

Seventh-day  
Adventist® Church



# Has General Conference Session voted for the ordination of female elders? Part 2

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS JULY 27, 2018**

*Q: Has the General Conference Session voted to approve the ordination of women as local elders in the church? Could you please confirm whether this is reflected in the most recent Church Manual? – Cy, from Australia*

A: This question has been addressed in a previous Q&A ([see here](#)), but perhaps you are seeking further clarification because you also mention the Church Manual. To answer this question more fully, it would be helpful to review some history of how Seventh-day Adventist churches started to ordain female elders:

At the 1974 Annual Council, the members of the General Conference Executive Committee voted: “3. To request the President’s Executive Advisory to also arrange for 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” ([General Conference Executive Committee Minutes, p. 74-389, available as a PDF here](#))

At the 1975 Spring Meeting, it was voted: “5. That in harmony with the spirit and intent of paragraph 3 of the Annual Council 1974 action (pages 12-14) 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” ([General Conference Executive Committee Minutes, p. 75-153 available at as a PDF here](#))

The 1984 Annual Council reaffirmed the 1975 Spring Meeting action that women could be ordained as local church elders in those divisions that make provision for it ([General Conference Executive Committee Minutes, pp. 84-386,387 available at as a PDF here](#))

The 1989 Annual Council received a two-part recommendation from the Role of Women Commission —

a. Part A recommended not to ordain women to the gospel ministry;  
 b. Part B recommended that “those who have, without regard to gender, been recognized as commissioned ministers or licensed ministers may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned, subject to division authorization of this provision, if the following conditions apply:

1. The individual has completed approved ministerial training.
2. The individual has been called by a conference to serve in a full-time pastoral-evangelistic-ministerial role.
3. The individual has been elected and ordained as a local church elder.” ([General Conference Executive Committee Minutes, pp. 89-387,388,389 available as a PDF here](#))

On Oct. 5, 1989, General Conference Executive Committee members at this Annual Council first voted and approved both Parts A and B, which would then be sent to the 1990 General Conference Session. ([General Conference Executive Committee Minutes, pp. 89-387,388,389 available as a PDF here](#))

However, four days later ...

On Oct. 6 they voted to separate the two items forwarding only Part A to the 1990 General

On Oct. 9, they voted to separate the two items, forwarding only Part A to the 1990 General Conference Session, with Part B being voted and finalized at the 1989 Annual Council (General Conference Executive Committee Minutes pp. 89-429, 430, 431 available as a PDF [here](#))

This 1989 Annual Council decision was based on the 1984 Annual Council decision that each world division could decide whether women could be ordained as local elders within its territory. This allowed for women to serve as pastors and to “perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned.” This was the basis for the recommendation to the General Conference Session to amend the Church Manual to allow for commissioned/licensed ministers to perform baptisms, weddings, etc.

The particular item regarding whether to allow women to be ordained as local elders was never brought to the General Conference Session explicitly. Read the transcript of the discussion in the [Adventist Review “Daily Bulletin” July 17, 1990 \[GCB No. 8\], pp. 13-18 as a PDF](#) and [Adventist Review, July 19, 1990 \[GCB No. 9\], pp. 8-10 as a PDF here](#))

What the 1990 General Conference Session did was amend the Church Manual to provide gender-neutral language regarding church elders. Even though background information was provided before the vote, the question of whether women should be ordained as local elders was never debated on the floor of the Session; the 1989 Annual Council had already assumed the responsibility to make that decision.

The discussion at the 1990 General Conference Session actually centered on how to implement an action already taken by the 1989 Annual Council. Even though some people may wish to portray the discussion as being about whether women could be ordained as elders, the record does not portray it as such. The revision of the Church Manual to make its language gender-neutral sought to harmonize the Church Manual with what had been decided at the Annual Council, rather than directly declaring that women could be ordained as local church elders.

Some may wonder if it matters that the topic of ordaining women as local church elders has never been specifically discussed at a General Conference Session. In considering this question, it may be helpful to keep a couple of points in mind:

1. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not ordain women to the gospel ministry, female pastors must be ordained as a local church elder to be able to “perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned.”
2. When topics with widely differing viewpoints that affect the world church are raised, it has been considered wise to invite input and discussion from the large, worldwide delegation that is present at a General Conference Session, rather than from the smaller group at an Annual Council or the even smaller Spring Meeting. See “How Your Church Works” (part 1 and 2) [here](#) and [here](#)

WORKS (part 1 and 2) [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

Please join me in praying for God’s wisdom and strength to do what matters most: fulfilling the mission that He has given us, His prophetic, remnant people, in these last days of earth’s history. That mission involves more than ordained gospel ministers. It involves everyone: women, men, young people, girls, and boys! This point is made very clear in Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 9, p. 116: “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”

I urge every church member to take this call to heart and rally to the work. Let’s focus on our God-given mission and unite our efforts to reach this world for Him. Maranatha! Jesus is coming soon!

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