international travel and other general procedural protocols for many decades, the expected attendance and composition at Annual Councils was not as fully developed with world division representation as it is now. It was not until the 1990s that there was wider world division representation at Annual Councils.)

- 1973 Annual Council called for “continued study be given to the theological soundness of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination.” ([See page 19](#))
- 1974 Annual Council requested “further study of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination and that division committees exercise discretion in any special cases that may arise before a definitive position has been adopted.” ([See page 19](#))
- At the 1975 Spring Meeting (a meeting of some but not all members of the GC Executive Committee) voted: “That in harmony with the spirit and intent of paragraph 3 of the Annual Council 1974 action the greatest discretion and caution be exercised in the ordaining of women to the office of local elder, counsel being sought in all cases by the local conference/mission from the union and division committees before proceeding.” ([See page 153](#))
- 1984 Annual Council reaffirmed the 1975 Spring Meeting action that women can be ordained as local church elders in those divisions which make provision for it. This vote also included guidelines to be followed “in the selection and ordination of women as local church elders:
 - “ a. The concept should be carefully examined, discussed, and properly accepted at the local church level.”
 - “ b. If a church contemplates such an action, the entire matter should be discussed and approved by the conference committee after the conference administration has sought counsel from the union leadership. The negotiation between the church and the conference should occur in advance of the final decision and vote by the local church.”
 - “ c. The action to elect and ordain a woman as a local church elder must not be taken unless a clear consensus exists that the ministry of a woman elder is desirable and even essential to the spiritual well-being of the local church family. It should also be the consensus of the church that a woman elder will be respected as a spiritual leader and soul-winner. The church should also express its belief that there are dimensions of spiritual service and counsel which cannot be properly fulfilled by a male elder.”

“ d. A clear majority of the voting members of the local church must be in favor of the action. The matter should be considered at a specially called church business meeting. Every church member should be given the opportunity to vote on this issue rather than only the few who might be present at a regular meeting where routine items of business are on the agenda. Although preliminary study could be given to this question by the church board, any final action should be taken by the church in a business meeting.”

“ e. Whatever the decision of the church, it should result in unifying the members and not be the source of divisiveness or alienation. The body of Christ, the Church, must not be tarnished in any way. In this important issue, as in all things, the name of our Lord and Saviour must be exalted.”

Source: General Conference Committee Minutes, October 14, 1984, 84-386-387

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